HONOR BOUND:
EXPLORING THE DISPARITY OF TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN KURDISTAN, IRAQ

A Dissertation
by
LORI A. MASON

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APPROVED BY:

Kelly Clark/Keefe, Ed.D.
Chairperson, Dissertation Committee

Vachel Miller, Ed.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Laura DeSisto, Ph.D.
Member, Dissertation Committee

Jim Killacky, Ed.D.
Director, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Edelma D. Huntley, Ph.D.
Dean, Research and Graduate Studies

ABSTRACT

HONOR BOUND:

EXPLORING THE DISPARTIY OF TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN KURDISTAN, NORTHERN IRAQ

Lori A. Mason, B.S. Southwestern Oklahoma State University

M.A. Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Dissertation Chairperson: Kelly Clark/Keefe, Ed.D.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the disparity of treatment of women in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. The primary focus of this feminist, ethnographic research was to explore the conflicting perceptions of women in Kurdistan, Iraq, and the resulting disparity in the treatment of women. While the geographic territory that comprises Kurdistan is divided among four nations, this study examined only women in the Iraqi Kurdish area, Southern Kurdistan. This research examined the socio-cultural backdrop of Kurdish society against which the perceptions of women are formed. The focus of this study was then narrowed to explore the narrative descriptions of three women leader's experiences in Kurdistan in order to describe their efforts to navigate often conflicting roles and multiple identities in a society with markedly disparate views of women. Conclusions of the study are followed with proposed areas of reform for women in Kurdistan compiled from various sources. The results of this research are intended to contribute to discourse leading to social change for women in Iraqi Kurdistan. Conventional ethnographic techniques of document review and observations were

applied to this study as well as narrative interviews with three women leaders. Feminist thematic analysis was applied to interview data, documents, and field notes. The resulting work is presented in a detailed exploration of emergent themes. Themes that emerged from this study that contributed to the participants assuming their current roles include family, education, personal motivation, socio-cultural status, and governmental support through laws enacted to support women. The results of this dissertation support the idea that, in order for women in staunchly patriarchal societies to break free of gender constraints to assume positions of leadership, numerous personal and professional factors must be present in order to provide opportunity for leadership positions and empower women to assume those leadership roles with some measure of autonomy. Further, as evidenced in this study, women in patriarchal societies who attempt to break through traditional roles face numerous personal and professional obstacles as they traverse borders of identity and conflicting societal expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to a number of people who have made this document, indeed this doctoral journey, possible. First, I would like to say thank you to the participants of this study. Their willingness to allow me to enter their lives and experiences provided a very personal glimpse of the challenges facing women in Kurdistan. The complexity of issues they navigate daily both astounds and inspires me. I consider each a friend. Without their input, this document would not have been possible.

I cannot begin to adequately say thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Kelly Clark/Keefe. Her guidance, insights, and indomitable encouragement were crucial to this document presenting any depth or value. I have taken away from this experience an even greater measure of respect for her intellect, creativity, and warmth.

Numerous friends have provided encouragement, support, and an occasional nudge throughout the process of this doctoral journey, and I appreciate each of them more than I can say. While I cannot name everyone, I would like to say thank you to Matthew whose endless humor and sometimes backhanded encouragement throughout this doctoral journey have been invaluable. His contribution to the field research enabled me to complete the interviews for this study while his continued friendship has been a wonderful source of support. Thank you to Katherine for her willingness to travel with me to Kurdistan in order to support this research endeavor by caring for my most beloved treasure. Without her assistance, the interviews would not have been possible. Thank you

to my dissertation committee, Dr. Vachel Miller and Dr. Laura DeSisto, and to Dr. Jim Killacky, Director of the doctoral program, for their invaluable insights, direction, and encouragement.

My family has provided a wealth of support throughout my involvement in Kurdistan. They have continued to support my engagement in areas outside of their geographical and cultural borders despite their concerns for my safety and my sanity for such endeavors. I remain indebted to them for their love, patience, and understanding.

Finally, I must express my deepest gratitude to my beautiful daughter Ellie. She has provided a personal dimension to this study that both challenges and compels me. She has brought immense laughter and spawned numerous thought provoking anecdotes along this doctoral journey. Her presence during the trip to Kurdistan created connections and built bridges of common understanding between myself and many other women. My 'ambassador' succeeded in winning many hearts and opening many doors. Ellie, I can only hope that as you begin to pursue your dreams and discover this world, I can give you roots and help you find wings to take on whatever you choose in this life. I am and will remain the greatest fan of your beautiful life.

My motivation in conducting this research as well as for following the circumstances of women in Kurdistan is a deep hope that many other daughters will have the same opportunities I wish for my own daughter. It is my wish that they will one day have the opportunity to live in safety, to follow their dreams, to love, to laugh, and to become the person they choose to be. This dissertation is dedicated to the many victims of violence in the name of honor.

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PRELUDE

It was mid-September 2003 and still stifling hot in Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdish Region of Iraq. I stepped off the small plane onto the narrow strip of pavement serving as a runway. Though I did not know what awaited me once I was on the ground in Iraq, I was extremely happy to be stepping off of the plane and onto solid ground. I had been warned about the flight prior to leaving Amman, Jordan but nothing could completely prepare passengers for the small, crowded plane or the combat landing, a spiral nose dive that was to mark our arrival in Kurdistan. We were met in a gravel area by U.S. military personnel who whisked us into military vehicles and off to meet our ride. That first long drive to Slemani from Erbil, called Hawler by many Kurds, seemed to drag on forever. The three hour drive was in the middle of the afternoon when temperatures can reach 120 ° F. Three of us were crammed in the backseat of a very small, older model Toyota car along with bags and other items. Sweat poured down my back and legs as we sat glued together in the backseat, every bump and pothole being felt as we traveled. As we drove through the mountains, everything around was brown and burnt from a long, hot summer. I couldn't resist the thought that I had just arrived in Hell. What I thought would be a short six month stay extended over seven years as I spent the next two years living in Kurdistan and five additional years working and traveling back and forth to the region. I had no idea how much I would come to love the place and the people of Kurdistan.

Victims

My involvement in Kurdistan began as part of a project to assist Kurds with teacher and administrative training in private English schools operating in the region. Like many Americans, prior to agreeing to be a part of this project, I had never heard of Kurdistan, I knew nothing of the Kurds or their culture, and I had no idea what awaited me in Kurdistan.

Not long after arriving in Kurdistan that first September, I met a South African woman who was working with a medical project in the area. Anna (pseudonym) was in her late 20s, about my age at the time, and, as there were few other foreign women in the area, we soon became friends. She was a tri-athlete and the two of us would often try to find places to go run together. Her fiancée was also there working in Kurdistan with another project, however, both became involved in side issues as the needs presented themselves. One thing her fiancé, David (pseudonym), was able to accomplish was the opening of two private shelters for homeless men and women. One shelter was for men who were unable to provide for themselves and were not connected to family. A second shelter was for young women who had escaped violence of one kind or another but were, in effect, homeless as they could not return to their own families. The shelters that David began were privately operated. The government would not acknowledge a problem at the time and therefore did not see a need to provide any safe place for citizens. Anna invited me to come with her to visit the women's shelter one night. She often went to visit them as they had few other people who took an interest in their wellbeing and little connection with people outside of the shelter.

This visit was my first close encounter with these individual women and the dire situation of some women in Kurdistan. The visit with the women of the shelter was a very personal glimpse into the despair, the fear, and the pain caused by the perception of women in the region. I had no idea what to expect as we sat huddled together around a kerosene heater in the small, cold "family room" of their house, or what was serving as a house for the time. There were holes in the walls and floor, no hot water, and a terrible odor as they were crammed into a house with too few rooms for the number of occupants. But they were safe. As we sat and talked through Anna who was translating for us, a picture was presented that I had no idea existed prior to the encounter; one of pain and violence where women were viewed as property and bartered or sold to others, victims of severe domestic violence and abuse.

The ages of the women ranged from 14 to 28 years of age. The stories varied in detail but were similar in content. One young woman escaped from a situation where, after having been sold by her family to be the third wife of an alcoholic who often beat her, was going to be killed by him for attempting to stop the abuse. Another woman's neighbors had begun "rumors" of the nature that caused her family to try to kill her for dishonoring their family name. Yet another girl had contracted polio as a child and as a result had stunted, deformed legs. Not long after this young girl's mother died, her father remarried. A short time later she was left out on the street as she was an apparent burden to the new family. Yet another girl sought refuge at the shelter after running away from a situation where she was to be sold at the age of 15 to be the wife of a man she had never met, one twice her own age and who had severe physical disabilities. She had been orphaned and left to live with an uncle who felt this arrangement was the best use for her

rather than have her continue to be a burden to his family. I was informed her uncle's intentions were to use the extra money to purchase a car. The stories went on and on, and, by the time we left, my eyes were opened to a side of the culture I had not experienced, one that was not often talked about by Kurds at the time. This first experience with the brutality of life for some women served as a jolt, an awakening to what reality was for many just outside of view in Kurdish society.

Though David and Anna left Kurdistan, the shelter remained open through mutual friends, and we all contributed to the needs of the women. Eventually however, the government decided it was not a problem for the "eshnabee" or foreigners to deal with, and they closed the shelter. The women were forced to either move into a new government facility that also served as a prison for women convicted of crimes or to go back to live with relatives. That was the last I heard of most of those young women.

My next experience of the situation of women in the region was with a friend conducting a micro lending project with widows of the Anfal campaign. Anfal was Sadaam's systematic attempt at genocide against the Kurds during which men and young boys were rounded up and hauled to prison camps where many were executed. Villages were leveled, and the women and children were taken to "collective towns" where they would all be in the same place when Sadaam decided what to do with them. They were left in areas that had little water and no ability for self-sustainment; they were completely at the mercy of Sadaam to provide food, water, or electricity of any kind.

To be widowed in the region was a very difficult thing as women had few culturally appropriate means of providing for themselves. They would often be forced to take their children and live with extended family, a brother or male relative who could

provide for them. To be widowed due to Anfal was particularly difficult, as many of the women were from the same villages where the entire male population, mostly all relatives, were taken away and killed. There was no one else left to provide for these women or their children.

The micro lending project was an attempt to provide these women the dignity and ability to provide some means of income for themselves and their children. I traveled with my friend to a collective town located about a one hour drive from the area where I lived to visit with the first group of women in the project. They had received their initial loans about one year prior to my visit and were just completing the repayment of their portion of the loans. It was an exciting time for the women involved as it proved that micro lending could be successful for this forgotten population.

The town had a ghost-like feel to it as we drove down broken roads past homes with blue tarps covering holes in the roofs and mud covering everything else. Dirty-faced children with huge brown eyes darted in and out of houses in worn clothes, laughing and playing as children do. I was relieved to see those children as they were the only signs of life or hope in the area; the general atmosphere seemed heavy and depressed. I almost hesitated to get out of the car when we finally stopped in front of a small, squatty house on the southern edge of town.

The home belonged to a very unique woman, one who, despite the intense pain and suffering she had endured, still had a bright smile and very hospitable, generous spirit as she offered us a few of the meager candies she had available to serve guests. This particular woman had been selected to lead the project as she could count, do basic math, and was very meticulous at record keeping. Her portion of the initial loan was used to

purchase a refrigerator for her family and a sewing machine in order to provide an income for them. She took the repayment of the loans very seriously as this was the first project to provide her or the other women an opportunity to earn an income for themselves and their families.

As I sipped tea from a cracked glass, I listened quietly as she told her story: the story of a husband she remembered fondly, one who provided for her and their children and was not part of the resistance movement, yet who was taken by Sadaam and never heard from again. She dreamed often that he would return as she still had no word whether he was alive or dead, nothing to tell of his fate. As she told her story, I couldn't help but think of one of many mass graves with nameless, faceless bodies discovered outside of Baghdad the previous week. Many of the women in these collective towns had no word as to what happened to their husbands for years after their disappearance; many still held out hope of a reunion someday.

My own anger mounted as I listened also to the frustration with the current government, of promises made for help that remained unfulfilled, and of countless times of being used by nongovernmental organizations and government officials for public relations purposes to raise funds from outside organizations, funds these women rarely saw or benefited from. I felt the anguish of these women, who stated they felt they were forgotten, abandoned by everyone and left to fend for themselves with little means to do so.

The Other Side of the Coin

Time went on, and, as I remained in Kurdistan, I began to see more and more of a phenomenon I did not understand at the time. As the new government of Iraq and the

Kurdistan region were being formed, many new officials were chosen by the two ruling parties in the North. As parliament members were being selected and ministry heads were being appointed, I began seeing more and more women assuming those leadership roles. I questioned this placement and view of women to several Kurdish colleagues. Much of their explanation seemed to me to be based on the past years of fighting and the role women had to assume in the resistance; everything from managing homes, finances, and businesses to some even actively taking up arms and participating in combat. This forced assumption of nontraditional roles by women, as well as an increasingly secular view of what were considered religious issues, appeared to have contributed to a more liberal view of women.

I continued to observe a marked shift in women's roles and activities from 2003 on. After the fall of Sadaam, more and more women began to speak out in protest of the conditions for women in Kurdistan. These outspoken women were met with mixed responses: from some they received accolades and many garnered unprecedented support; however, from others these women were met with ridicule and exclusion. As support for women grew, there was a noticeable increase in the number of women assuming leadership roles.

In my own most recent role as director of a curriculum development project with the Ministry of Higher Education, I had the opportunity to meet a number of unique women participating in government and leadership roles. During a recent visit, I was invited by the Minister of Higher Education to attend a dinner involving a number of leaders in the health and medical profession as well as local party leaders from the area's dominant political party. As we filed into a large room and took our seats at the table, I

couldn't help but feel a little frustrated at the fact that, out of nearly 35 guests, I was the lone female. My frustration turned to surprise, however, as we were later joined by two single women. One of the women was a medical doctor with a private practice she worked in the evenings. Her day job was as a Member of Parliament and an advisor to the Ministry of Health. Like many of the women in high-level leadership roles, this woman had chosen her career over marriage and, as a single woman, still faced a social stigma for being out alone at night. As a result, she brought her female assistant with her. Either way, their presence without a male chaperone was quite unusual. As we sat and talked through the dinner, I learned a great deal about this unique woman. She had been an original Member of Parliament from the 2005 elections and, although she was connected both by family and socioeconomically, she still had to struggle to gain her position. She was very well educated, however her education was gained in Iraq; she had never been outside the country other than short trips to neighboring countries. To not marry was a choice; she had become "married" to her medical practice for the benefit of women. However, she continued to hold out hope of marriage someday despite the fact that her position would be intimidating to many men in Kurdistan, according to another guest at the table.

I could not help but be intrigued by the fact that, as with my new found friend from dinner, many women were taking strides to gain position in Kurdistan. As I continued to observe these changes, I had to admit the overall view of women, at least on the surface, seemed to be much more liberal than neighboring areas and even southern parts of Iraq where some leaders continue to attempt to enforce strict Shar'iah law.

During the course of my time living in Kurdistan and numerous years of traveling through the area since, I have been both intrigued and appalled by the situation facing women in the region. These experiences as well as my positioning as a white woman from the United States provide the contextual landscape in which this research project exploring women's issues in northern Iraq takes shape.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My views and understanding of the situation of women in Kurdistan have led to many questions, each of which contribute to the overall purpose of this feminist ethnography which examines the experiences of a number of women leaders who have overcome many limitations to achieve high-level leadership roles. I have examined their experiences, the cultural contexts of their lives, their multiple identities, and their perception of the overall treatment of women in Kurdistan in order to understand the disparity of treatment of women in the region. Additionally, I have explored ways in which these women leaders have both been shaped by their culture and ways in which they shape it as the women continue to press forward against restrictive boundaries.

The goal of this study was to examine the existing disparity in treatment of women in the Kurdish region. As yet, there is no detailed exploration of this phenomenon nor are there many studies which take into account the stories and observations of Kurdish women's experiences. Some studies (Coomaraswamy, 2005; Faqir, 2001; Welchman & Hossain, 2005) examine the phenomena of honor violence against women within this area of the world, whereas other studies (Richter, 1991-1992; Thompson, 2003) detail the lives of women who have aspired to leadership roles. Yet, in order to fully understand the global implications of a culture with such disparate views of women, a deeper, more contextualized understanding is required. This study utilized the conventional ethnographic techniques of observation and document review to describe

patterns in the sociocultural landscape Kurdistan, Iraq. This ethnographic exploration set the stage for the study's primary emphasis: exploring the narrative descriptions of three women leader's experiences in Kurdistan in order to describe their efforts to navigate often conflicting roles in a society with markedly disparate views of women. In examining the lives of women leaders who have risen above the challenges facing their gender, readers will have a more contextualized understanding of the sociocultural factors that create such a marked disparity in the treatment of women. Additionally, through examining the lives and identities of women in leadership who have been shaped by this cultural paradox, a better understanding of the ways in which these women as leaders are and could potentially continue creating change within their spheres of influence surfaced.

The following introduction sets the preliminary stage of the cultural and political backdrop against which this study unfolds. This leads readers to the ideological incongruities related to gender in this particular region of the world as well as to my own subjective positioning as a female and Westerner doing research among and because of the taut borderlands that both produce and constrain hope for basic human rights and gender equity. This idea and others will be explored in much more detail in Chapter 4, where the sociocultural perspectives held about women in Kurdistan come into full view and in Chapter 5, where the individual lives of three such women leaders become central.

A Place of Paradox

The Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq is a region of paradoxes, a place of conflicting ideas and ideals where traditional values and religious ideology clash with more liberal, Western cultural views. This is especially true in regard to the perception and treatment of women. Women in the Kurdistan Region must navigate conflicting roles

and identities as they attempt to understand their place within the culture. While boasting a liberal view of women and many women currently sitting in positions of leadership, the Kurdistan region of Northern Iraq also has a high rate of honor killings: murder of women by family members in the name of honor (United Nations, 2007, 2008).

Numerous studies regard honor crimes to be a result of a cultural perception of women, the socially constructed view of shame and honor, as well as male-dominated patriarchal practices leading to many women becoming victims of extreme violence in the form beatings and death (Faqir, 2001; McDonald, 2001; Ruggi, 1998; United Nations, 2007, 2008; Welchmann & Hossain, 2005). Fadia Faqir explains this social construction as follows:

> The notion of honour is divided along feminine and masculine lines, with different meanings for each gender. Masculinity,… is often praised and exonerated in neopatriarchal Arab societies. Popular culture is full of sayings, signals and proverbs which glorify men, their masculinity and image. Through ideologies and social constructs, through the lack of civil and criminal remedies and their interpretation, which often fail to give women adequate protection, we find that male violence is frequently, if covertly, legitimated. Men in general, but specifically within Arab-Islamic culture, are considered to be guardians of their female relatives and are given the right to police and chastise them. Femininity,… is socially constructed in such a way to favour… maids who conform to appropriate gender models. They must be passive, selfless and above all sexually pure or chaste. (2001, p. 71)

Although this violent experience is true for many women in Kurdistan, some women in the region are able to hold public office and attain high-level leadership positions such as members of Parliament or Ministry heads. This disparity in treatment of women affects the well being and opportunity of much of the region's population. In keeping with feminist ideals of ending oppression of women, efforts must be made to understand the implications behind this disparity and to address issues that will secure the

safe treatment of women as well as provide equity in opportunity for women in Kurdistan.

A Culture in Conflict

Kurdistan is a conservative Muslim area with deep cultural traditions steeped in Islam and Arab patriarchal cultural practices. Kurdistan is considered to be the largest non-state nation with population of over 25 million (Mojab, 2001). The Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic people in the Middle East; however, as a result of the partitioning of the Middle East by Western powers following World War I, they are scattered between four nations: Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. Mojab states that, "Kurdistan is a territory without recognized borders" (2001, p. 1), however she goes on to explain that the borders of this territory "are more visibly marked than most internationally recognized borders: it is a land whose borders bleed" (p. 1). Throughout the past 30 years, Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, has been virtually cut off from the rest of world as a result of numerous wars, embargos, and an ongoing resistance struggle. Under Sadaam Hussein's regime, the Kurds of Northern Iraq repeatedly suffered merciless attacks, including the use of chemical weapons as a means of enacting genocide against them (Katzman, 2005).

In recent years, however, there has been an increase in exposure to Western ideas of democracy and human rights through mass media and an influx of Westerners since the fall of the Saddam Hussein Regime. Borders once closed to foreigners due to ongoing wars and three embargos are now welcoming, even encouraging tourism, and business investment. Public relations campaigns such as "The Other Iraq" seek to draw foreign business investment and tourism ("Kurdistan-The Other Iraq," n.d.).

As a result of this influx, long-held cultural traditions appear to be clashing with a more liberal, Western influence. This creates a situation in which women become primary targets of retaliation by older family members who perceive their actions as shameful to family honor. In an interview with Ako Muhammed (2007), Tavga Rasheed, General Director the of Human Rights Ministry states, "women's social problems exist all over Kurdistan Region, especially in the rural areas" (para.13). He went on to say "new, imported technology and a lack of women's social awareness are the main reasons for suicide and honor killings" (para.13). Rasheed pointed to new technologies such as mobile cell phones "that are sometimes used for misguided purposes and some TV satellite channels that air less-than-respectable programs" (para.13) as the cause of many of the problems women face.

New Possibilities for Kurdistan

In light of such a difficult history, it has only been through persistence and a remarkable resilience that the Kurds now find themselves in a position never before dreamed of, poised to become leaders in the Middle East through the rebuilding of Iraq and the subsequent political negotiations between the nation's three main groups, Sunni, Shia, and Kurd. According to Lioneld Beehner (2006), the Kurds emerged as early leaders in the political struggle to unite various ethnic groups and religious sects, some of which have been long viewed as enemies by fundamentalists from each group. Largely secular and desiring to prevent Shar'iah law from being enacted in Iraq, the Kurds led negotiations between the three groups, often serving as the peacemaker by siding with both the Sunni and the Shia at different times in order to pass various pieces of national legislation. A 2006 Council on Foreign Relations report predicted that "the Kurds would

play a kingmakers role in forming Iraq's new coalition government, making them vital players in Iraqi politics" (Beehner, para. 1).

While becoming a voice in Iraqi national politics, Kurdish leaders have focused on rebuilding the Kurdish Regional Government as well. As a result of the first Gulf War and the creation of the No Fly Zone, the Kurds enjoyed semi autonomy for nearly 13 years prior to the United States led Iraq War in 2003. Taking full advantage of the limited reach of Saddam during that time, the Kurds developed their own government, infrastructure, and laws. In the rebuilding of their region, the Kurds have looked to the West, often espousing democratic ideals and a much more Western worldview, at least on the surface, regarding human rights and political freedoms. This liberal view has been praised by many, with Kurdistan being referred to as a democratic example for Iraq and the Middle East. Janet Benshoof, President of Global Justice Center, said, "Kurdistan can be an example to the entire Middle East if it can redefine democracy as meaning equality rather than being based on equality" (Kurdistan Regional Government [KRG], 2007b).

Incongruities as a Site for Inquiry

The Kurdish Region remains a place of paradox in relation to women. Despite the strides women have made in gaining rights or leadership roles in Kurdistan, they continue to be treated as inferior to men in various aspects of social life, often possessing little choice in regard to important personal decisions. Under Islamic or Shar'iah law, two women must testify in court cases as opposed to one man. Men can obtain a divorce for any reason; however, women are allowed very limited reasons for which to divorce their husbands. Many women have little voice over issues such as choosing a marriage partner, and inheritance laws favor men much more than women (Khidir, 2007). Under the

current civil law in Kurdistan, women in divorce cases receive one third of the assets whereas men receive two-thirds. If a woman sues for divorce in Kurdistan, however, she must give up all rights to assets to her husband. According to Khidir, women's activists have sought to amend the Personal Status Law in effect since 1959, but they have met with resistance in many cases.

Proposed amendments to the Kurdistani Personal Status Law were designed to bring changes in the definition of marriage, polygamy, divorce, inheritance rights, and a number of other subjects (Mohammed, 2007). Despite efforts, however, religious leaders called the changes to polygamy and inheritance laws contrary to principles of Islam. In a 2008 decision, the Kurdistan Parliament voted to continue to make legal the practice of polygamy in which men are allowed more than one wife despite the efforts of many activists seeking to have the law annulled. The decision was a blow to women's rights groups (Khidir, 2008).

My personal experiences mirrored this paradox while living in Kurdistan. During my time living and working in the region I was met by some with great deference and respect both socially and professionally. I found myself included in many meetings and social engagements that Kurdish women were not a part of as it would have been socially inappropriate for women to participate without a male chaperone. I was frequently asked and gave my opinion on issues that were taking place in the region and world while many women were not expected to speak or concern themselves with such issues. I was expected to attend social engagements with men in the evenings although I was unchaperoned at the time whereas many Kurdish women could not go out at night without out a male relative. At other times, I was met by both men and women with a

different attitude, being discounted professionally and viewed suspiciously in a social context. I was treated by some with disdain and reproach as a Western female. Still other times I was treated as completely incompetent and my opinion discounted. An example of this was experienced with a male driver who worked with us. While in route to Duhok, Kurdistan a gas gauge on our car failed to register correctly. I had noticed this and commented on it several times only to be blown off as silly and worrying too much. We later ran out of gas on the outskirts of Mosul at a time when the city was not a safe place. After an hour of trying to find out what was wrong with the car, the driver finally checked the gas and realized we were empty. Despite the previous conversation regarding the gas gauge, he made several excuses for why it was not his fault without acknowledging that I had been correct or he was wrong or even speaking of it again.

Although these and myriad other seemingly minor or occasional incidents in and of themselves might not give rise to an increased interest in the issues facing women in Kurdistan, my combined experiences over the course of the last seven years have affected me in many ways and led to a desire to explore these issues in greater depth while becoming an advocate for women. Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, holds a perception of women that continues to intrigue me; a perception that creates an environment in which women must navigate very uncertain roles and identities based on oppressive societal rules and norms. I continue to be involved in the lives of friends in Kurdistan, Iraq, both male and female. Through this lived experience in the region, I was able to view a culture in conflict with itself, a conflict surrounding the role and status of women in which the women are left to navigate an ever changing, often perilous terrain. Through living and

participating in the culture, I was able to gain a sense of the injustice and oppression felt by women there.

Definition of Terms

In conducting cross cultural research, it is necessary to continually check for understanding and guard against assumptions in meaning leading to misunderstandings. In order to avoid miscommunication and to give an idea of my use of certain familiar terms, definitions of terms as used in this study are listed below. Additional Kurdish terms are defined in the text where used.

1. Middle East: geographic region of predominately Muslim nations.
2. Muslim: follower of the prophet Mohammed.
3. Islam: religion organized around the teachings of the prophet Mohammed.
4. Patriarchal : society in which men have power or control over women in social, political, economic, and legal realms.
5. Post September 11th era: shaped by the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the ongoing war against terrorism in which there is a hyper sensitivity to stereotyped images of Muslim identity or people of Middle Eastern descent as well as an underlying sense of suspicion present in much areas of the U.S. and European nations.

Purpose

As a woman and as a human being concerned with human rights, the desire to alleviate senseless violence and oppression creates an even greater personal interest in the lives and experiences of women in this region. This provides the purpose for my study: to

document the experiences of women who have defied cultural limitations to become leaders in their respective fields. In exploring these women's lives and experiences, I want to better understand the sociocultural issues facing women in order to create social change in the treatment of women within this region. While this study is focused on gender in the Iraqi Kurdish region, an unexpected finding that emerged during the study is the connection to discourse regarding binaristic oppositions and issues of *difference*, whether it is difference along the lines of gender, disability, ethnicity, or orientation. Themes that emerged from this study were consistent with factors influencing many individuals viewed as *other*. Findings from this study can inform educational leaders in policy development on issues of equity as well as better prepare educational leaders by providing a global understanding of issues influencing women from various cultural backgrounds.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I have explored literature addressing the issue of women's treatment within the Middle East as a whole. I then turned attention to the conflicting treatment of women within the Middle East through an examination of the crime of honor killings and women leaders in the Middle East. From there, I explored literature regarding women in Kurdistan. In Chapter 3 of this study, I have detailed the design of this study as well as epistemological underpinnings. In Chapter 4 of this study, I explored the sociocultural view of women from a macro level to better understand the complexity of the positioning of women in Kurdistan as a whole as well as factors leading to this positioning. Chapter 5 narrows the focus to explore the lives and experiences of three women leaders in Kurdistan, their perceptions of treatment of women, and ways in which these women are creating change within their spheres.

Chapter 6 details implications for this study, limitations of this study, future research suggestions, and proposed reforms for women in Kurdistan.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

My initial review of the literature related to this topic along with personal and professional experiences have led me to question what seems to be conflicting views or perceptions of women in the region. Within Kurdish society there appear to be two conflicting cultures at play, with women being caught in the middle of this struggle. I continue to question the disparate treatment of women in this area: the open access of some to freedoms denied to many others and the applauding of some women as intellectuals and leaders while others have no voice over personal decisions or choices. I question how women in this society form identities and navigate their own positioning within a culture that affords little room for deviance from norms and perceptions of what women ought to be or what constitutes as honorable based on these strict cultural definitions. These questions have led me to an exploration of literature addressing the experiences of women in Kurdistan as well as similar sociopolitical regions within the Middle East. I have reviewed scholarly literature examining the treatment and perceptions of women in the Middle East, the phenomena of honor crimes, and women leaders in the Middle East then narrowed the focus of literature to address scholarly writing on women in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, honor violence in Kurdistan, and women leaders in Kurdistan.

Women in the Middle East

Honor killings, genital mutilation, and discriminatory laws and practices versus women in leadership roles, mixed educational opportunities and high-level professions:

What is the real status of women in the Middle East? Although more scholarly literature is now available on the issue, little clarity pointing to a single answer to this question is evident. The answer is, in fact, as diverse as the countries, regions, and people who make up the Middle East.

To many Westerners, the topic of women under predominately Muslim rule conjures up a stereotypical picture of women covered entirely in the blue burqas of the Taliban and living under intense oppression, an image that can evoke a response of anger and indignation in many Westerners unaccustomed to such brutal and unjust treatment. This picture does exist in more than one ultraconservative Muslim area where women are in effect chattel, property of men with little or no voice over matters pertinent to their lives, often victims of extreme violence and oppression (Barakat & Wardell, 2002; Helie, 1993). This is not, however the only picture of women under Islamic rule in the Middle East, and studies have warned against an overgeneralization of the treatment of women in predominately Muslim regions (Ottaway, 2004; Sen, 2005). In some Muslim countries, women actually enjoy many of the same freedoms and opportunities of their counterparts in the West. Women successfully hold positions of political leadership (Clark & Schwedler, 2003), and opportunities for educational advancement are available to many women, though the opportunity to use their education in a professional setting may be restricted (Mehran, 2003; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995).

A paradox exists in the treatment of women throughout the Middle East where tradition collides with modernity (Mehran, 2003), leaving women to navigate very difficult, sometimes dangerous, positions as they seek to practice the most basic of human rights. Based scholarly readings, I discuss the perception and treatment of women

within the Middle East. Second, I discuss scholarship that theorized the conditions through which women have gained access to high-level leadership positions in predominately Muslim areas where there has been a dramatic transition. Third, I consider the treatment of women on the other end of the continuum through an examination of the practice of honor killings, murder of women in the name of family honor. Finally, I discuss literature that focuses on the region of Kurdistan, Northern Iraq in light of the paradox that exists and the implications of that paradox in the lives of the women of Kurdistan.

Perceptions and Treatment

Despite the positive advancements often touted by political leaders in the area, under the best of conditions in the Middle East, women continue to face discrimination in various ways (Ottaway, 2004). Although in some areas women may have more freedoms than others, all seem to remain restricted in some manner, left to form identities and navigate cultural boundaries in which there is a disparate view of women (Clark & Schwedler, 2003; Helie, 1993; Ottaway, 2004).

In a 1979 article addressing women's position in Islam, Jane Smith cited the major issues facing women such as seclusion, lack of education, unfair marriage practices, and discriminatory divorce and inheritance laws. According to Smith, a common practice in Muslim countries is to allow male family members to arrange marriages for daughters at very young ages without their consent. Additionally, men are permitted to divorce women for little reason, whereas women must produce factual evidence supporting a small number of reasons that would make divorce permissible for women. Smith lists many of the serious issues facing women such as abuse, degradation,

and legal violence in the form of honor killings. Numerous studies (Barakat & Wardell, 2002; Clark & Schwedler, 2003; Faqir, 2001; Helie, 1993; Ruggi, 1998; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995) confirm a disparate treatment of women within areas where Islam is the predominant religion. The justification often used for such disparity seems to be based upon an interpretation of Islam in which women are placed in a subjugated position by divine order. Although gender bias and discrimination exist in many areas of North and South America and Europe where more democratic ideals are practiced, the distinction in areas of Muslim rule seems to be the view of women's position as natural or divine order (Smith, 1979). The Muslim holy book, the Qur'an, states,

> Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. (Sura 4:34, Shakir, 1983)

While this is not the only area of the Quran that addresses women's status, it is an excerpt often used to display a view within Islam that places women in a subjugated role. It is argued by many Muslim religious leaders that the treatment of women is based on the interpretation of Islam in which women are to be submissive to men (Smith, 1979). Muslim feminist Fadela M'rabet (as cited in Smith, 1979, p. 526) believes this argument places women in an "ontologically inferior" position to men. She believes that such a position is not a "detail which can be considered negligible or re-interpretable: for a believer, this inferiority is fundamental. Because it proceeds from a divine preference, this inferiority is the mark-natural, ineffaceable-of the women" (as cited in Smith, 1979, p. 526). To Muslim feminists, this position is arguably not one of mere inferiority, but

one of subjugation, the result of which is women often fall victim to oppressive leadership and abuse.

In my effort to gain a deeper understanding of the role of religion in the treatment of women, I have read and analyzed various memoirs by women who have lived under the oppressive restraints of cultural interpretations of Islam. What my review of this autobiographical literature has helped me consider is the type and rate of gender violence in predominately Muslim areas. Although discrimination and gender violence are evident in every society, according to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the role of women within predominately Muslim regions is one of particular vulnerability to honor violence and subordination (Ali, 2007).

Some authors have argued that much of those oppressive traditions have been derived from the assimilation of pre-existing cultural traditions into the practice of Islam in specific regions (Helie, 1993; Ottaway, 2004). Anise Helie cites examples of such assimilations as the Hindu caste system or female genital mutilation in some, though not all, Muslim societies. She states: "This adopting of cultural traditions is seen as an attempt by fundamentalists to manipulate the traditions in order to perpetuate their version of the truth" (p. 2455). This is especially true of regions controlled by fundamental wings of Islam where there seems to be a selectivity as to what constitutes truth and original teaching. To Helie, this is especially problematic because women in fundamentalist groups hold a particularly vulnerable position in that they represent the symbolic identity of society. She states, "the strict adherence of views of womanhood within a fundamentalist religious code is then necessary to be a precondition for maintaining and reproducing the fundamentalist version of society" (p. 2455). To

question or challenge these religious guidelines would be a betrayal of an individual's religion, community, and culture; to do so should be met by swift retribution.

In her examination of women's rights and democracy in the Middle East, Marina Ottaway (2004) states that nowhere in the Arab world do women enjoy equal rights; she goes on, however, to reject the stereotyped image held by most Westerners of homebound, veiled women as being true of all Arab women. Ottaway points to highly educated, professional women, "quite emancipated in their own minds but still struggling against restrictive social values" (p. 4). Many distinctions exist in the situated realities of women from various backgrounds within a single country. The lives of women from a upper socioeconomic status are vastly different from the reality of women in poverty within the same country and under the same laws. Distinctions are also made between women in urban and rural settings, as well as educated and illiterate women (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995). The adoption of stereotyped views of women in the Middle East has resulted in well meaning, albeit misguided, attempts to assist women in regions of extreme oppression (Barakat & Wardell, 2002; Hunt & Posa, 2004; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995). Women in these countries have been the subjects of numerous attempts to provide aide that has left some in a more vulnerable position than before (Barakat & Wardell, 2002). These women have been used as justification for military action (Ottaway, 2004), and they have been used as bargaining chips in political negotiations with religious and political leaders (Hunt & Posa, 2004).

Although it is clear that women in regions of predominately Muslim rule experience a great deal of gender discrimination and oppressive control, blanket

generalizations cannot be placed upon the Middle East as a whole because the treatment of women varies by region and cultural tradition.

Women Leaders in Transition

According to Jaquette (1997), since women's movements in Europe and North America first began to assert rights previously denied to women, similar movements around the world have echoed the struggle for greater freedoms and gender equality. The recognition of the right to vote for women was first seen in New Zealand in 1893; two decades later the right was recognized for women in the United States. The right to vote itself, however, did not automatically give women access to leadership roles or public office, and women who were bold enough to run for office faced ridicule in virtually every nation. Those who actually won office were subjected to exclusion from decision making and discrimination (Jaquette, 1997). In her study on the rise of women in power, Jaquette notes that women in more and more countries have mobilized for greater equality, basic rights, and access to leadership roles. Recognizing the trend, the United Nations held its first International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1975 and declared 1976-1985 to be the Decade of Women (Jaquette, 1997). In subsequent years, a spotlight on rape as a weapon of war shifted discussion of women's rights to a discussion of human rights (Conners, 2005). Jaquette also found that cultural factors significantly affect women's access to leadership; countries with long histories of liberal views of gender find it much easier to integrate women into leadership roles whereas Arab states typically maintain the lowest percentage of women in power (Jaquette, 1997).

Women experienced significant increases in participation in leadership from 1975-1995, leading to studies exploring the conditions for women's access to leadership

positions in modernized governments, as well as the implications of women's involvement within the political arena (Banducci & Karp, 2000; Chiva, 2005; Dubeck, 1976; Jaquette, 1997; Lucas, 2003; Newman, 1994; Steinberg, 2001). These studies have examined variables contributing to the successful assimilation into leadership roles by women in Western nations where they have experienced greater access to political office and leadership positions. Results of a few of those studies have found that gender identity affects party affiliation and vote (Newman, 1994) party ideology impacts recruitment strategies for women who would run for political office (Chiva, 2005), the type of governmental organization affects women's political career advancement (Newman, 1994), and the institutionalization of women as leaders helps women to overcome disadvantages in access to office and affords greater influence once in office (Lucas, 2003). Additional studies have revealed that a woman's education, age when assuming office, occupation, and party leadership contributed to the success of women in United States state legislative offices (Dubeck, 1976).

As noted by Jaquette (1997), Arab states typically have the lowest percentage of women in political office. However, in recent years, studies indicate women in some Arab nations have made strides in accessing political office and leadership roles (Clark & Schwedler, 2003). Islamic political parties once vehemently opposed to women in power now open doors for women's participation. Countries such as Yeman and Jordan have seen a shift in the stance of Islamic parties as they have sought to win the support of female voters. Party leaders have recognized the benefit gained from promoting women's participation in order to gain votes or appease critics, both domestic and international. This change is not the result of an ideological shift but rather a need to promote women

within their parties in order to court female voters (Clark & Schwedler, 2003). Utility and the promotion of the party itself has been at the forefront of many of the gains made by women in leadership in predominately Muslim countries in recent years; however, support from male leaders in these regions has remained inconsistent at best. Examples include Islamist political parties such as Yemeni Reform Group, or Islah, in Yemen and Islamic Action Front, or IAF, in Jordan, all of which once opposed women's involvement completely. Yet a mere decade later both parties have more women participating than any party within their respective countries (Clark & Schwedler, 2003). This inclusion has not been without strong criticism, most of which is based upon religious ideology, primarily "the idea that, since women cannot occupy any position superior to a man's… female parliamentarians are necessarily unacceptable" (Clark & Schwedler, p. 301). During the 1997 Yemeni elections, the supreme religious leader of Islah criticized the appointment of a female deputy minister stating, "God made women emotional and did not give them strong character, and emotion does not suit leadership" (Clark & Schwedler, p. 305).

As small windows of opportunity have been opened to women, many have seized the opportunity and sought to expand their positions within various realms (Clark & Schwedler, 2003; Mehran, 2003). For example, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the government began to promote women's education in an effort to teach women to be the "New Muslim Woman" (Mehran, 2003, p. 270): a woman who is both modern and traditional at the same time, one who can educate her children in many areas such as health care, yet one who subscribes to the traditional roles of women in Islam. As the Iranian government has sought to educate women to assume what was determined to be their proper place, opportunities for education previously denied has been expanded for

women, albeit to gender specific fields. As a result, women have "used the post revolutionary educational system to empower themselves by taking advantage of the opportunities created by the interplay of tradition and modernity" (Mehran, 2003, p. 271). Doors to education once closed to daughters of more conservative and pious religious families have now opened, and education has been used by many women to promote social justice in Iran (Mehran, 2003). Women have also seized opportunities available to expand their influence in the political realm as intraparty conflicts or external threats have preoccupied party leaders, creating a situation that worked in favor of women by allowing them greater access to leadership roles and greater influence within those positions (Clark & Schwedler, 2003).

Despite gains made by women in leadership, access to the highest level offices such as president or prime minister remain largely denied to women. Because of the scarcity of representation by women at this level of leadership in the Middle East, I have expanded to a world stage to include women who have attained these roles in patriarchal societies. There are a few women have aspired to remarkable levels of leadership in areas of democratic transition. Women such as Corizon Acquino of the Philippines, Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, and Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, to name a few, have attained the highest offices within their countries, all of which are hostile climates maintain women in leadership (Richter, 1991-1992; Thompson, 2003).

The lack of female leaders in South and Southeast Asia, like many areas of the world, has been explained by religious ideology and traditional gender roles (Thompson, 2003). Linda Richter points to the effects of patriarchy on the opportunities for women in leadership in these areas stating,

> The ideology of patriarchy has had a decisive impact on the fate of women in most cultures around the globe… Male dominance has been legitimated in law and custom. Politics or the public life of the polity has been presumed to be a natural sphere for men while for women, to the extent they had a space or turf to call their own, the "natural" sphere was presumed to be private. … Thus the private family role forced on most women formed part of the basis for making them "ineligible" for political roles. (Richter, 1991-1992, p. 526)

Richter goes on to say that "women have traditionally been told that it is not their purity that is at stake so much as the family honor that might be compromised by their leading less restricted lives" (Richter, 1991-1992, p. 526).

Despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles, however, a few women have aspired to remarkable leadership roles. In a study of all female presidents and prime ministers, Blema Steinberg (2001) determined that birth order, the sex of siblings, and father-daughter dynamics affected the achievement of women who assumed these high level positions.

In studies of female leadership in democratic transitions in South and Southeast Asia, Linda Richter (1991-1992) and Mark Thompson (2003) found a number of variables exist impacting women's achievement of toplevel leadership roles. One variable existing in the lives of these female leaders was their association with a nationalist cause or independence movement; many of these women moved to positions of power under dramatic circumstances such as a death of the current leader or during a period of democratic transition that led to the toppling of dictatorships. These women have also symbolically represented a religious or moral cause, being viewed as mothers to their countrymen or as a symbol of purity to clean up after corrupt dictators. Women leaders were also considered to be more public spirited and less power hungry than male counterparts. Another key variable present in the women leaders was socioeconomic

status, all female leaders studied would be considered members of the elite society, having access to quality education and acquiring English language skills. Of the women studied, all came from family dynasties actively involved in political life, and many assumed leadership roles after the death or martyrdom of either a father or husband already in the position of leadership. These women were viewed by many supporters as representing the suffering of the country yet carrying on the cause of their martyred relative.

Although a few women have aspired to top-level leadership roles in areas openly hostile to women in leadership, support from male colleagues has been inconsistent at best (Clark & Schwedler, 2003). Unlike Western nations, the number of female leaders following the example of women who have attained high level leadership roles in predominately Muslim countries has not expanded as hoped since these women leaders held office (Richter, 1991-1992). It is clear from the studies, however, that often the instances in which women have defied odds to assume top-level leadership roles, they have done so under dramatic circumstances and, once in office, have had to fight to maintain their position. Variables such as family, socioeconomic status, education, and association with a nationalist cause helped most of these women assume power in unlikely regions (Richter, 1991-1992; Thompson, 2003).

Crimes of Honor

Although access to leadership is an attainable goal of some women in predominately Muslim areas, many are faced with a very different reality. Numerous women in Muslim regions find themselves to be victims of violence on the pretense of

protecting family honor (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998, Welchman & Hossain, 2005).

In recent years, an international spotlight has been placed on the issue of violence against women in the form of crimes of honor (Sen, 2005; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Changes in global dynamics and East/West interaction in the post-September 11th era has brought the issue into focus as a key aim in the promotion of democracy and human rights (Ottaway, 2004). Previously, discussions of crimes of honor were dismissed as cultural practices to be accepted under the umbrella of tolerance; however, changes in international relations are challenging this notion (Sen, 2005). The United Nations first began to categorize violence against women as human rights violations in their 1975 World Conference on Women (Conners, 2005). This delineation brought this issue to the forefront of political discussions on human rights between the United Nations and states sanctioning honor violence. In discussing honor crimes, United Nations Special Rapporteur Radhika Coomaraswamy (in Welchman & Hossain, 2005) stated,

> These practices…represent forms of domestic violence which until recently have escaped national and international scrutiny largely because they are frequently presented as 'traditional or cultural practices' requiring tolerance and respect. Thus, cultural relativism (or respect for multiculturalism) is often employed to excuse the violation of women's rights by inhumane and discriminatory practices in community and family- despite such practices being clearly contrary to international human rights law. (p.xii)

The concept of honor as used in this context consists of the notion that male and family honor is vested in the ability to control women's behavior, primarily their sexual behavior (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). The socially constructed cultural belief is that women collectively embody morality within a society (Faqir, 2001;

Begikhani, 2005). Within patriarchal societies, the belief that women's bodies are not their own but belong instead to families and society has been legitimated as it has been codified into civil and penal laws (Amado, 2004). United Nations Special Rapporteur defines honor in this context as

> women's assigned sexual and familial roles as dictated by traditional family ideology. Thus adultery, premarital relationships (which may or may not include sexual relations), rape and falling in love with an 'inappropriate' person may constitute violations of family honour. (Welchmann & Hossain, 2005, p. 5)

Crimes of honor include but are not limited to honor killings, assault, interference in choice of marriage, confinement, imprisonment, or rape (Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). Although this term is invoked as justification for honor killings, the term is also used to cover for murder in arguments over inheritance, incest, dismissal of one wife for another, and rape (Faqir, 2001; Welchmann & Hossain, 2005). Incidents of honor violence can be extreme, such as the cases cited by Fadia Faqir of a 4-year-old girl raped by a 25-year old man then left to bleed to death by her family for bringing dishonor to them or a 16-year-old young woman killed by an older brother for bringing shame to the family after she was raped by a younger brother.

Reasons for honor killings include pre- or extramarital sexual relations, inappropriate relationships with a male who is a nonrelative, refusal of a forced marriage, falling in love with someone deemed inappropriate for marriage, rape, or incest. Honor violence can be invoked simply upon the suspicion of violation regardless of whether rumors are founded or not. Many examples exist in which women frequently are not guilty of the acts they are accused of and murdered for (Faqir, 2001).

It is difficult to know an exact rate of incidence of this type of violence against women as most of the cultures in which honor crimes take place view this as a private, family matter (Ruggi, 1998). As a result, statistics recording the violence are often not well kept, making it very difficult to understand the extent of the problem (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). Yet another problem in recording the rate of incidence of honor crimes is the mislabeling of the offense. For example, reports indicate a rise of suicides, though many understand these to be cases in which women are forced by families to kill themselves or accidents are engineered to cover the murder of women in crimes of honor (Faqir, 2001). In a 1997 interview, the former Attorney General in Palestine reported that possibly as many as 70% of murders in Gaza and the West Bank were honor killings (Ruggi, 1998). Lack of proper recording makes this figure difficult to substantiate or refute. Many times the local police are the only ones with access to evidence of honor crimes, making it difficult for activists to obtain information (Ruggi, 1998). Activists argue that statistics are recorded by men with no training in gender sensitivity and personal prejudices that may affect their reporting of the crimes (Faqir, 2001). Another key issue for activists is the underreporting by victims of these crimes for fear of retaliation or reprisal (Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). Cultural constructs make it difficult for women to be economically self-sustaining in many of these societies; therefore the victims often remain financially dependent on male relatives, which also contributes to under-reporting of these crimes (Faqir, 2001).

In countries such as Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Egypt, to name a few, civil and penal codes actually perpetuate the problem either by making such crimes legal or offering reduced sentences in trials where honor is said to be the

motivation for violence (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998; Welchmann & Hossain, 2005). Tribal customs also become intertwined with civil and penal codes, further subjugating the position of women. For example, the tribal custom in cases of rape permits the rapist to have a sentence reduced or dismissed if they agree to marry the victim, thereby forcing the victim to marry her attacker (Faqir, 2001; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). A stark example of this is relayed by Welchman and Hossain in the story of a 10-year-old rape victim in Palestine. Her family's main concern was to keep the incident hidden to avoid shame; their solution was to have their daughter marry her rapist when she came of age.

Violence against women exists in all societies with most of the violence taking place within the home where the perpetrator is known to the victim (Faqir, 2001). Areas of Europe and the Americas report violence against women also, frequently labeling them crimes of passion (Sen, 2005). In an effort to find a common framework for action in the international community, there has been a push to include crimes of honor in the same category as crimes of passion under an umbrella of violence against women (Sen, 2005). Frequently used as justification in defense trials for honor killings, crimes of passion imply impulsive, reactionary incidents in which the perpetrator is often a sexual intimate of the victim acting in response to provocation by the victim; thereby blaming the victim for the violence enacted against them. There is a problem with this distinction in cases of honor killings, however, as frequently the perpetrator is the victim's father, uncle, brother, and in many cases includes female relatives. Many activists working for reform against honor crimes oppose this linkage as it would distort the true understanding of

reasons for honor crimes and implications of this type of violence against women (Sen, 2005).

As local and international media raise public awareness of honor crimes, there is growing interest by Western governments and nongovernmental organizations in the treatment of women (Ruggi, 1998). This interest has led to the accusations by some Muslim religious leaders of Western moral superiority and neocolonialism as religious leaders allege the debate over honor killings has been instigated by Western countries trying to superimpose moral values and cultural norms, what has been called "westoxication and Western hegemony" (Faqir, 2001, p. 77; Sen, 2005). The protection of patriarchal customs normalizing honor crimes has been viewed by some as a last resort against Western neocolonial attitudes in a changing global climate that has often depicted the Muslim world to be the "enemy of the West" (Faqir, 2001; Sen, p. 46).

Although there is evidence that some of the reform taking place in regard to women's rights and crimes of honor has been effective in making small changes, there is a great deal yet to be done. Women's activists in Palestine report having been threatened and even beaten for their efforts to protect women. Attempts to reform laws are slowly being made; however, they are often met with resistance from religious leaders (Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). Some sociologists believe this resistance to reform in women's rights throughout much of the Muslim world is part of a much larger picture of male resistance to changes taking place in the status of male and female relations in which there is a destabilization of social structures within traditional patriarchal regions (Faqir, 2001). Fadia Faqir calls the rise in honor crimes evidence of resistance to those changing roles. In a meeting of representatives from 22 nongovernmental organizations

representing 10 nations held in Malta in 2004, discussions of reform pointed to the "persistent quandary of whether legal change can actually transform social practices" (Amado, 2004, p. 127).

Women in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq

Kurdistan, the conservative Muslim region of Northern Iraq, exemplifies the paradox that exists in much of the world where tradition collides with modernity. Although there are a few historical accounts of women being granted the ability to exercise rights in Kurdistan, studies indicate some women actually held political office and leadership roles throughout the ongoing resistance movements of the 20th century, though the patriarchal system was equally powerful in this region (Mojab, n.d.; Mojab, 2001b). During the brief existence of the Republic of Kurdistan, a Kurdish nation founded in Iran in 1946, women's unions did exist and women spoke out on various issues including education for girls. However, despite the presence of women in the public arena, the expectations for women were positioned within traditional roles under patriarchal control (Mojab, 2001b).

In the aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991, the creation of the no-fly zone by the United States (U.S.) and coalition countries left the Kurdish region with a quasi barrier, a buffer zone from Saddam's reach that allowed Kurds some measure of freedom. Taking full advantage of the shortened reach of Saddam, the Kurds began to practice a limited version of democracy, creating their own government, political parties, and laws. Despite the gains made toward autonomy, the Kurdish Regional Government was left without recognition by any state or international entity. Additionally, a civil war between the two main Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic

Union of Kurdistan (PUK) resulted in further alienation and division, with the region being divided into two separately administered areas (Begikhani, 2005). It was only after the U.S.-led war in 2003 that the two Kurdish parties united and began to assume a position internationally during the rebuilding of the post-Saddam Iraqi government.

Prior to 1991, honor killing was a subject that could not be openly discussed in Kurdistan (Begikhani, 2005). Honor killings were a problem in Kurdistan, but women's issues and human rights were secondary to issues of self-determination and nationalism (Begikhani, 2005; McDonald, 2001; Mojab, n.d). To challenge women's place in Kurdish society historically was seen as an assault on the nationalist cause. Political leaders have argued that women's movements should be postponed until self-determination is achieved (Begikhani, 2005; Mojab, 2001b). Iraqi government offensives against the autonomist movement effectively silenced any voice for women as well (Mojab, 2001). However, once the semiautonomous region was created, Kurdish women in diasporas as well as women's unions in Iraqi Kurdistan began to speak on behalf of women in the region who were subject to honor violence (Begikhani, 2005).

Kurdish penal codes were based on the Iraqi Penal Code; article 111 of this code permitted honor killings, Articles 128 and 130 provided legal excuses and a reduction in sentence for honor killings (Begikhani, 2005). To make this more difficult, a 1973 Iraqi Supreme Court ruling made murder legal if for the purification of shame (Begikhani, 2005).

Many of the early reform attempts by women's groups in Kurdistan were ignored and went unnoticed. Women's groups benefited in the 90s, however, as more and more Kurdish women sought refugee status in Diaspora (Begikhani, 2005). This development

led to an ability to speak out against honor crimes in an international arena, as well as fund support for reform efforts in Kurdistan. Pressure by women's groups with a new backing successfully brought about the amending of the law in Kurdistan making honor killing illegal by the PUK and later by the KDP (Begikhani, 2005).

Kurdish society is based on an Arab patriarchal system in which endogamy--marriage within a tribe--is practiced; therefore the tribe and tribal customs are of great importance (Begikhani, 2005). Despite the successful amending of civil codes, little faith has been placed in the civil government or the justice system. A tribal justice system called komelayti is more often sought to settle issues between families and tribes (Begikhani; United Nations, 2008). Kurdish women's rights activist Nazand Begikhani describes this system as a means of imposing socially and politically accepted remedies to disputes. Komelayti has been favored over civil courts due to the societal belief that courts do not establish justice or find a remedy but rather seek to accuse one of the sides, a situation that causes further shame as cases brought public do not end. Decisions made by tribal leaders are often based on customs and tribal remediation rather than justice, and decisions are final. Begikhani gives the example of a young man named Soran who was accused of having an inappropriate relationship with a young woman in his town. The young woman was killed by her brothers as a result of the accusations. Soran was shot and left for dead by her brothers; however he lived through the incident. The young woman's family then demanded restitution for her death and invoked the komelayti. Their conclusion was that, since Soran's family did not have a sister or cousin that could be given to the girl's family as restitution, they must pay the young woman's family 90,000 dinars, an amount reduced from the original decision but still much more than

Soran's family could afford. His family had to sell their house in order to make the payment and were left homeless as a result of the decision of the komelayti. Soran maintained his innocence throughout the proceedings. The decision was by no means just or fair; however, because the system is practiced and respected, further bloodshed within the families was prevented and the decision was final (Begikhani, 2005).

The 2003 U.S.-led war ended the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, bringing international attention to the plight of women in Iraq and Kurdistan. This newfound attention followed years of resistance, conflict, and struggle during which little attention was given to issues of women's rights or human rights (McDonald, 2001; Mojab, n.d.). The desire of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) for recognition in the international community has created an opening for women to voice their concerns and demands. The KRG has been more responsive to advocacy in an effort to maintain support from the international community (Welchmann & Hossain, 2005).

Dishonorable Acts

Despite the espousal of more democratic ideals by Kurdish leadership, much has remained at a surface level as political and social problems within the region remain very high. Allegations of corruption and nepotism remain the norm for Kurdistan despite rhetoric of change (Cagaptay, 2008). Indicators show very little movement beyond mere talk to action in addressing social problems within the region. In reporting for the local newspaper *The Kurdish Globe*, Ako Muhammed (2007) notes that "the Kurdish region in northern Iraq has taken giant steps forward in developing its political, security, and economic conditions, but reports indicate that social problems are still rampant in the region" (para. 3).

Although various forms of social problems exist, Muhammed (2007) refers primarily to issues facing women in the region. He gives examples of such social problems in Kurdistan by relaying the story of a father who imprisoned his three daughters for 3 days on suspicion of contacting boys by cell phone. In another example, Muhammed describes a young woman whose father threatened to kill her if she did not withdraw from college because he saw her laughing with a boy. These young women have been victims of honor-based violence. The practice of honor violence has become a part of the culture and tradition within Kurdistan and much of the Islamic world. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq Report, between January and June of 2008, some 56 women were murdered and 150 women burned in apparent forced suicides in Kurdistan (United Nations, 2008). Statistics indicate an increase in the occurrence of honor killings in the Kurdish region since 2003 (United Nations, 2007). In a statement to the *Kurdish Globe*, Yousif Muhammed Aziz, Minister of Human Rights stated, "I am here to tell you that these crimes against women increase daily and I have warned all of the ministries as well as Parliament about this, but they are not cooperating," (Khidhir, 2007, para. 3).

The Kurdish Government remains largely inactive in prosecuting perpetrators of honor crimes. Sentences for perpetrators remain very lenient, with many receiving reduced sentences when there is an honor motivation. For example, in the case of Pela Atroshi, a young Kurdish woman murdered by her uncle in 1999, both the uncle and father who was also involved were given 1-year suspended sentences by a Kurdistani court since the killing had honorable motivations (Jowan, 2008). The government has shown signs of taking a stronger stand against such violence, however, at least in

rhetoric. In a speech to honor a women's rights activist, former Prime Minister Nerchivan Barzani stated, "in order to be truly strong and prosperous the Kurdistan Region must not focus only on our economy…our cultural and social attitudes must also grow as we develop." Mr. Barzani went on to condemn the practice of honor killing, saying, "there is no honor in this crime. These actions offer nothing beyond disgrace to our people and a stain on our character" (KRG, 2007a, para. 3). Although much reform still needs to take place, activists see signs of some change in regard to honor violence in the region. Indicative of small change taking place, human rights groups are seeing an increase in women filing court cases and taking action against family members for abuses (Muhammed, 2007). The Ministry of Human Rights reports,

> Many women have filed court cases because of exposure to physical abuse. Registered cases indicate that women filed 28.64% of the total cases in Kurdistan courts in 2006. Nearly 18.91% of the cases dealt with attempted homicide against women, and 2.40% were rape cases. Most of the cases, 35.36%, were against husbands, with 6.96% cases against fathers and 3.36% against brothers. (Muhammed, 2007, para. 6)

In an effort to expand awareness of reform, the Kurdish Women's Rights Watch, partnered with New York-based legal NGO the Global Justice Center, launched a training course in 2007 involving judges, Members of Parliament (MPs), media representatives and women's rights activists. The course was designed to inform participants on how to align local laws to international standards in order to enhance the rights of women (KRG, 2007b). Facing international pressure at a time when negative publicity would be especially damaging, the two ruling political parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and eventually the Kurdistan Democratic Party amended laws in their area to criminalize honor killings. However, observers continue to report much of this change is merely on paper as little is done to prosecute perpetrators of honor killings (United Nations, 2008).

Further work is needed to protect women from violent retribution for acts considered shameful by their families and some elements of society; the social, religious, and cultural reasons behind the violence must be adequately explored and understood in order to affect change in the circumstances of women. Many activists question whether legal reform alone can effectively combat honor violence (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001). Social change in the form of laws to protect women, emergency resources, education of gender equality, and harsher punishments for perpetrators must take place in order to create a safe environment for women.

Women Leaders in Kurdistan

Although a great deal of discrimination against women remains in this conservative region, there is also a paradoxical view standing in stark contrast to this discrimination and violence. There exists in Kurdistan a liberal view of women allowing some to attain high-level leadership positions such as parliamentary members, ministry heads, and executive advisors. This paradoxical view of women affords them greater respect, opportunity, and personal freedom. Access to greater educational, business, and political opportunities are available, and some women have taken lead roles in the rebuilding of the Kurdistan Region in the years following the latest of many wars in the area. A recent change in law requires that 30% of the seats of the Parliament in Kurdistan be filled by women, nearly double the rate of participation by women in the United States Congress (KRG, 2006a). Currently three government ministry offices are headed by women, including the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal, Ministry of Municipalities, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (KRG, 2006b). Women have made strides in obtaining positions of authority and leadership in traditionally male-dominated fields such as

engineering, medicine, and politics. Women's Unions have been successful in creating or amending some laws to protect women's rights under the new Constitution (Muradkin, 2008). The reforms have been part of an effort by women to advance gender equity and equality for nearly 18 years (Begikhani, 2005). The relatively new freedom and opportunity to speak is being utilized by women both in Kurdistan and Diaspora: however, their efforts are frequently met with opposition from religious leaders (Begikhani, 2005). Women's Unions and NGOs are taking advantage of this window of opportunity to make strides in changing the situation of women in Kurdistan. The results of their efforts have been fruitful in creating limited change; however, much remains to be done in an attempt to achieve protection and equity for women in the Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq. The final result of their effort remains to be seen.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Statement

In this qualitative feminist ethnographic study, I examine conflicting cultural perceptions of women in order to understand and to critique the disparity in treatment of women in the region. In exploring this topic, I have inquired into a range of issues facing women in Kurdistan such as professional equity, opportunity, civil laws relating to women, and violence against women. The goal of my research is to contribute to social change for women in the area.

Guiding Questions

1. What experiences have helped women in leadership rise above cultural constraints to assume positions of power in their respective fields? To address this, I have explored family background, education, personality, and professional opportunities of women leaders to better understand ways in which these women have formed identities and come to understand their current positions as leaders.

2. How would women in Kurdistan who have defied the norm and assumed a leadership role describe the general societal views about, conditions for, and restrictions placed upon women in Kurdish society? Within a variety of arenas and social settings, I have explored the views, expectations, and restrictions placed upon women in Kurdish society through the eyes of women who have defied the norm and assumed a leadership role.

3. What are the ways in which these women leaders perceive themselves as influencing change in their social spheres, especially with respect to the treatment of women in the region? I have explored ways in which women leaders have become agents of change within their spheres of influence and how that change has affected/ is affecting the treatment of women in the region.

Epistemological and Subjective Intersections

As I moved back to the United States after living in Kurdistan, I experienced a reverse culture shock. I did not realize at the time the profound impact living within the culture had upon me in everything from dress to interaction with people. As I began to process the time I had spent in Kurdistan and adjusting to being back in the United States, I began to question many things. I continue to question the differences in cultures, the reasons for such differences, and the way women construct identities in a culture that I viewed as treating them as second-class citizens at best, as property at worst.

My decision to enter the doctoral program at Appalachian State was fueled primarily by my desire to work internationally in conflict and post-conflict regions to rebuild education systems and provide greater opportunity to people living in extremely violent or oppressed areas. My hope was also to contribute to more open dialogue and a greater understanding of other cultures and people. Realizing the necessity to show qualification for the type of work I hoped to do, I entered the doctoral program. Throughout the course of classes and dialogue, I have become very interested in feminist research and feminist methodology. Feminist methodology assumes a stance of action, an underlying purpose in research that will address areas of inequity and injustice for women. (Reinharz,1992). Feminist research is emancipatory in nature seeking to

contribute to "the *eradication* of women's oppression (Jackson, 2003, [emphasis in original])" by raising awareness of women's situated social and political conditions, empowering women to break oppressive holds of patriarchy. This interest in the cultural constructs of meaning for women in Kurdistan has led me to look more closely at feminist ethnographic research.

From an epistemological standpoint, I take the view of a constructionist, the idea "that all knowledge…meaningful reality…is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty,1998, p. 42). Taking a constructionist view into this study means that I perceive the treatment of women in Kurdistan as a social/cultural perception, one where there is a marked disparity in view and treatment of women. Understanding the disparate cultural perception of women can only come through systematic, critical examination of the construction of meaning within this particular cultural context.

As a feminist, I take into account the ways in which women and men develop perceptions of gender roles within Kurdish society. According to Shirley Hune, feminist scholars primarily use gender in the organization of hierarchy in society (2006). I examined how meaning is made for both men and women based upon societal norms, cultural restrictions, and religious ideology. My aim was to conduct research that provided a better understanding of the multitude of issues surrounding women in Kurdistan. As stated by Reinharz (1992), "Rather than there being a 'women's way of knowing,' or a 'feminist way of doing research,' there are women's *ways* of knowing" (p. 4, [emphasis in original]). I have explored the ways in which women's identities are

formed and cultural issues are navigated within this region of the world in order to understand the cultural phenomena and help contribute to knowledge leading to change in regard to women in Kurdistan.

Numerous academics have addressed subjectivities and issues of voice and representation in feminist research, particularly cross cultural research of women in Third World or developing nations (Jackson, 2003; Mohanty, 1991; Spivak, 1994; Trinh, 1989). In conducting feminist research in Kurdistan, I was and am acutely aware that I remain disconnected from the realities that shape these women's lives. I am not Kurdish, therefore I am not subject to the same cultural rules or expectations that many of these women find to be an everyday reality nor was I subject to those rules while living in Kurdistan myself. I have taken into account my own subjectivities and biases in viewing the status of women in Kurdistan. As a woman and a professional working in an academic setting in Kurdistan, I have sensed the discrimination felt by Kurdish women academics in the region; however, as an American woman, I am often afforded much more leniency and a higher degree of credibility than many Kurdish women themselves are given. Yet, despite the status of being a foreigner, a disparity in treatment exists between myself and male colleagues. On more than one occasion, I have been discounted professionally on the basis of gender. I have watched as male colleagues were heard much more quickly by Kurdish men in certain circles. Although this is not true of all Kurdish men, it is certainly true of many.

As a friend to many women in varying familial and socioeconomic positions, I cannot help but feel empathy for my Kurdish friends as we discuss life, relationships, opportunities, or dreams. I am often conscious of my own desire to hold back in the

course of conversations surrounding many of these issues as I realize their situations are starkly different from any I have personally known. I see written in the expression on their faces their sense of amazement that life could be different for women, their pain in realizing for them it may never be so.

As the mother of a baby girl, I cannot help but feel the desire to shield or protect her from harsher realities of the world; the disappointments and frustrations of being defined or confined by gender and even the possibility of being victimized in any way. In thinking of my own daughter, I cannot help but feel a strong need to assist other women's daughters in their effort to gain a more equal footing in an area that defines worth by gender and often leaves women vulnerable to abuse. I read news accounts of anonymous women or girls whose bodies have been tossed aside with no record of who they are, no recognition of their lives or existence, and no one to speak out on their behalf (Kurdistan Women's Rights Watch, 2008b). I am outraged at a system that allows this to occur with very little effort to pursue the perpetrators of these crimes. I conduct this research from the perspective that steps must be taken to find some means of justice for these women, a voice for lives that have been cut short on the basis of cultural tradition or religious ideology.

As a practicing Christian, my own religious beliefs shape my understanding of the subjugation of women in the name of divine order. It must be said that within certain interpretations of Christianity, women are placed in an inferior position to men; however, this is not my view of gender roles within Christianity. Women in Muslim countries are placed in society and held to many social restrictions based upon an interpretation of Islam (Sen, 2005). Additionally, within many Muslim countries, cultural and civil codes

advocate severe punishment for indiscretions based upon their interpretation of the rules of Islam (Welchmann & Hossain, 2005). Within my view of Christianity, mercy is to be extended to others rather than judgment; severe punishments for actions considered deviant in the name of divine law is unacceptable. I have found it necessary to often reflect on my own views of religion and other interpretations of Christianity in light of the use of religious justification for violence against women in order to remain open to the various interpretations of Islam that can be found within one geographic region.

Each of these areas of personal identity influence my view of the treatment of women in Kurdistan, and fuel my biases of the culture as a researcher concerned with areas of inequality for women. These beliefs and experiences color my perception of the treatment of women and have necessitated constant critical reflection as I have engaged in this research. According to Kapoor (2004), there is a certain danger as a Western woman undertaking study of the women in patriarchal societies of reproducing versions of Western hegemonic power. Spivak (1994) advocates an acknowledgment of the complicities of the researcher/participant relationship as well as a hyper-critical reflexivity in order reduce the risk of reproducing a hegemonic interpretation of the Other. Acknowledging our positioning within a variety of discourses, our personal motivations, and bias as a researcher will aide in creating a non-hierarchical relationship with the Other (Kapoor, 2004). I have found it necessary to pay a great deal of attention to areas of bias based on deeply held beliefs and to bring discordant areas into a self-speculative gaze in order to understand the ways in which I have formed an understanding of women's positioning and treatment in Kurdistan. Acknowledging the

existence of bias in my research has led me to further examine my beliefs and challenge my assumptions regarding women's issues in Kurdistan.

In considering views of women in Kurdistan, I realize that the understanding of feminist issues in the Middle East must be different than that of feminism in the United States. As a developing, post-conflict region, the views of women must be situated within the context of the culture in which they exist (Luke, 2001; Mohanty, 2004; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Trinh, 1989). As a feminist very interested in women's issues in Third world regions, it was my wish to explore the personal experiences of women in this region as it pertains to the larger view of the culture. Mohanty (1991) points out that women's issues in developing or Third world countries are defined differently than those of women in a White, middle class, Western setting. Women in Kurdistan face a range of issues that intersect along lines of class and gender, issues that are culturally based and situated within this cultural context.

Research Purposes and Plan

In keeping with the tradition of feminist research aims, the purpose of this study is to speak out for women previously denied opportunity in an effort to address areas of inequity and oppression and to create change for women in this region (Reinharz, 1992). Although some women in Kurdistan do achieve a degree of respect and a platform for speaking out about their rights, many do not. Too many women and girls fall victim to violence based upon cultural traditions (Begikhani, 2005). These women and girls are not heard; they are often nameless and faceless, becoming a statistic whose fates have been determined on the basis of oppressive, patriarchal male societal norms. Where these women are afforded no voice, others must speak out on their behalf. I agree with

Shulamit Reinharz (1992) when she states her beliefs about the perceived positions of feminist researchers: “We cannot speak for others but that we can, and must, speak out for others” (p. 16). I cannot speak for the women leaders of this study. I have not experienced the treatment that they have experienced. I have not lived under the societal restrictions these women have lived under. I have not had to overcome the obstacles these leaders have in order to achieve a leadership position. Nor have I ever had to experience the threat of violence as a result of cultural boundaries like many other women in Kurdistan do. My experiences as a White, American woman are vastly different from the experiences these women have had. I cannot speak for them; however, I can speak out on their behalf.

The design of this study is a feminist ethnography. As a methodology, ethnography involves multi-method fieldwork including observation, participation, document analysis, and interviewing. According to Patton (2001), ethnography involves a detailed and systematic examination of a culture or a particular cultural phenomenon. As previously indicated, the study has examined the existing paradox in treatment of women in Kurdistan; it involves a detailed observation and examination of Kurdish culture and the construct of gendered meaning within that culture.

Ethnography involves long-term participation in a culture in order to understand its norms and mores. My personal experiences, ranging from living in Kurdistan for two years and continuing professional involvement within the region for five years, have given me a view of the culture from firsthand experience. I have drawn upon my understanding of the culture based on my experiences there. Open ended interviews with women leaders in various fields were conducted in Kurdistan as well.

Site Selection

My dissertation research was based in Erbil, Kurdistan, the capital of the Northern Region of Iraq. Erbil city is an urban area representative of the paradox in views of women. Erbil is home to offices of the President and Prime Minister of the Region, Parliament, and government Ministries. The city welcomes Western investment and houses various foreign consulates. Some women in Erbil participate in all walks of life and enjoy freedom not afforded to women in other areas of Kurdistan. Although this freedom is offered to a large number of women in Erbil, an equal or greater number experience a very different life, being subject to the rule and authority of male family members. These women experience a harsh reality of cultural expectations and boundaries that afford little room for deviation. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq Human Rights report for the first half of 2008, "between January and May, officials recorded 23 apparent murders of women in Erbil and Dohuk and 74 burning cases, including 32 fatalities" (United Nations, 2008, p. 16). Within the city itself a culture is in conflict, apparent in the numerous reports of violence against women occurring relatively short distances from the offices of women serving the region in various leadership roles. Erbil city is representative of the disparity in treatment of women throughout the region. As my interest in exploring the phenomena of the disparity in treatment of women intersected with my various professional and growing personal relationships in the region, I grew to recognize Erbil city and my relationship with its citizens as what Patton would call an information rich case (Patton, 2001).

Participant Selection

In considering participants for this study, I was acutely aware of the fact that careful attention must be given to issues of security and anonymity. In order to ensure the safety of the participants, names and identities were changed. I have given each participant a pseudonym. Job titles were changed while maintaining the context of the job responsibilities. No photographs of participants were used as part of this study.

A total of three participants were selected from among women leaders based on a variety of criteria. The study was originally designed to include four participants; however, due to schedule conflicts, one person had to withdraw from the study. Participants were women who have defied cultural norms to achieve a level of leadership in a variety of professions. For purposes of this research, a definition of leadership is based upon participants having responsibility for oversight of a ministry or office, responsibility of creating policy or laws, and supervision of employees or subordinates. The participants of this study were identified during previous trips to Kurdistan. One participant is an advisor to a minister appointed by President Massoud Barzani. Another participant was a leading member of the Kurdistan Parliament and an advisor to the Minister of Health. She is also a medical doctor operating a private practice in the evenings. A third participant is chair of her department at a local university. Ethical issues were further examined through the Institutional Review Board approval process.

Data Collection Methods

There are no distinctly feminist research methods; rather a variety of methods are used by feminists in conducting research. Feminist aims in research involve exploring women's identities and women's experiences (Reinharz, 1992). To this end, I have

employed a variety of methods in collecting data for this study. I have based a large amount of information on systematic reflections of my past experiences living and working in the Kurdistan Region. I have also used loosely structured, open-ended interviews, participant observation, and document review.

Through examination of field notes, journal entries, and memos spaced throughout my time in Kurdistan, I have sought to better understand my perception of what was taking place at the time in regard to women's issues. I have engaged in critical reflexivity in order to explore ways in which I have created meaning from those experiences in an effort to challenge my own assumptions and explore the limits of my understanding of women's issues as a Western woman interacting with men and women in Kurdish society. The guiding question of this reflexive gaze has been "what do I think I know and how did I come to know it" (Glesne, 2006, p. 126)? This information has provided a base of understanding from which I have engaged in this research.

For this study, I have also conducted open-ended interviews with the three participants, Bahar, Lana, and Shna (pseudonyms), to gain an understanding of these women's lived experiences, perceptions, struggles, and goals. Questions that were explored during interviews were informed by my general theoretical and conceptual framework of feminist, constructivist, and critical theorist. The questions centered on familial background, the participants' perception of the treatment of women in general in Kurdistan, and participants' experiences as women leaders. (see Appendix D for sample interview protocol). A minimum of one, 1-hour interview was conducted with each participant. These interviews were conducted in various locations based upon participant and researcher availability and privacy issues. Each of the participants are fluent in

English therefore the interviews were conducted in English, and no translator was present for the interviews. The interviews were videotaped for analysis upon my return from Kurdistan.

Upon returning to the U.S. from Kurdistan, I have maintained open access communication with the participants of this study as much as possible. I have followed up the interviews with further communication by phone and email in order to clarify any questions and address gaps in the information provided. I have provided participants the option of engaging in a review of my observations prior to the conclusion of the research project. The participants had the option of reviewing preliminary findings in order to provide further clarification of events and perceptions.

I conducted participant observations in order to observe the women formally working within their respective field or interacting informally with colleagues in various settings. Observations included viewing some participants while working in and outside of Kurdistan in settings such as group meetings, formal and informal meals, and conferences. The various settings provided the opportunity to explore the dynamic between male and female colleagues and document changes in behavior and leadership style as location and social settings changed. The changes noted reflect directly on the unspoken cultural rules and norms that govern so much of the interactions in Kurdistan. Additional observations included in this research include numerous personal and professional experiences while in Kurdistan and my perception of what was taking place.

Cultural documents including newspaper and journal articles, press releases, United Nations Human Rights reports, Amnesty International reports, women's rights organizations' reports, and past and current laws were collected and used as data to assist

me in identifying patterns and better understand overall societal norms regarding gender roles through examination of emergent themes (Glesne, 2006).

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues were addressed prior to enlisting participants for involvement in this study. I addressed issues of security and anonymity for each participant. I discussed involvement with each participant prior to all aspects of the study to ensure an understanding of all potential issues related to their participation with this project. I have known two of the participants of this study for several years, and I view each of these women as friends and colleagues. The nature of this relationship raises ethical concerns as I have endeavored to conduct this study in a way that will engage the women in research without exploiting this relationship. Glesne (2006) attends to ethical concerns as she discusses various researcher roles and subsequent ethical dilemmas involved. Postcolonial feminist studies attend to the ethical concerns raised when Western researchers attempt to speak for or about the Other/subaltern (Alcoff, 1991; Jackson, 2003; Kapoor, 2004; Spivak, 1994). One potential concern raised in relation to this study is the possibility of divulging information that may be uncomfortable to the participants or their families. In light of these ethical concerns, I have offered each of the women in this study the option of reviewing findings prior to the completion of this study.

Participants of this study may benefit in several ways. For participants in the study, no monetary compensation was made. Women within this group may benefit in knowing their lives and experiences contribute to addressing areas of injustice for other women within this region. Their participation in the study will hopefully help these women to use their voice in speaking out for Kurdish women as they have reflected on

the culture in relation to their own identities and roles as leaders in Kurdistan (Glesne, 2006; Reinharz, 1992). Participation in the study may give these women a sense of satisfaction in having a platform for their voice to be heard on issues related to their lives and experiences as women and leaders in a difficult area.

One area of concern to me in regard to this study, particularly in regard to the participants of this study, is the means of representing these women. Denzin and Lincoln argue that qualitative research is in a "crisis of representation" (2005, p. 19) stating the researcher claims moral and authoritative superiority. Glesne (2006) further asks whether researchers can fairly represent the experiences of another. Numerous studies call attention to the complicities involved in the task of representing or re-presenting the Other (Jackson, 2003; Kapoor, 2004; Spivak, 1994). I am aware of my own limitations in adequately representing the lives and experiences of these women from a cross cultural perspective without creating victims, which they certainly are not, or romanticizing their experiences. Member checking, sharing research findings with the participants represented in this study, addressed some of these concerns.

Data Analysis

According to Glesne (2006), "qualitative data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (p. 147). In light of the research goals of exploring the cultural perception of women in Kurdistan, I have done feminist thematic analysis. Feminist researchers use this method of analysis for the comparison of gender relations in society and text (Reinharz, 1992). In other words, "The cultural products of any given society at any given time reverberate with the themes of that society and that era" (Weitz as cited in Reinharz, 1992, p.145).

Thematic analysis is widely used among qualitative researchers to analyze data (Glesne, 2006). In thematic analysis, the researcher begins the analysis of data with no preconceived ideas or categories but rather codes the data in order to "build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 86). Knowledge is induced from themes that emerge during the coding process (Ezzy, 2002).

I have coded the transcribed video footage of interviews according to various categories and subcategories to identify recurring themes. The same method of thematic analysis was used to identify patterns or themes in cultural documents and artifacts. In reading the various reports, articles, and press releases, I have used the same categories and subcategories to initially identify emergent themes, while I have remained open to new patterns or competing ideas. It is through this process that I have attempted to contribute to feminist theories as well as inform gaps in literature addressing the disparity in treatment of women based upon what I have seen and heard. I have attempted to connect my experiences in Kurdistan to the stories of other women. I have viewed my findings in light of existing theories related to women, leadership, and violence. When analyzing content using feminist analysis, one must "study both the texts that exist and texts that do not" (Reinharz, 1992, p.163). To address feminist analysis, Crotty states that

> all human life and every human situation can be seen as text. As they address that life and those situations, women need to lay aside the cultural understandings imposed upon them, inevitably sexist as those understandings are, and interpret life and situation anew-yes, reading them as they have never been read before (1998, p.182).

Limitations and Strengths

I have drawn heavily on my past experiences living and working in Kurdistan to interpret the treatment of women in this dissertation study. My involvement in the region for seven years has afforded me a unique opportunity to view the treatment of women over a time of significant change both politically and socially to the region. I have witnessed many changes in regard to women's treatment as well as the reaction from various members of the culture. This long-term involvement has strengthened the ethnographic research in that I have been given an opportunity many others have not been provided. This experience is one that I believe provides a better understanding of the issues facing women in the area, informs research, and allows me to ask better questions in order to probe for a depth of understanding with the participants as I have sought to understand my own experiences.

As a Westerner viewing the circumstances in Kurdistan as an outsider, I am able to speak more freely, observing the culture with a critical eye. As an outsider, I do not feel the need to propagandize information addressing areas of need in Kurdistan. Within the document review, I have included a variety of documents in the study to provide a balanced view of the culture. I have used official government documents, popular media, nongovernmental office reports, and other information to present a wide range of perspectives on Kurdish culture. In presenting a balanced view of the culture, I have also included interviews of women from varying rungs of leadership in Kurdish society. Presenting a wide sampling of perspectives strengthens the study.

Seeing a phenomenon through a particular lens is also a means of not seeing (Reinharz, 1992). Each of the areas that strengthen this research are also potential

weaknesses. In viewing Kurdistan as a Westerner, I look through a Western lens in which I hold very strong opinions and biases in regard to women's issues in Kurdistan. To view the Eastern world through Western lenses can often lead to misunderstanding and misinterpreting actions and viewpoints (Mohanty, 2004). This has necessitated constant self-reflection in order to identify areas of personal subjectivity and maintain a balanced view of the situation of women in this particular culture. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Validity

This study is one of great personal interest to me. I realize as a researcher I entered the study with strongly held views regarding women's issues in Kurdistan. I found it very hard not to prejudge or form conclusions based on my own understanding of human rights. It was also difficult at times to listen without adding my opinions of what appears to me as an indoctrination of women to a belief of inferiority to men as natural order. As Maxwell (2005) points out in regard to qualitative research, "*any* view is a view *from some perspective,* and therefore is shaped by the location (social and theoretical) and the 'lens' of the observer" (p. 39, [emphasis original]). To address researcher bias, I have continually reflected critically upon my own subjectivity. I have written thoughts and observations after interviews to monitor preconceived ideas or opinions in the research. I have asked myself questions following the interview to monitor biases. Questions included what preconceived ideas did I have going into the interview? What surprised me about the interview? What information contradicted my understanding during the interview? How did I see or understand the situation of women differently as a result of the interview? I used multiple sources for the document review

in order to present a broad picture of the culture at large. I have continually engaged in "negative case analysis" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37) or a search for unconfirming evidence of my hypothesis. The study included multiple sources of information and multiple methods of data collection or "triangulation" (Glesne, 2006, p. 37) of sources that lend to validity. According to Glesne, extended time and prolonged engagement in the field assists qualitative research as a means of learning the culture, building trust, and pursuing hunches. The numerous years I have been involved in Kurdistan and my continual contact with individuals living in the region lend a more informed picture of the complexity of the situation for women. Upon returning to the U.S., I followed up the research by providing participants the option of engaging in member checking to review of my observations prior to the conclusion of the research project. The participants were provided the option of reviewing preliminary findings in order to provide further clarification of events and perceptions. This further lends to truthfulness of the study.

My personal situation as a single mother presents numerous challenges to international travel as my 11 month-old daughter traveled with me to Kurdistan. In order to assist with my daughter and add to the reflections on my research, a friend also accompanied me on this trip. Kate (pseudonym) spent six months living in Kurdistan from February to July 2004 as we worked together on an education project in the region. Needless to say my daughter's presence on this trip presented some interesting challenges as well as comical breaks during the course of travel.

The women involved in this study, indeed the women of Kurdistan are resilient and strong. They have watched their husbands, sons, brothers, and fathers fight in years of resistance, in many cases they have picked up arms and joined men defending their

homes and families. This group, often said to be victims of patriarchy and male control, actually wield a great deal of control and influence in their spheres. They have learned means of controlling aspects their lives while dealing with areas in which they lack control. As an outsider viewing the interactions of Kurdish men and women, women with one another, families, and neighbors, I question my ability really understand the interworking of social life within Kurdistan. Who am I to judge interactions so commonplace in Kurdish society they go unnoticed to those involved? I am aware of my constant shift between various roles of researcher, participant, observer, friend, colleague, and other; viewing Kurdish society from the outside but never really completely included. It is from these often conflicting positions that I will attempt to convey the "partial truths and fictions" (Clifford as quoted by Britzman, 2000, p. 28) of ethnographic research and the realities of Kurdistan as I understand them.

What Is to Come

The findings of this study have been organized into two discussion chapters; Chapter 4: Lines Drawn, Lines Revised and the Socio-cultural Ambivalence of Gendered Life, and Chapter 5: Leaders on the Lines. The first discussion chapter addresses the larger research question regarding what perceptions of women exist in Kurdistan to create such a marked disparity in the treatment of women. This chapter focuses on a macro level cultural exploration drawing from my analysis of experiences and observations over seven years of either working or living in the Kurdish Region; cultural documents such as newspaper articles, recent laws, and human rights reports; and some responses from the three interview participants. The second discussion chapter places emphasis on the women's stories and thinks with them as responses to the questions of the study sought to

explore their experiences and identity. The final chapter, Chapter 6: Outside the Lines discusses this study's implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research. Ideas for reform for women in Kurdistan are explored as well.

CHAPTER 4:

LINES DRAWN, LINES REVISED, AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AMBIVALENCE OF GENDERED LIFE

Cultural Lines

This chapter outlines the sociocultural and political terrain in which women in Kurdistan form identities and learn to navigate cultural borders of gender and power. Observations, review of relevant cultural documents, and systematic reflections of my experiences as an outsider viewing the cultural fabric of Kurdish society play a central role in informing this chapter. Interview data has also been brought to bear, though to a lesser extent in my efforts to describe the sociocultural and political landscape.

Double Standard

> All the Kurdish ladies, let's say Middle Eastern ladies, they prefer to have baby boys. That is just Middle Eastern attitude. My mom had the same thing, she wanted baby boys. But unfortunately for her, she had baby girls. The difference in our ages is only 1 year because every time when she became pregnant she said ok, I am going to have a baby boy this time. She kept trying for boys and then the fifth came a boy (Bahar, personal communication, February 4th, 2010).

Entering Kurdistan via the Turkish border in 2004 meant a long, hot taxi ride from Diyarbakir, zigzagging from one smoke-filled office to the next for all the stamps necessary for entry; presenting bags for multiple security checks; then sitting sometimes for hours behind freight trucks, oil tankers, and private cars for your turn to cross the bridge lined with Kalashnikov yielding soldiers signaling entrance into Kurdish, Iraq.

Once my taxi driver and I completed the final stage of the crossing, I was relieved to see familiar faces of two team members patiently waiting for our arrival. Having not eaten since early that morning, I was hopeful of a late afternoon lunch before beginning the drive back to Duhok for the night. At the time there was only one restaurant I knew of at the border, a small, dirty little corner place with the signature plastic tables, plastic chairs, and a multitude of flies. My team members, two males and I, walked into the restaurant looking forward to catching up over tikka or bryiani and a cup of tea. As we entered the door at the lower level of the restaurant, we were met with looks of surprise followed by a surly man speaking quickly in his Bahadini dialect. Although none of my team nor I understood Bahadini, we could not mistake the intent of the message: We were not supposed to be here. Instead we were relegated to the second-story level of the restaurant, an area a little dirtier than the first floor that seemed to be hotter and attract even more flies if that were possible. This was the room for women or families to eat; they were not allowed to mix with the men below. It was an unmistakable welcome back to an area where gender at times denotes second-class citizenship and marked lines of separation.

Reflecting on my personal experiences, I have come to understand there is an unmistakable line of demarcation for men and women in Kurdistan evident in many settings including restaurants, where most establishments have a men's and women's section separated by curtains, ceiling length plastic plants, walls, or entire levels. This demarcation creates a double standard for men and women evident in the material realities of public life as well as in the mindsets of people in this patriarchal system. This double standard exists in every area of life and is perpetuated through the generations as

popular culture gives clear signals as to the status and positioning of both men and women, often legitimating these positions through civil codes (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998; Sen, 2005). It is further codified into law with the vulnerable legal position of women in areas such as inheritance, divorce, and personal status laws. Women receive less than men under Islamic inheritance laws, and they have a difficult time initiating divorce whereas men can file for divorce with very little provocation. Polygamy is also still legal in Kurdistan (Khidir, 2008; Mohammed, 2007).

A detailed examination of newspaper reports and cultural documents shows that efforts of women activists to challenge to this double standard are beginning to take place in Kurdistan. For example, one key area women are asserting their voice is in regard to the polygamy law. In 2008 Kurdish lawmakers voted on a bill outlawing the right for men to marry more than one woman in Kurdistan. In accordance with Islamic law, men in Kurdistan are permitted up to four wives whereas women cannot have multiple husbands.

One Kurdish feminist cited polygamy issues as being the root of most social problems that her organization for women deals with ("Globe Interview," 2009). Women's unions, international human rights organizations, political leaders, and numerous others voiced their desire for a bill to be passed outlawing polygamy in the Kurdish Region. Arguments in favor of polygamy centered around Shar'iah law and cultural traditions. Proponents also claimed polygamy benefited widows and older unmarried women as well as prevented divorce; however opponents argued the law in practice never benefitted widows or older women and arguments of that nature were means of continuing a male-dominated practice (Khidhir, 2009; Mohammed, 2007).

According to one interview participant for this study, prior to the vote in Parliament, religious leaders met in protest with Masoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan to garner support for the law and express outrage at such a violation of Shar'iah law. When the count was tallied, the final vote was 39 / 35 in favor of continuing the practice of polygamy. Kurdish feminists have voiced their disappointment with lawmakers for allowing the practice to continue as the outcome hinged on 4 votes in favor of polygamy ("Globe Interview," 2009).

The reaction by religious leaders and subsequent continuation of the controversial practice of polygamy is evidence of the power of cultural perceptions about women and the depth of tradition still in existence in Kurdish culture. Studies have indicated that where patriarchal societies face the possibility of extreme change, the reaction by males is to tighten control on women in order to perpetuate their dominate status (Faqir, 2001; Helie, 1993). It would seem as if there is a conservative, traditional reaction to potential changes in the status of women in Kurdish society attempting to hold women in a position of subjugation.

The reaction is also a reflection of the conflict growing within the culture, as people spoke out both for and against the centuries-old tradition. The controversy surrounding the polygamy law allowed arguments to surface in the struggle for equality for women. The debates sparked in the months preceding the vote caused women and men alike to question their beliefs regarding culture, tradition, and religious ideology. Members of Parliament especially were forced to take a stance in regard to the law and their beliefs about the status and legal position of women in Kurdish society. Although there has been much rhetoric on the topic of women's rights, this vote in Parliament

offered a chance to see what each member of Parliament truly believed in regard to women's rights.

Rules

> A reason for girls not having opportunity is the way they live, their society. It is a very restrictive society" (Bahar, pseudonym, personal communication, February 4, 2010)
>
> {If you lose your reputation} you break down, everything is against you. You lose your status, you lose your future. You can have somewhere to work but you cannot have a good future person to marry. So it is terrible (Shna, pseudonym, personal communication, February 1, 2010).
>
> …if you want to work in this society, you have to respect them (men), you have to get your idea to reach their idea then you make change that you want…(Lana, pseudonym, personal communication, January 31, 2010)

Certain rules exist in all societies; expectations that are placed upon its members based on gender, class, race, and other variables that define or color the lives of individuals who are sometimes unaware of the profound impact these rules have on their identity. In patriarchal societies such as Kurdistan, appearance and reputation are everything; shame and honor are powerful forces motivating people to horrific acts such as honor violence (Begikhani, 2005; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998).

While living in Kurdistan I made efforts to be culturally sensitive; however, I had no personal stake in adhering to cultural rules until I began to develop close friendships with Kurdish women and men. I did not understand this emphasis on appearance or the lines drawn for women. As those friendships developed, I would often be admonished for cultural faux pas as my friends were concerned for me that my reputation would be diminished. I learned also that, to many of my Kurdish friends, my reputation would be a direct reflection upon them as they we were associated together. I valued my friends greatly and made efforts to conform to the cultural rules that applied to

Kurdish women. However as I began to realize exactly how constraining those rules were, I began to feel as if I were living in a goldfish bowl, where every move was viewed and scrutinized as either appropriate, inappropriate, or scandalous. My American team member and I often discussed the pressure of feeling as if we were on display, every move being judged. Having a conversation about this phenomenon over coffee one Friday morning, we were provided further proof that every move was indeed watched as we noticed our neighbor's guard on patrol that morning. During his patrol, the guard would walk directly in front of our kitchen window, the same area we were sitting. As he paced back and forth on patrol, he would turn each time he passed the window and watch us sitting until he was out of sight, then repeat on the next round, confirming in our minds that we were constantly on display to outside eyes.

In order to live and function within such restrictive societies, individuals must learn their accepted place within that society along with all of the rules pertaining to their position or face certain consequences for noncompliance (Amado, 2004; Faqir, 2001; Ruggi, 1998). While living in Kurdistan, I learned what that meant for Kurdish women. For example, women cannot go out alone at night without a male, most often a close relative, chaperoning them. They cannot live alone in a house or apartment. They cannot be seen too often with a male who is a not a relative. They do not drink alcohol or smoke in public. They are in effect confined within a highly codified set of physical and cultural boundaries, strict lines marked by gender drawn centuries earlier (Begikhani, 2005). According to one interview participant, appearances are so important to Kurdish society that women are judged primarily on their physical appearance, their attractiveness according to cultural standards of beauty before any other measure. Each of the interview

participants described the profound impact their understanding of these cultural parameters had in shaping both their identity and their leadership styles. All have cited ways they have learned to adapt to the societal rules in order to be effective within their leadership positions. Each of the participants could also cite a time as a leader when they have crossed a cultural line only to learn how their status as a woman preceded their position as a leader.

Societies often use these unwritten rules as a means of behavioral control and for perpetuating cultural values, allowing their culture and system to survive by confining its participants, particularly its women, to predefined roles and acceptable behaviors (Helie, 1993; McDonald, 2001). Third world or nonwestern feminist scholarship also posit a need for understanding the intersecting boundaries and multiplicity of identities that create complex gender relationships and define rules for women (Luke, 2001; Mohanty, 2004; Trinh, 1989). As is the case in Kurdistan, these rules often cut across gender, class, socioeconomic status, and family (Begikhani, 2005).

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into all the factors surrounding the dynamics of cultural conditioning within Kurdish society and the rules that apply to its members, it is important to note that, within Kurdistan, stark lines are drawn for acceptable behavior of women, lines that determine behavior and infiltrate all areas of women's actions, attitudes, and opportunities. One's status as a woman most always outweighs one's position in leadership. The sheer power of reputation is a powerful force for policing women's behavior.

Education For All?

> Schools outside the big cities are mixed. Primary schools, no harm, they can be mixed, people do send their girls to those schools. When they get to

> the secondary level, when they become teenagers, they don't want to send their daughters to the mixed schools so what do they do? They tell their girls ok, that is enough, you did your primary level school, and you don't need to go to school any more, schools are for boys not for girls anymore (Bahar, personal communication, February 4, 2010).

Reflecting on the educational structure and reforms in education in Kurdistan, certain themes have emerged that call attention to the perception of education for girls in Kurdistan. Recalling a trip to a village near Suliymaniyah with a team of Special Forces who were looking for ways to assist the village areas outside of town, I encountered some of the challenges to women's education in patriarchal society.

Though it was midmorning, it was already quite hot as we climbed into humvees loaded with supplies and gifts for the elders and children. We drew quite a bit of attention as we bounced over broken roads and into the outskirts of the village. Children playing in the distance couldn't resist running up to see the eshnabee, the foreigners. We were met warmly by a portly woman who had been working in a pen making what appeared from the distance to be fuel chips from a mixture of sheep dung and water. As we spoke through the translator, we were offered customary refreshments for guests before being taken to the small, three room, crumbling building serving as a school. The building itself was a shell. Its broken blocks and a crumbling ceiling housed bright eyed, dirty faces curious about the strange visitors. Marty (pseudonym), the team sergeant, led the conversation with the village leaders allowing me time for questions regarding the school. My eyes were drawn to colorful artwork created by the students and displayed proudly on the wall of the dilapidated classroom. One particular picture displayed artistic skill beyond that of a child's drawing; however, when I inquired about that particular artist, I was told she was no longer in the school. I asked the reason for her absence and

was told she was recently married and was no longer attending school. Her teacher said she had just turned 14 years old.

As stated by Shaheed and Mumtaz, "society's perception of what women are and should be determine the direction of development plans for women" (1995, p. 67). Traditional cultural views of women's roles in society explain many of the reasons little emphasis is given to the education of daughters by some families. Women are expected to be wives and mothers, not contributing members of the economic development of a family or society, therefore formal education is viewed as unnecessary (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995). Young girls are often needed to help with work in the home or caring for younger siblings, causing some families to choose not to send their daughters to school. Traditional families in Muslim societies often reject the notion that schools can be mixed with boys and girls attending the same school. However, as a result of limited resources and a shortage of qualified teachers in village areas, schools often must be mixed, resulting in families pulling their daughters from secondary schools rather than risk a possible stain to their honor or reputation by allowing teen daughters to continue in school with boys (Mehran, 2003; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995).

The idea that education for girls is optional is a mindset that continues through tertiary education as well. According to one interview participant, traditional families encourage their daughters to think of marriage and family before pursing higher education. Although the high number of young women currently enrolled in universities is promising, she believes that most families do not encourage young women to pursue higher degrees but rather more domestic pursuits and traditional roles for women. According to her, these traditional families believe that if a young woman completes a

bachelors' degree, she has attained all the education necessary for her to fulfill her expected role in society. These cultural beliefs shape the educational opportunities available for girls and women within Kurdish society.

While ingrained aspects of cultural beliefs account for much of the lack of emphasis on education for girls, it is necessary to also consider recent Kurdish history in order to provide insight into the failure of Kurdish society to properly educate all women. According to another interview participant, the resistance by Kurdish leaders to Arab control and resulting military actions against the Kurds caused many families to keep their daughters close to home as a means of protection from a regime that used horrific tactics such as rape as a weapon of war. In the 1970s, refugees returning home did not send their girls to school, creating essentially a generation of illiterate wives and mothers in some areas of Kurdistan. Conflict continued despite the veiled peace agreements until once again the Kurds were forced to flee in the early 1990s creating yet another generation of young girls with limited educational opportunities. The lack of educational opportunity for this group of young women perpetuated the belief that education for girls was unnecessary beyond the cursory primary years as these women became mothers. In examining the factors contributing to lack of access to primary education for girls in Iran, Mehran (1997) concluded that the absence of an educated role model contributed to the mindset that education for girls was unnecessary as families had not witnessed a successful educated woman. This speaks to the influence the lack of educational opportunity for mothers will have on their daughters.

Revisions

Many factors including cultural perceptions, traditional roles, and recent military history contribute to the high rates of illiteracy of women in Kurdistan. As an interview participant noted, however, recent history is also contributing to change in mindset regarding educational opportunities for women. She puts it this way:

> Mind you there is one thing for Kurdish girls. After 1991, after the uprising, they had a chance to mix with new organizations because the UN was here, they had a link with the outside, with Europe mostly. That helped them to change their mind about educating girls. So after the uprising of 1991 the situation had changed. People started thinking of sending their daughters to schools even at the university level. That's why you have a lot of girls in school level and university level. And that is promising, I like it because when are educating people, it means that you are educating society (Bahar, (pseudonym, personal communication, February 4, 2010).

Despite political positioning, the Iraq War of 2003 has had a profound impact on the lives and circumstances of the Kurdish people (Beenher, 2006). For many women, the changes in cultural attitudes and international spotlight have kicked open doors of opportunity that were sealed shut for the past 30 years if not longer, including opportunities for higher education (Akrawi, 2006). Kurdish society is undergoing extreme change.

As one interview participant explains, the Gulf War, the uprising of 1991, and the subsequent military crackdown on Kurds by Sadaam as a result of the uprising created a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions in which thousands of Kurdish citizens were forced to flee into the mountains to escape Sadaam's retribution. Though relief from Western nations was slow in coming, many did eventually respond to the plight of the Kurds, moving into the Kurdish region to assist in alleviating suffering. This influx of Europeans and Americans in nongovernmental organizations and humanitarian groups,

journalists, and United Nations officials provided opportunity for Kurds to begin to build relationships with people of differing beliefs and views of women as well as provide exposure to a conflicting worldview. Kurdistan received another influx of Westerners as the Iraq War of 2003 opened geographic and technological borders long closed to the outside world.

This exposure to the West and ideas of the *other* has contributed a rethinking of the position of women. It is important to note that, as exposure to alternative worldviews and beliefs regarding human rights continues, there has been a shifting in the perception of women within this region. According to 1 interview participant, a comparison between the attitude toward women in 1990 and present attitudes would reveal significant change in regard to women's education. The degree to which this change will continue remains to be seen. Prospects of change are promising as continued exposure to the alternative ideas occur

Recent History

Kurdish history reveals a resilient, tenacious people unwilling to accept domination as leaders have sought to secure a free, autonomous Kurdistan. Efforts of Arab nations to control the region have therefore resulted in years of armed struggle (McDowall, 2007). As stated in Chapter 2 of this study, during the many years of armed conflict, women's issues were often pushed aside as Kurdish leaders were focused on issues of statehood and nationalistic aims. To push an agenda of women's rights at the time would have been viewed as a threat to nationalist interests and a detriment to the Kurdish cause (McDonald, 2001; Mojab, 2001b). Kurdish political leaders argued that women's movements should be postponed until self-determination was achieved,

effectively silencing the voice for women during those years (Begikhani, 2005; Mojab, n.d.; Mojab, 2001b).

Throughout the years of resistance, scores of Kurdish women have been active in the struggle for autonomy, with many taking up arms and fighting alongside men as peshmerga or militia. A tension was created as women were allowed to participate in the struggle for liberation while themselves being subject to traditional restrictive, subordinate roles within society. To question this subordinate position would be an assault on the traditional role of women and therefore an assault on the nationalist cause (McDonald, 2001). In her article addressing the issue of Kurdish women and self-determination, Susan McDonald (2001) argues that, historically, women have been active in many struggles for equality; however, those struggles typically come secondary to struggles for independence or autonomy. She states that, in nationalist movements, serving aims of statehood by developing group identity also serves to perpetuate traditional roles that often subjugate women. Within traditional societies, women are frequently viewed as the symbol of a society's values and traditions; to maintain cohesion and further a common identity, women must not question their subjugated position (Helie, 1993; Luke, 2001; McDonald, 2001).

It appears to me that, within Kurdistan, the nationalist struggle has meant that women have had to choose which cause to support fully, thereby causing many to refrain from speaking out against injustices and constraints placed upon them. As other feminist researchers have experienced, I have found some women to be hesitant to criticize their political system and their male leadership to an outsider (Luke, 2001). However, despite nationalist sentiments, the paradoxical positioning of women throughout the nationalist

struggle has served to prompt many women to begin raising questions and advocating for equal treatment within Kurdistan.

Understanding the impact of recent political history is crucial to understanding the current position of women in Kurdistan. The nationalist struggle, although securing some autonomy for the Kurds of Iraq as a whole, has resulted in a failure of Kurdish leadership to effectively respond to—and has possibly contributed to—the oppression of women in Kurdish society. Kurdistan has enjoyed 20 years of relative peace and security following the Gulf War and the creation of the no-fly zone. Within this 20 year period, however, very little momentum for women's issues occurred, in fact, there was an increase in honor violence against women during this period (Begikhani, 2005; Lichter, 2009; Mojab, 2001). The international spotlight focused on Kurdistan as a result of the Iraq War and ousting of Sadaam Hussein in 2003, calling more attention to the plight of women (Begikhani, 2005). In the ensuing years, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on women's rights and equality as Kurdish leaders responded to the call to address human rights issues. What changes will occur for women as a result of these years without armed struggle remains to be seen. The following section will seek to address Kurdish government responses to the treatment of women, as well as their actions and inaction influencing the positioning of women with Kurdish society.

Government

Examination of cultural documents since the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 show that Western leaders have made women's rights a key talking point in the justification for war (Hunt & Posa, 2004). Within the past seven years, there has been an increase in attention to the plight of women in all of Iraq by Western nations and

international organizations such as the United Nations. The leaders of Kurdistan have found themselves in the international spotlight since the Iraq War, often meeting with top U.S. and European officials, hosting diplomats and military leaders, and addressing issues on the world stage. Alongside the increase in attention by international entities, or perhaps as a result of it, Kurdish leaders have begun to make efforts to protect and promote women. Laws have been enacted in support of women which include amending the constitution to make honor crimes illegal and an increase in the quota for women in Kurdish Parliament from 25% to 30%, a rate higher than women's participation in many Western nations ("A look at women lawmakers in Iraq," 2010). Each of the interview participants believe the government is making efforts to change the status of women within the region through discussion of issues and attention to women's rights. The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) should be heralded for taking a progressive stance in many respects regarding women's rights, as changes in Kurdistan are strides ahead of the Middle East as a whole.

While these changes are positive on a one level, activists argue that actual implementation of real change resulting from these laws has been slow in coming. Government leaders continue to make nationalist issues such as the debate over Kirkuk and the hydro-carbon law priority rather than tackling real societal change relating to women (James, 2008). As discussed previously, lawmakers voted to allow the practice of polygamy to continue despite an outcry against it by advocates of women's rights. When faced with issues of honor violence, courts and political parties often relied on more tribal forms of mediation or komelayeti rather than legal means of settlement (Begikhani, 2005; James, 2008). Despite the rhetoric by government leaders, some leaders have continued

to deny the magnitude of the issues facing women in Kurdistan. One official from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), a leading political party in the region acknowledged the existence of honor violence but called much of the issue a media exaggeration, claiming rates of murder of women in Western cities were higher than those in Kurdistan. He pointed to the number of female primary and secondary school principals in Erbil as evidence of women's opportunities in Kurdistan.

Some leaders have dismissed the status of women as an attribute of Kurdish culture beyond their scope of changing (James, 2008). This type of hyper-sensitivity by political leaders as well as denial of the magnitude of the issue stymie any real and effective change for women. The Kurdish Regional Government must continue to push an agenda for real, substantive change in the position and status of women, which means individuals who comprise the political parties and government offices must themselves believe the struggle is one that merits focused and prolonged attention. Within the Kurdish political arena, this type of change must begin in the political parties.

Party Politics

In my study of the region, related analysis of official documents, responses of interview participants, and reflections on past experiences in Kurdistan, I have come to better understand the role that government party politics play in past and current conceptualization of women and the power they can and cannot be afforded. There are two primary political parties ruling the Kurdish Region: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) lead by Massoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headed by Jalal Talabani. During the elections in 2009, a rival party created by critics of the ruling parties received mounting support. The Goran or Change party has posed a challenge to

the status quo in Kurdish politics and forced both the PUK and the KDP to change practices in order to maintain majority support within their regions. These parties and their leaders have a history of sacrifice and fighting for the Kurdish cause. They also have a history of nepotism and infighting for control of limited resources. The idea of "wasta" is a well known phenomenon in Kurdistan, one in which who you know determines many of your opportunities and the support received within Kurdistan. This has proven to be beneficial to women in some respects and detrimental in others. Each of the political parties have women's unions either within the party or closely associated to the party (Kurdistan Democratic Party, n.d.). Women's unions and Non Governmental Organizations must have government approval to exist and are most often forced to rely upon government or party support to operate, therefore to speak too critically of any government official, government office, or political party could effectively end any support garnered by the organization (James, 2008).

Indicative of the total control of the ruling parties, many of the female representatives allegedly are wives, daughters, or sisters of prominent male leaders and do not speak for women's issues but rather vote as their party determines (James, 2008). This paternalistic view requires the blessing or endorsement of the party before women can assume a leadership role. At least one interview participant has confirmed this, stating that many of the female representatives in Parliament had been given the seat by their party as reward for a martyred family member or a relative currently in power. Each of the three interview participants are members of one of the political parties. This phenomena is consistent with findings regarding women in leadership in democratic transitions of traditional, patriarchal societies (Ricther, 1991-1992; Thompson, 2003).

Not all women in leadership in Kurdistan represent women's issues, as their position within a political party takes precedent over their position as a female lawmaker.

Religious Implications

While it is not the primary focus of this study to debate women's rights in Islamic practice, it is important to note the key role religious interpretation of women's rights within predominately Muslim nations has in understanding the status of women in Kurdistan.

Kurdistan is a predominately Sunni Muslim region with the majority of followers of the Shafi'ite rite. Islam first infiltrated the area known as Kurdistan as early as the 7th Century A.D.; however according to Mehrdad Izady, it is believed that most Kurds did not convert to Islam until the 12th century or later. Prior to the spread of Islam, the Kurdish people practiced Zoroastrianism and other indigenous religions that have influenced the practice of Islam in Kurdistan (1992). While many would describe Kurdistan as a secular, nominally religious region, it is my belief that this aspect of culture is undergoing change as well.

In a documentary regarding women's rights in Kurdistan, Dr. Nadje Al-Ali states that, since 1991 and the assumption of semiautonomous control of the Kurdish Region by Kurdish leadership, there has been a rise in Muslim practice in the Region (James, 2008). This increase has continued rapidly following the U.S. led war in 2003 with the Islamic Unions seeing a rise in membership. According to scholars, this trend should be alarming to both Kurdish leadership and U.S. officials as Islamic parties take an anti-Western stance (Padden, 2007). This trend is also alarming for women as Islamic parties tend to push for stricter interpretations of Shar'iah law to be enforced.

According to scholars researching women's issues in Kurdistan, one theory behind this rise in conservative religious practice is the current state of disillusionment with the Kurdish government and Kurdish leadership (James, 2008). The expectations regarding a post-Sadaam Iraq by many were utopian however unrealistic as the years following the ousting of Sadaam saw a limited supply of basic amenities such as water or electricity and government corruption was unabated.

The rise in religious practice has shaped the argument for women's rights within the Kurdish region, with clerics taking a lead role in issues such as the debate over polygamy. One interview participant described the outcry by religious leaders to the proposed bill to end polygamy, stating that leaders met in masse with Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan in protest to the bill. Interview participants believe much of the opposition by religious leaders to women's rights is due to an incorrect cultural interpretation of Islam that is not in accordance to the prophet Mohammed's intent but rather aimed at maintaining male domination of Kurdish society. While this paper does not aim to discuss religious views of women in Islam, the various views and interpretations within Islam that factor into the discussion of women's rights in this region warrant further discussion.

Meaning Out of Paradox

As I consider the cultural and political climate for women in Kurdistan and the changes taking place, I wonder how long social evolution must take. How does it occur? At what point do the individuals who comprise a society reach a paradigm shift to begin to radically change the way they think about individuals and the world at large? And through what lens does one begin to see visible signs marking this shift? Do humans have

a threshold for change, a tipping point at which individuals are unable to absorb any further shifting or shaking of our deepest beliefs about who we are as individuals and who we are collectively, as a group?

Cultural identity is shaped by the norms and ideologies collectively adopted throughout life. As those beliefs begin to be questioned, people react to the sifting in multiple ways. Tension is created in individuals and societies as new ideas collide with traditional ideals. I have heard many Westerners comment on the rapid rate of construction and rebuilding being undertaken in Kurdistan. Many have jokingly suggested a sign be placed in the airport upon arrival proclaiming Country Under Construction as leaders of Kurdistan are consciously undertaking steps to remake the region into the image of a modern, progressive society. While the architectural landscape is changing rapidly, the social climate is undergoing major change as well, albeit at a different rate. Cultural beliefs and ideals are being reshaped as tradition and modernity collide in Kurdish society.

As participant, observer, and researcher, it has seemed to me that the internal conflict is visible in Kurdish society as rapid change occurs and Kurdish men and women navigate the binary of tradition and modernity. This tension is also visible in the individuals living in the duality of tradition and modernity. I have witnessed numerous Kurdish friends and colleagues seemingly in turmoil within themselves as they attempt to embrace new ways of thinking about women and society through the lens of an identity shaped by traditional values and beliefs. While very progressive in thinking regarding one area, they may be very traditional in another; at times they contradict themselves in their struggle for identity amid rapid change. Many women in Kurdistan are themselves

unsure of what equality means or what equality in Kurdish society should look like. Kurdish feminist Chilura Hardi states,

> If you question a young girl of what is women's rights she will tell you the right to work and have representation in parliament, this is nonsense, the rights and privileges of women goes beyond parliament representation, women's rights is not just about having a 30% quote in parliament. (Globe Interview with a Kurdish Feminist, 2009*)*

Hardi goes on to state that the most crucial point of change for women is within the family. Changes in how families view and treat women will ultimately create societal changes needed to protect women from violence as well as provide opportunity for equality. It is within this realm, however, that much of the conflict occurs as families are often divided between tradition and modernity, with generational lines marking this division.

The increase of honor crimes as well as the rise in Muslim religious practice seems to parallel the changes in cultural beliefs and leadership opportunities for women in Kurdistan. As society changes at a rapid pace, perhaps people begin to cling to old beliefs and ways of thinking in order to stabilize some part of their world and maintain a sense of familiarity as they prepare for an uncertain future. Studies have shown that, in non-Western, primarily Muslim areas undergoing rapid change, one vestige of control exercised by those in power in any sphere is control of women, as they are often seen as the symbol of tradition. Studies also indicate that control of women's position in society is seen as a means of resistance to Western neocolonialism and imposition of values and ideals, a last vestige of control in patriarchal societies (Faqir, 2001; Helie, 1993; McDonald, 2001; Sen, 2005). While exposure to the West has contributed to the changing perception of women in Kurdistan, it is probable that the paradox in the

positioning of women in this region is due in part to the rapid rate of change toward a more Western worldview taking place within this traditional society.

It would appear that we are witnessing a society in the process of rebirth, undergoing a complete transformation from past ideas while trying to maintain a sense of history and cultural identity. This process of becoming (James, 2008) is much harder than it appears; it is a painful process in which beliefs, ideals, and traditions are brought into scrutiny in the everyday lives and experiences of members of this society. Women currently in leadership in Kurdistan are in a pioneering position as they chart new territory amid the changing perceptions and valuing of women in Kurdish society. These women leaders are frontrunners to the next generation of women who will push further for equality and women's rights. Three such pioneering women are the focus of the chapter that follows. With this present chapter's discussion of the sociocultural scene and its shifts in Kurdistan as a backdrop, I now turn to the expressed experiences of these women in achieving leadership roles within this society, how they understand their roles, and ways they are shaping change in Kurdistan.

CHAPTER 5: LEADERS ON THE LINES

As we stepped off the airplane in Washington, DC upon our return from Kurdistan, we were immediately directed to the long lines of immigration, a sign of arrival into the United States (U.S.). The customs officer welcomed us back home as I gave her our passports and waited for the necessary stamps to indicate we had officially returned to the U.S. These real gates and borders marked an entrance into a geopolitical territory, a physical border crossing. The concept of border crossing as a metaphor is one often used by scholars in qualitative research. Pugach uses this border metaphor to describe a means of "forging new individual identities, for blending discordant parts of one's life, for cultural crossing, and for personal and cultural creativity" (1998, p. 143). In listening to the participants of this study, I am aware of their constant crossings, their entry in to new territories of identity and personal understanding of self while remaining within rigid social constructs and the tension that ensues.

This chapter will seek to address two of research subquestions regarding personal experiences that have helped three women rise above cultural barriers to achieve their current status as leaders and how these women perceive themselves as influencing change within their spheres in respect to the treatment of women. In writing this chapter, I am acutely aware of the nature of my position as an outside observer attempting to create meaning from the lived experiences of these women without passing judgment or constructing them as victims, which these women certainly are not. I question the ability

of anyone viewing the lives of these women through the lens of other to be able to accurately construct meaning from their experiences; however, I will attempt to relate their experiences to the larger view of women as a whole in the Kurdish region. I begin this second of two chapters focused on research findings by first providing a brief vignette of each of three women leaders, whose stories serve prominent in the discussion that follows.

Research Participants

Lana (pseudonym)

Lana is a very vibrant woman in her early forties. She is an accomplished medical doctor with a specialization in a well respected field. Lana is not married. She began her education during the time Sadaam Hussein was in power. The regime created numerous challenges in all walks of life for Kurdish people. During this time, it was necessary for students to study in the south of Iraq for higher degrees, particularly degrees in the hard sciences, as the Sadaam Hussien Regime allowed only certain degrees to be taught in Kurdistan. Lana studied in Baghdad, managing to complete her degree in medicine before returning to the Kurdish Region. She lived alone at a hospital in Baghdad while attending university, something most women would never have attempted due to cultural barriers and safety concerns for young women under Sadaam's regime. Lana, however, was committed to completing her degree and this was her only option for study. Her determination has been made evident through the work and the accomplishments she has achieved to date. She has a private medical clinic which she runs in the afternoons. She served as a member of the first Kurdish Parliament, assuming her role in 2005. She also served with the Ministry of Health, as well as the medical committee of Parliament. She

created the first professional organization or society for her field in Kurdistan, bringing U.S. doctors to Kurdistan for continued professional training. She has continued to be active in creating change for Kurdistan in areas of health care.

I emailed Lana prior to arriving in Kurdistan and arranged to meet her for our interview once I arrived in Kurdistan. We had not seen one another since our initial meeting at a dinner in 2007, but I was looking forward to reconnecting with her. Because of time constraints and availability, we had to conduct a shorter interview than preferred which was fraught with many distractions. We agreed to meet at the Speed Center, a go-kart race track and lounge in Erbil run by a Western entrepreneur. The Speed Center caters to Western expatriates, complete with Western foods, a bar, and music. Many of the local Kurdish patrons of the Speed Center fancy themselves a bit more Western and liberal than their compatriots.

Lunch is slower than other times at the Speed Center, and we had the lounge area mostly to ourselves barring the loud music blaring through the speakers. Typical with Kurdish culture, Lana was very gracious and made sure we were served drinks before we began the interview. As we discussed the situation of women in the region, Lana's commitment to the women of Kurdistan was evident, the depth of her thought very impressive. Though the interview was conducted with many interruptions by wait staff and former patients of Lana's, her response was consistently warm and open to everyone.

Our interview was concluded after lunch as Lana had to return to the clinic to perform a medical procedure for a patient. As I reflected on the time spent with Lana, I was struck by the determination and drive of a woman who has spent so much time serving her region and her people. Her desire to impact society has been a driving force

in her career and personal decisions from an early age, and she continues to be active in creating change for women in Kurdistan.

Shna (pseudonym)

The second interview I conducted was in a neighboring city five and one half hour's drive from where we had been working with one university. The Ministry of Higher Education provided a van and driver for the trip as we were traveling primarily to meet with university faculty pertaining to the curriculum development project I had been working on for the past two years. Our driver, Salman, and I are very well acquainted from my previous trips to Kurdistan so he was quite used to me saying "hewasi" from the back seat, my feeble attempt to persuade him to slow down as we sped along the bumpy road dodging other cars. Despite the relatively new road, there were still many bumps and potholes which, from the back seat of a van with poor shocks, can feel enormous. My daughter who was traveling with us slept through most of the trip allowing me time think about the work ahead both with the university and with Shna, my next interviewee.

Shna is in her early 40s. She is married and has children, the only participant in this study with an immediate family. She is a professor in a local university where she has served as chair of her department. She holds a master's degree in her field and has spent many years living in Europe. She and her family returned to Kurdistan to help in the rebuilding following the war in 2003; however, she has expressed frustration with the current state of things in Kurdistan. Shna has been asked by a new political party to take a position in the newly elected Parliament in Baghdad. However, at the time of the interview, she had declined the request. Shna has worked with an international NGO in her city and with numerous other expatriates. She and I met during the early stages of the

curriculum development project as Shna was chosen to participate in a larger university committee overseeing reform. Her participation continued further when the department was chosen to partner with an American university department to address critical gaps in curriculum. I had an opportunity to observe her in various settings and roles as a part of this project and was impressed with her candor and her ability to be thoughtful and reflective about the mindset in Kurdistan without trying to cover or hide weaknesses in her department or her society.

I met with the university committees early in the morning, hastily finishing before lunch in order to spend additional time with Shna. We traveled back to my hotel where my friend was waiting with my daughter for the interview. The hotel is named for two Kurdish lovers in a story that resembles a Romeo and Juliet-type tragedy very popular in Kurdish literature and folklore. We were already checked out of the rooms so the interview had to be conducted in the lobby of the hotel, drawing many curious looks as we set up the video camera and began the questions despite the often loud background noise of men talking or stifling smoke from a multitude of cigarettes that wafted through the air continuously.

Shna began the interview apologizing for her English which is actually quite good. I was struck with Shna's openness as she answered questions, though she did preface some answers with the request to exclude the information from the research. She was deliberate and thoughtful in her choice of words, making every effort to express the situation of women and of Kurdish culture in general without trying to soften the answers or defend the region.

After the interview, Shna invited us to lunch at a local restaurant before we began the drive back to Erbil. Throughout the past two years of working on the curriculum project, Shna had become a friend so the lunch was refreshing as we were able to enjoy one another's company without the distraction of work or research, something we both enjoyed greatly. I was a little sad as we said our goodbyes in the rain and began the two hour drive back to Erbil as I knew it would be a long time before we saw one another again.

Bahar (pseudonym)

My final interview was with a colleague and friend I had worked with for numerous years. Bahar is a professional woman in her mid 40s. She is very efficient and punctual, something unique in the region. Bahar is not married and lives with her widowed mother whom she helps to care for. She has a Ph.D in a typically male dominated field that once excluded women; however, due to her father's support, she was able to complete her bachelor's degree in Baghdad then travel to the U.K. to complete graduate school. Her father supported her travels alone to the U.K. in order for her not only to complete her studies but to learn a new culture and system of thinking. She reflects very fondly on her time in Europe and the freedom she experienced.

Bahar has served in high-level leadership in Baghdad including a term as a Deputy Minister; however, she had to leave Iraq for a period of time due to death threats against her by insurgents. During that time, she taught in a U.S. university as a visiting scholar. She describes the experience in the U.S. as very meaningful in terms of learning American culture. Bahar returned to Iraq at the request of the President of Kurdistan, but she did not return to Baghdad. Instead she took a position as advisor to a minister in the

2005 cabinet. In the latest Kurdish elections held in July 2009, a new minister was named and Bahar has experienced new and increased levels of responsibility and authority under his leadership. She was asked to run for Parliament in Baghdad by her political party; however the nomination was withdrawn in order to have Bahar remain in her position to assist the new minister in major reforms being implemented over the next 4 years.

My interview with Bahar took place in her office inside the Ministry. Due to her busy schedule, we met after hours while most people had returned home. Bahar confessed she often stayed at her office until very late then continued her work once she returned home. Despite the late afternoon interview, we still had a number of interruptions from staff trying to work out last minute details of one or more project that Bahar was overseeing.

In talking with Bahar, I found her to be extremely insightful into the circumstances and problems facing women. She was very direct in her answers and at times displayed a veiled sense of frustration or anger as she reflected on her own experiences and those facing women. Bahar prefaced the interview by stating her situation and experience were not typical of Kurdish or Iraqi women. She had a very unique situation and opportunity that she credits to her father's support of her and her sisters. Despite this support, it was evident that Bahar has been shaped by her culture and has adapted to fit within the parameters facing her as a woman and a leader.

Bahar had already sent her driver home, so, as we concluded the interview, she drove me back to the hotel. As she navigated through the mildly chaotic streets, I couldn't help but muse over the similarity in navigating her roles as a woman in Kurdistan. I had to decline her gracious invitation to her home because of my daughter's

schedule and work still to be completed though I had hoped for time to meet her family. I determined to make that a priority on the next visit and said my goodbyes.

Themes

During the analysis of data, 4 themes emerged. Themes significant to this study include *family, education, personal motivations, and socio-economic status.* Family was further examined in the dynamic of father/daughter relationships, mother/daughter relationships, and family dynamic.

Family Matters

> In my family, my parents, especially my father was encouraging us to continue our higher education. There weren't any obstacles. We were all doing our best and they were encouraging us for higher education. My father, especially, I remember this word, he told me never think to marry until you get your higher education, not only your bachelor's degree (Lana, personal communication, January 31, 2009).

The first of several themes that surfaced through my analysis relates to the dynamic of family relationships. Each of the participants of this study indicated strong family support on the part of one or both parents. Each of the participants also attributed much of their opportunity to pursue nontraditional roles to the support and encouragement of their families. For example, Lana's father encouraged her to pursue her Ph.D, which for her meant living alone in a hospital in Baghdad.

Despite this support, however, each of the participants indicated ways in which they were still confined by familial ties in various areas and had to pattern behavior in such a way that would not be harmful to family status or honor. Bahar gave examples of returning to Baghdad from studying in Europe after attaining her Ph.D. While in Europe, she lived alone and experienced a great deal of personal freedom. When she returned to

Baghdad she was required to again live in her parent's home and abide by culturally appropriate social rules for young women. She discussed times in which, after her father's death, her mother would often push her to ask her younger brother's permission or opinion for her choices despite the fact that she was older and had achieved a higher educational level than her brother, as education is often viewed as a status symbol within Kurdish society. Both Lana and Shna experienced similar situations where, as free-thinking, adult women, family pressure caused them to abide by cultural constraints set forth in Kurdish culture. For example, one of the participants attempted to move into a flat to live alone but family pressure caused her to move back to her family's home. Each of the participants identified ways in which they have personally chosen to alter their behavior rather than create a conflict or potential problem for their family. One participant explained that, although she had her family's trust in regard to personal decisions, she made choices that would be culturally acceptable even when she did not wish to comply with societal demands. This self-regulation of behavior reflects cultural conditioning that has helped to shape the identity of each of these women as individuals and as members of a family unit living in Kurdish society.

The impact of family on human development and growth is well known and documented (Cox & Paley, 2003; Seigel & Hartzell, 2003). An encouraging family environment can provide young men and women from any region a platform from which to launch into a future full of opportunity. As evidenced across the women's narratives, family support is particularly vital to young women in patriarchal societies who may attempt to break the status quo expected for them as women. I believe, however, that in order to understand the hybridity of women leaders born into a patriarchal system yet

assuming leadership positions, a closer examination of the impact father/daughter and mother/daughter relationships have on forming identity and shaping women leaders within this traditional society is necessary. I will look briefly at those relationships in light of participants' responses and existing theory to discuss potential meanings for young women in gaining self-awareness.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a double standard in regard to women and men exists in many families as well as in the broader Kurdish society. This double standard applies one set of rules and opportunity for boys while treating girls much differently. In families where this double standard exists, that young women have limited access to opportunity and are forced to adapt to social conditioning of second-class status denying them full equality. For women in this study, however, it appears on the surface that there is no double standard within their respective families, no difference in treatment of sons and daughters by one or both parents. There was no difference between their treatment or the treatment of their sisters and brothers with one exception being Bahar whose father actually provided more support and encouragement for his daughters. This appears to be consistent with findings regarding family dynamics in a study of female presidents and prime ministers: children are treated equally with the same opportunities existing for daughters as for sons (Steinberg, 2001).

It is also important to note that, although parental support may have been evident for participants of this study, their extended families did not always agree with parental choices to allow them to pursue nontraditional roles. Bahar spoke of her uncles' efforts to persuade her father to force her and sisters into more traditional roles; however her father resisted the family's urging to do so. This is similar to findings in a study of

Muslim women leaders in Arab-Israeli schools. Some participants of that study described ways in which their extended families attempted to exert traditional control over their choices to pursue leadership positions (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005). Findings from both studies indicate the importance of extended family within patriarchal societies, therefore it was necessary to have support of immediate family members in order to resist pressure from extended family.

Father Relationship

> Yeah, he used to say girls are more important than boys, we need to educate them. This attitude that my dad had helped us, when I say us, I mean me and my sisters, helped us a lot. He decided to raise us in a way to do something for society to be proud of us. So that is why he was very keen for all of us to be in schools, for all of us to do higher degrees abroad, not in Iraq. No he said if they do their degrees in Iraq they would not understand other societies. My dad was very much ahead of everyone else in Iraq (Bahar, personal communication, February 4, 2009).

Each of the interview participants cited support of their fathers as being crucial not only to the opportunities open to them in pursuing leadership roles but to empowering them to do so as well. According to Bahar, her father consistently chose to encourage her decisions to be an independent thinker. She gives the example of choosing to pursue a bachelor's degree in a typically male-dominated field that required extensive field work with male counterparts. While her uncles' attempted to dissuade her father from allowing her to study in this field, her father championed her right to study in whatever field she chose and deflected much of the criticism from her extended family. Lana also spoke of her father's support and encouragement for each of his children to pursue higher education and nontraditional roles stating that, with one exception, each of her siblings also chose high-level professional fields.

This appears to be true for many women who have aspired to leadership positions from various societies. In her study of female presidents and prime ministers, Blema Steinburg (2001) found that the father/daughter relationship was significant for women who assumed high level leadership roles. Steinburg cites a greater involvement for these women in typically masculine experiences with their fathers that helped them learn how to compete and survive in a typically male-dominated society.

Within patriarchal societies, the father and paternal grandfather have an immense influence over their children as guardians, exercising authority over finances, marriage, and various other aspects of their lives. This role is in direct contrast to the concept of caretaking, a role traditionally fulfilled by the mother (Mojab, 2001a). These familial gender roles are true for Kurdish society as well. The father's influence can have an empowering effect for some women, as has been noted in a study of women in political offices in traditional Korean society (Chunghee, 1993). Chunghee writes that, within this traditional patriarchal society, "*nurturant fathers with an egalitarian worldview* [emphasis original] provide their daughters with 'anticipatory socialization', which engenders in them the attitudinal and behavioral preparation for status shifts" (p. 69). A father's influence can also be stifling, preventing any opportunity outside of a traditional role for women as a father's approval is needed in most aspects of patriarchal society.

In this study, among women who choose nontraditional or nonconformist lifestyles, a father's support was necessary in order to deflect criticism and societal pressure to conform to more culturally appropriate roles. Given the nature of control a father has over his children in patriarchal societies, particularly his daughters, there seems

to be little recourse for a woman to break cultural molds without her father's blessing. This finding has led me to consider the critical role fathers have in navigating the cultural lines of demarcation and empowering young women to become independent thinkers. I cannot say what this would look like within the boundaries of patriarchal culture which by construct is confining to women; however, for future advocacy, it is important to note the need for a father's support not only in granting permission for young women to pursue nontraditional roles but instilling confidence to attempt such counter-cultural pursuits as well.

Mother Relationship

The dynamics of the mother/daughter relationship is not as easily viewed, at least not in this particular study. Each of the interview participants experienced a different level of support from their mothers to pursue their current leadership status. For example, Bahar enjoyed great support from her father as her mother consistently attempted to position Bahar in a more traditional role. Bahar indicated her mother's strong desire to have had boys, something she attributes to a Middle Eastern cultural mindset. She also cited her mother's insistence upon obtaining one of her younger male sibling's approval for decisions after her father's death. Lana by comparison enjoyed almost equal support from both parents, whereas Shna describes her mother, a self-educated woman who was married at 15 and had her first child by age 16, as being much more liberal than many women in society and extremely supportive of her achievements.

There is no clear model for the mother/daughter relationship that would indicate this relationship is a significant factor in their daughter's success as a leader emerging from this study; however, it is my belief that the mother/daughter relationship would have

a great deal of impact on women aspiring to live nontraditional lives. It would seem to me this relationship could be one of great support and confidence or very adversarial as young women attempt to break out of shackles that may have held their mothers in place. Golnar Mehran's (1997) study of girls' lack of educational opportunity cited the lack of a successful, educated female role model as one of the factors contributing to denial of educational opportunity for girls within Iranian society. This assumes a mother's influence on educational opportunities for daughters in traditional society. Conversely, Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira's (2005) ethnographic study of female education leaders in Arab Israeli society indicated that the mother relationship was key in forming identity and fueling choices for female educational leaders. Interestingly, the women in their study appeared to react to their perception of their mothers as weak and lacking self-expression fueling their desire to become strong and independent.

Reflecting upon conversations with women in Kurdistan, I am intrigued by the level of control exerted by mothers over matters of the family within some groups in Kurdish society. One participant believes that the influence of women in family matters is much more typical in other Muslim societies. However, in examining newspaper articles and reports from human rights agencies, it appears that women in many other Kurdish families are silenced in matters pertaining to family where male members determine rules governing women. There is a lack of public discourse pertaining to the mother's role in affirming or influencing daughters to pursue nontraditional roles within this and other patriarchal societies. It is my belief that the educational attainment of the mother will have a profound impact on the children, as the mother fills the caretaker role; however this is not evidenced from this particular study.

Ties That Bind

While each participant enjoyed varying support from family members, it is clear from this study that the support of a father is critical to the realization of expanded opportunities for young women in traditional Kurdish society. This leads me to question why, within Kurdish society, some parents choose to allow self-expression and opportunity for their daughters and others choose restrictive lifestyles to be imposed upon young women. What factors contribute to the shift in mindset of more liberal parents to allow alternative choices for their daughters? According to Hertz-Lazarowitz and Shapira (2005) it is possible that some families in impoverished areas have begun to realize the potential for economic advantage through allowing women to enter the workforce and contribute to the financial wellbeing of the family. They also cite exposure to Western ways of thinking as influencing parental choices in a staunchly patriarchal society. Various factors may contribute to choices open for women in traditional societies, but it is clear that immediate family support is necessary for women to successfully break through cultural molds.

Education

> "I like this because when you are educating people you are educating society"(Bahar, personal communication, February 4, 2010).

The women involved in this study have all achieved a master's degree or higher in various fields. The participants explained the necessity for higher education in order to achieve upward mobility in Kurdish culture, where higher education is greatly respected and has proven to be a means of social mobility. For these women, a conscious decision was made to continue education beyond an undergraduate level in order to be better equipped to work in arenas of leadership in Kurdistan. This choice required a great deal

of sacrifice on the part of some of the participants while opening others to criticism for choices of study. In order to achieve her education, Lana made numerous sacrifices including a move to Baghdad during Sadaam's reign, a risky move for a young woman at the time. At her father's urging, Bahar moved to the U. K. in order to complete her graduate studies, moving completely away from home and family in order to do so. Shna chose to study her field simply because it was one of only two graduate degrees allowed by Sadaam in her university at the time. She determined it was better to pursue and complete her degree in any field than stop at a bachelor level. Each of these women understood the impact a higher education would have on their future opportunities and potential for success.

Numerous studies have verified the need for higher education for women to break through some of the barriers and achieve higher level leadership roles (Dubeck, 1976; Jaquette, 1997; Richter, 1991-1992; Shaheed & Mumtaz 1995; Thompson, 2003). It has been noted in studies focused specifically on women in leadership, particularly in patriarchal societies, that education is crucial for upward mobility and recognition in any field (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005). Demographics cited in numerous studies have also indicated that many areas that have a high rate of violence against women in the form of honor killings are impoverished communities with high rates of illiteracy, creating a correlation between education and the status and treatment of women (Faqir, 2001; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995).

As a socialist region, Kurdistan provides opportunity for all students to pursue higher education degrees at no cost. Students also receive a government allowance and are often provided with free housing while studying at the university. According to all

three participants of this study, the high rate of young women currently studying in Kurdish universities is promising as the impact of education is well supported. According to Bahar, it should also be noted that an almost equal number of young women are currently enrolled in typically male-dominated programs such as engineering, medicine, and law in Kurdistan, a significant shift culturally.

Review of newspaper reports indicate Kurdish leadership has recognized and begun to address the need for women to be educated through efforts aimed at adult education for women previously denied the opportunity to attend school. For several years, accelerated schools have been opened in order to allow adult women to study. Azeez Mahmood cites "a combination of social restrictions, war, population displacement, and lack of provision" (2007, para 7) that led to women in poor areas to be denied education as children. This school and others like it offer women an opportunity to complete a diploma in half the time it would take through regular schooling. The diplomas these women receive are recognized by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Kurdistan, which allows these graduates to be eligible for further study in the universities. Although the accelerated schools are tied directly with the PUK, one of the ruling political parties in the North, they are offer a promising opportunity for illiterate women in poorer areas to achieve an education and potentially obtain skills necessary to acquire jobs to contribute to the economic welfare of their families.

Another important development for women's rights regarding education in Kurdistan is the creation of various gender studies programs and gender classes within Kurdish universities. For example, the Gender and Law class in the College of Law at Sallahaddin University is a required course completed by all second year law students,

the future lawyers and judges who will deal firsthand with the issue of violence against women. The impact of these programs and classes are yet to be seen.

The efforts by the KRG in addressing current gaps in women's education is encouraging. Based upon the responses of the participants of this study and review of pertinent literature, it would seem to me that for women to continue to break through various barriers to leadership and have opportunity to excel in typically male-dominated fields, there must continue to be a focused push toward tertiary education for young women. Education in general and certainly higher education can be used as a means of combating violence against women as well. Each of the interview participants welcomed any efforts aimed at combating illiteracy and securing an education for women in Kurdistan.

Personal Motivations

Each of the women in this study have exhibited a great deal of resilience in their journey to leadership, allowing them to overcome stereotypes and gender biases to achieve their current roles. Many factors have contributed to the opportunity afforded these women, however, individual determination and persistence have also been key to their success. Each of the participants of this study exhibited strong personal ambition to move beyond conventional roles as well as a strong desire to positively impact their society. Each participant described an innate desire to make a positive change within their society and for women in Kurdistan. Lana described her choice to pursue medicine not as a desire for status or financial security but a desire to create social change, to "do some change, to have my special place" (Lana, personal communication, January 31, 2010). She further described the innate desire to serve her community through various health,

education, and social endeavors aimed at creating a positive change in the lives of Kurdish people.

The complexities for women learning to live and lead in a traditional society are numerous. To cross socially constructed borders of gender and power requires a fluidity and nimbleness on the part of women leaders in order to move between various roles and cultural expectations. This border crossing experience for women "allows for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power (Giroux, 1992, p. 28)." This experience of negotiating multiple identities amid traditional constructs of power creates a leadership hybridity, capable of transitioning between numerous situated identities as they engage in daily activities. It would appear that, in the lives of these three women, there is an ability to compartmentalize criticism and obstacles to their work while maintaining a sense of confidence in their ability to lead and create change within their spheres of influence. This ability seems to have served these women well as they discussed the opposition encountered to their leadership by male colleagues.

Lana described many of her male counterparts in Parliament as skeptical of women's ability to lead or create change. She explained that she has learned it best to demonstrate her ability rather than attempting to answer criticism. Each of the participants have described ways in which they were consciously working to prove themselves as leaders while also attempting to create greater opportunity for young women to pursue leadership roles within Kurdistan. Yet, although each of the participants of this study have shown a great deal of adaptability throughout the process of achieving their current positions, they do not identify themselves as experiencing dissonance or as being subjectively discordant. These women instead speak about being cognizant of their

various positionings as well as their ability to create change and are actively seeking to do so for young women with a lived awareness of obstacles they have overcome as border crossers in Kurdish society.

All of the women involved in this study are conscious of sacrifices made in one form or another in order to pursue their roles. Both Bahar and Lana chose not to marry rather than accepting being pushed into a marriage with a partner they did not choose. Shna persuaded her family to allow her to marry a man she chose for a husband. Shna confessed to being happy overall in her marriage, but she recounts the friction created in the early years of her marriage stemming from cultural assumptions about leadership and education as she had achieved a higher educational status than her husband at the time.

Each of the women have been touched by the sting of attacks based upon their gender and the strain of constantly proving themselves to their male counterparts. It would seem that encouragement from colleagues can often be slow in coming or nonexistent for these women. Bahar spoke of comments made by male colleagues regarding her ability as a woman to assume leadership roles superior to their own role and how difficult those comments were to take. One of the participants relayed a statement made by her male superior stating that because she was a leader, he no longer considered her a woman but would treat as a man; a statement that left a visible mark on her understanding of male perceptions of her leadership. While in meeting with Shna and a male colleague, her colleague stated Shna's work equaled that of three men. The statement appeared to visibly reassure Shna that her efforts were not unnoticed.

Perseverance and determination to pursue goals despite countless obstacles or challenges are required for leaders, male or female. These qualities are especially

necessary for women breaking cultural constraints and moving beyond expected roles. For women who aspire to leadership roles in patriarchal societies such as Kurdistan, there is a level of risk involved for such counter-culture aspirations. As I consider the challenges that have faced these women, I wonder what lies behind the motivation to continue the pursuit despite many hurdles. It is possible that the urge to create change for Kurdistan can be traced to years of living under hegemonic oppression by a military regime. This lived experience of sanctioned abuse has possibly contributed to instilling a desire to help the rebuilding of their region in these women. Much like the region of Kurdistan itself, efforts have been and continue to be made to place these women in a subordinate position by those in power. I wonder whether the nationalist struggle for liberation and discussions of aspirations for a democratic society has helped to fuel the determination of these women to experience greater personal freedoms as well. Perhaps it was the influence of family members who sought to instill these values in their children. Whatever the origins of their motivation, it must be noted that a strong will to persevere exists in each of these women, equipping them to make the personal choices and sacrifices necessary to see the realization of their goals.

Socioeconomic Status

It is my belief that socioeconomic status plays a key role in opportunities afforded women in all societies. Barriers to women's opportunities are often linked to multiple factors that cut across lines of gender, ethnicity, and class (Mohanty, 2004; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Richter, 1991-1992; Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995; Thompson, 2003). In this study, it is not clear what effect socioeconomic status played on the opportunities available to the participants. Only one participant could be classified as

being from a higher socioeconomic status; however, this could be attributed to a number of factors including years of military oppression that impacted the financial stability of most people within the region. It would be important to note that a slightly higher family status could be attributed to the families of the participants of this study indicating the existence of a social hierarchy within society that can affect many opportunities for both men and women. Although socioeconomic status may not be viewed as a factor impacting opportunity in this study, it has been found to be a vital component in creating opportunity for women in patriarchal societies (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 1995).

As noted in Chapter 2, rates of violence against women and high rates of illiteracy coincide with rates of poverty (Faqir, 2001). Understanding the culture of poverty and the intergenerational impact of this cycle is vital to constructing avenues to overcome poverty and realize change, whether in patriarchal or more liberal societies; therefore it is important for advocacy efforts to understand the implications of socioeconomic status on opportunities for women in Kurdistan.

Crossing the Lines

Reflecting on the conversations with the participants of this study, I am aware of their constant bind. These women are required to live and work between the tension of the cultural bounds of society that attempt to define them and their own liberated sense of self. The complexities for women involved in leadership in a patriarchy are numerous, as they are learning to live within and moving between varying roles and positions within this society. As noted in Chapter 5, Kurdish society is undergoing a rapid rate of change, and aspirations of modernity and long-held traditions are colliding. While Kurdish society is in the process of becoming, women leaders must also evolve, learning to

navigate their shifting and often contradictory positioning. This border crossing experience creates a hybrid model of leadership, a leader capable of navigating cultural rules that position them against their own sense of emancipation. This border can be a place of instability or insecurity and filled with tension regarding personal identity (Pugach, 1998) as their definition of self clashes with society's expectations for them. And yet, the participants of this study were not aware of discordant areas of identity. In this study, it is important to note that the Western notions of coherence in subjectivity and positioning are not a reasonable or desirable goal; they remain untenable at least in the context of these women's lives. Pugach states that "borders are psychological frontiers to be crossed, different interior locations that persuade us to work on our own evolution and that create discomfort as the edges of different parts of our personal and cultural characteristics clash" (p.143). These rough edges continue to be shaped as Kurdish society continues to evolve. It seems to me these women who currently live within the tension of change will be initiators of further change as they navigate their own multiple identities and attempt to bring discordant areas of identity to light within current societal constructs. This process of becoming for Kurdish women leaders will pave the way for greater access and equity of opportunity for the next generation of Kurdish women.

CHAPTER 6: OUTSIDE THE LINES

The cultural positioning of women in Kurdish society continues to require a multiplicity and fluidity on the part of women to successfully negotiate roles and develop strategies for navigating societal boundaries. Women leaders in Kurdistan continue to be border crossers, stepping across cultural boundaries between achieved positions and perceived place in society. In this ethnographic study, I have examined the sociocultural backdrop against which the situated reality of Kurdish women's experiences is framed then explored the experiences of three women leaders in Kurdish society.

This chapter will address implications of the study for future use in discourse and policy creation relating to women in Kurdistan, the limitations of this research, and recommendations for future research. Proposed reforms for women's rights in Kurdistan will also be addressed.

Study Implications

As stated in the introduction of this study, the long-term goal of this feminist study was to highlight the disparity in treatment of women in Kurdistan, contribute to existing knowledge to better understand why such a disparity exists, and inform possible ways to address areas that will help change the status of women in Kurdistan. The information gathered could be used by Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and governmental bodies in developing strategies to re-educate people at a grassroots level on

the rights and status of women, inform policy makers tasked with developing laws to prevent violence against women, and address areas of inequality in the law.

One outcome of this research is a contribution to a better understanding of the complexity of issues surrounding the treatment of women in Kurdistan. With this study, I have explored and highlighted the experiences of women who have defied the norm of conservative Muslim society to become leaders in their respective fields. The information gathered during this research feeds into a larger body of knowledge surrounding issues of women in Kurdistan and could potentially contribute to policy development toward expansion of professional opportunity, equity, amending of civil laws discriminatory to women, and protection from violence against women. Findings from this study have implications applicable for various groups including government leaders, women's rights advocates, and non governmental organizations. The information gleaned from such a study also presents one view of what characteristics have been necessary for three women leaders to achieve their current leadership positions. This information can eventually be used to reduce gaps for young women in the region. Understanding the factors that have contributed to the successful attainment of leadership positions by these women will help to better inform advocacy and reform efforts. For example, access to higher education was one factor that was crucial to the participants obtaining their positions. This finding can assist government and educational leaders in development of educational opportunities for young women in urban and rural settings as well as development of college readiness programs for young women. These findings can be applied to strategies regarding the structuring of educational opportunities for young women in urban and village areas, human rights campaigns in Kurdistan, and efforts to empower young girls

by informing political leaders advocates of women's rights. These findings can better inform lawmakers tasked with creating legal reforms to provide opportunities for social mobility for a group long held to a subjugated position. This study can also impact educational leaders in the West by preparing leaders to be culturally responsive to issues effecting women, help bridge cultural gaps in understanding, provide a context for difficult gender positioning, and inform discourse surrounding difference. Further practical means of applying findings of this study to future reform efforts are addressed in the final section of this study.

Limitations

This study drew upon a systematic examination of my experiences in Kurdistan over a period of seven years as well as cultural documents, participant observations, and interviews with three women leaders. In reflecting upon my experiences in Kurdistan, I am aware of my own limitations as a Western woman to accurately perceive and make meaning of the experiences of Kurdish women. A limitation to this study is my ability as participant/observer to accurately interpret or communicate the experiences of these women.

Another limitation to this study was the time available for interviewing participants. The interviews were conducted over a two week visit to Kurdistan to present a higher education workshop and conduct evaluations of the curriculum development project I had worked with for past two years. Taking into consideration the project workload for the trip, traveling with my infant daughter, and efforts to maintain cultural sensitivity in visiting old friends, only a limited time could be devoted to the interviews.

Additional time spent with participants engaging in reflection and dialogue could have contributed further to the findings of this study.

Due to my belief in advocacy for social justice issues and my personal experiences, I am influenced by a strong desire for equity and equality for all people. The analysis and interpretations of these findings are influenced by my own biases. I have addressed these biases more fully in the methodology section.

Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the military restrictions and isolation experienced by Kurdistan, the subsequent opening of those political boundaries, the immense societal change taking place in Kurdistan, and the lack of research taking place in Kurdish society, the region is prime for further sociological and anthropological research on multiple topics. My focus as a feminist concerned with women's rights sways my suggestions for research however many topics and areas of consideration beyond those listed below merit further examination and research in Kurdistan.

One suggestion for future research is to create qualitative studies to investigate the experiences of women leaders at the highest levels of leadership in Kurdish society, namely women who have achieved positions as Ministers of government offices. This level of leadership has been attained by only a small number of women in Kurdistan, with varying responses to their leadership. An exploration of the factors contributing to the successful attainment of this level of leadership by a few women could better inform efforts at advocacy for young women.

In addition to studies of women leaders in the highest level positions in Kurdish society, a study of women who choose to stop at a midlevel position could be conducted.

Studies of women in power indicate that the majority of women assume only a midlevel leadership role as a result of various factors including family responsibilities, the existence of a glass ceiling, and a purposeful choice not to pursue high-level leadership roles (Jaquette, 1997). A possible future study would be an exploration of women at mid level leadership roles to explore their personal choices to remain in midlevel positions as well as barriers prohibiting women from assuming the highest level positions in Kurdish society.

As two of the women in this study were neither married nor had children, a future study could investigate the experiences of women with young children who balance professional and personal spheres within patriarchal societies that typically discourage women from pursuing careers outside of the home. An exploration of the tension that exists for women who assume leadership roles while also being caretakers of young children within a traditional society would aide in creating avenues to assist women who function in these dual roles.

Examinations of globalization and its effect on leadership styles have been conducted through various studies. Quite often there is a gendering of leadership that describes certain traits as typically male or typically female with women in nonwestern regions often feeling pressured to adopt masculine leadership traits in order to compete (Luke, 2001). This study did not seek to examine leadership styles of women in patriarchal society but rather examined the experiences of these women leaders. A future study could explore the leadership styles employed by women leaders in patriarchal societies which by nature, are typically dominated by strong male leadership traits. The

study could further explore the perception of female leadership abilities by those under their influence.

As noted in Chapter 4 of this study, the rate of honor killings in Kurdistan has steadily increased since 1991, with a significant increase since 2003 (James, 2008; Lichter, 2009). Further study should be conducted in order to fully understand factors influencing this rise in the incidence of honor violence and the implications for women.

Kurdistan has been the site of numerous acts of violent attack against all citizens, male and female, by military regimes. A future study could examine the effects of the use of violence, genocide, and rape as a weapon of war, as well as the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on the attitudes and perceptions toward women in Kurdish society.

Future Aspirations

As determined from this study, factors that have enabled some women to assume leadership roles include immediate family support, opportunities to pursue advanced education, political affiliation, family status, recent governmental reforms and laws aimed at providing opportunity for women such as the quota in Parliament, and strong personal traits such as determination and perseverance.

While accusations that the KRG has failed to implement real change regarding women may hold some merit, I do not believe this is indicative of a lack of commitment to women's issues by government leaders but rather a means of measurement indicating where Kurdish society is in regard to the process of change. While many long held cultural traditions are being questioned, it must be understood that generational change

will not occur overnight but rather over generations as the perceptions of women held from centuries-old cultural beliefs will not easily give way to alternative views.

Cultural constructs in Kurdish society that create a double standard for men and women, draw lines pertaining to women's behavior, and attempt to keep women in subjugated traditional roles do exist and are currently perpetuated in much of Kurdish society. These bastions of patriarchal control of women will not easily give way to the changes taking place in Kurdistan. However change is inevitable. The concern for leaders, therefore, is the friction created in the process of change in relation to the individual lives caught in the midst of it. The role of government in protecting women must be expanded during this time to prevent unnecessary violence against a vulnerable group within Kurdish society.

A question Kurdish people and Kurdish leaders must address is the space between what are viewed as long held cultural practices versus direct violations of human rights. Increased international attention has brought the issue of women's rights as human rights to focus in recent years (Conners, 2005). However, because many of the violations against women occur within the private sphere, they are often justified as culture or religion (Okin, 1998). Violence against women can no longer be tolerated or excused in the name of cultural relativism or political correctness; it must be combated through every means possible. Practically speaking, on one level, this means a purposeful change in the justice system in Kurdistan to actually implement real legal reform for women rather than falling back to tribal methods of mediation for acts of violence against women.

Numerous Kurdish women's groups, international organizations concerned with human rights, and government leaders have called for various reforms to protect women from violence and provide greater opportunities for equality. It would seem that, for reform to be truly effective, efforts must cut across every sector of society including education, business, government, and religious realms. A recent conference addressing women's rights and reform proposed legal reform in the way of stronger laws to punish those who commit violence against women, laws aimed at preventing forced marriages, addressing discrimination against women, and the prevention of female genital mutilation. Efforts at education and leadership training for women were also suggested at a 2010 conference (Mahmood, 2010). Kurdistan Women's Rights Watch, an organization aimed at supporting women's interests in Kurdistan issued a proposal for protecting human rights in 2008 calling for various reforms to take place (Kurdish Women's Rights Watch, 2008a). Kurdish women's advocates have called for increased international awareness of honor-based violence by organizing conferences and seminars both inside Kurdistan and in international forums. One strategy employed by some Kurdish women advocates is dialogue with governments or organizations supporting gender violence by supporting regimes that violate human rights as well as dialogue with local Kurdish leaders (Begikhani, 2005). Kurdish activist Houzan Mahmoud's solution to end violence against women is the creation of a secular constitution with total equality for men and women (Lichter, 2009). As attention to the issue increases, various groups both inside Kurdistan and outside have begun to take action in addressing the violations of women's rights in Kurdistan.

In addition to reforms called for above, other ideas expressed by the participants involved in this study include training for religious clerics to better understand and speak out against interpretations of Islam that promote violence against women in the name of religion, the opening of social clubs for teen girls to provide opportunities to build self confidence and leadership capabilities, and education reform primarily in village areas making it possible for young girls to continue their education through tertiary years. I would add to the proposed reforms the alteration of primary and secondary school curriculum content to reflect non-traditional presentations of gender roles in society. I would also propose the addition of at least 1 gender course incorporated into the programs of study for all university programs such as the *Gender and Law* course required of all second year law students at one Kurdish university. Another area of reform would be the addition of small business loans and government grants for women creating businesses as well as business training to encourage entrepreneurship by women. Reform efforts must also include men particularly vulnerable to traditional societal interpretations of honor as they could become perpetrators of violence against women. Discussions with men in areas or backgrounds prone to honor violence about the notions of honor and human rights would merit consideration in reform efforts. Finally, I would propose a concentrated effort by local Kurdish media to address women's rights issues in a variety of realms. For example, the use of pop culture has proven to be a powerful agent of social change in Western society. Kurdish musicians and television programs which are extremely popular in Kurdish society could be employed as a means of delivering a message of women's rights to Kurdish society at large by presenting television shows with strong women role models.

Societal change will come only through continued efforts in multiple sectors to address women's rights as human rights, not to be viewed as a favor toward women but an opportunity for women to exercise basic human rights given by right of birth. Feminist Janet Afary describes a growing feminist movement among Middle Eastern and Muslim women that "attempts to undo the outdated notion that feminism is a Western or imported phenomena or that it is irrelevant to Middle Eastern or Muslim women" (Afray, 2004, p. 123).While the anticipated changes will not and should not create a replica of Western society or Western feminist aims, they must include basic freedoms of citizens to participate in all walks of society without threat of violence. It is my hope that every avenue available for the protection of women in Kurdistan will be utilized and that doors of opportunity for women to participate in all facets of society will be opened as Kurdish culture undergoes rapid change. The opportunity currently exists for Kurds to re-examine their cultural identity and perceptions and form an open society that would be a model of human rights for the entire Middle East. As Kurdish leadership has sought for many years to break free from dictatorial leadership, they must recognize that women must be afforded the same rights and freedoms many fought for during years of resistance.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. What perceptions of women exist in Kurdish society?

   (Within a variety of arenas and social settings explore the views, expectations, and restrictions placed upon women in Kurdish society)

   a. What rules or expectations apply to women in Kurdistan?

   b. What experiences have you had which helped you understand the rules or expectations that apply to women?

   c. Describe the experiences within your family/childhood that helped you understand the social rules that applied to you as a woman.

   d. How do you feel the government views women in Kurdistan? What laws or policies are consistent with your view?

   e. How would you describe local religious leaders' view of women?

2. How do the differing perceptions affect behavior and opportunities available to women in Kurdistan?

   a. What is your current educational level?

   b. What educational opportunities were available to you?

   c. What professional opportunities were/are available to you?

   d. Describe the reaction of family members to your education and/or professional achievements.

   e. What professional opportunities were/are available to women in general in Kurdistan?

f. Describe your experiences in obtaining your position of leadership. What were the responses of male colleagues? What were the responses of other women to your position?

3. Describe the biggest obstacles you have faced as a woman in Kurdistan.

4. If you were able to change one thing relating to the treatment of women in Kurdistan, what would that be?

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Institutional Review Board
Study #: __ 09-0239_____

Appalachian State University

Informed Consent for Participants in
Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of the Project Honor Bound: The Disparity of Treatment of Women in Kurdistan

Investigator _____ Lori Mason_____

I. Purpose of Research/Project

This research project will examine the disparity in treatment of women in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. The study will explore the experiences of women who have become leaders in various fields in Kurdistan and how these women have formed identity and navigated cultural boundaries in order to achieve high level leadership roles in a conservative Muslim Region. The study also involves implications for addressing violence against women resulting from cultural practices. You being asked to participate because of the achievements you have made professionally in assuming a high level leadership role in your respective field. As a result of my experiences in Kurdistan both living and working in the region, I will be highly self-reflective in my research process, I consider myself as both a researcher and a research participant in the examination of women's leadership in Kurdistan. The primary purpose of this project is to contribute to the understanding of the complexities surrounding women's rights in Kurdistan including cultural, religious, and familial constraints by exploring the experiences of women who have defied the norm to achieve a high level of leadership. A secondary purpose is to highlight the issue of violence against women in the form of honor crimes, murder of women in the name of family honor, in Kurdistan.

II. Procedures

The first procedure will be a self-reflective examination of my personal and professional experiences as a Western woman living and working in Kurdistan. The self-reflection will give rise to hypotheses regarding the treatment of women within this region. The second procedure will be open-ended, in-depth interviews with 4-6 female leaders who have achieved non-traditional leadership roles in a conservative Muslim environment in order to gain an understanding of these women's lived experiences, perceptions, struggles, and goals. I plan to construct the in-depth interviews in multiple ways. A minimum of two, 1 hour interviews will be conducted with each participant. These interviews will be conducted in various locations based upon participant and researcher availability and privacy issues.

The interview questions will be presented to you with responses being video-taped; the investigator will take notes as well. Interviews will last approximately 1 hour. Each participant will be interviewed two times in a location convenient for the interviewee and conducive to private conversation. One follow-up visit will be made with each participant to clarify any questions or ask additional questions. The videoing of the interviews will be important both for later analysis as well as allowing the women themselves to speak in regard to their current situation.

A final procedure will be document review. In conducting a review of cultural documents, I will include newspaper and journal articles, press releases, United Nations Human Rights reports, U. S. Federal Bureau of Investigation findings, Amnesty International Reports, women's rights organizations' reports, and past and current laws. Review of cultural documents will be analyzed to better understand overall societal norms in gender roles.

III. Risks

Potential risks for involvement in the study could include a negative reaction from more conservative peers to the proposed research, as the study will critically examine the role and positioning of women in Kurdistan. Another possible risk for involvement could include a negative reaction from family members of participants. While conducting this research, participants will be asked to be highly self-reflective in examining their experiences in relation to the role of women in Kurdistan. This self-reflection in itself could be unsettling to participants as they probe social and cultural constructs that have shaped their lives and experiences. Efforts will be made to avoid probing areas that may be extremely sensitive to the participants and their families or highlighting vulnerabilities of women participating in the study.

Contact information for women's rights advocates who counsel women in Kurdistan will be given prior to the interviews.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage participation. The benefit of your participation in this study stems from meaningful insights into the ways in which you have navigated social and cultural constructs as a woman to achieve a leadership role in Kurdistan and how those experiences have shaped your identity. While there is no monetary compensation, there is a greater social benefit to your participation as your experiences will aide in understanding the complexities of issues facing women who aspire to non traditional roles in Kurdistan. Your participation will contribute to a larger body of knowledge surrounding the issues of women and help policy makers, women's rights advocates, and educators highlight ways in which women's issues can be addressed to allow women greater equity of opportunity as well as protection from violence enacted against them in the name of family honor.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your name and any identifying information regarding your personal or professional lives will not be identified in the results published. Only my dissertation committee and I will be informed of the identity of the participants. A pseudonym will be used rather than your name with only regional demographics and educational level being used as identifiers. At no time will the researchers release the results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the project without your written consent.

Videotaping will occur during the interviews to be used for analysis of research. The videos will also allow you to speak directly in regard to your experiences as a woman in Kurdistan. You will at no time be videoed without written consent prior to filming. The videoed interviews will not be used for publishing at any time without your written consent. Videos, transcriptions of interviews, and coded data will be kept in separate, secure locations that only I will have access to.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You will be free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time you feel it may be necessary. You are also free to decline from answering any question you choose. Withdrawal from participation will by no means affect the relationship with me as the researcher, or the University. If you choose to withdraw, the videotape of your interview will be destroyed.

There may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a participant should not continue in the study at which time they will be asked to discontinue participation in the research project.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board of Appalachian State University.

_____

IRB Approval Date Approval Expiration Date

IX. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I agree to be videotaped during the research interviews. I have the following responsibilities: to inform the investigator if at any point I prefer to refrain from answering a question or wish to withdraw from this study.

X. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____

Participant's Signature
Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact

Lori Mason
001 704 880 8314
lorimason@horseshoem.com

APPENDIX C

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine how certain women achieve high-level leadership positions in a conservative, male-dominated society. This research is part of my program as a doctoral student at Appalachian State University.

I am asking you to participate because you have already achieved a significant leadership role within your respective field. The benefits to you of doing this study are that you may learn new things about yourself as a leader or your leadership styles and you may develop a greater sense of connectedness to other female leaders in the region and outside of Kurdistan. In addition, your input will help me and others assess the disparity in treatment of women in Kurdistan with a goal of increasing women's rights in the region and developing a means of altering the negative perception of women held by many in the region. There could be a risk, however, in that some fundamentalist, ultra conservative people may object to this type of research or the possibility of increasing women's rights in Kurdistan.

I will be the only person who knows that you are participating in this study. Anytime I use the information you give me, I will use a pseudonym for your name or initials to distinguish you. We can decide together how to describe your leadership role in order to disguise your identity as needed. When I interview you, I would like your permission to videotape our interviews and take notes to remind me of what we have discussed. We can decide together whether or not photographs should be used in the research based on potential threat incurred. The video footage will be used for a documentary film on women's issues in Kurdistan. In videoing the interview, I will use a shadow board to disguise your identity. At no time will your picture be included in this video without your express written consent.

As part of your participation in the study, I will spend time with you over the course of a few weeks. In our first talk, I will ask you questions about yourself, your family, and background. The next several meetings will be spent discussing your education, roles or jobs held in your current field; how you came to your current leadership position; opposition you have faced in doing so; and how you overcame that opposition. I will also ask your thoughts and opinion on the view of women within the Kurdistan region, problems women face, and potential solutions for those problems.

There is no right or wrong answer to the interview questions, I am seeking your opinion and thoughts on matters facing women in Kurdistan and how you have been able to successfully navigate those issues. You are the experts in this matter; I am listening for your views.

It is important for you to know that at any point throughout the interview process, you can decide not to participate or stop doing so at any point after we have begun. If you should decide to stop participating in this study, this will by no means hurt any future contact with me.

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE PROTOCOL

Individual Interview with Female Leaders in Kurdistan

I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me. As a reminder, this research project centers on your experiences as a woman in leadership in Kurdistan. I am interested in your experiences specifically because of your positioning as a woman serving in a nontraditional role while balancing what is acceptable for women within rigid cultural bounds.

This interview will be more like a conversation with you. I have three broad areas I would like to ask you about. These areas will help to gain an understanding of the perception and treatment of women within Kurdistan. Are you ready to begin?

1. One area I am interested in is your family background. What childhood experiences helped to shape your understanding of women's rights in Kurdistan, and what experiences prepared you for your professional position today? How supportive has your family been to you throughout your career?

2. Tell me about your experiences in becoming a leader in Kurdistan. What professional opportunities were opened to you and how did this affect your decisions?

3. A third area I am interested in exploring is your perception of the relationship between modernization and tradition within Kurdistani society. How do you describe this relationship and any influences it may have on your sense of identity as both a woman and a leader?

4. Final areas I wish to discuss are the changes you have experienced throughout your assent to a leadership position. In what ways do you feel you have helped change the status and situation of women in Kurdistan?

VITA

Lori Mason was born in Statesville, North Carolina. She attended Central Elementary School and graduated from North Iredell High School in June 1989. She enrolled in Mitchell Community College where she received an Associate in Arts. Lori then enrolled in the College of Education at North Carolina State University; however, she later transferred to Southwestern Oklahoma State University with an athletic scholarship. In May 1995 Lori received a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education and in May 1996 received a Master's degree in Secondary Education. In June of 2007 she began study toward a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University. She received her EdD in December 2010.

Lori Mason has worked in education since 1996 teaching middle school in Texas and North Carolina. She moved to Kurdistan, Northern Iraq in September of 2003 to work in administrative and teacher training for private English schools in Iraq. She continued involvement in Kurdistan through various humanitarian aide projects and conferences. She began working with the Office of International Education and Development at Appalachian State University in 2007. She served as Project Coordinator for a partnership project with Appalachian State University and the Kurdistan Ministry of Higher Education until May 2010.