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**The Role of Women in Political Decision-Making in
Iraq (2003–2020)**

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Supervisor

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The Role of Women in Political Decision-Making in Iraq (2003–2020)

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the man who sacrificed everything to raise me and my sisters—my first and best supporter in my academic journey. And to the woman who left everything behind and accompanied me to another country to take care of me. Daddy and Mommy, without you, I wouldn't have done it.

I'm the luckiest girl in the world because I'm your daughter.

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ABSTRACT

The Role of Women in Political Decision-Making in Iraq (2003–2020)

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Since the invasion by the US forces in 2003, Iraq has been struggling to overcome social, political, and economic crises. The democratic standards that promised to bring social and political equality were legalized following the invasion; however, they could not be actualized due to the patriarchal political culture on Iraq. Thus, Iraqi women are still far from being able to enjoy their democratic rights of participating in political life, as they have been experiencing gendered violence and discrimination in all aspects of their lives. This thesis explores the social and political dynamics in Iraq between 2003 and 2020 through a feminist perspective in order to identify the impact of the patriarchal political culture that isolates Iraqi women from politics in general and prevents their participation in political decision-making mechanisms in particular.

Keywords: Iraq, Patriarchy, Political Participation, Iraqi Women

ÖZET

Irak'ta Kadınların Siyasi Karar Alma Mekanizmasındaki Rolü (2003-2020)

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2003 yılında gerçekleşen Amerika Birleşik Devletleri işgalinden beri, Irak sosyal, siyasi ve ekonomik krizlerle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. İşgalin ardından vaat edilen demokratik standartlar ise yasallaştırıldığı halde, ataerkil siyasi kültür nedeniyle faaliyete geçirilememiştir. Cinsiyetçi şiddet ve yaşamın her alanında maruz kaldıkları ayrımcılık nedeniyle Iraklı kadınlar demokratik sistemin gereği olan siyasal hayata katılım haklarını kullanamamaktadırlar. Bu tez, Iraklı kadınların genel olarak siyasete ve özellikle olarakta siyasi karar alma süreçlerine katılmalarını engelleyen faktörleri tespit etmek amacıyla 2003 ve 2020 yılları arasında Irak'taki sosyal ve siyasi dinamikleri Feminist bir bakış açısıyla incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Irak, Ataerkil Sistemler, Siyasi Katılım, Iraklı Kadınlar

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLU	: American Civil Liberties Union
ADV	: A Different View
CEDAW	: Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPA	: Coalition Provisional Authority
CPI	: Corruption Perceptions Index
EMC	: Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center
GFIW	: General Federation of Iraqi Women
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KRG	: Kurdistan Regional Government
MP	: Member of Parliament
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
OWFI	: Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq
TAL	: Transitional Administration Law
UNAMI	: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	: United State of America
WILPF	: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

INTRODUCTION

“Women represent half the potential talents and skills of humanity and their under-representation in decision-making is a loss for society as a whole.”

—Athens Declaration, 1992

The primary objective of democratic political systems is to ensure people’s civil and political rights. Democratic governments must guarantee these rights to each of their citizens without any discrimination. However, in many countries across the world that claim to be democratic, women are discriminated against, Iraq being one of these countries. The patriarchal social system upon which the Iraqi democracy is built is the main reason behind this discrimination.

The vulnerability of women in patriarchal societies, especially the ones amidst political turmoil, emerges from the fact that although during wars, they are the ones advocating peace, they are often the first group to be victimized; this applies to Iraq as well. Iraqi women have been murdered, kidnapped, and raped over the last two decades during the crisis, which, in turn, has made them distance themselves from the public sphere.

The inclusion of women in political activities is a major global issue that necessitates governmental action. Thus, various international organizations have been pressuring national governments worldwide regarding this issue. For instance, in 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action stipulated that women must be represented at a proportion of at least 30 percent in the legislative bodies of countries (United Nations, 1995). In 2015, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals identified the elimination of “structural issues at the root of gender inequality, such as legal discrimination, unfair social norms and attitudes, decision-making on sexual and reproductive issues and low levels of political participation” as one of its

17 goals (United Nations, 2017, para 1). However, despite several global efforts, the proportion of women in national parliaments is still only 24 percent worldwide, and this low representation can be seen in established democracies as well as newly emerging democracies (United Nations, 2017).

Iraqi women have long suffered from clear exclusion and marginalization in decision-making positions, although they make up almost half of Iraq's population of approximately 39 million (Vilarado & Bittar, 2018: p. 5). The Iraqi population is multi-ethnic and multi-religious in its composition. At the ethnic level Arabs constitute the majority, where there also exists a large Kurdish population in the north of the country, and smaller populations of Turkmen, Shabak, Yazidis, Mandaean, Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac and Armenian communities. The main religious divides are between Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims and Christians (Batatu, as cited in Ali, 2018b).

Since the 1980s, Iraq has been faced with economic and political crises, wars, economic sanctions, and internal conflicts which have eroded the national fabric and destroyed the infrastructure of the Iraqi state. During this time period, the most significant development was the fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which promised a democratic republican system in the country (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). This new promise included the pledge to eliminate all sectarian and "sectarian" (Mikdashi, 2018) elements in Iraqi politics, while establishing a system of equality for all the Iraqi people.

After the US invasion, sexual discrimination in the Iraqi political system was addressed under the constitution adopted in 2005, all Iraqi citizens are accepted as equal before the law and Iraqi women gained right to vote, be nominated for political office, be elected, and to work in politics. A 25 percent quota for female Members of the Iraqi Parliament was also established (Khadir, 2009). However, while the political system in Iraq has undergone profound change following 2003, with parliamentary democracy is established and four electoral cycles completed in 17

years, the sectarian political culture has not changed. In this context, this thesis aims to explore the reasons behind Iraqi women's exclusion from political life in Iraq and their marginalization from political decision-making, despite the 17 years of transition from dictatorship to democracy, through a close analysis of the social and political dynamics in the country.

1.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.1 Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender

Gender roles and the norms associated with gender are the principal cause of the discrimination against Iraqi women in the political sphere. The social understanding of gender in Iraq conceptualizes inequality in terms of the psychological, social, economic, and political capabilities of women and upholds that men have superior abilities in all these spheres. Yet, this is not a phenomenon unique to Iraq; throughout history, in almost all known societies, this social system of inequality based on gender has existed (Meagher, 2011).

The academic study of this universal phenomenon was first introduced to the social sciences in the 1960s with the conceptualization of patriarchal systems (Acker, 1989, p. 232), referring to “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Walby, 1989, p. 20). Through this conceptualization, patriarchal societies are identified as social systems in which “gender inequality is manifested in almost all aspects of life, where men are in the position of control, authority, leadership, and power, while women are generally oppressed, subordinated, considered inferior, and marginalized” (Solati, 2017, pp. 65–66).

The historical investigations on the subject have shown that the isolation of women from political life has been a common characteristic even in ancient human political history: “In ancient China, Greece, Egypt, and Rome, the vast majority of women had far fewer freedoms than men. Despite this, women had status in the household and as mothers, and some became priestess associated with goddesses in polytheistic religions” (Worsley, 2019, p. 10).

The ancient history of gender-based political discrimination, however, also had some power-related exceptions. For instance, in ancient Egypt from the first to the fourth centuries, female rulers are known to have established gender equality through law. Furthermore, in some ancient civilizations in north-east America, women's participation in choosing tribal leaders is known to have occurred (although women's leadership was not common), and women had the capacity to choose their spouses and decide on the number of children they wished to have (Worsley, 2019). "However, by the medieval era, when monotheism became dominant, particularly in the West and Near East, the spiritual role of women dwindled. Customs and laws created by men continued to limit the role of most medieval women" (Worsley, 2019, p. 10).

Patriarchal systems according to Solati (2017) were usually based on the existence of men in the public sphere while women were relegated to the private sphere. Women are always subordinate, oppressed, and productive mainly only in a maternal sense. In contrast, men are the leaders, ruler, and breadwinners. From the position of the breadwinner, man uses his power over woman to restrict her and prevent her participation in the public sphere and may resort to violent coercion if she does not obey him (Solati, 2017).

The societal role of women in these patriarchal societies was limited to being wives and mothers. Women's value is dependent on the number and gender of children she gives birth to, because in patriarchal communities sons are preferred over daughters. The honor of a family is linked to its female members, so families control their women and girls as a necessity to preserve the family's honor. The ideal role assigned to girls and women are is as a wife who brings value in marriage; early marriage for girls is preferred, increasing the childbearing period and enabling women to fulfil their socially-assigned value (Solati, 2017).

Furthermore, in some patriarchal societies, knowledge is derived from myths and legends, and particularly religious beliefs. Conceptions of truth are based on religious and metaphorical

foundations without any scientific credentials, and scientific knowledge may be assigned little or no importance. Society as a whole is based on vertical relationships (Sharabi, 1988).

Social scientists have identified three main historical determinants in the emergence and maintenance of patriarchal systems, namely household production, private property, and culture. Regarding household production, with the increasing need for labour with the development of agriculture from the Neolithic age onwards, women started to be considered as a means primarily for human reproduction. This has also been linked to political relationships, as exchanging women through marriage became a means to strengthen relationships between tribes and avert conflict and war. Women are also known to have been used as a means to improve economic status, as women's families received an amount of money from the groom's family in exchange during marriages (Lerner, 1986).

The development of private property is also of crucial importance. Tran (2017) illustrates that the shift in lifestyles throughout history led to the victory of private property over public ownership in human societies. Women have been seen as either private property or a means for its attainment throughout history. Under these circumstances, women started to be considered as property and vulnerable to physical and sexual violence. Slavery, abduction of women, and forced marriages are common models in such practices (Tran, 2017).

The growing acceptance of monogamy also strengthened the idea of treating women as a commodity, in which women do not have the right to divorce; thus, they are treated as men's property. They become no more than maids and nannies, tasked solely with serving the needs of the household and raising children. Men's role is defined in terms of inheritance, as they become the sole beneficiaries of family fortunes. This situation leads to the transfer of women and children's rights to the father's control (Tran, 2017). Therefore, men's desire to control the property of women further leads to their subordination (Sultana, 2010).

As evident in the above discussion, social construction is vital in the establishment and maintenance of patriarchal culture. Socialization, particularly during the childhood, plays a central role in the determination of gender roles. The male role in patriarchal cultures (masculinity) is identified with the characteristics of persistence, activity, and high decision-making ability, while the female role (femininity) is identified with cooperation, open display of emotions, and kindness. These cultural instructions become visible even through common labeling with the colors of pink for girls and blue for boys (Walbey, 1989).

In many contemporary societies, girls are given dolls to play with and taught ‘soft’ games, dedicated to the traditional role of the woman as mother and domestic worker, while boys play with toy cars and games that require strength and even a degree of violence; this phenomenon is called “sexual profiling” (Hasso, 2009). Moreover, books, magazines, television, and other forms of media also have a significant role in creating gender stereotypes, inculcating the idea that girls should help their mothers in domestic work. Simultaneously, boys are afforded opportunities for adventures and exploration outside the home (Walbey, 1989). This mode of socialization, however, not only affects women but also men. Masculine characteristics are imposed on male children, and they are expected to adhere to their socially given roles. If they fail to do so, if they act outside the framework of the social attributes imposed on them, they are considered deviants. For example, parents in patriarchal societies forbid their male children from acting or even playing in what is considered by social norms to be a feminine manner (Giddens and Griffiths, 2008).

Walbey (1989) explores the issue further with patriarchal ideology in private and public domains. The first variety is ‘private patriarchy’ which is based on household productivity. Women are excluded from the public sphere and prevented from obtaining paid work. Women are largely kept inside the house, where it can be guaranteed that they will be throughout their lives under the control of men, whether the father, brother, or husband. The second category is ‘public patriarchy’, based on the foundations of public institutions, excluding the home. In this

type, women can access public institutions and employment, and there are seemingly no overt obstacles in their way; however, they are subject to subordination within these institutions, distinguished from men and placed in positions of lesser value.

Walby's categorization is built specifically on the Western experience. Hisham Sharabi (1988), who specializes in patriarchal systems in the Arab world, in a similar vein identifies another category of patriarchy: neo-patriarchy. Sharabi identifies the main characteristics of the contemporary patriarchal systems in countries which did not experience a 'European' modernity. He states that 'neo-patriarchy' is a marriage of the traditional patriarchal system of the Arab world, with Western imperialism. European modernization was partially transferred to the Arab world through colonialism, especially from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The desire for change in various aspects of life (such as clothing, education, and politics) required external intervention, which in turn created dependency and subordination. The essential characteristic of all forms of neo-patriarchy is "the absence equally of genuine traditionalism and authentic modernity" (Sharabi, 1988, p. 23).

Neo-patriarchy, is a new form of women's oppression, including the obliteration of their identity and infringement of their rights within the family; it has helped to make the patriarchy a seemingly permanent system. As legal and financial modernization is not experienced by the Arab world, these societies' internal structures are stuck being deeply rooted in customs, traditions, patriarchal values, and social relations of kinship, clan, and religious and ethnic groups. Thus, social structures are maintained through vertical relationships between ruler and ruled, between father and child (Sharabi, 1988).

Another distinct character of neo-patriarchy, according to Sharabi, is the control structure. In this model, women exercise some control over the oppression of other women, but this happens under the supervision of the man who retains his superiority and right to be the supreme and only authority within the family. At the family level, the woman already residing in the home (the

mother/mother-in-law) persecutes the newly arrived woman (the son's wife) because she considers her a threat. The mother-in-law uses her strength stemming from her respect within the family in suppressing her son's wife, who in turn desires to establish a stronger position for herself within the new family, due to the mother's desire to maintain power and control (Habiba, Ali, & Ashfaq, 2016). Thus, the neo-patriarchal systems also provide a degree of satisfaction for women by giving them certain rights that are significantly higher than those in traditional patriarchal systems, such as education, work, and some economic independence (Sharabi, 1998).

1.1.2 Women's Representation in Democratic Decision-Making Mechanisms

The presence of women on equal terms with men in decision-making and leadership positions enhances government democratization in all types of democracies, to the fact that women represent half of the global population. Hence, women have the right to equal representation. Women's experiences in practice politics differ from men, so this will lead to policy development and implementation. However, women are still underrepresented, a situation which can be traced to several obstacles that stem from the patriarchal Idea which women across many countries still face in shaping their political work. These obstacles are divided into two main categories, political barriers, and socio-cultural barriers. (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center [EMC], 2014; Data Science, 2017).

1.1.2.1 Political Barriers

The lack of adequate support structures to correct codified policies to include women in political leadership and achieve equality in global politics stems from institutional constraints. The nature of the political system, in this regard, one of the mechanisms producing difficulties for women in decision-making positions is due to the political system in many countries across the world, men still enjoy political dominance. The basic rules of the political game in these countries are formulated upon patriarchy, given men's significant presence in the political arena: they define the rules for political life. In such political systems, Politics often depends on the idea of competition rather than cooperation, in which assertive and aggressive men are often viewed as

the winners (Shvedova, 2005). In such systems, men resist sharing political power and decision-making responsibilities with women, only allowing women to participate in political life to a small degree (Shvedova, 2005).

Political party structure is another important element in this matter. Typically, political parties do not financially support women in election campaigns and do not even place women in winning positions on electoral lists. Thus, this lack of support prevents women from taking leadership positions and discourages them (Shvedova, 2005). Aylan (2014) illustrated that parties' control over their members is another reason behind women's reluctance to participate. Some political parties impose the demand for strict adherence to their ideology on their members. This characteristic has taken on a broader dimension in relation to gender, with some female MPs, who typically hold little power in the party structure, becoming prisoners of their party and losing their freedom to express their will. The strength of the party or bloc over female MPs has a devastating effect on their activities, as the candidate's commitment and desire not to violate the bloc/party's regulations becomes one of the obstacles that weakens the role of a female MP.

The lack of cooperation between feminist organizations and female politicians can also be a reason for women's underrepresentation. Around the world today, there is a lack of communication and cooperation between female politicians and women's organizations, either due to a lack of awareness of the importance of cooperation among them, a lack of resources to invest in political development programs for women, or a lack of confidence in women in parliaments on the part of women's organizations (Aylan, 2014). These organizations, according to Al-Zubaidi (2019), hold female parliamentarians responsible for the effectiveness of their roles in decision-making positions; there can be no trust in women who are perceived as unable to prove themselves and are satisfied with the status quo. Issues of women's rights cannot be entrusted to their hands, as it is not often that women have been able to obtain their rights that are established in their countries' constitutions.

In order to reduce the gap between feminist organizations and female politicians, strategic structures and plans must be established to improve women's political participation. These programs can be developed by civil society organizations (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016).

The main task of civil society organizations concerned with women's affairs is to enhance the role of female political representation by creating a class of confident women engaged in politics and leaders who can express appropriate ideological messages. Moreover, the organizations should provide women in parliaments with the necessary skills to ensure that issues raised by women are taken into account in discussion and decision-making. New methods of thinking and action are needed (UNDP, 2016). Since women are still only represented 24 percent across the world's parliaments as of last year (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019)

1.1.2.2 Social-cultural Barriers

The inclusion of women in political participation, according to George (2019), is determined by the norms that constitute the broader social bodies, especially when women want to be social organizers or elected officials. Moreover, these norms undermine the role of women in public life and play a role in voting patterns, thus helping to keep women out of political life. There is a resistance to the political leadership of women. The following are some of the most important issues that women face with these ramifications of patriarchy.

Stereotypes are one of the main reasons for the persistent lack of political representation of women in various societies. On the one hand, Ilesanmi (2018) argues that due to the establishment of a stereotypical image of women in many societies, as they have feminine qualities associated with (kindness, sensitivity, and empathy with others), Prevent them from an effective representation because these attributes did not match the attributes of leaders and decision-makers, which should be the characteristics of masculinity (competition, self-reliance, enthusiasm, and aggressiveness), which are not possessed by women. Female leaders are

evaluated as less competent in political positions even if they act like their male counterparts. On the other hand, Nielsen & Huse (2010) argues that the existence of stereotypes, sometimes held by women themselves on some level, can undermine the performance of women in politics, as they could be fearful of their actions being considered as confirmation of the stereotype of the female leader.

Furthermore, cultural norms according to Shvedova (2005) play a prominent role in opposing the presence of women in the political arena in general and in decision-making positions in particular. Of prime importance is the idea of 'a woman's place,' which is often pervasive in society, pushing women into the role of wife and mother. If a woman wishes to work, the choices presented to her are low-paid jobs, far from the political domain. Sexual separation of roles is a characteristic of the traditional patriarchal system.

In addition, Ilesanmi (2018) identified the lack of time as another culturally based barrier. Political positions require much time, which may conflict with commitment toward the family. Women, thus, struggle to reconcile political work hours with family commitments, as the parliamentary work schedule is usually characterized by a lack of supportive structures for the working parliamentary mother. This schedule is not often modified to take into consideration the dual nature of the work that women in politics have to perform (Shvedova, 2005).

Several studies in addition to the stereotype and cultures norms have viewed religious affiliation as a powerful determinant in restricting women from politics, particularly in the context of the Islamic faith. It has been deemed one reason for the delayed development of women in the Arab world and other Muslim countries. Likewise, religious practices, the incorrect interpretation of religious teachings, and their association with other cultural factors have created obstacles in women's way in the name of religion (Sabbagh, 2005). According to Abdullah (2015), religious culture plays a negative role in influencing women's political behavior. Some religious extremist groups (such as ISIS and other sectarian groups that have emerged in Iraq since 2003) do not

recognize the right of women to participate in politics, and many women activists in civil society organizations and politics have been subjected to threats and killings, majorly affecting their political life.

Islamic law or Sharia is typically interpreted in a manner that constrains the activities of women. A study carried out by Glas, Spierings & Scheepers (2018), in the Middle East and North Africa, revealed that religiosity in itself does not create gender differences. Rather, it is socialization through patriarchal religious institutions that leads individuals to passively absorb patriarchal ideology. The inflexible patriarchal structures impede support for gender equality. By contrast, other dimensions of religiosity stimulate progress.

Nonetheless, women's lack of confidence played a role in creating a weak politician as Ahmed (2012) held that patriarchal cultures do not allow girls to nourish their self-confidence; rather, they inculcate a spirit of submission in them, until the woman has convinced herself that her enslavement and inferiority are part of her feminine nature and that she was created for reproduction and household chores. The negative view of women as ineffective has created a lack of confidence and support for female political candidates among the public.

Another distinct barrier of social-cultural barriers is media Influence. This barrier plays a vital role in forming the image of women among the masses. It can enable a conservative society in establishing the stereotype of women as weak and second-class citizens or support women in obtaining their rights. In the world today, there is an apparent lack of adequate coverage of the achievements and activities of women politicians. Many media platforms tend not to cover events or conferences relating to women's interests and are not actively involved in measures for promoting and improving the status of women. Furthermore, the media does not adequately inform the public about women's rights and their role in society (Jahan, 2014).

These media outlets have yet to recognize that women are the first to be affected by economic changes, social transformations, and political reforms. Rather, they are concerned with displaying the stereotype of women as physically attractive, focusing on models, actresses, and other celebrities. In other words, the focus is on women's physical and not mental attributes. Sometimes, media outlets report stories about women's political successes and activities, but they are, at the same time, more involved with reporting things unfavorably for the women (Jahan, 2014).

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FEMINISM

1.2.1 Feminist Movements and the Feminist School of Thought

The concept of patriarchy has been central to feminist political theory, as feminist scholars aim to identify the main factors behind gender discrimination in the political sphere and accordingly devise policies to fight against it. Modern feminism began in Europe in the 1960s as the philosophy that drove the women's liberation movement, with far-reaching social, political, and economic implications. The demands of this movement centered on improving women's situation in the patriarchal system by creating a society founded on equality between women and men (Weedon, 1987) and challenged the old idea of biological inequality between women and men (Withworth, 1994). Hooks (2000), a prominent feminist scholar, defined feminism as a "movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1).

Feminism stands against many societal practices, such as the mutilation of women into sexual objects for male consumption, rape, sexual violence, and pornography. Furthermore, feminism demands equal access to education, equality of employment opportunities, payment, and working conditions for women, as well as women's right to freely choose whether and when they want to have children and to share childcare and other domestic duties with men. Many feminists are also concerned with how patriarchal persecution of many women is multiplied by factors of class and ethnicity. Perhaps, most importantly, feminist theorists have sought the answer to questions such

as what it is to be a woman, how women's femininity and sexuality are defined for them, and how they can begin to redefine these for themselves (Weedon, 1987).

Some feminist studies such as Withworth (1994) have documented the exploitation of women by states, especially in times of war—for example, by states' encouragement of women to work in industries to fill the vacuum left by conscripted men or to have more children to strengthen the nation and ensure its power. For example, during the Iraq-Iran War, the Iraqi government under President Saddam Hussein supported the employment of women to fill shortages in factories, hospitals, and other institutions as well as encouraging women to have children by providing financial support and other necessary needs. Feminists have stood against such practices and opted to take a constructive position in peace-making rather than giving their support for militarization and wars.

The feminist movement initially encountered difficulties due to a lack of understanding of the particular experiences of women of color, working-class women, and women from other marginalized groups, leading to accusations, for instance, that feminism had a racist vision of achieving the desires of one group of women only: white women. For example, African-American women saw feminism as a movement founded by white housewives of the middle- and upper-classes, tired of being always at leisure, without concern for poor women who had a greater burden of work and Black women who faced racist persecution alongside experiencing male oppression. On the contrary, feminism today is more widely recognized as an affirmative term and movement that calls for equality for all and respects the choices of all (Hooks, 1984).

Feminism has passed through many stages from its initial appearance to the present day, attempting to shape itself in accordance with technological, economic, and social developments. Still, the core message or goal has remained the liberation of women in all its different aspects. The First Wave of feminism can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when women in the West did not have the right to vote or to attend universities and

could only work in specific jobs. And if they worked, they had their salaries and property under the control and management of their spouses or parents. The main goal of this wave of feminism was to obtain for women the right to vote and access to education and to establish laws regarding work and marriage (Ovi, 2017).

The Second Wave of the movement occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s. By this time, women in many parts of the world had gained some rights as a result of the First Wave. They were able to attend schools and universities. They also had the right to divorce but often did not use it due to social pressure. While marital rape had become illegal in some countries, many men did not act as if they were bound by this law. The demands of the new movement were more radical than they previously were, especially with rising awareness of the experiences of all minorities. One demand concerned constitutional amendments to achieve equal rights for all, regardless of gender, while other demands concerned sexual and reproductive rights (Ovi, 2017).

The Third Wave sought to ease some people's misconceptions about feminism, especially the notion that feminists hated men and cared too much about certain trivial issues (Grady, 2018). As a result, in 1992, the American feminist activist Rebecca Walker announced the end of the Second Wave. The new generation was affected by the post-modern world, and they assigned tremendous importance to the media and cultural production. They called on all women to form a sisterhood despite whatever factors divided them and come together to challenge oppressive regimes and focus on empowering women. While the Second Wave fought for women's access to men's positions, the Third Wave sought to empower women by recognizing but also eliminating differences; while Second Wave feminists worked to achieve equality at the institutional level, feminists of the Third Wave worked to dismantle the deep patriarchal beliefs that begin at the community level (Snyder, 2008).

The Fourth Wave appeared with the emergence of online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, between the years 2008 and 2012, and it continues to the present day. The

activists of this generation use the Internet to gather and form plans for their activities, such as street demonstrations (Grady, 2018). This wave has also continued to fight sexual discrimination, unequal pay, and sexual violence, showing that the legal victories achieved by the previous waves have not been put into practice (Abrahams, 2017).

Tickner (2001) stated that feminist theory has emerged to fill a space between the social sciences and humanities and has found a place within disciplinary circles with different political agendas. Therefore, it can be considered a multifaceted school of thought, which draws upon a wide range of philosophical positions and aims to explain the subordination of women while striving to end it. The primary critique that the feminist tradition raises pertains to patriarchal systems of thought, the conflicts and contradictions existing in societies concerning the assumptions related to women, and the reasons behind the frequent absence of women from public life—as discussed above. The feminist tradition offers analyses on this question in relation to power, equality, family, and religion. From a woman’s point of view, it creates a theoretical framework based on gender in the analysis of society (Osmond & Thorne, 1993).

The feminist scholarship has developed in three main stages, in which the intellectual trends of feminism were in close dialogue with the ‘waves’ of the movement, as discussed above. Scholars adhering to all these stages can, however, still be found today. Liberal Feminism came about after the First World War in Europe, corresponding to the First Wave. Liberal Feminist scholars, according to Hooks (1984), addressed gender inequality from a legal perspective. They did not challenge social or economic dynamics in societies and called for gradual, systematic legal reforms, as sudden radical reforms “will be met with a firm rejection by society because society is more responsive to the demands that do not threaten the status quo” (pp. 20–21).

They called explicitly for “the elimination of violence in the home and the development of shelters for battered women, support for women’s business, a solution to child abuse, federally funded non-sexist child care, a policy of full employment so that all women who wish and can

work may do so, the protection of homemakers so that marriage is a partnership, an end to the sexist portrayal of women in the media, establishment of reproductive freedom and the end to involuntary sterilization, a remedy to the double discrimination against minority women, a revision of criminal codes dealing with rape, elimination of discrimination based on sexual preference, the establishment of non-sexist education, and an examination of all welfare reform proposals for their specific impact on women” (Hooks, 1984, pp. 19–20),

Radical Feminism emerged in the 1960s, alongside the Second Wave. It advocated the reformation of patriarchal belief systems to free women from oppression and subordination. They claimed that the concept of women or identities associated with gender are not natural things but are rather socially constructed (Jones & Budig, 2008). The autonomy of women, and their separation from men and patriarchal society, was the solution they proposed (Weedon, 1987).

They demanded that the woman should be the only individual responsible for her body in such cases as pregnancy, motherhood, and even sexual transformation, as, in their opinion, women have suffered from oppression due to the control of her body, through sex, by men, with religion and other social institutions behind them (Jones & Budig, 2008). Yet, according to Hooks (1984), Radical Feminism contained some elements in which women were perceived as superior to men and in which all men were declared to be the enemies of all women. Thus, although they tried to overcome the sexual oppression of women, their radical ideas appeared to be waging a gender war rather than a political movement to end sexual oppression.

Socialist Feminist scholars, emerging at the time of the Third Wave, were influenced by a Marxist view of society and claimed that the exploitation of women starts with the family, which exploits them for unpaid reproductive labor, due to the demands of capitalism. They believe that gender inequality is rooted in capitalism (Jones & Budig, 2008). As Weedon (1987) notes, they perceive gender as a historically changeable stereotype and view patriarchy as a social system

that is linked to class and racial oppression, which can only be eliminated through a complete transformation of the social system. Thus, the Socialist Feminist solution to the women's oppression was a social revolution, as they believed that patriarchy would disappear under socialism.

1.2.1 Feminism and Feminist Movements in the Middle East

The political activity of women and feminist movements in Iraq has a long and rich history, closely intertwined with Iraq's social, political, and economic developments. Various experiences such as nationalism, different political systems, and a variety of social movements from leftists and nationalists to Islamists, have all contributed to shaping the contemporary Iraqi woman's political activity (Ali, 2018a). In conjunction with all the countries of the Middle East, the emergence of feminist movements and activities was associated with the emergence of modernity and the desire to modernize the nation (Al-Ali, 2012).

Middle-Eastern feminism shares historical and politics similarities, which combined, as Iraqi feminist scholar Al-Ali stated "their association with national movements and their subjection to the same process of modernity and development at the same time. The tension between secularism and religiosity and the opposition of the predominantly Muslim society's to Western agendas have also shaped the path of feminism in the region" (Al-Ali, 2002, p. 4).

The strong link between culture and religion has defined many Middle Eastern societies. The patriarchal culture of the Middle East has been justified through the misuse of religion, especially Islam, which merged with the prevailing customs and culture. Many Islamic teachings have been incorrectly practiced or incorporated with prevailing customs to suit males. It is largely agreed that the public space is a male domain, where women must respect males to reduce chances of harassment. Conditions such as wearing the *niqab* (face veil), an example of Islamic clothing, are thus imposed upon women; however, the necessity of the *niqab* is a

controversial issue among Islamic scholars, many holding the opinion that it is not mentioned in the Qur'an (Badran, 1986).

Middle Eastern women have not benefitted from certain aspects of Western feminist discourse, which views the problems of women from a specific perspective, thereby turning a blind eye to the fundamental issues that women suffer outside the West. For example, the West, including Western feminism (especially in its First and Second Waves, or liberal and radical varieties), still views non-Western women from the third world or developing countries, including most of the Middle East, as uneducated, unswervingly obedient to their husbands, and willful subjects of oppression (Mohanty, 2003).

Western feminists made the *hijab* the central issue for the liberation of Arab and Muslim women, without considering other factors that may have helped them. The veil was sometimes made a symbol of terrorism, thereby falling disproportionately on the Muslim community, though unevenly within the community. For example, one of the justifications raised from the beginning of the United States' war on and occupation of Afghanistan was to 'liberate' Afghan women from being forced to wear the veil. At the same time, the US did not interfere in Saudi Arabia, where the *hijab* is enforced, and considered it a mere internal affair (Sanches, 2014).

A complete discussion of the Iraqi women's movement in history is found in the chapter below. Here, a brief account is given to demonstrate the similarities and differences between Iraqi and Western feminism(s). The feminist movement in Iraq took its first steps under the monarchical rule as a part of the nationalist movement demanding liberation from British colonialism. Iraqi feminists continued to strive towards the emancipation of women through education and demanding rights such as suffrage.

The movement achieved some of its demands with the regime change to the Republic of Iraq; many rights for women were consolidated in the Iraqi Personal Status Law of 1959. Despite a

succession of dictatorial regimes in Iraq, the secular basis of those regimes preserved these rights and did not suppress the feminist movement. However, under Saddam Hussein, with his aggressive and militaristic foreign policy and cooperation with conservative forces, enlightened social movements, mainly feminist activities, suffered a setback, especially during the 1990s (Al-Ali, 2012). Under Saddam's regime, no independent organization was allowed to emerge. The General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW) was founded by the ruling party. The work of the GFIW was limited to denouncing the idea of imperialism, defending Iraqi nationalism, and supporting the Baath regime (Hughes, 2012).

During the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States administration raised the slogan of women's freedom as a primary principle on its agenda. However, this was just a pretext to mislead world opinion over the aims of the Iraq War. In reality, Iraqi women previously enjoyed rights that were robbed from them after 2003, because of the strict religious rule subsequently imposed. Post-invasion Iraq has been characterized by chaos, excessive patriarchy, and infringements against all kinds of human rights, not just that of women's (ADV Authorial Board, 2017).

In the last 17 years, as the regime changed and a democratic system appeared in Iraq, many NGOs (non-governmental organizations) began supporting and funding projects concerning women's rights. These organizations and feminist activists sometimes have ideas and attitudes which differ significantly from each other. In the aftermath of the invasion, Hughes (2012) divided the feminism movement in Iraq into two new types. 'Liberal feminism' spread from a number of women's movements based on the ideas and principles of liberal feminism in the West. These organizations, many of them funded by the United States government, focused on training women to be ready to enter the public sphere such as participation in business and elections. They also campaigned for the adoption of a secular personal status law, reducing domestic violence, ensuring the establishment of a safe environment for the free movement of women without a guardian, and raising awareness among women and men about women's legal

rights. They called for encouragement towards women taking a major role in politics and decision-making.

The second variety of feminism according to Hughes (2012) can be labelled 'Islamic Feminism'. Islamic Feminists also strive for women's rights like their liberal counterparts but desire these rights to be in accordance with the Qur'an and Islamic law, and their interpretations of the sacred texts. They often have differences with the Islamist parties in power, and some Islamic feminists have even worked against them, claiming they have created a system different from the true message of Islam. They believe that women are different from men but are equal in the rights mentioned in the Qur'an. Nevertheless, the political movements from which Islamic feminism developed held ideas about the status of women without putting these ideas into practice.

Ali (2018b) in her book *Women and Gender in Iraq* divided women's groups in Iraq into four main categories. The most widespread was 'human rights feminists', which corresponded to Hughes' liberal feminism. This type of feminism is the most prevalent in Iraqi society, and its activists are composed of women who largely do not have a political background. They defend the rights of women as a part of human rights and, in their defense, rely on international conferences and agreements such as CEDAW and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. These feminists stand between Iraqi society and women's rights. They work to defend women's rights in both public and private spheres.

In the private domain, they work to protect the rights of women, as provided in the Iraqi Personal Status Law of 1959. They stand against practices such as domestic violence, honor killings, and the necessity of a guardian during travel, which perpetrates violence against women. However, they do not frequently speak about polygamy or any topic related to Islamic teachings, or anything overtly related to sex, as they insist on respecting Iraqi culture and Muslim society. In the public domain, they have struggled for the implementation of the 25 percent quota for the representation of women in Parliament and encourage women to participate in the elections and

decision-making processes and seek positions of leadership and engagement in civil society or political groups. They try to achieve what they think of as justice for women, rather than complete equality.

Ali detected a greater nuance within the conjunction of Islam and feminism than Hughes in her analysis. Ali wrote that 'Islamist activist' feminists include Shiite Islamist, Sunni Islamist, and Kurdish Islamist feminists. They defend women's rights, including the use of international conferences and agreements, as long as the teachings of Sharia Islamic law are not compromised. They define women's rights according to a patriarchal understanding of women's issues. For example, the idea of a man as a woman's guardian is unchallenged. Moreover, they believe the primary role of women is to raise children and run the household, while the man is responsible for financing the household so that his wife can be free from work outside the home; a woman working outside is conceptualized as being purely for economic reasons and not for their development. They strongly defend heterosexuality and the restriction of sex within the framework of marriage. Islamist feminists are a reflection of the conservative religious control. They pass on their ideas to women through their charitable work covering various aspects of a woman's life, thereby furthering the acceptance of their ideas within women's minds. Islamist activists are mostly involved with sectarian Islamic parties (Ali, 2018b).

The third category, according to Ali (2018b) was the 'Muslim feminist'. This type includes women holding Islamic beliefs but acting in support of women's rights as human rights activists and not Islamist party activists. They believe that a correct reading of the Islamic religion, jurisprudence, and sacred texts does not conform to social patriarchy, and form an essential means in advocating for women's rights and equality. They demand the reinterpretation of jurisprudence and holy texts by religious specialists and criticize Islamists who perpetuate the stereotype of the patriarchy and consider them distorters of the exact message of Islam, which stipulates equality of rights between sexes. They stand between the religious and the secular and try to develop a moderate Islamic thought and are often involved with secular organizations.

Muslim Feminism does not view terms such as feminism or ‘gender equality’ as Western innovations; Islam is considered the basis of equality, which is inherently present within some aspects of Iraqi society. The presence of Muslim women activists in this category prevents them from engaging in sectarian party ideology, which sees women’s rights as a humanitarian or cultural issue, rather than a party-political or purely religious issue. Conversely, they stay away from issues of sexuality as it is not culturally acceptable.

The last variety of Iraqi feminism according to Ali (2018b) is ‘leftist and radical feminism’. Like their Western counterparts discussed above, this group advocates a radical understanding of gender equality, and view the patriarchy as the main stumbling block in women’s struggle for societal justice. They are one of the few groups to openly address cases of prostitution and sexual violence and provide assistance to victims of forced prostitution and sexual violence, prisoners, and have opened shelters for victims of abuse. This group avoids talking about religious matters and considers feminism’s sphere of action to be social. Unlike the other feminist trends in Iraq, they defend sexual freedom and homosexuality. Differing from political leftists in their boldness, radical feminists do not set limits in talking about sexuality, and often disregard the socially imposed limits of what is deemed acceptable.

Women activists in Iraq, along with their defense of women’s rights, have defended the rights of security and dignity for all Iraqis. Furthermore, they have campaigned for political issues such as the complete liberation of Iraq from foreign interference, eliminating corruption and sectarianism, respecting human rights and freedom of expression, and, most importantly, the formation of a civil state. However, feminism in Iraq has struggled in many cases and failed due to the lack of funding for its projects, lack of necessary facilitation for activities that seek the empowerment of Iraqi women, and religious parties in power that view feminism as an attempt to spread European social corruption and even ‘Masonic activity’ in Iraq. For example, as this paper was being written, Yanar Muhammad (2020), a feminist activist and head of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), had a lawsuit filed against her by the Iraqi

Council of Ministers accusing her of establishing shelters for women fleeing tribal violence and threats of honor killing, and inciting women to make decisions to leave their families where they were subjected to psychological and physical abuse and forced marriages. Mamouri (2018) argued that these negative attitudes towards feminism, which have spread widely in society, have greatly impacted the work of Iraqi feminism and the obstacles it faces.

As a result of the diversity of ideas and divisions within the Iraqi feminist movement, the feminist's role within Iraqi society has arguably been weakened. Iraq today does not have a unified feminist movement, but rather a group of civil society activists with their outlooks defined by "conflicting political agenda[s]" (Ali, 2018b: p. 290). The solution, therefore, may be to develop a specific identity, or at least a standard or a middle ground, and develop an organized plan against the patriarchal framework of Iraqi society and its unfair laws.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

All sources used in the analysis are based on primary and secondary sources written in Arabic and English, including academic books and scholarly articles, newspapers and the reports of international organizations such as the United Nations and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, as well as local human rights organizations.

1.4. THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis is organized in four chapters. The first chapter, introduction, provides the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study as well as the research methodology of the study and the thesis outline. The second chapter titled 'Gender and Society in Iraq', explores the gender dynamics of Iraqi society through a historical analysis from the 1950s until 2020. The third chapter of the thesis titled 'Iraqi Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making', provides an analysis on Iraqi women's participation in political decision-making processes from 2003 to the present, while identifying the societal barriers to women's political participation in Iraq. The final chapter, conclusion, provides an overall analysis of the entire research.

2 GENDER AND STATE IN IRAQ

The territorial boundaries of modern Iraq were established historically after the Treaty of Qasir Shirin was signed between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires in 1639. Based on this treaty, the region was divided into three provinces, namely the 'Ayala of Baghdad,' 'Ayala of Mosul,' and 'Ayala of Basra', under the rule of the Ottoman Empire until 1916. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the administration of these provinces was taken over by the British Empire, which brought them together to form the modern state of Iraq with the establishment of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1921.

Under the British monarchy, Iraq existed as an impoverished agricultural region. However, with the collapse of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic in 1958, Iraq came under successive military governments. Thereafter, the people often failed to significantly benefit from the country's resources, including oil, due to mismanagement, frequent coups, and wars. After 1990, many of women's gains were reversed due to the policies of Saddam Hussein, who began to co-opt the conservative forces of tribes within his rule in order to strengthen his regime after the Gulf War defeat, and economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations on Iraq.

After 2003, the situation worsened because of the occupation of Iraq by the US and its allies and the subsequent handing over of the state to men who had previously been far from the state administration. Their policies led to the semi-division of the Iraqi state into a Kurdish region in the north, the rights of which are enshrined in the Constitution, and a Shiite Arab majority and a Sunni Arab minority in the remainder of Iraq, a situation which has had implications for all civil laws and human rights in Iraq (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). This chapter begins with a brief background on the position of women prior to the US-led invasion of Iraq.

2.1 WOMEN'S SOCIAL RIGHTS IN IRAQ UNTIL 2003

The modern history of Iraqi women contains a catalogue of privileges and rights that they enjoyed, more so than many of their counterparts across the Middle East. With legislation such as the 1959 Personal Status Law that guaranteed women's rights, Iraqi women played an active role in the political and economic development of Iraq. The 1970 Constitution recognized equal rights for women; other laws stipulated their right to education, voting, run for political office, and property ownership. However, with the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, women's rights began to deteriorate rapidly, and women lost most of their privileges because Saddam Hussein used the tribe's power to maintain his power (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

The roles of women, along with all Iraqis, are determined by the prevailing societal traditions and norms. The Iraqi society is still largely a tribal society, in which tribal kinship and patriarchal ideas play a significant role in shaping social and legal attitudes towards women's issues. In the tribal system, a girl's honor and purity are tied to her chastity, and this honor is tied to the honor of the whole tribe. Thus, the girl is held responsible for the tribe's honor; members of the tribe isolate and separate her from the public sphere and other men and control her on the pretext of protecting the tribe's honor. The most significant tribal practice discriminating against women in Iraq is *al-Nahwa*, the reservation of a girl for marriage, most frequently to her cousin; she is forbidden from marrying anyone else, even if she desires to. Another such prejudice is *Al-Fasliya*, a way to resolve a conflict by presenting a woman as the price for reconciliation, a type of forced marriage to resolve the dispute between two clans; the girl is given away against her will to avoid the hostile clan from taking revenge (Al-Azzawi, 2005).

The successive governments that ruled Iraq, rather than restricting the tribes' power and social character, used those tribes to empower themselves and control the society. In 1920, the British exercised power through the tribal sheiks, strengthening feudalism in the tribal society and recognizing the supremacy of the sheiks over land. As a result, the tribal sheiks in Iraq transformed from community leaders to landowners (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). However, with the Iraqi revolution in 1958, the role of tribes in the lives of Iraqi women was curtailed to the greatest extent through the Constitution and the Personal Status Law 188, which gave women's

rights a legal framework and placed Iraqi women at the forefront of the Arab state (Ismael & Ismael, 2015).

Advances for women included the following: placing limitations on polygamy, that is, the husband cannot marry a second time without his first wife's approval; requirement of full consent for marriage, that is, when she attains the age of 18 years; preventing marriage ceremonies conducted by religious clerics with no legal registration; rights for divorced women; and awarding custody of a child to the mother even if she married another man (Iraqi Democratic Union, 2006).

Following the first Gulf War, Saddam Hussein, in order to maintain his power, started to re-enable the tribal leaders' power to exact influence upon Iraqi politics. Their traditional patriarchal approach to social and political life, in return, affected the political dynamics in Iraq negatively in terms of gender discrimination. As a result of this policy, an estimated 4,000 women and girls had been victims of 'honor killings' since the passage of the reforms in 1991, as reported by the UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women in 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2003). In the early 2000s, the main ruling parties in the Kurdistan Region, the Popular Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, also repealed laws penalizing honor killings that did not consider 'honor' to be reason enough to reduce the penalty for the killing (Ali, 2018b).

The influence of the clans was not the only reason for the deterioration of women's status in Iraq. Another significant factor was the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the UN, and the primary victims of the ensuing economic crises were the women. These sanctions affected various aspects of life; in the field of education, the rate of school dropouts started to rise significantly among females. Furthermore, "according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as a result of the national literacy campaign of 1987 and the compulsory education in previous years approximately 75 percent of Iraqi women were literate; however, Iraq had the lowest regional adult literacy levels, with the percentage of illiterate women at less than 25 percent" (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 4).

Jawad (2012) argued that by 2000, the rate of illiteracy among females became 77 percent, mostly due to poverty. Moreover, the besieged economy made women employees feel that their work was ‘worthless.’ Salaries fell to such levels that women preferred, or were forced, to stay at home and help with the household chores. Moreover, many Iraqi families disintegrated, as men migrated to other places in search of a better standard of living. The aforementioned events paved the way for increased patriarchal control over the Iraqi society. As discussed next, failures of the coalition forces after the 2003 invasion in ensuring the protection of Iraqi women made them a trump card in the hands of Islamist parties that wished to return the position of women to the traditional gender role (Fontan, 2009).

2.2 IRAQI WOMEN IN A CLIMATE OF FEAR: US INVASION, POLITICAL INSTABILITY, AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS (2003–2005)

As the dimensions of the US occupation of Iraq became clearer, the feelings of the Iraqi people ranged from happiness at the downfall of an oppressive dictator to sadness because this occupation was not done in their interests but for oil and regional control, including the control over women. The occupation, altogether, changed the fate of Iraqi women. Today, even 17 years after the occupation, this thesis argues that it can be evaluated as a change for the worse.

The US occupation of Iraq created a new system to structure the new Iraq, a mixture of neo-feudalism and the tribal system, which ensued from Saddam’s use of the tribes, with entirely different tribal customs and traditions (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). Graham and Luke (2007), in *Militarizing the Body Politic*, describe the political system imposed by the US as a new feudalism, because it does not resemble a developed capitalist economy. First, they argue that the coalition that waged war on Iraq was ‘feudal’ in its attitude towards power. Second, they point out that surplus production was used to finance belligerents in a war economy, rather than allowing the growth of a civil economy. Third, the creation of a new Iraqi army and the high cost to train and equip them resembled the feudal idea of an ‘armored knight’. Fourth, the war was glorified in the West, who used religious rhetoric as a legitimizing tool for the war. Fifth, the world was discursively divided into good and evil by the US administration to justify the military

action against Iraq. Sixth, the UN, which gave the coalition legitimacy to wage war, played the role of the church in the feudal system.

As Ismael & Ismael (2015) suggest, the impact of the new system on women can be summarized as deepening the role of gender, with woman's place being considered only in the light of the demands of war. For instance, men were associated with the role of the warrior and the importance of masculine qualities such as courage, intelligence, and aggression. By contrast, women were not considered worthy enough to possess these qualities, so their purpose was relegated to providing comfort to the opposite sex (the male warrior). Evidently, in this system, women could easily become the target of sexual exploitation and abuse.

After the start of the occupation, women lived in the *climate of fear*. The primary fear was the fear of loss: the loss of a loved ones during the initial stages of the war; the loss of a relative leaving their town to flee from the war; and possibly the loss of one's own life, as any day could be their last (Al-Windawi & Bray, 2004). Another fear that women lived with was fear for their country. After the fall of Iraqi cities on 9 April 2003, hordes of people began to loot government and public institutions, hospitals, museums, libraries, factories, houses, and presidential palaces, all under the watch of the coalition troops, who may have even protected them (Al-Ali, 2007).

According to Fontan (2009), the fear of sexual violence was extremely prevalent among the women. Incidents of kidnapping of women for extortion of money and sexual assaults became rampant, often random, sometimes to extort money and in other cases solely to violate the women. Moreover, with the disintegration of law and order, these incidents were tossed aside. Women were repeatedly insulted, beaten, raped, and exploited and were subjected to human trafficking. Worse even, in the conservative Iraqi society, which values women based on their 'honor,' many kidnapped women were murdered by their own family or left to die from their assaults for bringing 'dishonor' to the family. Ergo, the terror of violation compelled the Iraqi women to remain in the house, isolated from the public sphere.

Al-Ali (2007) found that the criminal actions of the US forces was another menace that the Iraqi women had to deal with, as citizens were randomly killed on the slightest suspicion. Many

pregnant women in labor refused to go to hospitals and waited until morning, putting their lives in danger to protect themselves and their husbands from the US troops. Women were again used as pawns in this political game; the US forces abducted the wives and daughters of suspected fighters, tortured and, in some cases, raped them, to force the surrender or confession of their male relatives: “Several documents released on 7 March 2005 by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) show thirteen cases of rape and abuse of female detainees. The documents also reveal that no action taken against any soldier or civilian official as a result. The infamous case of gang rape and murder of Abeer Qassim Al-Janaby, a 14-year-old girl from Mahmudiyah, by certain US Army soldiers was widely reported in the Western media”(Al-Ali, 2007, p. 239).

Nevertheless, Allam (2019) reports that despite these fears, women continued to work without fatigue, even amid confrontations with the American forces. Women exerted some level of control over their neighborhoods and their homes, where they continued fulfilling their domestic duties, as well as treating the wounded who fell in battles. Also, it was the women who announced the names of the martyrs over loudspeakers.

2.3 IRAQI WOMEN DURING THE SECTARIAN WAR (2005–2014)

The events following the start of the occupation did not materialize as expected by those who had welcomed the occupation. The economic problems that existed in Iraq since 1990 deepened despite the end of economic sanctions. The rebuilding of the Iraqi state was hindered by the corruption, which spread after 2003, due to the lucrative contracts given by the UN and US for reconstruction. According to Paul Bremer, who was the head of the US occupying Coalition Provisional Authority during 2003–2004, the solo-control of US over Iraq’s oil fields reduced Iraq to a rentier state (Ambirly, 2018).

Ali (2018b) notes that these years saw the outbreak of a sectarian civil war. This era has been identified by scholars as the ‘Shiite revival.’ After the repression suffered by Shiites under Saddam Hussein, the new ruling class gave preferential treatment to those who had fought the former regime, especially the families of martyrs and exiles who returned to Iraq from the country of exile. The government gave them financial compensation, residential land, and senior

positions in the new administration. The first to be compensated for were the families of the martyrs of the Iraq–Iran War of 1980–1988, who fought against the Iraqi state within the ranks of Badr Brigade, and secondly, the families of those who lost their lives in the Baathist prisons. Fontan (2009) suggests that certain incidents catalyzed the growth of sectarianism. Kurdish and Shiite participation in the occupation forces’ attack on the Sunni-majority city of Fallujah caused considerable damage and led to Sunnis boycotting the political process and elections at the time. With the bombings of the Al-Askari Sunni shrine in the city of Samara, these events sparked a long civil war.

In this midst of the sectarian conflict, under the pressure of the US, the new Iraqi Constitution was created in 2005. This Constitution was rejected by the human rights advocates and secularists because of its contradictions and ambiguity in addressing key issues (Ismael & Ismael, 2015). It was considered to be a victory for the Shiite religious leader, Ali al-Sistani (one of five clerics who currently hold the title of Grand Ayatollah in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, Iraq), as he united the Shiite blocs under his command (Arato, 2009). Many Iraqi Shiites voted at the behest of al-Sistani, who declared that voting was one of the religious duties of a Muslim. He did not specify whom they should choose, but he endorsed a list which received more than 3 million out of the total 8.5 million votes (Fontan, 2009). This was equivalent to 140 seats in the Iraqi legislative elections (Arato, 2009). As argued further below, the Constitution allowed clerics to exercise cultural repression of women and established sectarianism as a base of rule for Iraq (Ismael & Ismael, 2015)

Al-Moumin (2007) argues that in terms of achieving equality between women and men, the Constitution contains many articles that gave women significant rights. However, it fails to specify how these rights must be implemented, that is, the processes, mechanisms, or agencies of their implementation. The Constitution’s position on women’s rights can, thus, be judged as ambiguous. As Ali (2018b) illustrates, in summary, the post-occupation period increased Iraq’s economic crisis and gave it a sectarian nature, accompanied with the deepening of gender discrimination when compared with the rights enjoyed by women in prior decades.

In the aftermath of the occupation, with the increasing prominence of sectarianism, the idea of establishing an Islamic regime began to emerge within the Iraqi society. The civil war began to divide Iraq into sectarian districts, especially Baghdad, which was once considered the most diverse Iraqi city. As a result, not there are Sunni neighborhoods and Shiite neighborhoods, enclosed within concrete walls and checkpoints, controlled by different militias representing the sect of the neighborhood (Ali, 2018b). Whilst the Constitution's article 15 states that everyone should enjoy freedom, security, and life, and that anyone who infringes this right should be punished (Iraq. Const 2005: art. 15, S: 2), these years were characterized by forced internal displacement. Many people who had lived in different areas of a city without being harassed in the past were now threatened and forced to move to other neighborhoods depending on their sects (Ali, 2018b). Moreover, many Iraqis suffered external displacement, fleeing to neighboring countries such as Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey.

Whilst many of the fears which emerged during the initial years of occupation were common to both women and men, the fear of the Islamist militias particularly prevailed among the women. In 2006, when the sectarian war had reached its peak, the militias began to impose their ideas on the people by force of arms, such as allotting certain dress code for women, as well as placing restrictions on their movement. For instance, university students in Basra and other cities of Iraq reported the presence of groups of men standing at the university gates to make sure that they adhered to these religious dress codes; if a woman did not, she was shouted at, in some cases threatened with death, or their faces were burned with chemicals if they did not wear *hijab*, irrespective of their religion. These violations were not limited to female students; they impacted all Iraqi women (Al-Ali, 2007). The Iraqi Constitution arguably backed these actions, with article 2(A) stipulating that "No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam" (Iraq. Const 2005: art. 2, S: 1). Al-Moumin (2007) argues that this article was exploited by the militias, promoting discrimination, especially during the early years after the Constitution was drafted, particularly in the southern cities.

Sectarian violence, which peaked during 2006–2007, killed almost 20 people every day. For instance, suicide bombings targeted government buildings and institutions. Although most of the victims were men, their deaths forced the widowed women to take the position of head of the

family and become the sole breadwinner for their children (Allam, 2019). These bombings continued until recent years; Shaibani (2017) reported that in 2016, a devastating incident of bombing left more than 320 dead and hundreds wounded in the Baghdad neighborhood of Karrada. Nevertheless, such attacks have now become less frequent.

Ambirly (2018) finds that the increase in the number of widows and the rising complexity of life gave rise to new phenomena previously unseen in Iraq, including female suicide bombers. He explains that extremist groups often exploited women with mental illnesses to carry out suicide operations.

Another phenomenon was that of temporary marriage (*al-mut'ah*, literally "pleasure marriage"). As a report stated, "women and girls were sexually exploited through so-called temporary marriages, under which a man gives the family of the girl or woman dowry money in exchange for permission to 'marry' her for a specified period" (United States Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2018, p. 51) This type of marriage was previously rare or even non-existent in Iraq, but as a result of poverty, as well as the sanction of some Shiite clerics, it became a feature of the Iraqi society (Vilarado & Bittar, 2018). While other doctrines of Islam prohibited this type of marriage, it was strengthened after 2005 through the exploitation of the Constitution's article 41, which enshrines religious freedom (Iraq. Const 2005: art. 41, S: 2).

Talking about the solidarity and resilience of women, Al-Ali (2007) emphasizes that despite the fear and suffering resulting from poverty and lack of access to basic human needs such as electricity, money, gasoline, and medical services, Iraqi women tried to resist, survive, and protect their families, living in such harsh conditions and trying to improve them, exchanging their experiences and skills to help others and themselves. The vicissitudes of life could not constrain these women within four walls; they tried in every way to improve the situation and communicate their voices to the outside world whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Allam (2019) records that many women worked with international agencies, covering the Iraq War as journalists and translators to convey the stories of Iraq to the outside world. Al-Moumin (2007) reports that despite the intimidation from Islamist groups, some female university

students and women continued to refuse to wear *hijab* and robes because they did not wish to be oppressed in the name of religion. They defied the orders of armed militias to go to their respective institutions, holding up the rights mentioned in the Constitution, which stipulates the equality and freedom of all citizens regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, sect, or nationality.

2.4 IRAQI WOMEN WITHOUT LEGAL PROTECTION: ISIS YEARS TO PRESENT (2014–2020)

Over the years, the situation had somewhat stabilized, and the Iraqis had begun to imagine a quiet life without conflict. However, in 2014, the condition of women's rights worsened further. In the beginning of 2014, Iraqi Minister of Justice, Hassan al-Shammari, announced a new personal status law based on the rulings of the Shiite al-Jaafari Sect, which was approved by the Iraqi cabinet and became known as the Jaafari Law on 25 February 2014. This law, containing 254 articles, applied only to the Shiite community in Iraq. It based on the secular jurisprudence school of Jaafari which has been founded by sixth Shiite Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (Evers, 2014). Ali (2018b) notes that this was not the first political attempt to establish such a law; in 2003, resolution 137, issued by Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, a prominent Shiite leader, demanded the repeal of the Personal Status Law of 1959 and its replacement with a law based on Islamic law. Nonetheless, this decree was rejected in 2004 after feminist activists managed to convince Paul Bremer to refrain from implementing this decree.

When the demand for a new personal status law based on Islamic law resurfaced in 2014, opinions varied. Some supported the new law, desiring to follow Shiite doctrine in different walks of life. Peculiarly, Islamist Shiite women defended this article, considering it salvation for the exercise of their religious freedom that was denied by the Baath regime for 30 years. Nevertheless, feminists and women's rights activists rejected the law because of the following reasons: firstly, it divided the Iraqi society based on sectarian lines, not serving the interests of the whole of society, but creating a precedent of the application of laws to some and not others (Ali, 2018b); secondly, it violated women's rights, authorizing marital rape, as under this law a husband can have sex with his wife without her consent, and it also allowed forbidding a woman

from leaving her home without her husband's permission or traveling without a male relative. It also granted the custody of children aged two years and above to the father in the event of divorce or separation, reduced the age of marriage to nine for girls and fifteen for boys, and even opened the door for girls under nine to get married with their parents' permission (Evers, 2014). All of these marked a significant setback for women's rights even compared to the already existing deteriorated standard.

In June 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took full control of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul without even a fight with the security forces. According to an Oxfam report, the people of Mosul initially welcomed ISIS because they believed ISIS would rescue them from the Shiite-dominated Iraqi forces and Shiite militias, who had been persecuting them (Dietrich & Carter, 2017). However, to their shock, the presence of ISIS in Iraq opened a door for new dangers for the society, particularly women. ISIS's policies aimed to persuade marginalized, frustrated women to condone an extremely traditional, matriarchal role. Women were seen as merely complementing the role of men, never competing with them; ISIS portrayed life inside the Islamic state as one full of luxury and amenities for Sunni Muslims (The Carter Center, 2017). According to Dietrich & Carter (2017), Mosul citizens' support for ISIS ceased to exist after they began to suffer from ISIS oppression.

The ISIS's control over large areas of Iraq negatively affected a large number of women, particularly minority women such as the followers of the Yazidi faith. They were subjected to atrocities such as rape, sexual slavery, sexual violence, forced religious conversion, deprivation of liberty, and various other violations of international law (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq [UNAMI], 2017). The ISIS also imposed new restrictions on the women in their territory. For example, women had to wear black robes and *niqab* (face veil), as well as gloves and socks. Unlike the previous system, male relatives, including fathers, brothers, and husbands, could not interfere with the dress code imposed on women, even if they did not want their female relatives to wear such clothes. If a woman did not adhere to these rules and refused to obey, both the woman and her 'guardian' were punished. Additionally, forced marriage was prevalent; if a leader or fighter of ISIS desired a particular woman, she was forced to marry him, a type of '*jihad*' in the opinion of ISIS. Women were expected to give birth to many children to increase

the Islamic State's population. In addition, ISIS forbade men from wearing short trousers and shaving beards. Smoking cigarettes was forbidden, as was listening to music and using the internet and mobile phones. The people were forced to go to mosques for Friday prayers (Dietrich & Carter, 2017).

As it can be seen, during these years, Iraqi women were fighting on two fronts. First, they struggled against violence and abuse from ISIS in the areas under its control and to ensure the rehabilitation of women freed from ISIS's hands and secure them a decent living within the Iraqi tribal society. Second, they fought against the Islamist politicians of the Iraqi state, who tried, at every opportunity since they came to power after 2003, to change the Personal Status Law, which included several articles guaranteeing the rights of women in the Iraqi society to a law based on strict Islamic law.

The ISIS occupation of Iraq and the violence they perpetrated against women, in particular the Yazidi women, the images of whose suffering appeared around the world, urgently pressed all international and local organizations, the international community, and the Iraqi government to devise a plan to save these women. Iraqi feminists began attempts to legislate a law on violence against women. Notably, this was not the first such attempt of Iraqi feminists; since 2008, attempts were made to legislate a law punishing internal violence and establishing shelters for women who had been subjected to domestic and sexual abuse. The first draft of this law was released in 2012, but all the efforts were in vain when it was scrapped (Ali, 2019). However, in 2015, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, in cooperation with many government agencies and civil society organizations and under pressure from the UN since Iraq is a signatory to many bodies and agreements for defending women's rights, prepared and submitted a draft to the Parliament. The draft contained many suitable amendments regarding the Domestic Violence Act (Vilarado & Bittar, 2018).

Previously, Iraqi law did not criminalize domestic violence, and article 41 of the Iraqi Penal Code no. 111 of 1969 allowed the man to 'discipline' his wife and children if there were 'worthwhile' reasons stipulated in the law and customs, even though the Permanent Iraqi Constitution specified the prevention all forms of violence and abuse in the family and society in

article 29 (United States Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2018). Further, Iraqi law did not hold a person accountable for an honor crime. Article 409 of the Iraqi Penal Code stipulates that a defendant accused of an honor killing shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years with a suspended sentence. This applies to men who find their wife or a *mahram* (female relative) in the act of adultery and kill them immediately, or kill one of the individuals involved, or assault them which leads to death or permanent disability. This article is considered by many feminists to be a violation of article 2 of the Iraqi Constitution, which stipulates that “(a) No law may contradict the principles of Islam”; according to many interpretations, Islam does not permit honor killing. Moreover, the same article states “(c) No law may be enacted that contradicts the fundamental rights and freedoms contained in this Constitution.” The law on honor killing contradicts the Constitution’s stipulation of the right to life, detailed in article 15. It is also a violation of article 14, which stipulates the right to equality; in case a woman kills her husband in the act of adultery, the crime is treated following article (406) of the same law, which considers the act to be a deliberate murder, punishable by execution or life imprisonment (Debis, 2012; Iraq. Const 2005: art. 2(1), S: 1).

According to Vilarado & Bittar (2018), the Kurdistan Region, which has always tried to fill all international requirements in the matter of human rights, was an exception to this trend; here, greater attention was paid to women’s issues than in areas under the control of the Federal Government. In 2007, under the Ministry of Interior, the Kurdistan government created the Anti-Violence Against Women division. Women form 30 percent of the total staff of the department, which is tasked with investigating cases of domestic violence, supporting battered women in filing complaints, providing psychological and legal assistance to survivors, and transporting beaten women to shelters. In 2011, the Domestic Violence Act No. 8 was approved by the Kurdistan government, according to which many societal practices against women were defined as domestic violence. These included forced marriage and forced divorce, underage marriage, marriage instead of the payment of blood money (*fasliya*), suicide or abortion as a result of family violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation—a habit prevalent in rural areas of the Kurdistan Region, and strict penalties were imposed upon the practitioners of these habits under the 2011 law—the breaking of kinship ties, forcing family members to quit education or

employment against their will, forcing children to work or beg, and hitting any family members or children (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/Iraq, 2018). These moves were a positive reversal of the earlier backtracking on women's rights vis-à-vis honor killings, as mentioned above.

Ali (2019) mentions that the Domestic Violence Act draft submitted to the Federal Parliament was subjected to many criticisms by the authorities for a variety of reasons. According to them, the notion of establishing shelters contradicted Iraqi customs and common Islamic practices. Politicians also requested a change in the name of the law, so it did not specifically mention violence against women but instead used the vague term 'family violence.' An objection was also raised claiming that this law contradicted the Iraqi penal law that allows a man to discipline his wife. Despite the change in the name of the law to 'domestic violence' at the time of writing, this draft is still pending implementation and has not been approved by the Iraqi government yet. Evidently, the above-mentioned laws against women remain on the statute books.

With the non-issuance of the law by the Federal Government and after the liberation of areas under the control of ISIS, women who were subjected to violations remain without protection from the tribal society, which equates a girl's honor with her chastity. However, in 2017, a group of Iraqi tribal leaders issued the document, 'Iraqi Tribes for Community Peace,' which states that the society must do justice to women who were victims of rape or other forms of sexual violence because they were violated against their will and, therefore, deserve community support. In the same year, the Sunni religious body, the Iraqi House of Fatwa and Sunni Endowment, issued a ruling entitled, 'Islam's Attitude towards the Usurped Woman,' elucidating the religion's position on men who committed rape. According to it, they are divided into two groups: 1) adulterers, who do not attempt to justify their action through religion, who have committed a crime and are harmful to society; and 2) those who commit rape and justify it as religiously permissible, who are apostates and may suffer the death penalty. As for women who are raped, it states that a woman who was forced in any way cannot be considered at fault and should not be punished in any way, and that she must receive the society's sympathy (UNAMI, 2017).

There have been other positive developments in legislation for women's rights. Vilarado & Bittar (2018) explain that after the government's failure to pass the Violence Against Women Law and with the continuing debate on the Jaafari Status Law, in 2017, a large group of women demonstrated on the streets against the change of the Personal Status Law to the Jaafari Law. Moreover, the United Nations representative to Iraq spoke out against the law, calling it to be contradicting the Iraqi Constitution and many of Iraq's international obligations because it risks women's rights. Bowing to this pressure, in December 2017, the Iraqi Parliament announced that it would not amend the Personal Status Law of 1959. However, it is worth pointing out that this was merely a retreat from amending or replacing an existing law, rather than a genuine step toward the new progressive legislation that Iraqi feminists have argued is needed.

Atrocities toward women continued even after women's attempts began to break the restrictions which the society and the religious parties in power tried to impose on them. After years of being forced to stick to the stipulated dress code, they desired to dress as per their own wish. Hence, as an alternative, they used social media to present themselves. However, social conservatives considered this scandalous, and militias tried to reassert their power to suppress women again and make them live in fear. As Al-Hurra (2019) reports, many Iraqi girls have been exposed to sexual blackmail through digitally-edited personal photos which their blackmailers threatened to send to their families or post online, acts which could result in the girl's murder in such a conservative society.

In 2018, Iraq witnessed the assassination of four Iraqi women: a human rights activist in Basra, an Iraqi model, and two owners of beauty centers in Baghdad, all of whom died under mysterious circumstances, and no clarification was issued by the authorities. The question, therefore, arises as to whether, and to what extent, the Iraqi government (i.e. the political parties in power) is involved in trying to suppress Iraqi women and keeping them entrapped in the name of customs and traditions based on an authoritarian interpretation of Islam, rather than following the actual teachings of Islam or a more liberal perspective.

The Iraqi government bears the bulk of the responsibility for its failure to protect women within the Iraqi state by relegating the issue of women to the secondary position. Rather than trying to

see the issues from women's perspective, the Federal Government has approached the problems that the country is facing, such as terrorism and instability, which also affect Iraqi women, perhaps more so than men in some respects, without considering the implications for women. The government's failure to legislate laws that protect women exposes their lives to the opinions of clerics and tribal leaders, who wish to dominate the social situation in the new Iraq; even if their decisions are in the interests of women regarding some issues, this situation works to deepen the role of such institutions and patriarchal thinking in a controlling society. It puts women's rights at risk to an extent that when the women cannot tolerate anymore, they unleash their wrath, leading to the ongoing grassroots backlash as discussed next.

2.4.1. Iraqi Women in the 2019 October Revolution

Following the US invasion, the years of civil war, ISIS, and the rule of sectarian and patriarchal governments, women's role had greatly diminished, and they had seemingly lost the possibility of influencing the events of their country. However, in October 2019, after 17 years of struggle for a homeland in a country which had been stolen by strangers, without warning, a wave of free young people took to the streets. They had fresh ideas about Iraqi politics and society and were tired of being deprived of their rights and their interests and needs being constantly ignored. They demonstrated on the streets of Baghdad and the southern cities of Iraq, returning hope to Iraqis and the ability to dream of a new Iraq, free of sectarianism, devoid of favoritism, sans sectarian quotas. Most importantly, they proved to the whole world that the new generation of Iraqis could speak in one common voice regardless of sectarian division.

The above-mentioned event opened a new door for Iraqi women. Their participation in the demonstrations against the government's corruption and its failure to provide the basic needs of life was a colossal move. Women formed an inseparable part of the masses demanding political change. They challenged the customs and traditions that limited their role in the society, the clergy that condemned the interaction between the sexes, and the Sunni and Shiite extremist armed groups which made women pay a high price for maintaining their dignity (Al-Najjar, Lamboli, & Shawish, 2020). Iraqi women decided to participate actively in the demonstrations held on 25th October 2019 to demand their stolen rights just as the men did, as both lived in a land marred by corruption (BBC Arabic, 2019). The women also demanded equal rights for

themselves. Amal Kabashi, the coordinator for the NGO, the Iraqi Women's Network, said, "We will not stop until we have changed the whole system. Enough is enough! We want to live in peace, and we want an equal society" (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF], 2019: Para 20).

BBC Arabic (2019) reported that the demonstrations demanded, and started to achieve, the correction of some of the Iraqi society's defects, including society's perspective regarding women. Surprisingly, despite the large numbers of participants, none of the protest sit-ins saw a single case of harassment of women. Women participated vigorously, some doing so without the knowledge of their parents in case they would try to prevent their attendance, thereby breaking the social barriers that restricted them in order to change their future. In a city infested with wars, crises, tribal norms, and sectarian militias, it was the dream of many citizens to see the civilian face of their cities and to see young female college students walking in the streets dressed as they wanted. These demonstrations inspired women to demand change and freedom alongside men, which was a scene that had not been witnessed in Iraq since 2003. Empowered women in their doctors', engineers', professors', and teachers' uniforms rebelled against anyone trying to weaken their voice.

Women's participation in demonstrations broke down many of the barriers between men and women and changed the stereotypical image of women that portrayed women as outsiders in the political field. It proved that the reverse of the idea that Iraqi women are weak was in fact true (Magid, 2019). Yet it remains to be seen what impact the demonstrations of 2019 and 2020 will have on women's participation in political decision-making, which, as discussed next, has historically been low.

3

IRAQI WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

The participation of women in political decision-making has attracted the attention of activists in the fields of democracy, human rights, and citizenship. Although women's political participation has changed positively in many countries, especially after the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 recognized the need for women's participation in the decision-making process and assuming political responsibilities, this participation has not always necessitated their increased access to decision-making positions.

Historically, the political participation of Iraqi women pre-2003 was not extensive, given that the Baath Party controlled the Iraqi political sphere. Nonetheless, the political participation of Iraqi women was represented for the first time within the policies of this party in 1980, as they obtained the right to vote and entered the parliament in the same year. In 2000, the percentage of women in the Iraqi parliament was 8 percent, equivalent to 20 members of the total, but they remained confined to the one-party philosophy (Al-Athari & Zahir, 2019). Despite the original Pan-Arab philosophy of the Baath Party, in Iraq, it was a nationalist and socialist Arab party.

Under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, there was a clear imbalance in the distribution of powers, including ethnic and sectarian imbalance, and the regional distribution of leaders. There was a clear inequality between the sexes. All leaders in the government were men. Throughout the 35-year rule of the Baath Party, no woman received a high position until 2001, when Huda Salih Mahdi Ammash filled a regional position in the Revolutionary Command Council. She became known as 'Lady Anthrax' for her alleged association with the Iraqi biological weapons program (Marr, 2006).

Despite the negative ramifications of the 2003 invasion, according to Al-Baldawi (2014), there were some positive developments for women in the political sphere. After the regime change, Iraqis were euphoric because of the end of dictatorship and regaining the rights of groups

marginalized during the previous rule. These feelings accompanied a renewed interest in women's rights and a willingness for their representation in politics.

3.1 WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND THEIR ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE NEW IRAQ

The desire of Iraqis to transform their country into a democratic state inclusive of all components regardless of gender, religion, and ethnicity, and as Pratt (2006) mentions, the great attention given by United States to the inclusion of Iraqi women in the political field in order to convey a picture to the outside world of the new shape of Iraq, came with a positive change in the political participation of women after 2003. As stated by the NGO Alliance for the CEDAW Shadow Report (2014), after US President Bush announced the completion of military operations and the total control of Iraq by the US and its coalition allies, the feminist movement was quick to assert its presence in the political arena through conferences, advocacy events, and awareness campaigns.

The feminist organizations articulated their vision of success in the process of Iraq's political and democratic transformations based on respect for human rights and equality depending on the extent of women's participation in political and public life, and the removal of all forms of discrimination against them. They demanded the adoption of no less than 40 percent women's representation in the National Transitional Council and the provincial councils, as well as in the specialized committees drafting the constitution and organizing the election process.

According to Pina (2006), feminists' demands were reflected in several gains, including the participation of three women in the Governing Council among the 25 political figures who issued the Iraqi State Administration Law. The Transitional Administration Law (TAL) served as a temporary constitutional paper to govern Iraq to fill the void resulting from the fall of the Iraqi state. Moreover, the establishment of a new political space, built on the foundations of democracy and laying the ground for a new culture of democracy, freedom, and dialogue, rejecting violence and monopoly of political power, created a suitable environment for women's advancement, with the allocation of at least 25 percent of the seats in the Iraqi Parliament to

women (Ebrahim, 2011). The system of proportional representation applied by TAL in the transitional phase was approved in the elections for the National Assembly, the first interim government ruling Iraq with limited authority. Its main task was to form a constitution-writing committee, with a popular vote on the Constitution in October 2005 (Pina, 2006).

As Al-Athari & Zahir (2019) state, Iraqi women held 87 seats out of 275, equivalent to 31 percent in the National Assembly. When the National Assembly appointed a committee to write the Constitution, ten women were selected, equal to 18 percent of the committee, distributed among all sub-committees that worked on writing the various chapters of the Constitution. Fontan (2009) argues that the constitution-drafting process contained many gaps, as it was established on a sectarian basis. With a boycott of the process from the Sunni community, so the highly educated and secular women were excluded from the constitutional discussions. The women on the writing committee belonged to the Islamic parties to fill the quota imposed by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).

Despite all the problems with the Constitution, the Permanent Constitution adopted in 2005 has been considered by some as among the best of Iraq's constitutions in terms of women's rights, containing clear and explicit emblems of women's rights and freedoms. Politically, it has approved equal opportunities for all Iraqis regardless of gender (Vilarado & Bittar, 2018). Article 16 stipulates that "Equal opportunities are a guaranteed right to all Iraqis, and the state guarantees the necessary measures to achieve this equality." The Constitution has also clearly affirmed women's right to political participation, with article 20 stating, "Citizens, both men and women, have the right to participate in public affairs, and to enjoy political rights, including the right to vote, elect and run for office" (Iraq. Const, 2005: art. 16 & 20, S: 2). The Iraqi State Administration Law legislation on the quota system was approved in the Constitution, with article 49 stipulating that "The Parliament Council should have women's representation of no less than a quarter of the members according to the election law" (Iraq Const, 2005. art. 49(4), S: 3).

The quota significantly paved the way for women to enter the political sphere and guaranteed their participation in the political process. Some women parliamentarians fulfilling their

percentage stipulated in the Constitution during the four electoral sessions held until now have given a positive impression since its adoption of the future role of women, giving them an effective role towards political mobility and creating a political climate based on gender equality (Al-Tamimi, 2018). Figure 1 demonstrates the extent to which women in different regions of Iraq have entered the country's political world.

Nevertheless, although the Iraqi Permanent Constitution of 2005 guaranteed women the right to participate in decision-making and fulfilled feminists' demands for a quota in Parliament, women are still marginalized and critically underrepresented in Iraqi political decisions in internal and external affairs, as well as in various sectors such as judicial, economic, and independent bodies. Government ministries are male-dominated even today. Although women assumed six ministries in the first elected cabinet after 2003, they have now shrunk to one ministry in the government of 2010–2014 and two ministries in the 2014–2018 government. Worse even, the post-2018 election cabinet had no female ministers until the end of 2019. Moreover, some departmental ministries are free of women in senior roles; despite the presence of female employees, they have not had the opportunity to take up senior positions in their ministry (Cross-sector Taskforce 1325, 2018).

The political scenario during 2003–2019 was devoid of any woman's name for the position of parliamentary speaker or deputy speaker despite the women constituting 25 percent of the parliament council. No women were nominated for the positions of Prime Minister or President of the Republic until the 2018 elections, when Sarwa Abdul Wahid, an independent Kurdish Iraqi politician, announced her candidacy for the presidency with six male competitors. While she did not win, she had taken an unprecedented and courageous step; her audacity was widely remarked, as for the first time, a woman was running for a leadership position and breaking many social-political restrictions.

Vilarado & Bittar (2018) have closely studied the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and have written that contrary to the situation under the Federal Government, the KRG has actively tried to boost the presence of women in the decision-making process. The authorities raised the women's quota in the Kurdish parliament to 30 percent than the 25 percent allowed by the federal government and

lowered the age for serving as a Member of Parliament to 25 years instead of 30. They created special institutions to deal with women's issues and to support women in decision-making, such as the supreme council for women's affairs. Despite this, according to Mahmoud (2019), women in the region had not held any of the major sovereign positions in the region for a long time, such as the Presidency of the Region or the Prime Minister, or even held advisory roles to these position. However, the last parliamentary session in Kurdistan region led to the election of a female parliamentarian to head the Parliament and another female MP as the parliament's first deputy.

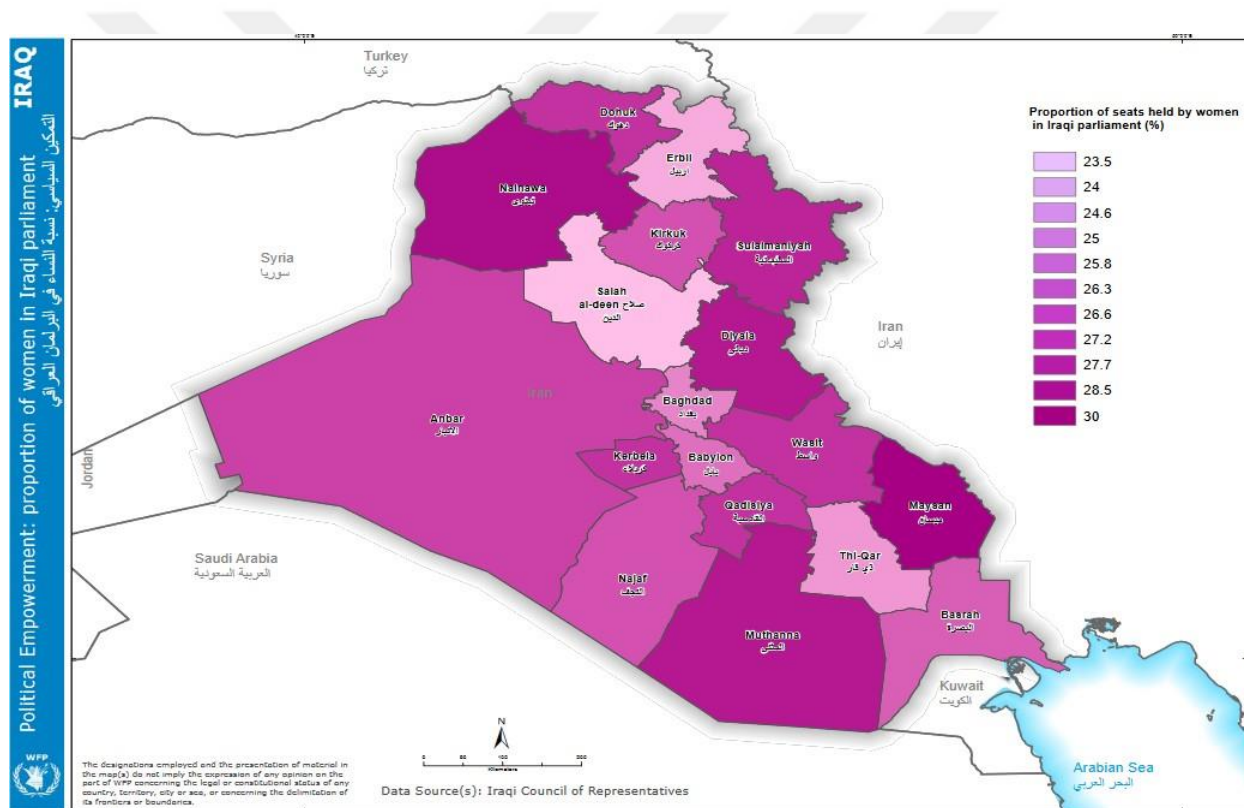


Figure 1: The proportion of women in the Iraqi Parliament from regions of Iraq 2018. (World Food Program [WFP], 2019)

The ability of women to negotiate strategic decisions is the most critical prerequisite for increasing their meaningful influence in politics. Political participation of women requires awareness, desire, and organizational capabilities on behalf of the state, as well as an environment that enables it to grow, especially in countries where the rule of law is weak and the

decision-making process is based on favoritism and religious control over politics (O'Neil & Domingo, 2015).

According to Renard (as cited in Saleh, 2005), the goal of political participation is for a person to hold a specific position and perform a role and for the participating person to represent a wider social group. Many disadvantaged and powerless groups of society, including women, are excluded from participation in decision-making. Women's access to decision-making positions is one aspect of political participation and their ability to influence political decisions is another.

It may then be asked as to what the benefit of women's current participation in Iraqi politics really is, as female MPs still hold negligible positions within the parties, as well as within Parliament and have little negotiation power. Women are rarely included in political negotiations in Parliament or in concluding deals; if they have any presence at these levels, it is merely symbolic. Women rarely chair parliamentary committees and are often excluded from the functioning of these bodies. For example, the 21-member Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee has completely rejected the membership of women.

Even in societal issues or issues that concern women, women parliamentarians have not been given a clear role. In many cases, women politicians are used to pass and defend laws against the interest of women, such as the Jaafari Law (Al-Rahim, 2019). This marginalization, underrepresentation, and weak role in decision-making can be traced to many obstacles that limit women's work and place barriers in their way to exercising political freedom.

3.2 LOCAL PROBLEMS IN DECISION-MAKING MECHANISMS IN IRAQ

Iraqi history has long been characterized by ups and downs in the role of women in state-building, due to the multiple wars in which Iraq has been entangled, the autocratic regimes that ruled it, and the economic deficits it has suffered. Despite the enthusiasm of some officials when establishing the new Iraqi system after 2003 to create opportunities for the political empowerment of women and the improvement in the rate of women's participation in the

political sphere, there has been a clear marginalization of women in leadership positions and decision-making centers and political empowerment in general.

The challenges faced by Iraqi women are not in isolation from those faced by women around the world. All these universal obstacles that women face, as mentioned in the first chapter, stand as barriers to the progress of Iraqi women in securing decision-making positions. Moreover, the political system in Iraq since 2003 has added more and specific challenges to the progress of Iraqi women. These challenges are aggravated by armed conflict-based violence, the weakness of the quota system and the electoral law, the lack of a coherent female agenda, and the political corruption that has engulfed the country.

3.2.1 Armed Conflict and Violence

In countries suffering armed conflict, women are vulnerable to sexual violence, kidnapping for sexual slavery, human trafficking, forced marriage, forced prostitution, and becoming a target for violence. Women often attempt to stay out of the way in order to avoid such violence, especially since countries such as Iraq have failed to contain these acts through legislation; so far, no law has provided effective protection to Iraqi women from violence (United Nations, 2009).

Given the magnitude of this obstacle in the lives of women, the United Nations issued Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, calling for women to be included equally in peace processes as they are most affected by armed conflicts, as well as highlighting the urgent need for international laws to protect women during and after conflicts, in addition to recognizing women's perspective in peacekeeping operations (United Nations, 2000).

In May 2003, Security Council Resolution 1483 was issued, affirming the need to activate Resolution 1325 in Iraq in order to ensure equality in rights and access to justice for all citizens without discrimination; however, Iraq has not fulfilled its obligations towards this resolution, and is still floundering in its implementation (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/Iraq, 2018). Although Iraq was the first country in the region to adopt a national plan for Resolution 1325, it was integrated into the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in 2014, which may hamper its effectivity (Cross-sector Taskforce 1325, 2018).

The danger that Iraqi women face is not new. From 1980 until today, Iraqi women have experienced multiple types of violence. A survey conducted by Oxfam in 2009 showed that 55 percent of women had been subjected to some kind of violence (Kaya, 2016). Kaya (2016) argues that the growth of militias and sectarian warfare after 2003 is the factor that has influenced women's role and participation in politics the most. Sectarianism and the evolution of extremist Islamic groups drove women to the edge of public life. Kidnapping, killing, and rape became means of pressurizing among competing groups, and women began receiving death threats to prevent them from working and participating in public life.

The threat of assault and kidnapping kept qualified and educated women away from politics. In 2003, several months into the occupation, Aqila al-Hashemi, the first woman to be appointed to the Governing Council, was assassinated. She was a prominent figure with significant political experience, having served as a diplomat within Saddam Hussein's government; she was a supporter of secularism for the new regime, a defender of women's rights, and the leading female voice within the male-dominated authority in Iraq (Alkifaey, 2003). Her assassination was not the last attempt at silencing Iraqi women in politics, but was the beginning of a series of threats and assassinations of women which has continued for 17 years.

Armed violence also affects women indirectly. Even when the conflict does not directly target women but violence is rather directed against men, the long-term effects will fall on women. For example, during the sectarian war in Iraq, almost 80 people died every day, mostly being men (Allam, 2019). For every one of these men who was married, a widow was left behind, now forced to become the breadwinner of the family and main guardian of her children in all aspects of life. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning has stated that terrorist acts and displacement resulting from armed violence left a huge number of widowed and divorced women who became the breadwinner for their family, the number of widows in Iraq reaching four million (Cross-sector Taskforce 1325, 2018).

Even since the security situation in Iraq has relatively stabilized, violence against women remains, presently not so much by killing but by extortion. "Gender-based blackmail" was a characteristic feature of the 2018 elections. Many female candidates were exposed to scandals

through the publication of pictures and videos of them in situations considered highly inappropriate in Iraqi society, including sex tapes and photos, and images of them kissing, posing in underwear, or dancing in revealing outfits. Many of these videos were faked; even if genuine, it is important to note that they represented the candidate's personal life, not her political work. Their release was a calculated means to pressure the female candidates to withdraw from the elections (Chirillo & Roddey, 2019).

3.2.2 Quota System

The calls to increase women's participation in politics have had a positive impact in the past two decades. In the 1995 Beijing Conference, governments were invited to aim for 30 percent female representation. Many countries allocated quotas to increase women's participation (United Nations, 2015). A quota means that a number of seats are automatically allocated to women in Parliament. Only women candidates can take those seats; either they are selected to fulfill the stipulated number, or surpass it through a good electoral performance, but the number of women in parliament cannot be less (Krook, 2006).

As Krook (2006) illustrates, the quota reflects a view of the importance of women, and a desire for their presence and influence in parliament and state matters. Quotas are one of the mechanisms for increasing the proportion of women in international parliaments. It is considered a qualitative leap in the history of politics. This system is about liberation and democratic thought, as it is a means for more democracy for countries that seek democracy.

Iraq was one of the first countries in the Middle East to legislate a quota for women higher than 10 percent. However, many argue that the Arab world's quota system is not so much a victory for women as an 'easy fix' reacting to international pressures that demand an increase in women's rights (Al-Tamimi, 2018).

The women's quota system in Iraq is a double-edged sword. Although it provides women with the opportunity for political action, according to Abdullah (2015), it also allows parties to exploit their members who are women in order to fulfill their own demands, especially in the House of Representatives. Therefore, the quota system may be considered to contribute to discrimination

against women, inhibiting their equal treatment with men. It also gives the impression that women cannot reach Parliament through their own capabilities. Women are entitled to nominate and contest competitive elections just like men, depending on their competences regardless of the specific allocation of seats for women in the legislative bodies and Parliament (Abdullah, 2015).

In Iraq, whilst the quota has guaranteed women's formal presence in Parliament, it has not led to these women having any influence on the political agenda. The voices of women MPs have been rarely heard on any important issue discussed in Parliament (Vilarado & Bittar, 2018). Al-Tamimi (2018) has analyzed the quota in Iraq according to three categories: 'descriptive,' 'substantive,' and 'symbolic' representation. She explains that the *descriptive* representation refers to the number of women physically present in Parliament. A *substantive* representation refers to how women's interests are presented in the legislature, and whether this leads to perceptible gains for women as a whole. *Symbolic* representation constitutes the degree of influence that female politicians have upon legislation and their ability to change societal beliefs towards women, such as the idea of politics being a male domain and the impact of this belief on citizens' attitudes and behaviors.

In descriptive terms, the presence of women in the Iraqi Parliament is increasing. Al-Athari & Zahir (2019) state that the number of women in the House of Representatives reached 70 out of 275 members in the 2005 elections, the first parliamentary elections after 2003. In the Parliament's elections for its second session in March 7, 2010, the number of women reached over 2000 out of 6,539 candidates throughout the country's electoral district, in which they competed for 325 seats. Women won over 80 seats in Parliament. The parliamentary elections held in April 2014 saw 22 women elected above the quota, meaning that out of the 328 total members of the House of Representatives, 83 or one quarter were women. In the 2018 elections, 22 women won seats above the quota, meaning that women occupied 83 parliamentary seats out of 329. Thus Iraqi women are considered to have achieved a descriptive quota, as Iraq has come to rank at 67 out of 192 countries in terms of the proportion of women in parliaments (Chirillo & Roddey, 2019).

Iraqi women parliamentarians have not yet succeeded in achieving substantive representation. Female politicians' actions in voting have been largely limited to demanding politicians' privileges, such as a high salaries, customs exemptions, and travel allowances. Women's participation towards the achievement of a free, democratic society based on equality, legal sovereignty, and the separation of powers, has not yet been achieved (Ahmed, 2012).

Furthermore, the symbolic representation of Iraqi women parliamentarians, according to Al-Tamimi (2018), has not been achieved, because women continue to face significant challenges arising from the nature of a patriarchal society. Women have not enjoyed, for example, the respect of the media; women have not appeared like their male counterparts to cover the Iraqi social and political reality on news reports on television channels. Women's parliamentary share has thus been of little value in supporting Iraqi women parliamentarians to become influential decision-makers and help raise the general status of women.

Through the quota system, women in Iraq have taken their seats in Parliament based on religious sectarianism instead of their real merits and leadership qualifications and capabilities. The presence of women in the Iraqi Parliament occurs according to political and party diktat, ensuring that they are not provided with an influential voice or access to positions of power (Abdullah, 2015). This allows parties to exploit the women politicians affiliated to them in order to fulfill their own agenda, especially in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that the quota has not led to a representative proportion of women in Parliament; women in Iraq make up nearly half of the population (49.4 percent), yet their share is only 25 percent (Chirillo & Roddey, 2019).

In summary, the failure of the quota system in Iraq has been evident since the National Assembly elections in 2004, when the Iraqi Minister for Human Rights at the time, Zuhair Chalabi, admitted that 'The participation of women [in Parliament] was to fill the blanks' (Abdullah, 2015, p. 240). The quota in the modern Iraqi state is nothing but the mere formal representation of women within a patriarchal political system. They are treated as numbers and purely biological beings with the assumption that any women serving in Parliament will represent the interests of all women. Iraqi women are not recognized as having their own aspirations outside

the male-dominated system, but treated as a luxury to embellish the seats of Parliament (Al-Zubaidi, 2019).

3.2.3 Electoral Law

Free elections are a democratic formula that developed societies around the world adhere to, in order to peacefully manage conflict between social forces with different interests and ideological trends. Fair and transparent elections reflect the desire for individual and social freedom, and reflect the extent of development, progress, and awareness of the society which engages in them, and the degree of democracy that the citizen may practice (Abd Allatif, 2009).

Chirillo and Roddey (2019) explain that the new political system in Iraq following 2003 was founded as a representative (parliamentary) democracy, its political elites stressing that it would not be permissible to enact laws that contradict the principle of democracy. The Iraqi Constitution thus guaranteed suffrage for all Iraqis. Article 20 of the Iraqi Constitution (2005) stipulated all Iraqis' freedom without discrimination to vote, elect, and run for office. Article 49 formed the basis for organizing the elections process, section 1 stipulating that the candidates must represent all components in Iraq, and section 4 stating that the quarter of the Parliament must be women. Sections 3 and 5 stipulated that a law must be organized to regulate the electoral process, the demands of the voters and the candidates, as well as how to replace candidates in the event of resignation, death, and dismissal (Iraqi Constitution, 2005: art. 20 & 49, S 2 & 3).

According to Election Law no. 45 of 2013, the electoral system is based on a proportional representation system with an open list, meaning the voter can choose both a political party and a specific candidate from the list. It is also stipulated that each list must contain the name of at least one woman among the first three candidates, and the seats are distributed according to the Saint-Lego method (Chirillo & Roddey, 2019). The same law stipulates that whoever loses or resigns their seat for any reason is replaced by the next candidate on their party list; however, if the vacant seat belongs to a woman, it is not required that a woman replace her unless it affects the women's representation rate (i.e., a fall beneath 25 percent female representation in Parliament). This law is a violation of women's political rights and the Constitution, enabling political parties to manipulate women's participation. After a woman's success in an election and

her entry into Parliament, pressure on her to step down increases, in order for her to be replaced by a man from the same list (Chirillo & Roddey, 2019).

As a result of the popular revolution in October 2019 a new draft election law was issued, approved by Parliament in December 2019. The law stipulates many amendments to issues that the Iraqi people had considered reasons for the political system's weakness. One of the most notable changes is a change from proportional representation, in which the whole of Iraq was considered one large electoral district, to a system dividing Iraq's governorates into multiple electoral districts. Every 100,000 people would be allocated one electoral seat, and voters could choose a specific candidate to represent an electoral district, instead of the whole electoral list (Iraqi Parliament council, 2019a).

Regarding women's rights, Article 16 of the new law stipulated that the percentage of women's representation should not be less than 25 percent of the members of Parliament in each governorate. The article explained in detail the replacement mechanism, which is the same mechanism stipulated in the old law, where it is not required to replace a woman with another woman (Iraqi Parliament council, 2019a).

This new law has not yet been put into practice, and it remains controversial in Iraq, with experts and activists divided between optimists and pessimists. Optimists believe that this law is a victory for the protest movement, and hope the law will be applied in the upcoming elections objectively and professionally. The Iraqi voter can choose a candidate directly at the ballot box, according to their own policies and efficiency, ending the ethno-sectarian quotas and coalitions that have contributed to the country's weakness and loss of national identity. Others predict however that this law will not end the control of the major parties, but lead to political and tribal forces to pressure voters with threats and bribes, and open the way for fraud in the next elections because votes will be cast with voter cards instead of the biometric card (Sattar, 2020).

3.2.4 Lack of a Coherent Feminist Agenda

One of the goals of women's presence in politics is for women to achieve a position of influence in speaking on women's issues. For this goal to be achieved, it is necessary for women to have

an influence over decision-makers who can make and shape the policies that concern women. Therefore, there must be support and communication between women's organizations and politicians, and women's organizations should be financially supported by the government, because external support may undermine these organizations, making them work according to a specific agenda. Likewise, women should be prepared to be effective and influential in politics through the establishment of training courses to expand women's opportunities for political participation. Economic programs should be implemented to provide women with opportunities to access jobs and achieve financial independence. It is also known that barriers that reduce gender equality are required to be removed for gains that increase women's impact on decision-making. The authorities must pay attention to how the political system's various mechanisms work together, including electoral rules, the parties, and political culture, to deny women decision-making power in politics, and contribute solutions for the reform of this system (O'Neil & Domingo, 2015).

The Iraqi political process in previous parliamentary sessions has been characterized by a lack of planning for women's social advancement. As part of the formation of the government in 2005, the Ministry of Women's Affairs was established, the only supreme committee responsible for women's affairs working on programs to develop the status of women. However, in 2014, as part of the continued marginalization of women in the Iraqi government, the Ministry of Women was abolished. Women MPs now face the challenge of setting goals and planning explicit action for all Iraqi women, either through legislation or the adoption of special issues for specific segments of women or society with precise roles in achieving these targets for women MPs (Aylan, 2014).

Aylan (2014) also suggests that in previous years, the vast majority of women MPs have been ineffective in representing women, although some may appear as successful politicians. Hanan al-Fatlawi had been re-elected in three electoral sessions and has become the leader of one of the parties participating in the political process. In the 2014 election, she gained the highest number of votes, over 90,000, of any individual candidate in her district. She is well known in Iraq for her sectarian rhetoric, using phrases such as 'Seven for seven,' indicating that if seven Shiites are killed in sectarian violence, seven Sunnis must be killed in exchange. She has also stoked ethnic hatred in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, as well as mocked the protests against the government's

offer of financial grants offered to men wishing to enter polygamous marriages. In the 2018 election, she was appointed as the Prime Minister's advisor on women's affairs. Her appointment to this position came as a surprise to Iraqi women and men, and many women took to social media platforms with the hashtag, "Hanan al-Fatlawi doesn't represent us" (Al-obaidi, 2019, para 3). Hence, women need to have a plan to propel each other forward, especially those in positions of power in the Parliament who genuinely represent women's interests, others those with experience and expertise in the political process (Al-Zubaidi, 2019).

Women parliamentarians were finally able to form the Iraqi Women Parliamentarians' Caucus on 15 October 2018, after many failed attempts in previous sessions. This gathering included all the women members within the House of Representatives, in order to unify their efforts to advance the female role and challenge male dominance over Parliament and its various subcommittees. It aims to strengthen the Iraqi Parliament's female members' participation in political decision-making regarding issues on women and children especially, to contribute to legislating and amending laws guaranteeing women rights and to monitor their implementation, and unifying forces supportive of women's rights inside and outside Parliament to build human capacity and develop the skills of the assembly members. This gathering may eventually form a women's lobby away from the political blocs (Iraqi Parliament council, 2019b).

This gathering has not yet produced any significant achievements such as changing laws or demanding accountability for those guilty of discrimination between women and men. However, it must be mentioned that it is a positive step that may result in important achievements, if the politicians affiliated with this group are serious about abandoning ethno-sectarian identity in their parliamentary representation and instead dedicate themselves to advancing the cause of women.

3.2.5 Corruption

Corruption is one of the most serious challenges facing countries, especially developing countries where it has a severely malign impact on their societies, often beginning with the security situation and subsequent paralysis in construction and economic development. This may thus lead to the destruction of the economy and financial and administrative capacity, and thus

the state's inability to face the challenges of reconstruction and building infrastructure. Corruption wastes money and wealth, time and the people's energy, and hinders the performance of jobs and services, and on the part of the corrupt individual represents a violation of the laws and deviation from the performance of duties for personal financial gain. This is thus a breach of the privilege of professionalism and public values; this process is often undertaken by mediators, and is not directed by officials (Dawud, 2015). Transparency International identifies corruption as "The abuse of high-level power that benefits the few at the expense of the many, and causes serious and widespread harm to individuals and society."

Since the transformation of the Iraqi regime into a democratic system in 2003, the foundations of accountability, monitoring, and trial have not been established in Iraq, and a public authority has not been established to effectively oversee a successful democratic process, which has led to a remarkable spread of the phenomenon of corruption. Iraq has featured in the lowest ranks in the corruption index produced by Transparency International from 2003 to 2020 (Mohammad, 2013). In 2019, Iraq ranked 162 out of 183 countries across 20 categories on the CPI corruption index (Transparency International, 2019).

The basis of corruption that has affected Iraq is the pursuit of financial gain through monopoly and the cross-fertilization of politics and the economic market, such as the approval of particular laws in exchange for political support for winning elections (Shvedova, 2005). Mohamed (2013) further notes the prevalence of electoral bribery, whereby the politicians pay bribes to buy votes, and judicial bribery, to obtain or delay judicial decisions. Likewise, Dawoud (2015) argues that nepotism, the appointment of family members to official positions, also rife in Iraq. Related is the system of *wasta*, in which appointment to a position is not dependent on qualifications or competence for the post, but on networks and connections with influential individuals, again often extended family members or important political allies. This, which has led to the decline of public services and of public trust in the authorities, is another of the most prominent examples of corruption in Iraq.

Women have been severely affected by the spread of corruption in Iraqi society and the concurrent absence of counter-corruption legislation and weakness of the system to combat

corruption. In comparison to men who enjoy connections to the hierarchical structures of Iraq's political parties, many women suffer from a lack of financial resources, which stands in the way of their full participation in decision-making and politics (Ilesanmi, 2018). The various aspects of corruption, such as bribery, extortion, and theft of goods and services, constitute a significant obstacle in women's way. A former member of the Iraqi Parliament, Nada Ibrahim, explained to the *Middle East Eye* platform that she won in the 2014 elections the highest percentage of votes on her electoral list; however, this victory achieved by Ibrahim was not acceptable to the patriarchal political elite who ensured a change in the results, and she had to pay a bribe of hundreds of thousands of dollars to confirm her victory won at the ballot box (Steele, 2017).

The spread of 'the law of the jungle' helps in encouraging manifestations of organized crime, which creates for women an atmosphere of fear of violence against themselves or family members. This corruption also affects a woman's attitude toward her civic duty. For example, some Iraqi parties have used their militias to threaten women in positions where they can expose corruption with death, to prevent them from revealing the facts. This leads to women politicians' increased ineffectiveness, sending a message to society that women's participation in the political process is more about a numerical indicator than political feasibility or the demand of women to have their voices heard in the political sphere (Al-Zubaidi, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Democracy cannot be considered to have been achieved in a country if equality is not enjoyed by all members of society irrespective of gender, race, religion, sect, or color. However, in most countries that are termed democracies, including Iraq, there still a significant distinction between citizens owing to their identity; one of the most pervasive forms of discrimination is gender discrimination. Gender-based discrimination has become an impediment to women's participation in social, economic, and political life everywhere. The political participation of women has thus become a contested issue in many parts of the world. Equal gender participation is a matter of concern because achieving it ensures community justice and, as discussed above, forms evidence of a healthy democracy.

This issue has attracted the attention of activists in the field of democracy and human rights, especially in Iraq, which adopted a democratic system after the 2003 invasion. After the fall of the dictatorial regime in Iraq and the beginning of the US occupation, Iraqi women were indeed able to enter the country's political process. Iraqis wanted to build a new system that included all components, including women, and the US administration also wished at the time to convince the outside world that it had intervened in the country in order to build a democratic system, so it attached great importance to engaging women in politics. The new political system was avowedly intended to remove barriers to women's political participation. Indeed, Iraqi women entered Parliament, confirming their right in the Iraqi constitution, which stipulated that women must be represented to a proportion of at least 25 percent.

However, on the contrary, this thesis argues that since 2003, significant new challenges in the way of women's effective political participation in Iraq have arisen. Iraqi women, even after they constituted a quarter of the Iraqi parliament, remained in a weak social position, and have been marginalized from the political process. Iraqi politics over the last 17 years has not witnessed the nomination of any woman for the key positions of state, such as the Prime Minister, the President

of the Republic, the Speaker of Parliament, or any of these positions' deputies; nor has a woman ever filled any of the most important ministerial positions, such as the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior.

This thesis attempts to discern the reasons behind the lack of effective roles for Iraqi women in decision-making positions, despite the presence of feminist voices in the Iraqi political process. In light of the experiences of feminist movements, the political and social positions of Iraqi women over the 17 years from the fall of a one-party dictatorial system to a parliamentary democracy were analyzed. The study focused on federal Iraq, and thus did not explore in detail the situation of women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which has its own Parliament, Constitution, and laws, although these were sometimes referenced for comparison.

To answer the core research questions, the study analyzed events in Iraq over the last three decade from a feminist approach. Feminist theory critically examines the reasons behind women's weak political participation from various angles, and in general comprehends social phenomena as occurring as a result of gender discrimination. Activist scholars of this theory not only try to study the reasons for the absence of women from the public sphere, but also aim to contribute to policies which, it is hoped, may eliminate the obstacles that women face. Iraqi women's under-representation and their marginalization from decision-making positions can be traced to a set of societal and structural obstacles that prevent them from playing an active role in the political process, even after they have had achieved some formal political freedom since the fall of the Baath regime.

In all aspects of life, the social norms of a patriarchal society shape the political behavior, forming a significant stumbling block in women's struggle for social justice. This society is built on the basis that men are the dominant force in society and that social relations are formed on a vertical basis descending from sect to tribe. Thus, the family, gender, and patriarchal norms constitute the causes of gender discrimination. The patriarchal system employs discriminatory practices and organizations to persecute and exploit women. It espouses inequality in all aspects of life. The role of women is confined to being homemakers or tools to produce children. In such a system, men act as leaders and breadwinners, using this power to impose restrictions on

women and prevent them from participating in public life. Religious myths and beliefs are often considered are the source of knowledge in such societies, while scientific development and education are neglected.

Iraq has undergone various historical stages since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state in 1921. Women's participation has remained a fundamental issue throughout. While the issue went through repeated fluctuations in the decades before 1991, the policies regarding women were considered mostly positive, providing Iraqi women many privileges that were not enjoyed by their counterparts in other regions of the Arab world. After Iraq's failure in its occupation of Kuwait and the United Nations-imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, Saddam Hussein began to strengthen the conservative forces in Iraqi society, particularly the tribes, to strengthen his rule. This policy soon led to restrictions on women in the domains of mobility, education, and work; the growth of a tribal society meant that tribal kinship and patriarchal ideas came to play a significant role in shaping social and legal attitudes towards women's issues.

The tribal factor, in addition to the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War, exhausted Iraqi women. Hope arose among them after the US invasion, which had supposedly placed the liberation of Iraqi women near the top of its political agenda. However, the hope for an Iraq free from the constraints of conservative forces quickly disappeared in the first years of the US-led coalition's occupation of Iraq. On the contrary, the occupation paved the way for extremist religious forces to gain power, which began exercising excessive patriarchal authority that eroded even those rights that women had until then enjoyed. The reality of Iraqi women after the occupation deteriorated sharply, widening the gap between public and private spheres. At a social level, women lived in a climate of fear. Insecurity and the brutality of the American forces led to the emergence of armed groups and religious militias. These groups subjected Iraqi women to kidnapping, killing, sexual violence, loss of loved ones, and an uncertain future. Women thus became housebound.

The transformation of rule from the US-led coalition forces to an Iraqi civilian government began with the writing of the Permanent Iraqi Constitution of 2005, simultaneously as Iraq witnessed the first sparks of the sectarian war which would come to dominate the country for

years to come with disastrous effect. The Constitution enabled the clerical control of society and the establishment of an Islamic system on sectarian lines. Through this, the Islamist men now holding political power tried to exert their control over Iraqi women, restricting their freedom, imposing a certain dress-code on them, and permitting certain practices that degrade women. However, the Constitution also provided for some women's rights, guaranteeing gender equality in employment, voting, nomination for elections, and political positions, though it did not specify the mechanisms through which these rights should be exercised, rendering them vulnerable to abuse subject to the whims of the authorities. Therefore, the Constitution was vehemently opposed by parts of the Iraqi feminist movement.

The domination of Islamist parties and their militants over society resulted in more substantial restrictions upon women than those they suffered in the 1990s. The Iraqi government and the Islamist parties in power did not give Iraqi women and their issues significant attention, despite the occupation of some parts of Iraq by ISIS after 2014 and the injustice that women were subjected to at the hands of these monsters which the whole world saw. The Iraqi Parliament neglected to enact a law protecting these women who were subjected to rape, torture and forced marriage in a society which considers a woman's honor to lie in her chastity. Iraqi women to this day suffer from a lack of legislation against domestic violence, despite multiple attempts to pass such laws from 2012 until now. The dominant parties have refused to draft such a law, on the pretext that this would cause a conflict with customs, traditions, and religious teachings. On the contrary, there are laws in the Iraqi penal code that permit violence against women, such as not imprisoning those accused of honor killings, and also allowing the husband to discipline his wife through physical violence.

The Islamist parties in power have also tried at every chance to legislate laws violating women's rights. For example until 2017, there was an attempt to change the Personal Status Law into a law based on Shiite doctrine called the Jaafari Law, which would apply only to followers of the Shiite sect in Iraq. This law contains many articles that violate women's rights, such as permitting the marriage of minors, denying the mother custody of children, and forbidding a woman from leaving her home without her husband's permission, or traveling without a male relative.

The analysis of Iraq's new political system reveals a set of specific obstacles to the progress of Iraqi women in politics that has caused women's marginalization from decision-making positions. Iraqi women have faced challenges due to the wars, armed conflicts, and sectarian conflicts that Iraq has experienced. The most significant is the armed conflict-based violence to which Iraqi women have been subjected, such as rape, murder, kidnapping, extortion, and sexual extortion. Studies have shown that 55 percent of Iraqi women have experienced some kind of violence. The spread of corruption in the Iraqi state, the realization of the 'law of the jungle', and the threat of violence, have put Iraqi woman in a state of fear to oppose any decision that may not be in the interests of a specific party or group.

The current state of women's participation indicates that their involvement is often hindered by constitutional and legal impediments, paradoxically exacerbated by the quota system for their Parliamentary representation. This system, which appears to guarantee women's entry into the political process, has resulted in a worse situation for women. It contradicts the principle of equality demanded by feminists, as the low quota percentage does not match the proportion of the population of women in Iraq. Furthermore, the Election Law leaves women vulnerable to exploitation, allowing the replacement of women parliamentarians by men. This study has also illustrated the division between women politicians based on sectarianism; the representation of each of society's religious components rather than a coherent agenda to defend women's rights; women's reproduction of sectarian rhetoric instead of contributing to the peace process; and the lack of mapping or planning among women politicians and activists themselves, which have all led to their failure in the eyes of others.

Therefore, the marginalization of women from decision-making positions is a result of several obstacles imposed by a patriarchal society. Iraqi women share many of these obstacles with women around the world. However, the significance of these obstacles varies from country to country. These include political obstacles, springing from the inherent discriminatory nature of a male-dominated system, in which men's refusal to share power with women or relinquish their control over women, even within political parties, have limited women's role, denied them the necessary support for them to reach decision-making positions, and relegated them to a tool for fulfilling international requirements and democratic principles in word only. There has also been

an apparent lack of trust between feminist organizations and parliamentarians, which has played a crucial role in women's under-representation.

Second, social obstacles stem from the patriarchal system's determination of gender stereotypes and culture, defining the role of each individual in society. Women's role is presented as the wife and mother. They do not have the time required to reconcile family care and housework with political work, the latter of which requires long working hours. This situation gives rise to a woman's mistrust in herself and her ability to act politically. Religion frequently also plays a role here, as religious institutions exert control over society and the political process.

At the end of the research, which dealt with the role of women in political decision-making in the Iraqi state, the study clarified the obstacles to women's effective participation on several levels. Even with a legal framework that nominally supports women's equality in the public and political spheres, women have not experienced equal standards. The thesis argues that it has become increasingly clear over the past 17 years that the presence of Iraqi women in the political process has merely been a token measure to claim the 'democratic' and 'inclusive' nature of the political process since 2003 for women.

The study findings relate to feminist theory. Feminism views the patriarchal system as the cause lying behind discrimination against women. This thesis finds that in Iraq, it is particularly the tribal system and patriarchal society's view of women as belonging in the home or in low-paying work which have resulted in women's absence from the Iraqi political sphere. The feminist movement has worked to counter these misconceptions, instead providing women with the freedom to control their own bodies, lives and choices, freedoms denied to Iraqi women because of tribal society's view of honor and the abuse of women as a means of resolving disputes between the clans in what is known as the *fasliya*.

The task of research into women's under-representation and marginalization from political decision-making is not easy, since the issue of women and their political participation is still a marginalized topic in parts of the world such as Iraq, and requires much more academic research. The study has tried, as much as possible, to identify the precise reasons for the marginalization of

women. The results have motivated us to develop realistic recommendations through which the role of women in political decision-making could be fortified.

From a feminist position, in order to end such discriminative practices, firstly the Iraqi government should work on making amendments, such as including more women in prominent decision-making positions, and the establishment of laws requiring the presence of a sufficient number of women in political parties and leadership positions of these parties. Secondly, the law which stipulates the right of men to replace a woman in Parliament as described in Chapter Three should be changed. Thirdly, the representation of women in Parliament, currently stipulated at 25 percent by the Iraqi Constitution, should be changed to bring the number into line with the actual number of women in Iraqi population. Fourthly, the existing Personal Status Law should be amended in positive accordance with women's rights and the demands of the feminist movement, not replaced with a new law deepens sectarian and sectarian attitudes.

The civil society and human rights organizations in Iraq, on the other hand, should conduct educational training for women to make them aware of their rights and how to effectively demand them. They should work to counter society's patriarchal notions that have been entrenched in the minds of women since childhood. A strong feminist movement must emerge which can apply pressure on community institutions, trade unions and other civil society bodies, in order to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions. The barriers to women achieving economic empowerment must also be broken down, because empowerment and participation are two sides of the same coin; the concept of empowerment includes everything that may advance the participation of women and develop their capacity, awareness and knowledge. They may then fulfill their achievements at various economic, social and political levels, and obtain the qualifications that can allow them to control their circumstances and contribute freely and consciously to building society. Women's organizations should also continue to demand to change unfair laws against women and defend the rights of women in Iraq.

The Iraqi women's movements which have been established since 2003, are still not effective enough to run strong grassroot activities to emancipate women and facilitate a greater women's

participation in Iraqi politics. Feminists in Iraq must unite and achieve a consensus to establish a specific political identity and develop an organized plan to confront patriarchal society and the unfair laws within the community. They should form a feminist coalition among women MPs and activists to support each other's decisions. Female politicians' actions in voting must go beyond demanding politicians' privileges, such as a high salary, customs exemptions, and travel allowances. Women should participate seriously in creating a free, democratic society based on equality, legal sovereignty, and the separation of powers. Only through engaging in the political process can women fight for and achieve their rights.

Movements such as the protests beginning in 2019 and continuing until now, the first social movement since 2003 in which Iraqi women have taken a very visible role, in particular are deserving of further attention. In the absence of much leadership on the women's issue from Iraq's political elite, positive change may yet be achieved through grassroots pressure. Since the call for the emancipation of women and their participation in politics is young, because Iraq is a new democracy and is still developing politically, and because the fight over ending gender inequality is still ongoing, I hope that my study may show the way for further studies, and more comparative research on this vital subject.

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