

# Roundtable

## Gender Research in Iraq: Facts and Expectations

*Al-Raida* is pleased to publish the thematic discussions of a roundtable that grew out of a two-year project entitled “Gender Training for Iraqi Academics and Researchers”, funded by the Open Society Institute, International Women’s Program and implemented by IWSAW in collaboration with SOAS Centre for Gender Studies, University of London, and the Women and Memory Forum, Egypt. The project focused on developing the research writing skills of 19 Iraqi researchers (Baghdad and Erbil) on how to undertake research projects on women and gender studies. Participants in the roundtable discussed the current status of gender research in the Arab world with special focus on Iraq. They also were trained on proposal writing skills and learned the importance of writing a good proposal to attract funding as well as the value of networking with regional and international research centers, universities, and NGOs.

### Transcribed and translated by Rada Soubra Barraji

**Dr. Samira Aghacy:** Good morning dear guests, sincere greetings and welcome to Lebanon and to our roundtable “Gender Research in Iraq: Facts and Expectations”. Since its inception in 1973, the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), has been committed to women’s issues, not only in Lebanon but also in the entire Arab world. The Institute carries out various activities aimed at developing women’s studies at the Lebanese American University by integrating them into the curricula, as well as by raising the students’ awareness vis-à-vis these studies. A faculty committee was established to this effect, consisting of a multidisciplinary team of professors who work closely in order to adopt a gender-based approach, and to incorporate women’s issues into their curricula. The Institute is thoroughly committed to empowering Arab women through development and cultural programs, working hard to make a change regarding women’s rights issues in Lebanon and in the region.

The Institute strives relentlessly to foster networking with international organizations and institutions that are concerned with gender issues. Among such collaborative efforts is our venture with the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies and The Women and Memory Forum to produce The AMEWS E-Bulletin. The Institute has



Roundtable participants

carried out many activities consisting mainly of development and training programs, including research and studies that are published in *Al-Raida* (“The Pioneer”), the quarterly journal published by IWSAW since 1976. *Al-Raida* is a multidisciplinary journal, whose mission is to promote research on the condition of women in Lebanon and in the Arab world. The Institute’s commitment to academic research was recently augmented by launching an M.A. program in women and gender studies.

We are very proud to introduce our international guests: Dr. Suad Joseph, distinguished professor of Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies at the University of California, Davis; Dr. Hoda Elsadda, professor of English and Comparative Literature in the Faculty of Arts, University of Cairo, and member of the Rights and Freedom committee in charge of amending the Egyptian Constitution; and Dr. Nahla al-Nadawi, professor in the Faculty of Education for Girls, University of Baghdad.

From Lebanon, please let me introduce Dr. Noha Bayoumi, professor in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and expert in literary and cultural criticism, and women’s studies. Dr. Samira Atallah, director of the UN-ESCWA Center for Women was expected to join us but unfortunately, she will not be able to make it today. We are also extremely pleased to welcome our Iraqi guests and the audience. Last but not least, my greatest thanks goes to my colleagues at the Institute for their wonderful job, especially Lara Shallah who devoted herself to organizing this meeting.

Dr. Hoda Elsadda, the floor is all yours.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Thank you. I am particularly pleased to be part of this meeting because we are handling a subject that is dear to me, i.e., the importance of establishing gender studies programs in all Arab universities, as well as the importance of developing a gender mainstreaming curriculum for the humanities

and Social Sciences. This is not new anyway, as I recall very well, it was in the early 2000s that real attempts were made in this respect; raising awareness about the importance of developing such programs and inciting Arab researchers to adopt this approach in their studies, etc. As we are in Lebanon, I do particularly remember a very important conference organized by *Bahithat*, entitled “Incorporating a Gender Mainstreaming Perspective into the Policies of the Lebanese University and its Curricula”.

Concerning the issue of translation, for instance, various efforts have been made in this respect: how to translate concepts and how to translate the term gender. The discussion is still ongoing and remains unsettled because each Arab country, even each group, is using a different terminology, an issue that needs further debate. I think that we have reached a consensus to make male and female Arab researchers adopt the gender mainstreaming approach, integrating it into their research. By doing so, many objectives can be achieved, one of which is producing knowledge that supports women’s movements. I think this is an important goal to achieve since knowledge is the backbone of any successful movement, and for a movement to prevail it needs the support of solid and reliable knowledge. A second issue that is worth mentioning is that the concept of gender offers a genuine critical perspective. Therefore, globally speaking, adopting it would be promoting the humanities and social sciences in the Arab world.

Another point I would like to talk about, is how this can be done in Arabic. It is common knowledge that as early as the 2000s, many M.A. programs were developed and many centers for gender studies were opened, all of which use foreign languages. However, until we conceive programs in Arabic, such concepts will not be fully integrated into the Arab culture. Being able to offer these courses in Arabic



Roundtable participants

is a matter of personal concern to me, since it is well-known that in most Arab universities, courses are mainly offered in Arabic. Teaching gender studies in Arabic is an important step to be taken, albeit not an easy one.

I would like to say a few words about The Women and Memory Forum. We are trying to address two issues: the first one has to do with developing programs of gender studies in Egyptian universities, and then providing the adequate curricula. In this respect, we did two things: we translated various seminal texts into Arabic, touching on fields such as gender and history, gender and social sciences, gender and political science. The idea behind it was to transfer to the Arab world the great job that has been done so far in the United States, England, and France. So we started the process of translation in order to provide both Arab students and researchers with this knowledge.

The second thing we did was to hold conferences and educational sessions in Egyptian universities to introduce the new research methods and the gender-based perspective to students, researchers, and professors, to allow them to adopt them in their respective fields. For instance, those who are specializing in history may find articles combining gender and history, those who are specializing in literature use articles combining gender and literature, etc.

We tried to organize a regional conference in 2011. Researchers from Tunisia, Yemen, and Iraq were invited but as my Iraqi colleagues already know, we could not provide the Iraqi guests with visas, so I personally apologize for this regretful incident, I apologize on behalf of Egypt. And here, a tribute should go to Dr. Nadje Al-Ali, as well as to Dr. Dima Dabbous, the former director of IWSAW, who took the initiative of holding the September 2012 conference in Lebanon, dedicated to Iraqi researchers. It was a good start I guess, and that's how I met all the Iraqi participants who are among us today. So I consider this roundtable to be in the continuity line of the 2012 conference. For those who were not present then, the emphasis was on research methodology, particularly from a multidisciplinary gender-based perspective. All participants were asked to think about or to produce a gender-based study. A follow-up to this conference took place in Erbil in March 2013. Dr. Dima Dabbous and Dr. Nadje Al-Ali were present there, but unfortunately I was unable to go to Erbil. Some studies were presented there, and it is still an ongoing process. So one of the aims of today's workshop is to sound the participants out on their opinion regarding the Erbil conference in order to evaluate what has been done so far in the field.

I just want to draw your attention to the fact that this session is being recorded for the proceedings to be published on the website and later in *Al-Raida*. We have two speakers now, the first speaker is Dr. Nahla al-Nadawi from Iraq. Dr. Nahla is one of the prominent scholars who participated in the 2012 conference; she is professor of Arabic literature at the University of Baghdad and has done research and studies on various issues related to Iraqi women. One of the most important is an evaluation of Iraqi women's parliamentary performance. Dr. Nahla is also an independent feminist and an expert in training on women and gender issues. She will deal today with the Iraqi situation, to be followed by Dr. Noha Bayoumi.

**Dr. Nahla al-Nadawi:** Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I will try to focus on the status of feminist studies in the Iraqi universities. In short, administratively speaking, until now we have no centers for women's studies; the terminology used in the curricula deliberately ignores women's issues; we have no qualified professors of feminist studies; we have a problem with methodology, and the feminist approach is not incorporated into the social sciences. Unlike The Women and Memory Forum, we have no Gender Studies program; no specialized scientific publication, and no specialized library in women's issues. The situation might seem bleak, but this is not the complete picture. This is true concerning public institutions, but the situation is different when it comes to private initiatives, and I'll leave it to my colleagues to talk about the efforts that are being made on an individual basis in the universities all over Iraq.

I have a great announcement to make with respect to the public sector. A few months ago, under the instigation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education, the final consent was given to open an Iraqi Center of Feminist Studies within the Faculty of Girls' Education at the University of Baghdad. So our baby is not born yet; we have just baptized it, and we hope it is going to be a healthy one.

A quick historical overview of the structural approach to social sciences would be of great help to understand the challenges that are facing feminist studies in Iraq, as feminist studies are part of the Department of Social Sciences. The first Iraqi universities go back to the 1920s. The Iraqi state was founded in 1925 and needed administrative staff and lawyers. The first school to be founded was the Faculty of Law. Later on, institutions of higher education improved in leaps and bounds thanks to human resources, to the flow of money, and to generations of exceptional educators, technocrats, and academics. If we suppose that the Iraqi institutions of higher studies are 80 years of age, then let me say that the first half was a success, characterized by a gradual development, qualitatively and quantitatively speaking. The second half was mitigated, quantitatively speaking, it was improving, but from the qualitative point of view, there was a drastic regression. The triggering factor was the start of the Iraq-Iran war in 1980, in addition to other political and social factors; the end result was detrimental as the challenges outweighed many of the previous achievements.

I will go over these negative factors quickly.

Universities came to be under governmental control and had to bear the burden of technologically-biased governmental policies whose main aim was to achieve a higher degree of militarization and development, and therefore were much in favor of the natural sciences and technology when it came to financing and granting scholarships for students to study abroad. Universities suffered also from the ideology of the single-party system, which has put very strict restrictions on any social science approach both on the theoretical and the practical levels. This had a negative impact on many social science fields, because it sets limits to the various approaches to political studies, philosophy, humanities, history, as well as to the modernization of the curricula.



Roundtable participants

The second factor that affected academic life and particularly the departments of social sciences is an institutional one. In Iraq, the social sciences are confined to the Faculty of Arts and Education, so there are 16 divisions, with nine divisions and four branches, whereas worldwide, there are more than 39 divisions and branches. The result was a clear cut separation between political science and law studies for instance from sociology and anthropology. This situation loosened the structural bonds between these disciplines, so that the global expansion of the social sciences did not reach Iraq, for as I have previously said, our academic institutions have only 16 branches. An additional institutional drawback was that we were left with poor databases and poorly stocked libraries due to sanctions and censorship.

The third and penultimate factor is a cultural and social one. Both society and the state scorned the Social Sciences, looking down at the holders of such degrees who were offered few job opportunities; the same was true for their chances of remuneration, with the exception, however, of those working in the oil sector or international law experts. And I would add, as a joke, that even girls who married men holding a scientific degree were considered of a higher category. These were social and cultural factors whose effects are still being felt.

The fourth factor that seriously affected the level of social sciences in Iraq has to do with wars and the militarization of society from 1980 until 2003. During the Iraq-Iran war and the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, qualified teachers and professors were mobilized; they joined the army and ended up being killed on the ground. Then there were many waves of migration, and finally it was the economic embargo that gave our resources, our research, and our curricula the final blow. Under the economic embargo we were completely cut off from the outside world, as far as knowledge was concerned. Dr. Faleh Abdul-Jabbar's Strategic Studies Institute surveyed professors and university staff asking them to estimate the knowledge

deficit they have suffered. Unfortunately it was estimated that the knowledge gap was 25 years, and this is no simple issue. So we were cut off from the world; we suffered from a lack of resources, followed by a brain drain. Scholarship allocations for students to study abroad were stopped, as the budget went to the war effort. The quality of education suffered a great deal and we ended up with a knowledge gap. We also had to face corruption and bribery. Students and professors were neglected, and behavioral codes were turned upside down. Student-professor behavioral codes were shaken, and so was the professor-professor code of ethics. Under the embargo, the economic situation of academics deteriorated dramatically owing to inflation. I recall, from the embargo period, the situation of a professor who was a father to many girls - he had to remove the window frames in his house, one after the other, and sell them for a few dinars. His salary then was equivalent to eight US dollars. I also recall the story of a colleague of mine who told me that she was happy she could afford to buy a pair of shoes that month. At certain times, the monthly salary of an Iraqi professor was equivalent to the price of a pack of eggs. You can just imagine how bad the situation was, and how much our value system was shaken. So these factors combined have negatively affected academic life in every aspect: teaching conditions, quality of textbooks, research, production of knowledge, etc. This was the harshest period for the social sciences.

As for the present situation, post-2003, I would like to talk about this period, highlighting its advantages and drawbacks. After the 2003 fall of the regime, and with the advent of the occupation, all state institutions were dismantled, as everybody knows. Although the new political system aimed for democracy, this period was characterized by violence, lack of security, and an institutional void.

Please allow me to start with the positive effects. Our isolation from the rest of the world came to an end. Travelling abroad resumed, given that previously going



Roundtable participants

abroad was not possible. Academic scholarships were resumed. We had internet and mobile phones, and we were lucky to have such an influx of books without any legal restrictions whatsoever, on publication, or on translation.

We had a dramatic change in the financial conditions of the Iraqi professors. The wages that had reached a minimum of 8 US dollars per month were raised to 500 US dollars, and now they have reached approximately 1000 US dollars for a starting salary, to rise to 3000 US dollars; they might even reach a peak of 5000 US dollars. Personally, I belong to the category of the 3000 US dollars.

As for the external factors, we were overwhelmed by international organizations and agencies, research institutes, as we became a market with a high demand for research. Nevertheless, our local scholars were not able to meet the demand for quality research because things had not changed since, (we are talking here about a relatively short and unstable period of time, that is from 2003 to present). This situation was called an “embryonic market” by Dr. Faleh Abdul-Jabbar’s Institute.

So much for the bright side, please allow me to talk about the challenges that we had to face. Terror invaded our lives; we were threatened and the result was that we lost many competent people. According to statistics that are not that accurate in Iraq, 2.5 million Iraqis fled the country, a great number of them were technocrats, scholars, and scientists. We also had professors who were killed, and those who were not displaced or killed were living in constant terror. Some universities came to be under the militias’ control, if not militarily then figuratively speaking. Our value system was so shaken that some students became more influential and more powerful than their teachers, because they were backed by a powerful political party.

Although our regime was supposed to be democratic by constitution, our politicians made a tacit agreement based on compromise and quotas. Therefore, we had to endure another type of power in addition to the power of arms: the regime’s ideology. We had to face the consensus on sectarian quotas that goes from the top of the pyramid to its bottom. Please do not be surprised as the politicians’ agreement was initially made to nominate high ranking executive officials such as state secretaries, ambassadors, director generals, etc. The sectarian quota infiltrated our institutions so that they ended up appointing a Sunni janitor and a Shiite one for the sake of preserving sectarian balance. This ideological factor had its impact on research and on the academic programs, as well as on other cultural activities. Apart from very few exceptions, appointing heads of universities, or pursuing our studies, were directly affected by these practices: the candidate had to be approved by the Party, and even if he/she was not affiliated to the Party, he/she had to secure its support. That led to a phenomenon of exclusion, the Party excluding non-partisans, or the candidate him/herself excluding him/herself from the system, if he/she was not ready to abide by the dictated agendas.

Please allow me to talk about the weaknesses of the Social Sciences in Iraq. We have a deficiency, in the curricula. But I will talk also about the libraries and human resources. Many young faculty members were recruited, and attractive retirement packages were offered to incite older professors to retire. On the one



hand, this decision was a double-edged sword. From one side, this was a good thing to do, because frankly speaking, professors were too traditional and uninformed of new developments in their fields, but in some disciplines this was a bad thing because we had not learned enough from them yet. Newly-hired young persons are eager to learn; they show great learning capabilities, but they suffer from lack of basic general knowledge. I am an 'inbetweener.' When we were offered this great opportunity to come to LAU, we were enthusiastic and excited about it. But we have many lacunas: we do not have the necessary comprehension tools; we lack accumulated knowledge, and we are not fluent in foreign languages. For instance, if I am taught to do something, I will not be able to apply it, and this is because I did not study methodology. Methodology should be a subject to be taught to all social science students. But imagine, law students are not taught methodology. Economics students are not taught methodology; they just learn statistical planning which goes back to Saddam's era.

Things are on their way to change now; the will is there but it is time-consuming. I am on the committee in charge of changing the curriculum of the Arabic language. We did not hold a single meeting until now, but the positive thing about it is that the program was officially endorsed by the government although its enforcement is something else.

As for my expectations regarding the field of feminist studies, I would really have liked Dr. Lahay or Dr. Asma to discuss the matter as they represent the most prolific departments in research production. In the past, it was the departments of social sciences that used to take care of these studies theoretically and practically, but do not ask about the quality; it had to conform to the regime's ideology, of course. After 2003, many factors contributed to a rising interest in feminist studies, as if we were in a market. The young men's and ladies' inclination towards such studies increased with the advent of democracy, and this was encouraged by international agencies and organizations. So it was the young academicians who had to meet such demands, and I am referring here to the elite of course.

This trend looks like a fashion. In earlier times, we used to do structuralism and stylistics. It is trendy now to do feminist studies. I also see this as a great opportunity for the secular and the religious approaches.

My time is up, but let me please add one last thing. During the monarchy era, Faculties of Girls' Education were opened in order to meet social demands. Then these faculties were shut down because parents rejected co-education. Under Saddam's rule these faculties reopened, and now we have eight of them. The Ministry has decided recently to establish a woman's university which will house a center for feminist studies. Thank you.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Please welcome Dr. Noha who is going to talk about Lebanon, then we will open up the debate. We listened to the Iraqi experience, now we are going to listen to the Lebanese experience. Dr. Noha is a professor in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Lebanese University; she is an expert in literary and cultural criticism and in women studies. She has published numerous studies, but I will not go over all of them, so the floor is yours.

Dr. Noha Bayoumi: Good morning, I am a member of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers – *Bahithat*, and a great deal of my research was produced in cooperation with them. Recently, we published a book related to a conference we held: “Arab Feminism: A Critical Perspective”. The English version of the book came out in 2012, published by I.B. Taurus.

In the Arab world, *Bahithat* is known to be a pioneer publication because it has revolutionized the way in which research is done, departing from conventional and traditional ways. As far as gender studies in Lebanon are concerned, apart from some individual experimental research and reports produced by NGOs, there is nothing much to say. Gender studies do not exist in the universities’ curricula, unless it is done on the professor’s own initiative. For instance, while teaching a course on biographies, I am able to introduce some concepts to my students in an indirect manner. I cannot separate myself from my research, so it is via this subliminal way that I can merge myself with it. In many of my studies I came to discover the difficulties the researcher encounters while dealing with women’s issues. Usually we are mostly interested in the curriculum; we present it and discuss the underlying concepts, and we rarely look at the producer of such curriculum, because his/her work reflects his/her own perception of him/herself as a person, to which degree he/she is integrated in society. I have discussed this issue in many of my studies,



Roundtable participants

and maybe the last time I did, it was in the previously cited book. So I think that any methodological approach is good, because it touches a vital part of our living experiences, and it sheds light on important aspects of our lives.

I do not want to discuss gender or feminism, because for me, any approach is valuable; the main issue here is that concepts interact in a harmonious way, not in a mutually exclusive manner. During the conference on Arab feminism, it became clear to us that gender studies are less important than the women's issues that are being thoroughly discussed by feminists at an international level.

Also, I do not consider gender studies to be a discipline on its own like history or literature. As a subfield, it is its main goal that counts, but we are getting away even from that. What is the aim of gender studies? It is about revealing facts, and pinpointing the change occurring in relationships. Lately, while doing my research, I sided with the key element, i.e., the researcher, because it is his/her degree of self-consciousness that determines the final outcome, as well as the conceptual framework. This is an issue I would like to stress today, particularly when it comes to young researchers who need special training sessions and not only on methodology and concepts, but they also need awareness sessions about the producer/production relationship, even though they claim to be impartial. However, I would like to raise some points.

To what extent is the researcher subordinated to the prevailing cultural norms and criteria so that the production of knowledge becomes accommodative and consensual? We have noticed that generally the researcher adapts him/herself to the society he belongs to; he/she just tackles whatever is available to him/her, and avoids what is not available, or cheats on it. Another issue is related to stereotypes which are making their way into research in a unintentional manner. That's why this matter should be studied more carefully.

One type of submission is to accept psychological violence exerted by *shari'a* laws and biased positive laws, particularly regarding family relations and the right of passing nationality to spouses and children. But I should not be making sweeping assumptions here, as I know that our societies are challenging these practices, and this is particularly true for Lebanon. Another aspect of submission would be to accept sectarianism and its grip on political life. We should be able to transcend the impact of religion and the state on our lives in order to accept others who are marginalized because they do not conform to our convictions. *Bahithat* has produced an excellent book on marginalization, abiding by cultural dictates for fear of exclusion, and overcoming the new social class hierarchy, etc., all these are additional forms of submission.

Our Arab societies are shaken by many crises, conflicts, and wars that affect the private and the public spheres, family, society and the state. Up until now, studies were unable to interpret this phenomenon properly, including the period covering the Lebanese Civil War. These studies were also unable to bring about any change to our political system. So our cognitive reference is poor, regarding ourselves and our societies. Whenever we have discussions, we discover from our conversations that

we are missing many important elements that are neither reflected in our studies nor in the books we read. I have been told recently by a friend the moving story of a traumatized 30-year old woman, who has been able to open up and talk about seeing her mother cheating on her husband (the girl's father) when she was only a few years old. The mother opened up to her daughter just one week ago, and admitted that she had an affair, adding that all the family, the father, mother, brothers and sisters, even the husband knew about it, but that he decided to forgive her after ending the extra-marital relationship, for the sake of saving their marriage. So, we discover that we have not produced such studies that explore this side of our society, because we are blinded by a stereotyped vision of society split into two types: either a conservative society or a society that is more liberal. But in fact, there are certain dynamics that we are unable to grasp.

The point is that the production of knowledge has to go through knowing ourselves, and I am not referring here to mere self-knowledge, but to an extended one that encompasses family, society, and groups. Actually, we are surprised by the wave of increasing violence in Lebanon as if it came out of the blue. The reason for that is the following: we are not making any connection between this increasing violence and the overwhelming prevalence of religious communities, politically speaking, but also socially and economically, hence the marginalization of all those who do not conform to the mould. This situation started a long time ago with the emergence of the militias that were metamorphosed into sectarian communities. Until now, we are unable to come up with a coherent political system that provides for all citizens, and hence can be considered as a reference. So with no political reference, legal reference, even a cultural reference, it is just normal to witness such an increase in gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and all these abuses that are being echoed by the media, and that are sometimes considered to be exaggerated. In reality such abuses are really happening, and some of us may even know some cases.

With the Lebanese civil war coming to an end, we were faced with a mounting wave of fanaticism instead of the tolerance that everybody expected, so violence and fanaticism are the characteristic features governing relationships. Gender studies have played a positive role in this respect in warning against what is happening within the available cultural limits, and the limits the researcher sets for him/herself. Therefore, it is important that the researcher develop his/her mindset in a way he/she does not let his/her previous perceptions influence the present, the same way inequitable laws or overwhelming political domination are doing. How are we going to assimilate the cultural and social phenomena in this critical period if we do not examine our position vis-à-vis fundamental issues that affect us, such as the sectarian state, or religion? How would we be able to understand segregation, violence, power relations, and the public/private sphere connections? We do not seem to be concerned with these issues.

Our societies tend to transgress taboos or try to navigate around them. Many studies have shown how women in particular navigate the barriers of law, the state, religion, and sex. It is the person who cannot secure his/her rights that attempts to maneuver around such barriers. Even men do the same, because some patterns of behavior are difficult to adopt on a daily basis. Lebanese young men and women have always

travelled to Europe and to the United States and we have, as you know, a great deal of skilled and educated people. How do they adapt to a regime that makes them feel alienated? They simply reject it. They have changed but we are not changing anything. They have made their new way of life, but we are unable to make any connection with the larger sphere of society.

Please let me discuss now the issue of *hijab*. Wearing the *hijab* used not to be a common practice at the university, but now a large number of girls are wearing it. The French section at the Lebanese University used to be *hijab*-free. But now a good 80 percent of female students are wearing it. Of course, I have nothing against the *hijab*; it is a matter of personal choice, but we are not able to understand it. Two days ago, I had a discussion with a colleague in the department. She said: "I have a veiled student who is open-minded, and is going to pursue her higher studies in France. She talks openly about the relationship she is having with her boyfriend in front of the class, and how far they have gone, and she is veiled. Is this not a contradictory behavior?" Some changes are happening and we are stuck with our preconceived ideas, unable to study them or to understand them objectively. We refer to them as contradictory issues, and that should be rejected. No, these are new phenomena occurring in our society that need to be more thoroughly understood.

It is as if our self-perception, along with our perceptions of present and past societies, as well as our beliefs are in constant ebb and flow. We are in a chaotic situation, not a creative one, but a destructive one that shuffles the cards. The danger comes from the researcher getting all confused and opting for more conservatism, and complying with patriarchy. Although many have opted for this pattern, few researchers have decided to overcome marginalization, and work underground in order not to be persecuted. As a final point, I maintain that we can transform our perceptions of society by transforming our own self-perception. We are stuck in a rigid belief system when knowledge is becoming more and more modern; our lives are changing drastically, and our perceptions and beliefs are changing unconsciously, too. This is the trio that we have to work on in order to achieve scientific, cognitive, and cultural knowledge. Thank you.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Thank you Dr. Noha. Before we start the debate, listening to your remarks and opening the Q. and A. session, I would like to highlight some relevant questions that I think will help us orient our debate. The first question is how we make the most of the produced knowledge in various Arab countries since one of the most serious problems that we face is the lack of circulation of knowledge, and of books. We do not have an 'Arab Amazon,' we do not have a centralized library that gathers all what has been produced in Arabic in the field of Gender Studies so that what is produced in Tunisia, becomes available in Iraq, and what is produced in Egypt becomes available in Syria. We just have made good attempts to establish specialized libraries, etc. but there is nothing concrete yet. This is an important issue, because if we are in Syria or in Lebanon or elsewhere, we might ignore what is happening in other countries, and we end up reproducing what has already been done, and so on.

The second issue I would like to raise, is that when we are talking about Gender Studies in any Arab university, we would like to know the major subjects that are

going to be taught, whether we are going to copy the western pattern, which is plausible – I do not intend to make an East/West dichotomy – but I think it should have different patterns in Arab universities.

Dr. Noha raised the issue of finding a consensual language that we agree upon and that we can use in the process of knowledge accumulation. I would like to mention here also that some of the challenges we have focused on do exist in the Arab countries in various degrees of importance. Almost all of what is available has been done on an individual basis most of the time, and we lack supporting bodies, although we have excellent institutions such as Birzeit's Institute of Women's Studies, one of the best in the Arab world.

Another question that Dr. Noha has raised and that I think is quite important is how we perform self-knowledge, social knowledge of society, and political self-knowledge? Another relevant subject would be how to deal with taboo issues. And finally, the gender approach that is the core of the relations of power in society, whether it is men/women relations or any other type of relation of power, rich/poor, etc. And I would like to recall the intersectionality issue that I brought up along with Naje Al-Ali and Dima Dabbous in the 2012 conference. When we are talking about gender we do not think about women alone, but its implications are much more far reaching; we are talking about the relations of power dealing with class, touching all groups in society. So, we have to take this intersectionality, deduced from your presentations, into consideration.

**Ms. Muzdha Mohammad:** Good morning, please allow me to clarify some issues about Kurdistan, as Dr. Nahla talked about Iraq in general.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Dr. Suad drew my attention to an important issue, that each participant introduce himself/ herself.

**Ms. Muzdha Mohammad:** I am Muzdha Mohammad, Head of the Social Work Department, Faculty of Arts at Salaheddine University, Erbil. I have not received my Ph.D. yet, but it is on the way, inshallah. Please allow me to talk a little bit about Kurdistan, because the previous presentations did not refer to it, and please excuse my poor Arabic but I learned it out of a personal effort.

First, I do agree with Dr. Nahla that the conditions were very difficult all over Iraq. After the uprising of 1991, most of us fled Iraq, the bombardments, the destruction, the genocide, the tragedy of al-Anfal, and the chemical war. Then there was the post-1991 period, of self-autonomy and the ensuing civil war. All of these factors contributed to the undermining of our standards of education, in addition to targeting women who were killed on their way to college. The international organizations that came to support women were accused of inciting them to prostitution. Until 1999, university professors were not getting paid regularly on a monthly basis; we received a certain amount of money every three months, so we had to sell some household articles to survive. After 1996, things started to settle down; we opened up to the world; we had internet, satellite, and foreign companies started to establish themselves. There was a will to move on; substantial development

was felt in all sectors, including universities; and we could say that by now we have reached quite a high level of education.

In addition to our public universities there are private, multilingual universities: French universities, British universities, American universities, a Lebanese-French university etc. We benefit from a cultural diversity due to the expertise of international professors in addition to Arab and Kurd professors. All this has paved the way for a great leap in the field of gender studies, that have become a sort of trendy fashion as Dr. Nahla said. So professors joined academic fellowships and missions and returned with new ideas. We do not have a Department of Feminist Studies, but recently we established a research center for Feminist Studies. There are professors in the Department of Sociology specializing in gender studies. We always try to participate in workshops and sessions held on gender issues; research is flourishing and we have received many books on the topic. International book fairs are on the rise, especially Egyptian, Lebanese, and Jordanian.

Unfortunately, the appointment of staff at universities depends on their political parties' affiliation. For instance, the president of the university and the majority of the staff belong to the same party. To become Head of the Department, I had to overcome many obstacles: young age, lack of political affiliation, unavailability of another candidate in the Department, so we are struggling with them.

As for legislation, our laws are somehow better than the central ones. Our MPs attempted to make some changes regarding honor crimes, for instance. In some other regions honor killings are given a light sentence, whereas in Kurdistan it is considered a premeditated act. So the rate of crimes of honor has decreased, but the other side of the coin is that we have an increase in the rate of women burning themselves. Are these really acts of suicide, or are these deaths by burning a cover-up for crimes of honor?

Another topic of interest is female genital mutilation which is considered an act of violence against women, but it is still a widespread practice in our rural areas, and many studies and workshops are trying to address this issue. We are also concerned with women's employment. Although the number of women who are joining the labor force is on the rise, women are performing low status jobs and it is really hard for them to reach high posts because of the prevailing patriarchal mentality.

Another matter of preoccupation for us is marriage. First of all, the legal age for marriage was raised to 16 years, on condition of securing the guardian's consent. This is a good development knowing that prior to this law, girls used to be married at the age of 9. But the drawback of this new situation, especially in rural areas, is that since courts are not authorizing marriages before 16 years, clerics give their approval to perform marriages with 12-year old girls, but then there is a waiting period of a few years until the marriage is registered. If a marriage is registered at the age of 18 for instance, the children who are born during these 6 years are deprived of their nationality and civic rights.

A second issue related to marriage is polygamy. The Parliament has limited the number of marriages to one, unless the husband secures the approval of the first wife

in court and leaves a certain sum of money for her as a guarantee. Polygamous men are stuck now with the prerequisite of the first wife's consent, and as we are in Erbil, which falls under the central government's legislation, they leave Erbil and go 90 km to Kirkuk and take a second wife.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** I have a special request from all participants, please stick to the main purpose of this roundtable in your discussions which is sharing information about Gender Studies and particularly what can be done in this field in order to move on, what priorities to consider, especially that the situation in most Arab countries is not a favorable one. I can talk for an hour about the University of Cairo and our problems there, and believe me they are many, but this is not the issue. For example, off the top of my head, in this period of constitutional amendments and the modification of laws in all Arab countries, is it the right time to create a Gender Studies Program in the Faculties of Law, for instance? The point is that I would like us to emphasize the issue of Gender Studies. We have only 45 minutes left, and we are all in the same boat, as they say. It will be your turn, then Dr. Rend, then Dr. Moushira, Fatima, Lilia, and Dr. Nahawand.

**Dr. Liqaa Mussa:** Good morning, Dr. Liqaa Mussa, University of Baghdad. I do want to stick to the guidelines regarding the topics to be discussed, i.e., the relevance of Gender Studies in the Arab world, and especially in Iraq. I just have an objection concerning Dr. Nahla's presentation, because it was irrelevant, it depicted quite a pessimistic situation concerning Iraqi universities, so that I felt as if I had graduated from a dumpsite, not a college.

Iraqi universities are well-known for their concern with methodology. Our eminent professors graduated from prestigious European universities, and their focus on methodology is almost obsessional. When discussing M.A. or Ph.D. theses, especially M.A. thesis, we are very keen that our students adopt the proper methodology.

Having said that, violence has led to sectarian conflicts that made their way into the universities too, but this is no reason to believe rumors. I am sorry to tell you that the Sunni-Shiite janitor anecdote is no more than gossip, and does not reflect any institutional politics. I do not deny that there is such segregation, but not as widespread as depicted by Dr. Nahla. I do not want to discuss the matter any further, but I am sure that what is happening in Iraq is happening in other parts of the Arab world, because socially speaking, Arab countries are almost all alike, and we have noticed that from previous presentations.

As my colleagues have already said, Gender studies has progressed considerably. Professors have shown an increasing interest in the topic that is growing in importance, hence the rise in a number of relevant studies and conferences dealing with women's status and women-related stereotypes.

The most common topics are those concerning violence against women. After having consulted the available data in many studies, I found that most of the violent incidents were related to the rise of armed violence that emerged after the American invasion. I went through many studies that treated issues such as girls' kidnapping



and women's suicide. I also went through studies that discussed the wave of violence that targeted hundreds of women who were killed by armed extremist groups for various political reasons or for some *fatwas* coming from religious fanatic groups. The systematic killing of female employees, journalists, politicians, translators, freelancers, even politicians' wives or daughters, and the assassinations that were caused by religious fanaticism that killed 140 women in Basra, 150 women in Diyala, were analyzed in many studies. According to studies conducted between 2003 and 2006 about the assassination of academic women, 5 percent of them have been killed. We have studies on crimes of honor in Kurdistan and the related practices such as burning the victim, or throwing her from the top of the building, and the seemingly unintended 'run over' accidents. So the transitional period was mostly characterized by violence and this is the reason why most of the studies concentrated on this issue.

Other studies focused on the increasing number of widows in Iraq, their number and the repercussion of this tragic human cost on the country. The increasing number of widows in Iraq constitutes one of the most important consequences of war.

Some other studies have dealt with the issue of legal discrimination vis-à-vis women in the personal status law and in criminal laws. Other studies were commissioned by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and jointly assigned to Iraqi professors and to foreign professors who had to handle the sensitive question of the budget allocated to gender issues. This is actually the most widely debated topic inside the Iraqi government, as well as its most serious object of concern.

Other topics of interest are unmarried women and the tremendous increase in divorce rates over the last years where it has become a real social problem. Recently, the Ministry of Women's Affairs organized an international conference on the divorce issue. So, there is no doubt about the relevance of such studies, knowing the prevailing conditions in Iraq and the related problems we are suffering from.

As far as the challenges that researchers face, I think the most important ones are poor training skills, as well as researchers adopting extraneous points of view so that studies seem to be cut off from reality, hence less relevant.

Also, concepts related to gender and feminism are still ambiguous, and constitute a source of confusion to the academic circles, making the studies of these issues problematic.

Another challenge we are facing is related to statistical research that requires the awareness and the cooperation of various governmental authorities, but we are faced sometimes with top-heavy bureaucracy.

I would like to talk now about the conflicting points of view regarding gender issues and feminist studies, and the ensuing division that is taking place in the mindset of the academic elite. It is common knowledge that it is the middle class that constitutes the grassroots of society. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the elite was mostly constituted of the liberal and secular middle class, but this is no more the case in Iraq, and

even everywhere else in the Arab world. Our new middle class has basically Islamic overtones. This segment of the population is increasing in number so that ignoring it and sticking to the secular discourse will simply create a huge gap. This struggle has reached the Iraqi universities and has affected the academic discourse.

The ideological conflict that was mentioned in previous presentations is there; academics are not sharing knowledge and are not concerned with offering society the best they can give; each person is sticking to his/her own convictions, accusing the other of ignorance.

A last point that I would like to make, please, is the split in the academic discourse: so we have a religious fanatic trend, and a consilient, participatory one, that represents Islamic feminism whose guides are Mohammad Abdo and Qasim Amin. This split is part of our academic life, and each professor has his/her own opinion. Personally, I am a follower of the participatory approach. I might disagree with a colleague, but this does not mean that I think he/she is wrong or ignorant since our ultimate goal is to bring about change, and change does not come with conflictual attitudes but with consultation and sharing.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** I will ask all participants to limit themselves to one minute, because it is really unfair for the rest of us. I know that the Iraqi participants are the most important group, but we need to listen to other points of view in order to have a real debate. We need to have a discussion, so please go ahead.

**Dr. Fahima Rzaij:** Thank you a lot. I am Dr. Fahima Rzaij, professor of Forensic Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Baghdad University. I want to thank all the participants for their valuable presentations, Dr. Nahla was very pertinent in some places, and somehow dramatic in others. Concerning methodology, as Dr. Liqaa has said in her presentation, we are determined in the Department of Sociology, even in other departments to stress methodology. We do not approve any research, M.A. thesis or Ph.D. thesis, unless it complies with all the requirements.

As for including gender studies in our curricula, we offer one course on Women's Sociology in our department. Concerning the expansion of the already existing centers and universities offering sociology courses, social service courses and gender studies, as well as the opening of new institutions, we do encounter many difficulties in this respect. This year, we tried to open a Faculty of Sociology, dividing it into departments of gender studies, women's studies, and so on, but we faced many difficulties and we did not get a final approval.

Another important issue that was raised by Dr. Nahla is the economic embargo Iraq has faced, and that affected all of us. I just want to tell her that as professors we have a strong will; we all have to produce and to study; we have our research and our working hours.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Thank you.

**Dr. Fahima Rzaij:** I just have another point to add in reply to Dr. Noha. She brought

up the issue of the girl who saw her mother cheating on her father and said that we were in need of more studies in this field. My answer to her is that these issues are still considered taboo in our societies. For instance, when I hold a seminar that deals with incest, or trafficking in women, or transsexuality, or gays and lesbians, I am told: you are being bold here, Fahima, this brings us back to the issue of the professor's preconceived ideas, so imagine what the case will be in society in general. Thank you.

**Mrs. Rend al-Rahim:** Thank you for inviting me. I am Rend al-Rahim, I am the executive director of the Iraq Foundation. We have projects in Iraq, many of which are related to women's conditions. I have met colleagues here with whom I have collaborated for years. I am very pleased to listen to presentations on the Lebanese situation followed by those dealing with the Iraqi situation. The political situation and the power relations prevailing in Iraq are quite similar to those prevailing in Lebanon, as far as religious communities are concerned, sectarianism, etc., which is a good thing.

I have some remarks and I am more pessimistic than Dr. Nahla for two reasons. First, gender studies in Iraq are persona non grata; they are considered as a luxury, and if it were not for the lobbying of international bodies and organizations we would not have a Ministry of Women's Affairs, and the bill on quotas in parliament would not have passed. And this is not the result of the Iraqi statesmen's efforts, but because it is trendy, because the UN, ESCWA, and UNIFEM exerted pressure in this regard. So do not expect political support from the ruling political class; we are working against the grain.

Second, Dr. Nahla, you forgot to mention that our primary and secondary education standards are very weak. So what about the qualifications and the eligibility of those graduating students who are joining colleges and universities? Regardless of the quality of the professors, how are they going to have a good academic standing as long as the base is so full of lacunae?

Another issue I would like to discuss has to do with the mindset. You have to talk about the mindset and structural mindset problems. Academic missions abroad were resumed, but how many for humanities and social sciences as opposed to the scientifically-oriented missions? Even our prime minister has declared that our missions are going to be scientifically-oriented; we shall have graduates in medicine, engineering, and science, and so on. Not once have humanities been mentioned, although the humanities are part of the social fabric, particularly in our societies because it is the humanities that pave the way to tolerance, inclusiveness, etc., not sciences. I am speaking about Iraq. It is set that all the missions are going to target scientific fields of study and students majoring in them.

NGOs, we have done a lot of studies concerning women, gender-based violence, etc., but as we do not confine ourselves to women's issues. So, I have come to discover that we were wrong about choosing our researchers: the quantitative data collection is good, but the qualitative analysis is nil. I am neither an academic nor a researcher, so when I receive a number of figures and pile charts in lieu of the study I have

asked for, I always have to go back to the researcher and ask him/her to translate the figures and the pie charts into social facts, in order for me to have an insight into society and reality, and also rise beyond that to creating certain precepts.

Thank you.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** This is an important issue, because when we talk about gender studies, we are talking in fact about the problems of social sciences and humanities in the Arab world, and it is a real problem that needs to be understood and addressed properly. I just want to add that the social sciences are in big trouble worldwide. There is an unusual global trend to shut down centers of social studies or social science departments. Recently, very reputable departments of philosophy have been shut down in England. It is true that this is a problem in the Arab world, but in fact it is part of a global trend, and it is something that has to do with some international political trends that value technocrats specializing in engineering and so on, and reduce the space allocated to social sciences, political science, and the humanities, which is the domain of people who think and those who are trying to bring change to society. So I think that we are being targeted. Please, go ahead Dr. Moushira.

**Dr. Moushira Khattab:** Thank you. Good morning everybody. I am Moushira Khattab from Egypt. I would like to thank Dr. Nahla as well as Dr. Noha for their wonderful presentations. Before I start my presentation, I would like to join Mrs. Rend al-Rahim in approving every word she has said, which is true for all Arab countries, not only for Iraq. The Iraq Foundation has done a great job, and it is a pity that she was given just two minutes; we would have liked to hear more about their achievements. Concerning us, as we are part of a roundtable, I think that the choice of participants is not fortuitous, so we are part of a brainstorming group here; rather than discussing our achievements, we should be trying to resolve the problems that face us, and they are many.

Concerning the prevalence of the scientific sections, I think that we are being hypersensitive about the issue. And what you were saying about Iraq is also true for Egypt. What has taken place in Iraq was a prelude to all what is happening all over the Arab world.

What you were saying about the deterioration of student-professor relationships is also true for us, and the same applies to the decline in the standards of education. So it is no use pretending that we're super-duper, and that we're fine. On the contrary, it is counterproductive to pretend that everything is fine, and praise the achievements in the Arab world where women's conditions are so miserable. Iraq did not emerge with the Iraqi war; Iraq is a very prestigious country, one of the most advanced in the Arab world, everybody knows Iraq. All of us are going through exceptional circumstances that have driven us to the abyss. We have made some progress in the democratization process, but as far as the quality of education is concerned, or allocations for education, or human development, we are definitely at the bottom of the scale.

I am going to answer now the three questions that were raised. First and foremost, where are we going to put women's studies? I do not agree to merge them with

the social sciences, because this is the reason of their decline. We are talking about laws, about rights; it is not that we are drafting new laws here, but we are dealing with human rights. Our biggest achievement is that we are talking today about legal obligations that are incumbent on the state. I am not begging because I am a weak woman, no. I am a citizen who is supposed to have the same rights as any other citizen. So we should be lobbying to include these studies in the Law Department and avoid the social sciences, because if I am going to include women in the social sections, I should include men too, and all the members of the family.

As far as the terminology is concerned, it differs too.

Also, I endorse what Mrs. Rend has said about data; we do have a problem with data. Egypt has grabbed the greatest number of studies, but if you are looking for disaggregated data revealing areas of discrimination you will not be able to find any. If you are advising any decision-maker where to invest money, you will not be able to do so. In Egypt we are talking about quite an important issue, that is the lack of targeting, so inspite of all this quantity of studies, we do not know where to act.

I totally agree with you that gender is the core of power relations governing society. And what Dr. Noha said about taboos is very important. We have to break the shell and say that women are human beings who have feelings, weaknesses, and strengths that we are not ashamed of. So if I were to give in and accept the prevailing social pattern, I will not do anything, I will not improve, so I have to break that pattern and move forward. As for the quality of education, we do not have much, so we should take the latest of what is done in Women's Studies from other centers in foreign developed countries.

As for methodology, I agree with you, we think of it as a formality more than anything else. Even if we talk about system analysis methodology or communication methodology, in fact, we do not care about methodology in our way of thinking, in our analysis, in the data collection, it is a mere formality for securing the approval of the thesis.

So, I repeat that we should be focusing on our defects. My time is up, thank you.

**Dr. Fatima Sbeiti Kassem:** I am Fatima Sbeiti Kassem, former Director of ESCWA's Center for Women and I am honored to have established it. I am going to start talking about the concepts as you have started with that, Dr. Hoda. Since 1995, while preparing for the Beijing Conference on Women, and even before that, we had suffered from the terminology issue. This challenge is not specific to Arabic, it is a controversial issue in French and in Spanish too, because in Spanish for instance, one of the meanings of género is a material. We held a workshop on that, discussing this terminology issue until 5 a.m., with linguistic specialists, sociologists, political scientists, and experts (although I concede that there is nothing called an expert on men's and women's issues). So we coined the term *annaw' al-ijtima'i* which is being used now. But we discovered that the public did not adopt it, because we had to explain and repeat what exactly *annaw' al-ijtima'i* is, even though it has been approved by the authorities in New York, and started to be used in studies and research. Personally, I do not use it in my research terms, just as I do not use *al-*

*jinsaniyya* (sexuality), or *al-gender* (gender), because it reminds me of the Lebanese *moujaddara* (a Lebanese dish with lentils and rice), so I use instead *al-fouroukat ma bayn al-jinsayn* (the differences between the sexes), and '*alakat al-qiwa bayn al-mar'a wal rajul* (power relations between men and women), because when you are talking about gender you are not just talking about women, you are talking about both men and women, and here we go back to the basic concepts.

Having said that, I move on to another issue, what do we expect from Women's Studies? We started in the early 2000s preparing a database concerning all Centers for Women's Studies, and the courses that they offered, based on what was available at Birzeit University's Institute of Women's Studies, and at LAU's Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, as well as at The Center for Women's Studies, University of Jordan, and then the project stopped. I think that one of the recommendations that we can come up with is to reactivate the project.

I am affiliated with the Institute for Research on Women, Gender and Sexuality at Columbia University. It is an institute similar to LAU's IWSAW, where we can start with an undergraduate curriculum, and then build on it. Also, I personally prefer the gender mainstreaming approach because I can be wearing the UN's hat, but even at the UN we have found a lot of difficulties in adopting this approach in our studies, although these were the Secretary General's recommendations to all organizations, and particularly to universities.

Dr. Hoda's question as to the place where gender studies should be located is quite relevant. As for the gender mainstreaming approach, it could be adopted on a temporary basis as Dr. Noha has suggested. The thing we did for the national machineries for women, and for the quotas could be done also for gender mainstreaming; however, without giving other alternatives, so that they should not be mutually exclusive, always keeping in mind the global picture.

The third issue I would like to raise is that of the database. While studying gender disaggregated data, we find that the majority of female university students are mostly oriented towards humanities and social sciences. But we are looking for diversity, so the directives recommend women's presence in fields such as sciences, architecture, business administration, and not only social sciences. I was surprised that some participants asked for reorienting them towards social sciences. I highly approve of what Dr. Noha has said about self-knowledge, because the researcher is going to be definitely subjective, no matter how hard he/she tries to be objective in his/her studies. For instance, I have been accused of being anti-Islamic in my writings, whereas I was not talking about religion, rather, I was discussing religiousness.

I want to add a last thing about studies and research. Many studies are done in the field of gender studies. The whole UN is working on that, many countries too, but what would be an important thing to do is to collect all these studies, using all the modern means of communication, social media, and the virtual tools to foster the circulation of information, not only in universities, but also globally speaking. This is one of the most important things to do.

Please go ahead, Lilia.

**Dr. Lilia Labidi:** Sincerely, it is very interesting to hold this session. Sorry, I said that I was going to speak in French. Well, as you know it is a very, very important moment, and I have a feeling that we are not measuring the full impact of this historic moment on our generation. We should be keeping in mind that this is the most dramatic moment of our lives. Because when we look at the Arab world, it does not exist anymore, and we do not know what would become of the Arab world tomorrow; if Iraq will remain the Iraq we know; if Syria will be the Syria we know, if Lebanon; if Libya will remain the Libya we know. So this is a crucial historic moment. And when I am in Tunisia or in any other Arab country, I have the impression that our institutions are exactly in the same condition as that of our states, and that our universities, and even us, are no better. And when I listen to Dr. Noha, I tell myself this is fantastic to be able to talk about it now.

Why am I saying so? I am saying so, because we are faced with such a denigration of the person, such a lack of respect for individual thought that it becomes impossible for us to conceive a vision concerning our region. Look, for instance, do we just know what we are going to have for lunch? This is very hard for us.

I'll just make one remark that can be deduced from our conference, since all of us are concerned and responsible at the same time. There is a discontinuity in the debate regarding the level of intervention as well as the sources, which makes the production of knowledge very difficult, and this is due to the fact that we do not respect individual thought. We do not support the person who is producing this knowledge; we do not help him/her, or rescue him/her, or protect him/her. Protecting these persons is incumbent on our institutions, and if they fail to do so, these persons are bound to leave and go abroad. And that is what is happening; we have a lot of capable people who are leaving, including me; when I feel tired I think of leaving. There is something that is worrying me and that I want to share with you: knowledge is exactly like any other commodity, like oil, like phosphate, like the electronic devices that are produced by our young people that are so much sought after in Europe and the States. So, what is happening? We are participating in the brain drain that is taking place in our region. Our countries are being drained systematically at all levels, all disciplines. Look at me: when I publish in French, nobody reads, when I publish in Arabic, nobody reads, so I say to myself, I am going to publish in English, nobody reads, even in English, nobody reads. We are being marginalized, even when we produce in English.

So what are we doing? As intellectuals, we constitute a tiny minority which is contributing to the devaluing of our universities. We are 22 Arab countries, but how many of our universities are in the top 50 universities ranking worldwide? Not even one. This is really something.

I am going to end my presentation discussing the most serious issue. It is not over yet. Do you know what is the most disastrous thing? It is that wealthy Arab people are subsidizing programs of Arab Culture and Arab Studies in the United States, instead of financing our studies, so we are left to beg from foreign institutions. This is something unprecedented. Instead of investing in our universities and providing

our students with the means, not me, I am an activist who is financing the university out of her salary – but I want my students to avoid all the sufferings that we went through if we want to help them, if we want to have a generation of producers. So these wealthy businessmen, kings or others, do they have any ethics? By financing these programs they are promoting western universities at our expense.

Nowadays, knowledge is a commodity, and I admire the Asian people for having understood that. As I said, knowledge is a commodity like any other commodity, like oil, like oranges, like olive oil. But what is our position regarding this issue? All my life I have been doing gender studies, but there is such a discontinuity in our discourse, and this is so frustrating. So it is good to be discussing the issue, but it is not enough to discuss it behind closed doors in an isolated manner; we should be doing this in the West, or even elsewhere. I think it is time for us to change direction because there are so many resources in the Arab world, so much work that is being done here, and if we are saying that we are the bottom of the class that means this is our fault, because we are not using our brains. And what Dr. Noha has just said is fantastic, as fantastic as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Thank you a lot.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** Of course thank you for speaking frankly. Dr. Fadia, please go ahead.

**Dr. Fadia Hoteit:** Professor at the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University, member of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers – *Bahithat*. It is very difficult to add anything after what Lilia has said in such an expressive and true manner. It was very, very nice, and I totally agree with her. We do not have people who think, we just have machines, and this is our biggest problem. We are so full of ourselves when we think, but after all who are we to think? As Dr. Hoda has previously said, we as *Bahithat* have tried to introduce Gender Studies at the Lebanese University, and this was no easy task to do at the public university. We faced many obstacles. So we decided to incorporate it into the curricula, so that each professor is held responsible for introducing the concept into his class, as my colleague Dr. Noha has previously said.

Also, I would like to build on what my colleague Dr. Noha said and I think that is quite important: to what extent are we choosing our topics, how genuine and relevant they are, or is it a mere trend that we are following, as was said in previous presentations? Sometimes we are just following a trend instead of choosing topics of interest, so that doing a study becomes a mere formality. We are not that enthusiastic about it because the topic is not related to our culture. Therefore, many of the gender-based studies are void and meaningless. I did a study published by *Bahithat* on the issue of content which leads us to the following conclusion: when focusing on methodology studies it is a mere formality, because we are not concerned with knowledge here; we are just doing research for the sake of research.

I think that gender studies and women's studies are two different things, so trying to incorporate them in the same center is not a good idea. Sometimes, connecting them so closely is not in favor of the gender studies program, because male students or professors might feel excluded when we are tackling women's studies. So we have



to be careful in a center of gender studies to offer topics that are not necessarily or primarily or uniquely related to women's issues, in order to promote them in our universities. Also, I think that it is a great idea that the center for Women's Studies is independent from the various faculties, as is the case with IWSAW. As Dr. Hoda said before, this would be a good thing to do, on condition that it does not just focus on Women's Studies, but also encompasses other topics such as social classes, social standards, poverty, and wealth.

Another suggestion would be to offer an interdisciplinary Master's Degree which is a modern trend of doing research, independently from the Faculty of Social Sciences and that of Education. I also suggest that we open up a little; the center should be multinational, or Arab- oriented, not just Iraqi or Egyptian or Lebanese, so we benefit from the expertise of various eminent scholars. And with the advent of the new technologies and means of communication, such as the digital media, internet, and skype, we are able to communicate and work more easily.

I would also like to mention that I recently attended a conference at the Lebanese University titled: Numérique et Humanité (Mankind and the Digital Era). It tackled the issue of digital culture becoming so intertwined with Humanities that the researcher is no more the only person in charge; the digital designer is also an essential part of the research, and the engineer who develops computer programs too. This should give us an idea about the new direction the Humanities are heading, following a new paradigm, off the beaten track.

**Dr. Nahawand al-Kadiri:** I am a professor at the Faculty of Media at the Lebanese University and a member of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers – *Bahithat*. I am sorry I am late; I missed my colleagues' presentations, and maybe I have no right to take part in the debate. My colleague Fatima asked me to talk a little bit about *Bahithat*, but I will be talking about *Bahithat* at the end, not at the expense of my time.

I would like to present here a concise summary of my experience. As a member of *Bahithat*, I worked on a study in collaboration with Suad Harb about female and male broadcasters at Télé-Liban entitled 'Female and Male Broadcasters: Research into Roles and Positions.' We did not mention that we have adopted a gender-based approach in that study for fear of producing shock. I also contributed with *Bahithat* in issuing a yearly collection of books. Besides I worked on a study entitled, 'Towards Empowering Women in Media to Achieve Equity between Men and Women Citizens: "An analysis of a sample of 'Women and Media' and 'Women and Law' studies in Lebanon 1995-2007' that was implemented by the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development. I found this study very interesting, even more interesting than gender studies. In fact, we need such types of efficient research in the Arab world, because it reveals many of the weaknesses that exist in the field, in addition to paving the way for further studies. My suggestion here would be to give studies a second analytical reading, in order for us to address any eventual weakness, and to choose the direction to be taken.

So, my teaching experience, my contacts with the students, promoting the gender-based approach, all these elements combined have boiled down to the following.

First, a distinction should be made between the activist and the researcher. We have a tendency in the Arab world, especially when it comes to associations and organizations concerned with women and gender issues to confuse the two, so that activists might be commissioned to do studies. In fact, the researcher has his/her own role, questioning the various concepts, and coming up with conclusions, so that the activist reacts accordingly until it is the turn of the media to transform it into a public issue. We have missing elements in this context that need to be examined.

Another point I would like to raise is that we should differentiate between method and methodology. Concerning the approach, we might use the descriptive method or the statistical method, but when it comes to methodology, it is the whole. In methodology we have the method; we have the hypothesis, the approaches, and the coherence linking all these elements. And here we reach the bottom point: studies produced by the universities in the Arab World. As far as the form is concerned everything looks fine, the hypothesis is clearly defined and so on. But when we start looking into more details, such as the way these hypotheses are put together, the extent that these hypotheses are aligned with the method, with the study tools, and efficiency in boosting the dynamics of the study, the end result that we are confronted with is sterility. People think that studying abroad is enough, or that doing a study is fine as long as its form is fine, but this is not true; we need working brains, and this is a severe matter.

A third issue I would like to talk about, as did earlier my colleague Fadia, is that we can no longer look at the social sciences from a unilateral approach. So this is the reason why the LMD system (Licence, Master's, and Doctorate) was coined, the reason why the interdisciplinary approach is sought after, and why the diversification of approaches and the intertwining disciplinary concepts are so important.

So we come here to the importance of the gender-based approach. I always tell my students that the gender-based approach is a plus to any study and constitutes its main dynamics. Therefore, we should be promoting the use of the gender-based approach to any topic, to poverty, or... or... and not just confining it to women's issues, as it becomes meaningless. I had the opportunity of assessing many studies that had gender as a main heading. But they turn out to be quantitative studies talking about women, so where is gender? These gender studies become meaningless if they are confined to women; they become meaningless if they are merely quantitative. Gender should not be associated with numbers and quantities: the number of women MPs doesn't tell us anything. Studies are meaningless if they are merely descriptive, or if they are out of context, because it is only when figures are analyzed in their context that we can grasp their full meaning. For instance, we keep talking about women in the labor market, and then we end our discussion on a negative note. For instance, and I am giving here an example from Lebanon, we do not pay attention to the changes in mentalities that is occurring in our society, as far as females' employment is concerned. Nowadays, many young Lebanese girls are leaving their home country to join other expatriates in the Gulf States or in other foreign countries for work. This phenomenon of parents accepting their daughters going abroad and living on their own, is quite a significant shift in mentalities, and is worth mentioning, not just as figures and statistics.

Let me say one last thing about gender, please. Gender is a complex concept that has to do with many issues, such as inequality, security issues, and changes that are happening all over the world. We are not paying enough attention to the transformation occurring in the public sphere, to the borders that used to separate the private sphere from the public sphere that are shifting now. With modern technology invading our homes and families, these borders are being redefined; there is no private sphere anymore, since women and children are now exposed to the public sphere. So, everything is on the move now, and this situation of constant change hates immobility, descriptive modes, figures and numbers. Thank you, and sorry for talking too much.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** I would like to thank all participants, and I really would have liked to have more time. I am going to conclude this session with some closing remarks.

First of all, the problems that we face while establishing new programs of Gender Studies need always to be considered in their regional or international context, whether we are talking about trends in doing studies, or sources of funding that limit academics' scope of action, orienting them in a specific direction. These are universal complaints that are not specific at all to Arab universities. The difference between the two situations is that, in our case, we would have liked to benefit from more local or regional sources of funding.

The second issue I would like to talk about concerns the challenges facing the production of knowledge in the field of Women's Studies. Another matter of importance would be what Dr. Lilia has mentioned when knowledge becomes any other commodity, a good deal of it is constantly changing. So whenever we are talking about a booming production of knowledge in the Arab world, there should be progress happening somewhere. Also, as we have tensions and conflicts in politics, the same is true for the production of knowledge, and this is what we call the geopolitics in the production of knowledge. Many related issues are quite important too, such as who is producing knowledge, for whom knowledge is being produced, and the purpose of this production. These are very important questions when it comes to gender studies, because they are first and foremost related to individual power relations, the countries' power relations, and power relations among conflicting groups.

As for the location, i.e., the appropriate place to establish a program of gender studies, some of us were in favor of the Faculty of Law. Dr. Fadia said that the center should be an Arab-oriented one, open to other cultures, and this is a very important issue, hence we would be promoting the Arabic language, as well as an endogenous production of knowledge, but of course without isolating ourselves from the rest of the world, as we are very much in need to benefit from the works that are being done in the field at the international level. So the location issue is an important one, and we find that in some places things are easier to achieve than in others. In western countries, the best departments to offer Gender Studies are the Departments of Foreign Languages and Literature and those of Social Sciences. As far as Arab universities are concerned, and here I will be talking about Egypt, we do not have

a proper program of Gender Studies, we just have curricula. The greatest interest in gender comes from the Department of English Language and Literature and the Department of French Language, probably because these departments are those that have the greatest exposure.

As for exchanging data, we need to have a circulation of research as Dr. Fatima has mentioned about data collection and the e-publishing process. I would like to draw your attention here to how The Women and Memory Forum is establishing a specialized library in Women's Studies and in Gender Studies that gathers all of what has been produced in Arabic in card catalogues, and my Iraqi colleagues know about it already. The idea behind it is to collect data and then to publish it. I also know that the Arab Women Organization has a similar project and they are actually working on it, but honestly speaking, I am not aware of the latest details.

One last thing before leaving, I would like to end the discussion on a controversial note. Dr. Nahawand wants a distinction to be made between the researcher and the activist. My suggestion is not to make such a distinction; we want the producer of knowledge to remain connected to his/her study, so this distinction needs to be reconsidered in the academic context.

**Dr. Nahawand al-Kadiri:** What I wanted to say, is that a researcher can complete both tasks: he/she can be a researcher and an activist, but an activist cannot be a researcher. I remember a long time ago, I collaborated with Noha and Fadia working on a study about NGOs dealing with gender issues in Lebanon, and Fatima was then in charge at ESCWA. At the end of the study, we discovered that those NGOs working on gender did not have a clue about the concept.

**Dr. Hoda Elsadda:** We agree to disagree.

Thank you all for your valuable input.