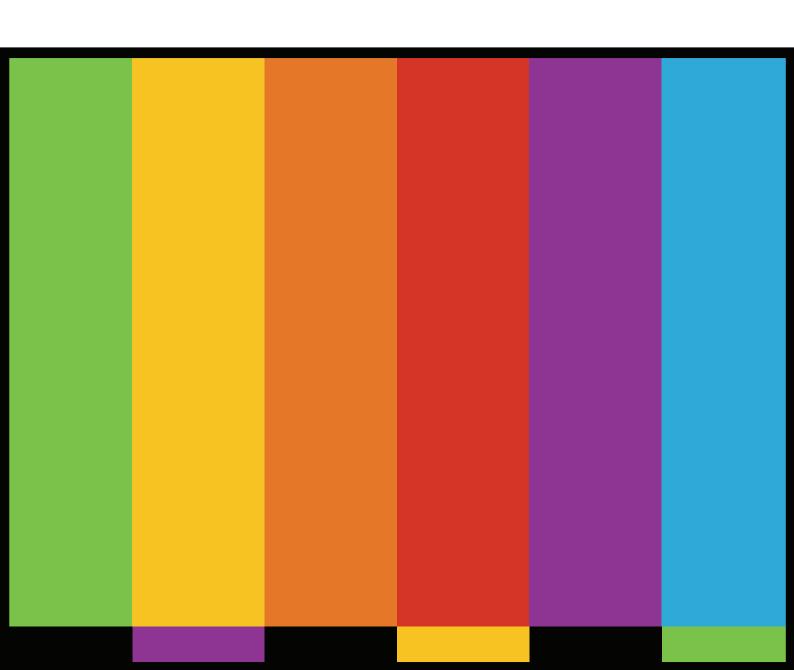# THE PERSISTENCE OF PATRIARCHY

OBSERVATION ABOUT THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN IRAQI KURDISH AND ARAB TV STATIONS

DR. AKEEL ABBAS & DASTAN JASIM
CENTER FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ, SULAIMANI

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Media reflects and represents social norms, including gendered norms. The way women are depicted in mainstream media tells us a lot about how society in general thinks, whether directly or indirectly, about women. These depictions are usually reflective of dominant ideas in society about women. In many societies, such depictions tend to revolve around patriarchal themes that de-emphasize the agency of women as full human beings. When not deprived of the opportunity to function as full human beings, women can achieve a lot in the public sphere, adding new value to society. In the interest of emphasizing traditional roles for women as home-makers and reproductive beings, though, this capacity is diminished.

Although these patriarchal themes emerge from mainstream social reality, the fact that the media takes them up and reproduces them helps naturalize such themes in society, shielding them from inquiry and criticism. This perpetuation of ideas as taken for granted, in turn, obscures their very historical nature, hence hindering efforts towards full and genuine equality between men and women.

In this report we analyzed six Iraqi TV channels, both Arab and Kurdish, to document their ways of depicting women, both in their programming and aired advertisements during their evening programs between 7:00 and 10:00 pm, from November 2018 to the end of September 2020. The report shows a number of common frameworks in which not only a great deal of misogyny becomes apparent but also where gendered representations of an ideal life are shown that greatly impact how people look at the role of women in everyday life. Especially when it comes to the topic of gendered violence, the leading narratives can be dangerous for affected women, which is why the report concludes that much awareness raising and grassroots activism is necessary to help challenge and eradicate such frameworks.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Public opinion and media frameworks reproduce each other. A lot of academic work has been done on the impact of mass media in recent decades to examine the media's manipulative patterns through the power of framing issues. Framing is defined as the process of "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution" (Entman, 1989, p. 5). Herbert Marcuse attributes to this capacity for framing the establishment of an all-embracing public opinion in the form of a "false consciousness" from which ordinary individuals cannot break free; rather, it pushes them into voluntary submission out of which "emerges a pattern of one-dimensional thought and behavior in which ideals, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 14). Marcuse warns against this type of public opinion, as it would make the discourse immune to objection and would reproduce an "authoritarian character of language" that "does not search for but establishes and imposes truth and falsehood," causing people, in the end, not to care about the justification of different statements but to accept anything that just "gets the job done" (Marcuse, 1964).

This uncritical process of opinion-making is a form of standardization of meaning that functions as a collective repertoire of patterns to categorize daily experiences for the members of society to help them make decisions without having to completely reevaluate these experiences each and every time, or, as Berger and Luckmann put it: "The emergence of historical reservoirs of meanings and institutions relieves the individual of the burden of solving problems of experience and action which appear in particular situations from scratch" (Berger & Luckmann, 1995, p. 14).

Yet, it is important to highlight here the fact that this standardization is not a result of a one-way and hierarchical process of meaning-making whereby the media actively produces the ideas and society passively consumes them. Indeed, the process is two-way in that ideas emerge through experience within society for the media to choose and reproduce for the public, helping to consolidate them by lending them the stamp of cultural authenticity. In their analysis of mass communication, Shoemaker and Reese argue that the media is positioned to show the "construction and reconstruction of reality" as reciprocal and dynamic, rather than linear and direct (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013, p. 6).

Still, the media, as an institutional operation, has a privileged position in selecting and consolidating certain ideas, rather than others, and circulating them in the social sphere. Here, "the propaganda model of media coverage" of Herman and Chomsky, for example, is relevant in its emphasis on how ownership structures in large media outlets influence the framing of issues and events (Chomsky, 1988). Others, such as Scheufele, through his model of framing analysis, focused on analyzing the frame itself and then looking at its effect on the public (Scheufele, 2003). Although the work of these analysts generally dealt with media outlets in Western contexts, the insights they developed are applicable elsewhere. The essence of these insights is that what underlies these various objects of analysis are the patterns of ideology that shape the substance of actors and channels of media, which can be defined as "symbolic mechanism[s] that serve as a cohesive and integrating force in society" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013, p. 70). Hence, framing can be seen as the last part of a long conceptual chain from social belief systems to the very specific way these belief systems are used in how news and other content is being presented in media.

Another approach is to analyze news through the myths they present and reproduce as facts. One conceptual and empirical contribution to this line of thinking is the work of Jack Lule on myths in journalism (Lule, 2001). Lule describes myths as a model for understanding the world as it is (Lule, 2001, p. 17). He argues that news more than merely spreads information about an event; indeed, it mainstreams myths by spreading a particular kind of story around the presented information, a common practice throughout human history. He defines myth as a "sacred, societal story that draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for human life" (Lule, 2001, p. 15). In this context, myths are deployed as the greater organizing narrative through which information is presented and received since this sort of narrative allows us to recognize myths as a "way a society expresses its prevailing ideals, ideologies, values, and beliefs" (Lule, 2001, Ibid.).

Given the significant amount of information that one has to deal with on a daily basis in the context of modern life, it is very challenging to understand information in a factual way

only. Myths help situate information into a larger context of human existence to show how something is relevant to one's own normative sense of reality. As part of maintaining this sense of reality, the many and different pieces of information are positioned to affirm, or threaten, the normative system of society that one belongs to. Another aspect of myths is the fact that they are reproduced repeatedly and therefore give events that are embedded in a specific point of time a greater meaning that can be traced to the past. This is why Lule argues that "like myth, news tells us not only what happened yesterday – but what has always happened" (Lule, 2001, p. 20). He elaborates seven master myths in a case study, in the form of articles published in the New York Times, one of which is the master myth of "The Good Mother." He examines this master myth to show that the Good Mother, as opposed to the Terrible Mother, is a nourishing, selfless, and loving character who projects the maternal qualities that make her a model for others, especially in the contexts of the many sufferings of the human race (Lule, 2001, p. 110f). She is, furthermore, characterized by a form of collective individualism whereby her single efforts are punctual acts of relief for various forms of injustice and pain, while leaving intact the flawed structure in a society that produces injustice and pain.

ANALYZING PATRIARCHAL BIAS IN IRAQI TV STATIONS

These ideological frames and myths are effective in producing a certain kind of knowledge to normalize the patriarchal assumptions in society that promote the inferior status of women as admired objects of desire by men and serving beings, best suited to taking care of the needs of others, naturally incapable of managing any serious independent tasks outside the caring functions. These patriarchal assumptions appear, to various degrees, in many knowledge-producing fields such as journalism. A media analysis, considering the perceptions and depictions of women, like the one these pages present, needs to carefully consider the socio-political raw material that feeds into the construction of the culture-specific patriarchal images and ideas about women and the ways in which they are diffused and normalized. This work of deconstruction is a necessary building-block towards any genuine form of women's liberation from the shackles of patriarchy. This awareness-raising is a basic tenet in the different strands of feminist theory. The question about the patriarchal construction of women can be seen in the general feminist discussion between equality and difference feminism where one side argues that true liberation lies in establishing the complete equality between men and women (Beauvoir, 1949), sometimes going so far as claiming deconstruction as the ultimate goal (Irigaray, 1977), while the other side focuses on re-evaluating what is female, highlighting the point that the core of patriarchal oppression is the devaluation of what is considered female (Young, 1991).

Feminist media research has looked at very different patterns of media representations of women, examining the social foundations of the images and the impressions that are (re)produced through these very patterns. With the second wave of feminist studies and the ongoing influence of poststructuralist theories, the demand has therefore not only been to portray women in a more realistic way, but also to question how media itself constitutes what a woman is (Carter, 2012). Other analyses pursued psychoanalytical and Freudian lines of thought as the basis for their media interrogations, as for example

in the case of Laura Mulvey who elaborated the paradox of the male representation of women in media (Mulvey, 1975).

While not adhering to a particular methodological approach, this report indirectly makes use of different insights from a variety of feminist and media studies to help investigate the patriarchal codes and images that Iraqi TV media, both Kurdish and Arab, promote through their programming that show women in secondary roles as unequal and dependent human beings in relation to men. While primarily focusing on TV programming during peak hours, the analysis also includes advertisements that aired during the programming, since advertisements are central vehicles for marketing all these unattainable ideals that supposedly can be a bit more attainable through the purchase of a specific product or service.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF IRAQI TV MEDIA

Historically speaking, TV, as a media outlet, used to be under the strict control of the state in Iraq. During most of the years of Ba'athist rule, 1968-2003, TV stations, ranging between four and six in total, reflected the pan-Arabist Ba'athist worldview, including the role of women in both private and public spheres. As the official promoters of a modern, pan-Arabist and socialist ideology, TV stations generally celebrated the idea of equality between men and women, naming women as the half of society that has to be empowered, and emphasizing a number of generally progressive laws and measures that the government made to help realize this promised equality. The carefully constructed images of happy and empowered Iraqi women that beamed from TV stations were meant to impress on the audience the significantly changed status of women under a revolutionary and progressive government bent on making history. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, this general portrayal of women was more an ideological construction imposed by an authoritarian regime than an actual reality for the majority of Iraqi women despite some general improvement in the lot of Iraqi women in the urban areas.

This ideological monopoly over the TV representation of women started to show serious signs of cracking in the 1990s, when the ruling regime was weakened as a result of international sanctions following the Kuwait invasion and consequent liberation in 1990-91. No longer able to fund its modernizing project, the government gradually abandoned the secular elements in its women-related programs and laws, giving in to traditional religious and tribal values whose emphasis was on women in the mothering and home-making roles. TV coverage mirrored the new government priorities. Another development weakening the central state's monopoly over meaning and indoctrination through mass media was its loss of control over the Kurdish region, mainly the three provinces of Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok, which acquired a quasi-independent status under Western protection. Freed from the autocratic grip of Baghdad, the two main parties in the region, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), set up four Kurdish-language TV stations, two for each. Two other minor parties, located in Sulaimani, had also a TV station each, bringing the total to six channels. Although party mouthpieces, these TV channels were less ideological in how they presented women, reflecting different local cultural perspectives on Kurdish women: generally conservative

and tribal in the KDP-controlled land, while more liberal and urban in the PUK-controlled land.

Still, these TV stations, while more realistic in their portrayals than those of the central government, situated women in larger political contexts related to the struggles of the Kurdish liberation movement that many Kurdish women were associated with in one way or another. In both Kurdish and Arab TV stations, women were presented not as autonomous beings, with particular and specific concerns and needs of their own, but gendered agents whose social legitimacy mainly depended on their ability to cohere into the bigger and defining causes of the nation and nationhood. By their very historical nature, these causes tended to have strong patriarchal systems of meaning that extol the "heroic" values of physical power, fighting ability, defeating opponents, and the projection of the world in binary, conflicting terms. Values such as process-oriented pursuits of results, having to deal silently with suffering and the consequences of loss and destruction, personal resiliency, peace-building, attention to nuances and multi-tasking, which reflected women's experiences, were less represented in these causes.

The demise of the Saddam regime in 2003 ended the control of the Iraqi authoritarian state over the airwaves. Dozens of TV stations were quickly established in the context of a still evolving media landscape that, unlike in the pre-2003 world, meant a wide-ranging competition for the attention of an eager and diverse audience. Within this competitive media market, TV stations, whether state-owned, commercial, or party mouthpiece, were more reflective of a heterogeneous and complex reality, echoing society's agreements and disagreements, regardless of the professional quality of their products. It is worth noting here that while TV stations of nearly all stripes differed significantly to the point of contradicting one another in covering politics, a realm traditionally associated with men, reflecting a deeply divided polity and people, they tended to agree on how to cover social issues. Such issues were perceived as the reserved domain of women, thus reproducing, in the process, common patriarchal values that form the very fabric of this society.

METHODOLOGY

In this report, the Center for Gender and Development Studies (CGDS) closely monitored a number of Iraqi-Arab and Iraqi-Kurdish TV channels to document their ways of depicting women, both in their TV programming and aired advertisements during peak hours, mostly the evening programs, between 7:00 and 10:00 pm, from November 2018 until the end of September 2020, a 22-month period. This summary is based on reporting the programming of the Kurdish and Arabic channels Al Sumaria, Al Sharqiya, Iraqaya, NRT, NRT2, NET TV, and Rudaw. This original plan had to be somewhat modified, as some channels dropped their online broadcasting service for periods of time during the COVID-19 pandemic, becoming no longer monitorable by our CGDS teams. These were replaced with other programming, broadcast online by other channels. Like the Kurdish channels, the monitoring targeted four Arab channels (Al Sumaria, Al Sharqiya, Al Iraqaya, and Al Rasheed). A couple of months into the monitoring operation, the last two discontinued their internet broadcasting, becoming no longer monitorable.

All channels, with the exception of the state-owned Al Iraqiya, are privately owned, with NRT and NRT2, however, having started out as private channels but then becoming party-affiliated when their founder, Shaswar Abdulwahid, entered politics and founded his New Generation Movement in 2017. Al Sumaria and Al Sharqiya are Baghdad-based, airing in Arabic, and the rest in Kurdish. Rudaw and NET TV are based in the Kurdish capital city of Erbil, whereas NRT and NRT2 are based in Sulaimani. The number of reports over time is the same, to ensure that the sample is representative of both Kurdish and Arab Iraqi TV. Furthermore, all of the selected channels are meant for a general audience, combining news and entertainment. Since all reported shows were downloaded as streams, technical difficulties with the stream of NRT and NRT2 led the research team to switch to NET TV. The number of reports on both sides, Arabic and Kurdish, is basically the same even though the channels have changed over time. Despite such changes, the thematic focus of the monitoring operation, with the aforementioned mix between news and entertainment, remained unchanged. The channels are also mainstream in terms of socio-political orientation, neither veering far to the left or to the right, hence representing the more common values among Iraq's different communities.

The analysis was conducted using RQDA, an open source tool for qualitative data analysis using the coding language R. The coded categories were adapted and discussed frequently among the members of this research team, following a grounded theory approach, where general theorized patterns in the data are deducted from the data itself rather than testing a theory on a data set. This approach allowed the researchers to deal with the topic in an open manner and to allow for consecutive research to build on these first exploratory findings.

OVERVIEW: CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

Discussed in more detail and analyzed below, we found the following gendered categories of portrayal. Overall, in both Arabic and Kurdish programming, we found 194 instances of gender stereotyping, with passive women depicted 147 times. Women were portrayed as "angels" (caring, kind, and selfless) 23 times, as "goddesses" (using power, including that of their aesthetic appeal, benevolently) 12 times, and as "bitches" (heartless, mean, and selfish) in 25 instances. Women were portrayed as evil (destructive and malicious by nature) 28 times, and hysterical 19 times. Women fought with each other 18 times. Women were portrayed as something other than individual beings 198 times. There were 40 negative portrayals of independent women, and 10 negative portrayals of successful women. As for physical appearance, there were 85 instances in which they were reduced to physical appearance, 32 instances in which judgement was made of their physical appearance, and an additional 20 references to the specific way a woman should be dressed. Unattainable beauty standards were put forth 51 times.

There was explicit sexist language 19 times, with 322 gender-specific jobs portrayed, and 238 gender-specific qualifications. Additionally, we found 192 references to gender-specific social acceptability. Female voices were featured 118 times, a male voice more than four times as often, at 498 times, and men spoke for women 61 times. Male politicians appeared 211 times; female politicians, with 15 appearances, appeared 14 times more seldom. Women appeared 73 times as solely relevant in their support of men's actions. Women were victims of violence 40 times, and the violence was justified as punishment 24 times; two female victims were shown to be at fault for the violence. Thirty-six times, a woman who had been victimized by a man was shown to be drawn to that man nevertheless.

PATRIARCHAL THEMES AND ASSUMPTIONS IN IRAQI TV STATIONS

Clearly, from the analysis of the recorded material, which covered about 600 hours of video material, normalized patriarchal assumptions inform the programming in Iraqi TV stations, both Kurdish and Arab, with little or no countering perspective. These assumptions are pervasive, as are the ideas and the images that grow out of them in the form of aired TV programming. Some of the overarching ideas and images in this regard include the following six themes.

1. **Disproportionate Male-Female Representation**

   One visual manifestation of these patriarchal assumptions is the lack of proportional representation of men and women in the TV programming that we examined. Men dominate by far, as TV presenters, guest analysts, or casual interviewees. Although there is no specific numerical pattern to detect in this visual dominance per channel or language, the consequence is obvious: men's views and perceptions about issues of coverage dominate. In the few examples where women were shown more numerically, the contexts were related solely to traditional women's experiences such as those of pregnancy, motherhood, and women's fashion. In the rare situations where women had more visual representation in the contexts of general, not gender-specific, experiences, these were related to loss and grieving. In one Kurdish-language show that featured a grieving family because of the death of two of its sons at the hands of criminal gangs, four women and two men were shown crying. The idea of a natural association of women with being emotional is not lost on the audience, who expect women to cry in reaction to many situations. Although crying is usually considered as a sign of weakness for men, the death of a loved person is one exception to this social rule. However, featuring twice the number of women crying compared to that of men fits more into the patriarchal assumption about the easy emotionality of women as evidence of their perceived natural weakness.

   The dominance of men's visual representation in the TV programming under study not only reflects editorial choices, whether conscious or unconscious, by program producers, but also, and more importantly, of unequal power arrangements in reality in favor of men who are much more represented than women in the different sectors of the economy and public sphere, hence resulting in more visibility in media programming. Nowhere does this appear more clearly than in the TV coverage of political events. Across the board, in Arab and Kurdish channels, men are featured much more frequently and in much greater numbers than are women, both in political talk shows and news bulletins. In many of the news items that discuss important issues of public interest, women are simply absent in the media coverage or generally presented as passive witnesses. For instance, during the Kurdish New Year's celebrations in Mosul on March 21, 2020, a ferry with a maximum load of 50 passengers, but carrying 200 passengers, capsized while crossing the Tigris River, causing the death of more than 100 people, many of whom were women. The tragic event received wide coverage, particularly as the capsizing seemed connected to corruption that prevented taking proper measures to avoid this tragedy. In covering this event and its aftermath, hardly any female politicians appeared on TV to discuss it. In one piece, 14 saddened female politicians were shown, with one of them crying, but none of their words were aired. Male politicians of various political stripes were featured

discussing what the government should do in response to this tragedy, while no female politician from Mosul itself had the opportunity to express her opinion about the event. For male politicians to have the opportunity to address a national audience is indicative of the symbiotic relationship between power and representation. Political decision-making in Iraq has been the exclusive monopoly of men as a fact of patriarchal power, and while TV coverage reflects this fact, the failure to question it or bring it to the attention of the audience only helps to normalize it, consequently lending legitimacy to an exploitative set of relations in society.

The fact that decision-making is the exclusive monopoly of men is normally reinforced by visual representations of this fact, even, and especially, in the official highest decision-making institutions of the land. A variety of scenes of the Kurdish Parliament usually presents the visual dominance of men. During the monitored period, one such scene shows a male president of the parliament with a small number of female parliamentarians who sit at the back of the chamber while male parliamentarians sit in the front and the middle of the chamber. The implication here is that female parliamentarians are shy, tending to stick together as a group who has collectively accepted its inferior position of being always "in the back." In Iraqi society, women customarily sit in the back of the car, in the "family section" at restaurants, and sequestered in the mosques. Because the Iraqi Constitution, written under US influence and voted on in 2005, stipulated that the parliament have at least 25% female representation, the minority of women that one sees in both the federal parliament in Baghdad and the regional parliament in Erbil (with a requirement of 30%), points to a foreign-imposed, isolated legal requirement, not an indigenous socio-political success for the cause of women. Although the 25% and 30% requirement for female parliamentary representation is a positive thing in itself, given the many hurdles in the way of women reaching political decision-making positions, the way it has been implemented has, in most cases, led to an indirect assertion of patriarchal values. In order to fulfill this mandatory quota, political parties, usually dominated and run by men of traditional thinking, choose "docile" women who would not challenge the patriarchal status quo, and who accept and follow the party line, leaving aside feminist, independent women. The quota translated into more appearances of female parliamentarians on TV. Yet this appearance hardly ever meant supporting women's issues or the call for a genuinely egalitarian society that empowers women. On the contrary, anti-women's-rights positions have been asserted, as in the media call made by one female member of parliament from Mosul, urging men to practice polygamy in order to "alleviate the problem," as she put it, of widowed and single women who supposedly need husbands to support them and help save them from going down a sinful path. It was a positive reaction that this call was heavily and rightly criticized by liberal and women's rights groups.

In addition to the political realities that forced the misrepresentation of women, in the few examples where women are supposed to have a voice, they are presented poorly because of the choices made by TV stations regarding female TV presenters. In one newscast with two presenters, a man and a woman, the female presenter appears to lack interest in the serious political discussion going on as the male guest analysts argue their points. While the male presenter, during the interview, speaks confidently to the guests, the female presenter looks several times at her nails and adjusts how she sits, showing

little interest in the unfolding debate. When her turn comes to ask questions, she seems to do so based on a script, in a mechanical way, with no follow-up questions or suggestions of her own in response to the analysts' answers. On the contrary, her male colleague interjects and has follow-up questions for the guests. Indeed, he seems interested in serving the public interest, while his female colleague appears concerned with her looks. Occasionally, there is the appearance on TV of a female politician or analyst who speaks confidently about a certain issue of interest to the public. In one interview during a newscast a female parliamentarian is hosted to discuss corruption, making a number of coherent points. But this positive presentation of female personalities in the context of public interest issues does not represent the norm in Iraqi media.

The poor, rare, or non-existent female representation goes beyond political issues to include economic, social, and cultural issues. A news report about the opening of Baghdad's International Fair, a popular annual event that brings international and regional companies in a variety of fields, solicited the opinions of six males. Another news report about local residents' complaints because of the lack of water supply to their houses for fifteen days plays soundbites by five males. Although women are traditionally tasked with home-making duties such as cooking, cleaning, and bathing children, all of which require the use of water, no woman's perspective on this shortage was offered. A news report discussing a conference on suicide rates in the KRG features two male government officials, one of them a police chief. Although suicide numbers among women in Kurdistan is higher than it is among men because of the social pressures and oppressions to which women are subjected, the report fails to bring a woman's voice to the discussion of this critical topic. What these examples highlight is the suppression of the gender plurality of voices and experiences within society in the interest of standardizing men's perspectives, making them appear central and authentic. In addition to the inherent injustice in such acts of exclusion, these acts deprive society of valuable contributions by women that can enrich society's knowledge and help offer solutions to some of its problems with which women are more traditionally familiar.

2. Reducing Women to Physical Appearance

One recurrent patriarchal theme in the monitored TV programming is reducing women to mere physicality, i.e., to how they appear physically. The theme is reinforced in multiple ways in the context of the various programs being aired. In one soap opera episode featured on a monitored channel, featuring a man and a woman are caught up in a car chase, the man tells the woman: "you might be beautiful now, but we all know that once Russian women get old they get short, fat, start growing their mustaches, and wear a scarf around their heads. I can see your mustache showing now." Instead of protesting, the woman responds: "'Babushka', that's what they use to refer to the Old Russian women." The man replies approvingly "See; you've already found a name for them." In the mainstream Kurdish and Arab contexts, Russian women are usually perceived to be models of beauty, highly desired by men. The woman in the episode accepts the man's reductive assumption about the value of women as physical objects of desire and evaluation for men. In another soap opera episode by another TV channel that we monitored, a boyfriend comments on the physical appearance of his girlfriend who

committed herself to a serious diet by saying "I wonder about how you never get hungry…. I remember when you were fat. You look better now." Such individuality-denying exchanges that often go unchallenged in the public sphere are common in the Iraqi entertainment industry. Through both overt and subliminal messages about women, this industry becomes a powerful promoter of patriarchy by allowing itself to subscribe to patriarchal valuations of women based on appearance, where a woman's true worth is tied to how her physical shape appeals or does not appeal to the taste of men. There is rarely a comment from opinion-makers in society to counter this objectification of women, nor do the TV stations which play these shows offer a counter-perspective to these patriarchal conceptions of women.

Songs are an effective artistic tool in promoting a patriarchal worldview, taking the form of a romanticized ideal of love that limits the value of women to objects of desire pursued by men. In many of the love songs that were aired during the monitored period a certain image of the beloved woman appears as a passive receptor of male feelings simply because of her assumed physical beauty that appeals to the male lover. One song has these words: "Your beauty changes the circumstances, God has willed your blue dress and your honey lips and mouth, you're most precious in your blues dress, perfume rains from your lips. I wish to be that person who becomes permissible [in the sense of being allowed to marry her by law], the person who will become the guardian of her house and the father of her children." Notably, the woman in the song never has a voice. Her response to the man's advances is not recorded. It is her perfume, physical beauty, and blue dress that attract the man to her. There is nothing in the song about her personality or her history as a human being. She is simply not a person, her own person, but a set of assembled physical and aesthetic traits that can be found in many other women. This insistence on presenting women along male-centered archetypal and ahistorical/universal lines, rather than as human beings grounded in a specific set of social realities, is a trope in patriarchally-informed art and music. Another song goes even further in objectifying women by denying the desired female any form of subjectivity or physical wholeness, treating her as a collection of appealing body parts. This old Kurdish song describes the absent and admired woman: "Her legs are like pencils." Likening beautiful legs to pencils is a common metaphor in Kurdish that serves to sexualize women, presenting them as bodies without souls or minds, though it should be noted that this sort of sexualization is not unique to Kurdish or Middle Eastern culture.

The influence of this kind of music in society can be powerful because of the subliminal nature of the messages this music promotes: the barely perceptible devaluation of women that comes not only in what the song says, but also in what it does not say. Men, as the active love-stricken pursuers of women, appear as conscious, active, and assertive social agents whose romantic feelings and ability to express them make things happen, while women are deployed in these types of songs as passive and pursued objects who fail to cohere into full, willing, and recognizable humans with the ability to initiate actions on their own. They are simply voiceless beings whose presence in the world of the audience is made possible only because men felt desirous of them and wanted to express their desire for them.

It is worth noting here as a positive development that there have been in recent decades songs, both in Arabic and Kurdish, featuring female singers as full, confident and

assertive human beings in pursuit of their feelings for men. These songs have stayed away from the reductive and objectifying gestures which dominate men's love songs. These women's songs about men, however, are much fewer, and, as far as influence goes, far less effective in counteracting the influence of traditional men's songs about women, not only because the latter are more numerous, and more regularly featured on TV, but also because the current patriarchal structure of both Arab and Kurdish cultures in Iraq still heavily supports the male-dominated values expressed in men's songs.

This objectification of women into mere physical shapes goes beyond the entertainment industry. It is also present in the commercial advertisement industry. For example, an advertisement for shampoo features a happy, attractive woman. At its conclusion, the advertisement addresses the audience with the proclamation: "hair is the mirror of one's personality." Another advertisement for a dieting pill, supposedly for the use of both men and women, shows two happy and slim women. A third one that was repeated frequently on another channel features a type of soap that takes care of women's skin. Again, the image of a contented woman with clear and smooth skin dominates the advertisements. The running theme in these and other similar advertisements is that physical beauty is the primary goal of women, suggesting that a woman is not complete if she is not beautiful or at least pursuing beauty. The definition of beauty here is not individualistic; rather, it is social and relational: it is physical and tied to the approval of men. Above all, it can be bought with money through the advertised product that makes the realization of the physical beauty dream attainable. In both the entertainment and advertisement industries the variants of the theme of women's physical beauty as the true measure of their worth is interwoven in the works of both industries in both explicit and implicit ways with little to no resistance to the theme's pervasiveness. This is a testament to the accepted commonality of reducing women to a pleasing spectacle. Women's appearance as a commodity is, of course, neither new nor restricted to the Middle East.

In the rare examples where men's appealing physical appearance is the point of focus, it is usually in relation to women, especially in regards to how they react to men's attractive appearance and the frightening possibility of losing such prizes to other women. This appears clearly in a very popular reality show that has been aired for several seasons. Because of its unprecedented popularity and potential influence on the many people who watch it, this show deserves some special attention here. While taking the form of any number of sensationalist talk shows, it is unique in that it revolves around polygamy. The idea of the show is to bring married couples onto the set to "face a number of challenges." Overcoming these challenges earns the couple a prize at the end: an expensive TV set, kitchen appliances, furniture, and so on. But the truth of the matter is that it is not the couple who faces the challenges; only the wife does. The wife has to face the challenges which test her ability to bear seeing her husband go through the different stages of being paired with a very attractive woman all the way to taking the woman as a second wife. All the acts are staged, including the faux second marriage. The wife is challenged by seeing her husband give an engagement ring to his new bride, who appears in a wedding dress; he also dances with her and hugs her. Although the second-marriage proposal is staged, and the wife knows this, she often collapses or is shown in great distress at the sight of her husband with his new bride, and decides to withdraw from the show, refusing to pursue the next challenge. Moved by feelings of jealousy, the wife becomes visibly angry

at the bride, gets in a verbal fight with her, even trying to hit her, a critical moment at which the presenter intervenes to stop a fight from starting. An audience is there reacting with applause, surprise, or shock at the dramatic unfolding of events throughout the show, mainly the wife's emotional roller-coaster. The audience generally tries to provoke the wife into taking a more confrontational stance toward the other woman, her presumed rival. In rare situations, the wife goes all the way in accepting the challenges, culminating in her approval for her husband to marry the bride. The audience praises her wisdom and her model behavior, emphasizing her respect for Islamic law that allows a man four wives. One may then hear shouts of approval from the audience addressing the tolerant wife with "may God bless you!"

From beginning to end, the show exemplifies, often to a shocking extent, the patriarchal stereotypes about women. Women are shown as emotional, unable to think and react calmly and rationally, and as dependent beings whose lives revolve around men, especially their husbands. They are shown competing for their attention, fighting over one man, uninterested in equality or personal dignity as full individuals, while men are shown as confident, capable, and able to rein in the excesses of women. Apart from the problematic and obvious fact that the show promotes polygamy, sometimes blaming the wife for her husband's potential pursuit of a second marriage, presumably because she has not maintained herself enough to retain her husband's interest in her, the show essentially makes the attractive physical appearance of the wives central to maintaining marriages. More relevantly, the show projects onto women the reductive patriarchal notion that marriage is about physical beauty. For example, the biggest shock for the wife is usually when her husband's makeover is complete, resulting in his appearing on stage as very attractive, almost a new person. She is generally happy with this new look, acting confidently in appreciation of his male beauty. But she collapses when her newly good-looking husband appears with the new bride. It is often at this point that the wife decides to withdraw from the show, expressing feelings of guilt about her inability to appeal to her husband, or anger at the other woman for trying to steal her husband.

The wife, throughout all of this, is shown as a superficial being caught up in the notion that what matters in marriage and relationships is women's physical beauty. When she reacts to her husband's attractive new look with a sense of guilt and self-doubt, she actually projects onto him the patriarchal standards that she has internalized about reducing the complexity of human relations such as marriage to mere appearance. In other words, she evaluates her husband in the same way she is used to being evaluated: based on appearance. These notions are the show producers' in the first place. The structure of the entire show reproduces the very same patriarchal structure in Iraqi reality in this regard. All participants in the show—the husband, the wife, the potential second wife, the presenter, and the audience—are brought together with little choice other than to live out, in a TV setting, what people experience in reality. What goes on in this popular show is a clear testament to the complicit reciprocity between the general culture and the entertainment industry in (re)producing and (re)validating reductive ideas and images about women.

Although patriarchal reduction of women to dependent physical entities is partly made normal because of the participation of women in its stereotypes and traditions, often because of lack of awareness, this reduction still functions even in contexts where women

are not complicit in it. These stereotypes are still imposed on women by male journalists. In a talk show about social media, for instance, a female social media activist discusses her efforts to help people in her community through online counseling about a variety of social issues, something the male presenter seems to approve of. When the conversation turns to the consumption of food in relation to health and weight considerations, the presenter asks her, "How much do you weigh now?" The other guest on the show, a male, is not asked the same question. This enforcement of patriarchal ways of thinking, manifested in different ways, is common.

3. **The Division of Labor Based on Gender: The Hard-Working Man and the Soft, Caring Woman**

One obvious assumption that informs much of the programming is a natural division of labor between men and women. Men are routinely presented with serious and tough jobs, ones that involve decision-making that affects the community and demands a high sense of responsibility and sophisticated skills. Political leaders who make headlines and whose activities are covered by the media are all male. Business leaders are also male, and they get media coverage. For example, monitored news items covering such important issues—the reconstruction of the province of Anbar, making Basra Iraq's economic capital, designing plans about the future of Kirkuk, warning about disruptions in investment and development nationwide, and the deteriorating quality of internet services—feature only males who discuss them, either as specialists in decision-making positions, or as analysts who can inform the public about these issues. There is sometimes the assertion of a pre-modern tribal notion of manhood as an exercise of physical power and control over others, not only women, but also men who are perceived as weak, who fail to measure up to the standards of this version of manhood. One famous show, for instance, focuses on how men are in control of the city they live in, caring only for the weapons and drugs they trade, activities which result in all kinds of conflicts and competition among them that negatively affect others, including women. Women's roles are very marginal. In one revealing scene, for example, a male character says that "manhood is not measured by education and degrees." A female character responds, "by what is it measured, then?" The male character responds: "by a mustache and a gun!" This assertion goes unchallenged.

Although this crude conceptualization of manhood is in general rejected in Iraq, less crude and invasive versions of manhood are still popularly sanctioned in the name of nationalistic and religious values perceived to be in need of defense against threats and enemies. Throughout the monitoring period, there have been many videos featuring weapon-bearing men in military fatigues as the heroic defenders of the land, women, and the faith. Mainly showing videos of fighters from the Peshmerga, Popular Mobilization Units, or the Iraqi Army, all in stages of training, fighting, or parading, the emphasis usually turns to how the courage of these men and their readiness to sacrifice themselves for the sake of protecting the population ensures this population a safe and normal life, particularly for women, children, and the elderly. What these images call up, by implication, is an established patriarchal theme about the psycho-physical strength and endurance of men to act as protectors of the weak and the vulnerable. The implied superiority of men over women in this indirect comparison between the two is not

diminished by the occasional featuring, on Kurdish TV channels, of Kurdish female fighters, where the emphasis is usually not on the tenacity of Kurdish women in general when given the opportunity and properly empowered, but rather on the individual exceptionality of the pictured fighters to act contrary to the expected norm when motivated by the belief in Kurdish nationalism. In other words, it is the genuine adoption of Kurdish nationalism, a male-dominated heroic discourse, by these female fighters that "saved" them from their natural weakness as women. Still, these videos about female Kurdish fighters have been rare in comparison with the videos featuring Kurdish male fighters.

Apart from this particular nationalist context, women, in Arab and Kurdish TV media, are usually featured in relation to activities connected with caring for others. As individuals holding public office, women mostly appear in the news as members of political or parliamentary committees dealing with childhood, women, family, and, occasionally, health issues. But the more consolidating of this patriarchal division of labor is really the entertainment and advertisement industries. It is a common scene in Iraqi drama, both Kurdish and Arab, to have women in serving and caring roles in the context of family settings. These roles are normally taken for granted in drama shows in that they are not even meant to draw attention or become a point of discussion within the show. These activities include bringing tea, cooking food, and shopping as a form of therapy. An example in one show presents a woman carrying several shopping bags only to say, when she puts them down, "I will no longer allow myself to be sad. I feel good!" The association of shopping with the relief from sorrow or depression is an all too familiar and universal patriarchal stereotype about women.

In the advertisement industry, the presentation of women in serving and caring roles is even more stereotypical. Traditional female roles are regularly shown to be carried out by women with a sense of happy dutifulness. An advertisement for a diaper brand has a toddler approaching her mother, saying "I am hungry." The mother responds, "I made soup." Shortly after, the baby comes up to the mother again to say that she "made herself dirty," implying the need for a diaper change. The advertisement puts the mother in two traditional roles for women in Iraqi culture: cooking and cleaning in the context of caring for children. Women's natural purpose in life is shown as mothering. In another advertisement, for a brand of rice, a group of women attack another woman because she lied to them about how she cooks her delicious rice. She confesses to them that she has no secret recipe for cooking this rice; it is only the quality of the rice itself that makes it delicious. What is problematic in this advertisement is not only that it reinforces the traditional serving function for women, but also presents them as irrationally attached to this function to the point of fighting one another. Again they are made to appear as impulsive, emotional beings with little control over their impulses and emotions, particularly when they are prevented from playing their serving role—here, cooking—in the best way possible.

Another advertisement promotes a cleaning product called Lamis. It shows two housewives, one recommending the product to the other. The makers of the advertisement set up unrealistic beauty standards fulfilled by the two women, who appear with full makeup, including fake eyelashes, and features obviously enhanced by plastic surgery. The advertisement gives the impression that this is how females should look

when cleaning the house. It seems from watching this advertisement that the two women put much more effort and time into looking this particular way than in cleaning. Both tasks, cleaning and elaborate attention to one's appearance, are promoted as part of women's normal style of life. The advertisement sells a product and an idea about what it means to be a woman, reinforcing a problematic traditional understanding about the expected role of women in family life and, by extension, in society at large: serving others and being aesthetically appealing to the eyes of males.

The subliminal dimension in advertising also plays a significant part in mainstreaming traditional gender roles. In one advertisement, as an example, the product being advertised is a type of cake that a father and a son are shown eating with great enjoyment. In the background, we see the mother doing laundry. This extra messaging about the mother washing clothes has nothing to do with the product—cake—that the company is trying to sell. The scene exemplifies the relationship between classical capitalism as the mass producer of commodities and traditional family as a consumptive unit whereby continuous consumption requires stable families that can consume in a steady and reliable way. This stable family is organized along patriarchal lines: a working father, a home-making mother, and healthy children who, in the future, will grow into responsible workers and reliable consumers. The home-making function of the mother is crucial to the smooth operation of this arrangement. The serving mother in the background, behind the two males who are eating in the center, represents the invisible labor that is critical for maintaining the lifestyle which the family leads. Invisible labor is women's effort in home-making that is usually taken for granted and considered as a natural part of what it means to be a woman, a sort of labor for which women should not expect pay or even acknowledgement.

This traditional division of labor within the family extends to the rest of society, too. One advertisement for a brand of spices subliminally proposes how social labor should be divided based on gender. It shows a young boy playing football, a man behind his tea kiosk, a young woman sewing, and another one cooking. The woman cooking, who appears in the background, uses the commodity that is being advertised. If food-making is the one basic and invisible, but indispensable, activity that sustains the lives of others, it is, in the visual arrangement of the advertisement, taken for granted in the interest of other activities, particularly those by males. While the man and boy engage in gainful and diversional pursuits from which they benefit personally, the two women are shown in serving pursuits that benefit others in the first place within a voluntary set of patriarchal relations that assign specific gender-based socio-economic roles to the participants in the scene. The fact that the advertisement presents a public, not private, space in the form of a bustling street seems to imply a desire to confirm a reciprocally beneficial model of social behavior and economic activity. As such, spice cannot sell well without this model functioning smoothly.

Embedded in the implicit, and often explicit, gender-based division of labor, routinely asserted through the monitored programming, is the assumption that motherhood is the defining function of women. Motherhood here is not merely the biological ability of women to conceive and deliver babies, but more the social obligation to please men by allowing them the opportunity of fatherhood. In a scene from a drama show, a woman is shown to encourage her friend to become pregnant because her husband will love her more for it.

In another scene, a married couple is shown arguing. The wife has been in an accident, resulting in her physical impairment. She says: "I don't want to undergo any more surgeries. I'm sick of being ashamed of not being able to walk or ever becoming pregnant and giving you a boy." She then stands and tries to walk.

In another show, there is a scene where the wife talks to one of her in-laws, expressing her concern that her relationship with her husband is not going well. The male in-law responds that this is expected because "you did not give him a baby boy, so it's normal for him to go and look for another boy to give him love!" In a different show, a married couple who can't have children because of an unspecified health issue of the wife, argue about something related to the conduct of another family's children. The husband reminds the wife that she can't give birth, and doesn't even like other children.

What is at stake in these scenes, which are fairly representative of mainstream thinking in Iraq, is the meaning of female individuality. Women in this patriarchal Iraqi context do not become fully accepted individuals unless they prove their biological utility for men in pursuit of fatherhood. These notions of dependence on fulfilling men's paternal desires as the path to individual respectability and social approval are heavily promoted by society and internalized by women themselves. As a result, they basically translate into structurally unequal marriages in which women are subjected to all sorts of internal and external pressure to perform as expected: as a home-making, reproductive mother.

4. Violence Against Women

The mainstream culture in Iraq usually tolerates violence against women to the point of endorsing it both directly and indirectly. Much of the sanction of this violence is grounded in a traditional religious and tribal understanding that makes men, as husbands and fathers, guardians of women, allowing them to supervise their conduct, including the right to punish women n order to correct their mistakes. This general framework of thinking supports many social practices leading to the physical abuse of women or, at least, the threat of engaging in such abuse. Many media outlets present examples of such practices without seriously challenging them or duly calling them into question. These practices are often presented as bad forms of behavior, reflecting the personal temperament of the individual male in question, but without any grounding within a larger social system of beliefs that make such practices possible in the first place.

Even in the few examples when the content of the media report reveals a social pattern of sanctioning deadly violence against women, the result is a moral condemnation of the behavior with no structural link to the system of patriarchy that has enabled the ideas and feelings causing this behavior. For instance, in a talk show discussing social issues, a female guest is asked what certain girls who come from poor family circumstances should do to stand on their own feet, after mentioning that some get married as a means to escape from their difficult circumstances. The answer correctly comes to highlight that education is key to self-empowerment. The guest also talks about a report stating that 120 women have been killed in the KRG, supposedly because of immoral behavior, usually related to a perceived violation of the family honor code. Criticizing acts of killing women because of honor-related issues is morally right and necessary, but it does not go

far enough if the system of patriarchy that justifies such acts remains intact, not subject to scrutiny in the context of these reported killings.

The forms of violence against women vary by circumstance, but many such forms take for granted the assumption that a woman should not be in control of her own body. Instead, a woman's body is in control of men, or the ideas and institutions representing the interests and concerns of men. In one talk show discussing actual events, a case is mentioned about an employment agency that brings foreign domestic workers to the KRG. This agency tried to force a female worker to have an abortion because pregnant female workers are not desired by hiring households. The behavior of this company was rightfully met with criticism from participants in the show as being materialistic and inhumane. Although the criticism is valid, it shies away from probing the patriarchal root causes of this behavior. The individualization of problematic behavior makes it hard to face it as a social manifestation of a larger patriarchal system. It frames it as an individual rather than a collective problem.

In addition to talk shows, drama shows also feature a variety of violent forms of behavior towards women, be it direct or indirect. In a Kurdish show, a man shouts at his wife for having an abortion without consulting him. He screams and breaks things, almost hitting the wife. In response, the wife cries and apologizes; he firmly holds her wrists, saying "I hate you and I'm holding myself back from killing you." The scene ends with her brother and another man coming to help her. The scene reveals multiple oppressive values operating on the body of the woman and her sense of self, values that the woman is depicted as having internalized. First, it is a man who threatens the woman physically, the one who is supposedly the closest to her emotionally, as her husband. Second, it is also men who come to save her from the aggressive man. In both cases, the woman is shown as weak and in need of some form of male protection. Her weakness of character is also shown as she does not defend her position as to why she had an abortion, and thought it the right thing to do. Instead, she cries and apologizes. In general, the culture in Iraq, whether Kurdish or Arab, is staunchly anti-abortion, a position that is considered natural, moral, and religiously righteous. Pro-choice, as an intellectual and moral position, is unheard of in the mainstream culture of Iraq. These TV shows reinforce this social consensus, including the implications around a woman's relation to her own body.

In many ways, these shows consolidate, by way of re-confirming the higher status that men have in relation to women. One show looks at how men in a local Kurdish village took to the habit of hitting and abusing women as normal behavior. In a telling scene from a TV show in Arabic, a husband asks his wife about the reason she is laughing. She responds that she is laughing at the common understanding of manhood and masculinity in which he believes, an understanding that privileges men over women. He answers her: "this is called being a man and this man is your husband. If you keep disrespecting me I will step on your head!" The act of laughing at the husband's ideas is considered by him as a violation worthy of physical punishment of the violator. Another scene in the same show emphasizes the supervisory role that men have over women in the context of the family. A brother, warning his sister against being close to a male relative, screams at her, saying "I don't want you near our cousin Ali and if you disagree with me, I will hit you until you bleed! Do you understand?" In another show, within the context of disagreements among co-owners of the same company, one owner organizes an

assassination, targeting the co-owner. This conspiring owner asks his hit men to assassinate the daughter of the co-owner as a way to take revenge upon her father. What many drama TV shows deal with is indeed reflective of patriarchal reality in this context: men have the decisive say in what women should do with their bodies, whether in the name of entitlement, moral supervision, economic reasons, or settling differences among men.

The relative ease with which violence against women is committed also appears in foreign shows translated into the local language. In one Latin American TV show about drugs, translated into Kurdish, there is a scene in which a group of frightened girls are locked in a room. The girls are victims of human trafficking. One of the men holding them in captivity goes into the room and fatally shoots one of the girls. In another scene, a girl appears begging for her life before two men. Nonetheless, one of them shoots her. The other man says "Look at the mess you've made!" In all such instances, there is, even if unintentional, some sort of a cognitive training for the audience to accept as normal violence inflicted on females and a consolidation of the traditional notion that women remain defenseless without the presence of men to defend them against the evil of other men.

5. Blaming the Victim

Blaming women for mistakes and problems, whether directly by placing all responsibility on their shoulders or indirectly by exaggerating their share of responsibility while exonerating men or lightening their involvement, is a common patriarchal theme that one sees played out not only in social life and reenacted on TV. In the commission of mistakes, for instance, women's presumption of innocence is often questioned, unlike that of men, which is taken for granted. During an evening news bulletin, a news report discusses a fire in an orphanage housing women. Six women were burned as a result of this fire, whose cause was then unknown. In covering this piece of news, the male reporter adds, by way of background, that drugs and alcoholic beverages were found in the orphanage. The implication is clear: the women in the orphanage have been leading an unethical lifestyle. Moreover, this particular lifestyle is indirectly linked to the fire. The implicit message here is that the women in the orphanage are not victims of the fire, but somehow responsible for it.

Also in the evening news, a news report about a fire in a house was aired. According to the report, a young mother and her three children were severely burned. All the doors were locked from the outside, apparently to prevent the mother and the children from escaping the fire. The children died later. From her hospital bed, the mother, who also died a few days after the report, clearly accuses the father of her children, her husband, of starting the fire and locking the doors to get rid of her and the children. The news report includes much questioning of the woman's claim, despite her insistence that she was telling the truth. The assumption was clear in calling the women's credibility into question: women are not to be fully trusted. Beyond the news report, the case of this woman continued to play out in the community for many months after, with many defending the husband under the assumption that a father would not kill his own children. A year and a half later, a court in the city of Sulaimani sentenced the man to death for killing his wife and children.

One famous episode in a local social talk show deserves special attention here because of the huge interest it drew from the audience when it was aired. The talk show features a female presenter interviewing a man, serving a sentence in prison, for the crimes of blackmailing, over the years, more than 250 girls and women into giving him approximately $500,000 to avoid risking scandals that could cost the women their lives. The man, who cannot read and write in his native Arabic language, used the internet to lure his victims, with romantic talk of love and promises of marriage, into sending him nude pictures of themselves as well as recording their intimate video calls with him. His face blurred during the show, the man explains how he used the pictures and the recordings to extort money from the girls and women after threatening them to release their pictures and recordings. The interviewer then asks the audience on air to express their opinion about who to blame in this case. Calls pour in, mostly from men. The majority of the callers blame the victims in one way or another. For instance, the first caller, a man, says "As you saw, the girls are the ones making the job easy for him, by trusting him with their pictures and videos." As the exchange between the interviewer and the caller continues, the former asks if he is blaming the girls or their families. He replies with "we should blame the father first, for allowing the internet into the house." The second caller, also a man, says that "it's not the girls' fault. Girls are weak. They trust easily and they are vulnerable." The third caller, another man, says "the first thing to consider in this is not blaming the mother or the father [of the victims], but it's the mentality of the girls and the boys that we need to blame at first in dealing with all of this. There is no man who can fool 250 girls who have honor or who care to protect the reputation and trust of their families…. The man who has done this has no honor as well." The fourth caller, also a man, puts the blame on the victims, saying "why do they trust the man? Why do they give themselves to him without him talking to the girl's family?" The interviewer responds by saying "OK: assume he talked to the girl's family and he still did the same thing," to which the caller responds: "it's still the girl's fault."

On the lower part of the TV screen, text messages from the audience in response to the interviewer's question appear. Below is a representative sample of these text messages:

- "The girls deserve this."

- "Good evening, it's also the girls' fault. They should not trust anyone as your own brother. Even your brother is not trustworthy, so how will a stranger be?

- "If a man is like this, even execution is not enough for him. Doesn't he have sisters?"

- "Why are you covering his face? He should be known to everyone."

- "God protect us! There is no safety anymore."

- "There are a lot of people of his type. Our girls should not put themselves in such positions."

- "If they close the internet that would be the best thing. It's the main cause of all these problems."

- "All the fault is on the parents and the girls. They [parents] should put limit to them [the victims]"

- "Why are you cheating on your husband?" [The reference here is to a married woman that the man could not blackmail but had sex with.]

- "All the fault is on the girls. I don't blame the men. The second blame is on the internet."

- "Parents are supposed to watch their children, because a lot of young people nowadays use the internet for bad purposes."

- "In a nutshell, in a country where you do not have laws, anything is possible."

- "It's the parents fault for not watching over their girls."

- "All the blame is on the parents."

- "The fault is on the girls and the parents for allowing girls to have cellphones and access to the internet."

- "This man has a dead conscience."

- "This man does not have any ethics in him."

This particular episode is telling in several ways about the assumptions that constitute the bias against women. The responses from the audience, written and spoken, are generally negative about the girls. According to many of the responses, the girls are not considered victims, but guilty of some personal moral or family flaws that led to them being taken advantage of. The legal and moral victim-criminal hierarchy disappears here in the interest of a heated defense of public morality that seems to have been violated mainly by the victims, the girls. Although the man was criticized by some people among the audience, the criticism was personal, leveled at him as an individual with poor moral values: his failure is individual. Yet the criticism of the victims was structural and social: it went beyond them as individuals to include their families and the way they brought them up. The message is clear: a man's mistake is individualized, related only to him, while a girl's presumed mistake is generalized to the point that it becomes a worrying sign of the general moral decline of society at large. There was little sympathy for the victims during the episode and no acknowledgement of their suffering.

The episode also partakes in many of the usual patriarchal assumptions about women. From the very beginning, the question raised by the episode through the female interviewer is problematic to begin with. It is a question about blame by asking who is to blame more: the man or the victims. The context of the discussion that the episode sets up is clearly anti-female by trying to shift the blame, or a good part of it, to the female victims. The crucial issue of the criminality of the action and its structural cause are hardly

discussed; instead, the morality of the victims becomes the primary point of discussion. The episode also repeats traditional gender-based ideas about women such as their inherent weakness, inability to make good judgments, and the high cost of trusting them. Modern technology, such as the internet, designed to make life easy, turns, in the hands of women, into a dangerous tool that can threaten the moral fabric of society. This is not because these modern technological tools are themselves dangerous; rather, it is because weak-willed and gullible women use them. As such, the implied theme here is that women also need men's supervision when they use modern communication technology. The fact that a man has used this same technology to deceive and blackmail his victims does not translate into a similar call to supervise men's use of the internet. It is a clear example of patriarchal double standards where, in similar situations, the criteria applied to women are much more harsh and strict than those applied to men. Men can have the benefit of the doubt, but women can't.

6. Independent Women

Not all representations were negative. Some positive portrayals, in a variety of contexts, usefully challenge mainstream stereotypes about women's assumed subservience and inability to act as strong and capable rational agents.

In a talk show, the male presenter asks a female artist about a sculptural work of art she did in which she shows women carrying water containers on their heads. He says: "the tradition in Iraq is that women wear a cloak on their heads, but you haven't done that in this work; why?" She answers by saying "I wanted to give women the right to be free and choose whether to wear the cloak or not." The custom in Iraq, supported by the practice, is that women who carry water containers on their heads are from rural areas and dress conservatively, putting on cloaks that cover all of their bodies from head to toe. The artist here calls into question a stereotypical image about rural women regarding their moral responsibility to dress in a way to protect their bodies from the prying looks of men.

In another show, hosting a female Kurdish singer who became famously scandalous in the KRG because of the taboos she broke, the male presenter asks her about the meaning of one her of her songs. She responds by stating that the song is meant to inspire women with feelings of empowerment, confidence, and will. The interviewer follows up with another question about whether or not her song implies that women do not need men. She answers by saying that women do not need anyone, and elaborates on the negative personal implications for women in the fact that society encourages women to be passive by teaching them to aim first for a good marriage and for acquiring gold. Women, she adds, are taught to feel shame while men are encouraged to do whatever they like. She goes on to say that society needs to teach both men and women that they can do the same things. This egalitarian message is indeed powerful in a society used to the notion of inherent differences between men and women based on different natural capacities that each supposedly possesses. The male presenter asks her about a rumor that some political figure is behind her fame and success (the obvious assumption is that this assumed figure is a man). She answers confidently, saying "I am behind my own success." She adds that this is a common misconception, that female artists have someone political or rich supporting them, and that it is untrue.

In drama shows, there is also the occasional positive representation of women. In one soap opera show in Arabic, a strong-willed young woman is featured. She works as a lawyer and comes from a poor family whose house is being taken from them because the family cannot afford to pay the rent. Amera, the lawyer and the main character in the show, does her best to avoid eviction. She consistently appears as a determined and independent person who is able to speak up against injustices. This kind of character—assertive, calm, and fair—can function as a role model for girls and help the general audience confront the widespread stereotypical images of women as weak and dependent.

In addition to this positive portrayal of women, there are also some instances undermining patriarchal concepts through sarcasm. In a drama show, a woman comes to her husband wanting his attention. He dismisses her because he is busy with something else. She protests his inattention to her by saying that he is treating her like a *jarya* (a concubine). He looks at her, surprised, inquiring if she has read a book or surfed the internet to learn such a word. She responds that she has not. He asks her then if she knows what the word means. She says "sure, it means the woman who runs." He answers, saying "RUN away from my face and let me finish my work!" At a surface level, the scene seems to describe a typical dismissal by a busy man of his overly-demanding wife, with the implied questioning of her ability to know anything on her own. But a deeper look reveals something else that has to do with undermining a historically deep-seated stereotype about women as passive beings available only for sex and serving men. *Jarya* is grounded in Arab and Islamic history, referring to slave girls who are used for sex and domestic service. Coupled with this history is the stereotype that a *jarya* normally excels at making herself desirable to her master. For a woman in the modern context of Iraq, being a *jarya* is offensive, denoting subservience, absence of equality, and the physical use of women by men with no appreciation for their individual identities as human beings. There is an obvious play on words in this scene. The Arabic linguistic root for the word *jarya* consists of the verb "run" or "flow," which denotes movement, activity, and willingness, unlike the perceived reality of the *jarya* as a passive person whose goal is to please her master. The husband's sarcastic request of his wife at the end of the scene to run and to leave him alone serves as an invitation to act contrary to what a *jarya* is expected to do (i.e., to sit, accept, and please). Rather, he asks her to run, something that highlights her ability to do things; that is, to resist the situation she is in by running from it. In other words, what makes a *jarya* who she is, in the stereotypical image of mainstream culture, is her inability or refusal to resist the situation imposed on her by society.

During the monitored period, there were a few additional instances in which women were portrayed positively in the context of discussing politics and social issues. This certainly sends a good message. However, this message is weakened, even lost, by the fact that these positive instances are few and far between. What further weakens this message is the fact of featuring the same assertive and confident women in different shows. For instance, the female singer and artist discussed above appears in a variety of shows, emphasizing the same positive message. While this persistence is positive in itself, it is also likely to give the impression to the audience that only a very small, but active, minority

of women are different from the "norm," something that works further to consolidate this norm, dismissing the differing others as aberrations.
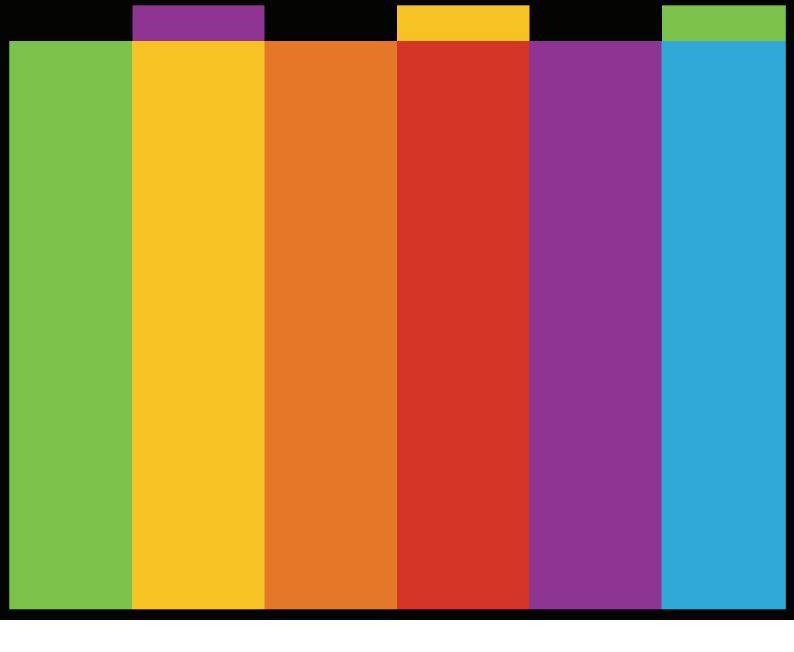
CONCLUSION

One clear finding from this media monitoring operation is the pervasiveness of the negative portrayals of women along traditional patriarchal lines within mainstream TV media in Iraq, both Arabic and Kurdish. The dominant representation in the selected TV stations revolves around common stereotypes that see women as weak beings, both intellectually and morally, who are always in need of men's help and supervision. Such stereotypes cut across the selected official, party, and private TV stations, reflecting a mainstream media consensus in Iraq about the function of women in public and private spheres. This media consensus, in turn, reflects a traditional social consensus, hence putting the media and society in an intellectual alliance where both reciprocally reinforce the same stereotypical understanding of women. The relatively few examples of positive representations of women in the monitored stations, which run against the dominant stereotypes, do very little to counteract these deep-seated patriarchal stereotypes. As a result, the negative image of women acquires for many the truthfulness of a fact of nature while the positive image appears as an exception to the well-established rule.

If there is one vital lesson to be learned from monitoring the selected TV stations, it is the importance of awareness-raising about women's rights and the dangers inherent in the local version of patriarchy whose notions relegate women to an inferior station in life. Given the strongly held belief in patriarchal binary categories about men and women, this awareness-raising needs to be both institutional and individual. At the institutional level, a good starting point is the educational system, which plays an important role in the early shaping of students' ideas about life and society by emphasizing the principles of gender equality and social justice. The teaching of such principles should find its way in the subsequent stages of education all the way to higher education: college and universities. At the individual level, grass-root efforts are very important, where concerned citizens and individuals come together and organize to pursue a goal of common interest by raising awareness about it. The work of independent civil society organizations in this regard is important. There are, indeed, many civil society organizations nationwide working on women's issues, but the majority of these organizations are either too weak to make a difference or affiliated with political parties whose priorities and agendas normally do not include gender equality. The experience of post-Saddam Iraq has clearly shown that current political parties are mainly interested in using women's issues and votes to further party interests, not women's true interests. The focus needs to turn to empowering women and men who believe in gender equality through independent grass-root organizing bodies that can do effective advocacy and awareness-raising to help establish an egalitarian society where women are not treated as secondary human beings, but as full and equal beings with the same access to rights, resources, and privileges as men's.

REFERENCES

1. Beauvoir, S. (1949). Das andere Geschlecht. Sitte und Sexus der Frau. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag.

2. Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1995). Modernity, pluralism and the crisis of meaning: The orientation of modern man. Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers.

3. Carter, C. (2012). Sex/gender and the media: From sex roles to social construction and beyond. In K. Ross, Ed. The handbook of gender, sex and media. Wiley-Blackwell.

4. Chomsky, E. S. (1988). Manufacturing consent: The Political economy of the mass media. Pantheon Books.

5. Entman, R. (1989). Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy. University of Chicago Press.

6. Irigaray, L. (1977). This sex which is not one. Cornell University Press.

7. Lule, J. (2001). Daily news, eternal stories: The Mythological role of journalism. Guilford Press.

8. Marcuse, H. (1964). One dimensional man. Routledge.

9. Mayer, V. (2013). To communicate is human, to chat is female. In C. Carter, L. Steiner, & L. McLaughlin, Eds. The Routledge companion to media and gender. Routledge.

10. Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. Screen 16, 6-18.

11. Scheufele, B. (2003). Frames—framing—framing-effekte: Theoretische und methodische Grundlegung des Framing-Ansatzes sowie empirische Befunde zur Nachrichtenproduktion. Springer-Verlag.

12. Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (2013). Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective. Routledge.

13. Young, I. M. (1991). On female body experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other essays. Oxford University Press.

CGDS

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF IRAQ, SULAIMANI
Center for Gender and Development Studies