

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

A Dissertation  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

HONOR BOUND:

### EXPLORING THE DISPARITY OF TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN KURDISTAN, NORTHERN IRAQ

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

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