This book is without doubt one of the most important publications that I have read for a very long time. These stories by Iraqi scholars raise many important insights, issues and questions. Their accounts provide some chilling insights into the terrible forms of oppression and discrimination that are part of the barriers to the realisation of an inclusive and creative development. It is extremely difficult to appreciate the pain and suffering that has been an integral part of their lives. Their accounts are readable and refreshingly honest.

I do believe that there is a moral responsibility for all members of departments in universities to read and discuss this book as a matter of urgency. This needs to be done in terms of what we can learn about Iraq and in turn, to critically examine our own current conditions, relations, policies and practices, so that we can also struggle for a more inclusive system of educational provision and practice in higher education.

Professor Emeritus Len Barton, England
Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in Post-Conflict Enquiry
STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Volume 15

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This series addresses the many different forms of exclusion that occur in schooling across a range of international contexts and considers strategies for increasing the inclusion and success of all students. In many school jurisdictions the most reliable predictors of educational failure include poverty, Aboriginality and disability. Traditionally schools have not been pressed to deal with exclusion and failure. Failing students were blamed for their lack of attainment and were either placed in segregated educational settings or encouraged to leave and enter the unskilled labour market. The crisis in the labor market and the call by parents for the inclusion of their children in their neighborhood school has made visible the failure of schools to include all children.

Drawing from a range of researchers and educators from around the world, Studies in Inclusive Education will demonstrate the ways in which schools contribute to the failure of different student identities on the basis of gender, race, language, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status and geographic isolation. This series differs from existing work in inclusive education by expanding the focus from a narrow consideration of what has been traditionally referred to as special educational needs to understand school failure and exclusion in all its forms. Moreover, the series will consider exclusion and inclusion across all sectors of education: early years, elementary and secondary schooling, and higher education.
Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in Post-Conflict Enquiry

*The Iraq Research Fellowship Programme*

Celebrating the 80th anniversary of *The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA)*

*Edited by*

Heather Brunskell-Evans and Michele Moore
A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those academics, their friends and families, who are in need or in exile, wherever they find themselves in the process of reimagining the world in which we live.

It is also dedicated to the young generation of our own families – to Charley and to Eve, and to baby Hugo – with the hope that they will be blessed with the aspiration to help forge a more peaceful future.
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SERIES EDITOR’S PREFACE

Let me declare my interest. Writing a series editor’s preface is typically a task performed at a tangible distance. One reads the book or collection of people’s chapters and then composes a series of unifying and summarising statements that are often unread as the book travels through the world. My task here is different. I was the academic coordinator for the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP) and worked closely with the editors and contributors to this text on the programme. So, though I write sitting at a table in a front room of a house in far-away Melbourne, the words are not disinterested nor is there a distance from this project that the geography may suggest.

The IRFP was not just another academic assignment; it was quite different. While engaged on the familiar territory of research infrastructure and productivity, the principal goal was to assist people whose lives and academic work had been wrenched from them by wars, international embargo, ongoing conflict and the relentless struggle of trying to deal with a deep poverty born of the destructive forces of war. Moreover my nationality, for what that is worth these days, is Australian. That fact connects me to Iraq in a relationship of international culpability. The effect of this project was and remains deeply visceral.

The chronology of my involvement with IRFP is interesting. A colleague at the Institute of Education asked me if I would be interested in a project looking at school curriculum in Iraq. Having been responsible for curriculum reform in a large Ministry of Education in Australia, I was interested. That the context was Iraq was intriguing. A meeting was arranged with Kate Robertson from The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA). Kate brought to the meeting a world of which I had no knowledge beyond highly mediated and inadequate media representations. Dr. Yahya Al-Kubaisi presents the curriculum project in chapter three of this text. The Iraq Research Fellowship Programme provides a mechanism for directing and sustaining support to Iraqi academics, living in Iraq and displaced, to build collaborative projects that are of strategic importance to rebuilding Iraq. This work is fundamental to rebuilding the higher education sector in Iraq.

The logistical challenges were significant as people travelled across sensitive borders to meet and work on the trans-disciplinary projects. For us who travelled from the safety of homes and universities in England, the risks taken by our colleagues from Iraq were breath taking and humbling. This proscribed the relationships that needed to be formed in this work. It was necessary to create a process where external expertise was available to support the work of Iraqi academics and to give them access to recent international developments in their field. As the editors observe this is problematic in a context of enduring post-colonial struggle. Working in different languages further complicates research relationships. Touraine’s (2000:195) reflection on working across these tensions is useful:

In a world of intense cultural exchanges, there can be no democracy unless we recognize the diversity of cultures and the relations of domination that exist between them. The two elements are equally important: we must
SERIES EDITOR’S PREFACE

recognize the diversity of cultures, but also the existence of cultural domination. ... The struggle for the liberation of cultural minorities can lead to their communitarianization, or in other words their subordination to an authoritarian cultural power.

The programme and workshop processes were profoundly important. At the heart of the work was a need to build sustainable relationships. Moreover the task for those of us coming from outside of the Iraq experience was to offer our knowledge, skills and networks to build the quality and profile of the research. This had to be done in a context where cultural distances and oppressions had been at the heart of the destruction of the Iraqi academy and those who worked therein. The process was iterative and highly contestable. Meetings at the end, very end, of the workshop days were sometimes volatile and the organising group would divide and reform over strategy and points of organisation. Notwithstanding the struggles around strategy and programme, there was an acknowledgement that we were engaged in a project that was much more important and significant than ourselves and we quickly regrouped. The commitment of all participants to the programme was remarkable, as was the sense of collegiality and good will.

This text is an important inclusion in the Studies in Inclusive Education series. The chapters collectively represent a vital response to the destruction of the higher education sector in Iraq and to rebuilding the academy and educational opportunities. This is the heartland of inclusive education.

REFERENCE


Roger Slee
Series Editor
The Victoria Institute for Education, Diversity and Lifelong Learning.
Iraq, known as Mesopotamia, is home to the oldest civilisation in the world. With a cultural history of more than 10,000 years Iraq is the Cradle of Civilization which is easily reflected in the people’s persistent resilience. It is after all the land which has experience wide range of extremes including wars, dictatorships, sanctions and occupations. Since the creation of modern Iraq in 1931, education has played an important role in developing the society and in capacity building. However, some of the education policies unfortunately have created tensions rather than integration. For example, the schools curriculum was built on the base of the identity of the Sunni State, with an attempt to address ethnic and sectarian nature of the Iraqi society but that did not succeed and as a result, a lot of conflict was created in the modern education system.

Until the beginning of the seventies, the academic activities in Iraq were still in its (relatively) normal evolving period. Iraq academy as part of the intellectual activities was reasonably free from any political ideology. However, after the coup of 1968 which brought the Baath Party to power, the political ideology started to dominate and control all aspects of social life and academic activities. The dominance of the political ideology caused many serious problems to science and higher education. After 1980 and the Iran-Iraq war, the domination of the ideology was further affecting in the tendency of militarizing the society, and the intense focusing on the military research and development programmes. Additionally, the invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent Gulf war as well as the economical sanctions all led to the education in Iraq to suffer greatly and lag behind significantly. These periods were marked by: limited social, political and intellectual freedom; little or no connections with the international educational and scientific community; low standards of scientific journals; little or no contributions to international science activities including conferences and journals; little or no financial support for non-military activities; no internet or access to computers, new text books or other publications, among many other difficulties which limited the development and the progress of Iraqi higher education.

Additionally, there was the dictatorship and the oppressive nature of the regime, which meant that many academics were executed or disappeared forever because of their political views. Examples of this include the execution of the distinguished scholar and author Mohamed Baquer Al-Sader, who refused to support the regime, and the thirteen year imprisonment of nuclear scientist Dr Hussain Al-Shahristani for refusing to work on Saddam’s nuclear programme.

The situation after the 2003 occupation has been dramatically different. The extent of the suffering and the difficulties is indiscriminate. Iraq has been bombed and systematically destroyed more than any country in the world, and the Iraqi people have probably suffered more than any other people in the world. The main concerns for post 2003 conflict are personal safety and security.
The situation for higher education is no better after 2003 and this book illustrates, with many heartfelt examples, the difficulties and challenges that Iraq higher education and Iraqi academics have faced since. It may be true to say that no students elsewhere in the world are searched for bombs or guns before entering exam rooms, expect in Iraq! This is what the President of Baghdad University told me about their experience in 2004, when the University academic staff were conducting the exams for more than 70,000 students with Baghdad in a state of war, with little or no security presence at the University. He also told me that it was their nightmare scenario that one of the discontented students unhappy with their exam might raise a false bomb alarm disrupting the whole exam proceedings! Luckily nothing of that had happened and the exams were successfully and smoothly conducted!

This book, titled *Reimagining Research for Reclaiming the Academy in Iraq: Identities and Participation in Post-Conflict Enquiry*, edited eloquently by two distinguished British academics to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA), focuses on the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP). It contains a wealth of information on Iraq academy since the 2003 occupation. With chapters written by Iraqi academics who took part in IRFP and reflected on their own experiences, the books has contributions from social and natural scientists as well as medics. It covers topics as wide as gender studies, curriculum studies in post-invasion Iraq, difficulties and challenges in setting up research in post conflict conditions highlighting the people’s resilience to complete experiments regardless of institutional electrical supply, by taking samples home to domestic fridge and later processed on kitchen tables. Difficulties in training paediatricians working with children affected by conflict in Iraq, and the experience of conducting research on diagnosis of tuberculosis in Iraq are also well covered. A joint project involving many researchers from Iraq shows the valuable role and work of CARA in supporting academics who are displaced or affected by post-conflict situation. I strongly recommend this publication to the widest possible audience.

*Adel Sharif*

*Professor of Water Engineering and Process Innovation*

*University of Surrey*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of this book represents a period of sharing and research collaboration that began in the winter of 2009 when the first meeting of the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP), sponsored by The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) was held in Amman, Jordan. Hopefully these collaborations, the social networks and personal and professional relationships (including a much celebrated wedding!) which were generated through the programme will endure.

This book is a collective effort which emerged through critical and uncertain discussions that took place during and between bi-annual IRFP workshops. We owe a debt of enormous gratitude to CARA for its funding of the IRFP and enabling the critical and reflective conversations that have made their way into the pages of this book, about ways in which research can contribute to the rebuilding of social capital in Iraq, to take place. Thanks are owed to wider programme funders including The Open Society Institute and the Sigrid Rausing Trust and to those who have contributed time as IRFP Committee Members. The vision of Kate Robertson, Deputy Executive Secretary of CARA and the Iraq Programme Manager has been compelling for all and we thank her for inspiration and unrelenting energy. The courage of Iraqi scholars who have been involved in the IRFP provides testimony to the immense possibilities for rebuilding the academy as part of the project of rebuilding Iraq and those of us who have contributed from safer places in the world have been privileged to come to know them, work with them, listen, learn and write with them.

Sincere thanks are conveyed to all the contributors, who were willing to push the boundaries of their familiar writing practices as part of the process of cooperating on this book.

Throughout the editing of the book, our families have been immensely supportive and for this we extend our heartfelt thanks.
MICHELE MOORE AND HEATHER BRUNSKELL-EVANS

NOBEL PRIZES FOR IRAQI RESEARCHERS?

INTRODUCTION

This book focuses on the work of The Council for Assisting Refugee Academics (CARA) in particular, the work of one of its contemporary branches, the Iraq Research Fellowship Programme (IRFP). Through the IRFP CARA has worked to support the academic freedom of Iraqi scholars at risk of oppression and exclusion from the academy. The book is located as one of a number of events and publications to mark CARA’s eightieth year. It is written particularly to celebrate the achievement of twelve teams of Iraqi research scholars who have sought support, knowing as they first came together in 2009 that ‘working as an academic in Iraq is a hazardous occupation’. In the words of those scholars: ‘the value of the IRFP is worth its weight in gold. I come to [the IRFP] to learn about research ... I see hope’; ‘we listen to each other, we try to understand each other and we hope new waves of amnesty will come in to our research and our lives’. A central purpose of the book is to provide a forum for Iraqi scholars to voice their own experiences in relation to the IRFP. It is widely accepted that the current situation of Iraqi academics ‘provides a much-needed reminder that intellectual freedom must not be taken for granted’ (Nature, Editorial, 2010).

CARA launched an Iraq Programme in late 2006 at the height of an Iraqi assassination campaign against academics. Numerous scholars fled from Iraq and dispersed into different countries, in particular neighbouring Jordan. Decimation of the academy in Iraq, which had begun long before 2006 following UN sanctions, lack of investment and failure to protect universities during periods of conflict, was endemic. A disabling of the individual research of scholars and academic teams ensued. The IRFP was launched in 2009 when changing security in Iraq offered up the possibility of working with those still in post in Iraq and reconnecting those still in exile. Thus, the IRFP was conceived to help reverse the trend of academic annihilation and contribute to the resurgence of Iraq’s Higher Education (HE) sector. In this book scholars who have been both directly and indirectly involved with the IRFP share their experience of research opportunities afforded to them by CARA. They explore the challenges, excitements and achievements of the work they have contributed through their enquiries to the rebuilding of academy in Iraq.

The chapters in this book all reflect personal journeys undertaken in the context of collective research engagements. They embody and produce a commitment to the possibilities of rebuilding both academy and community through shared research endeavours. But they also evidence the complexity of producing, writing
about and disseminating projects when research activities are entangled in vivid and dangerous tensions associated with an environment described as 'post' conflict yet in which, post the initial toppling of the regime, the opposite is the case and conflict still reigns; ‘there are still clashes and skirmishes and it isn’t always possible to go out... then clashes seem to die down. But later we hear gunfire again somewhere in the city and it is not always easy to go to the university’ ... ‘all night recently there have been firing sounds, big and small explosions. I don’t sleep. In the morning I cannot think’. It is well known that conflict is not a thing of the past in contemporary Iraq and that living conditions will continue to be perilous (Marfleet and Chatty, 2003). The Higher Education system in Iraq is still characterised by ‘murder, destruction, corruption and decline’ (Adriaensens, 2011).

It is in the challenge of re-imagining both the nature and power of research in the re-construction of post-conflict Iraq that we find spaces for new emergent dialogue, knowledge production, agency and prospects for re-building the academy according to the priorities of Iraqi scholars and people and scope for new conversations about research controversies and contentions more generally. It is to the unfolding of such a journey and the lessons learned through making it, which eighty years of the work of CARA has assisted, that this book turns. The book draws together a collection of reflections written by and with Iraqi ‘refugee’ academics who, in the aftermath of the Anglo-American invasion in April 2003, describe the processes involved in re-imagining and re-building their research, and through that process attempt to re-claim the Academy in Iraq.

Projects funded through the IRFP are outlined below. The stories of the first six listed became the direct focus of this book:

- Use of Molecular Methods for Better Understanding of Tuberculosis in Iraq
- Transforming the Learning Environment through Theatre (TLET): Developing a Basra model
- Female Iraqi Academics in Post-Invasion Iraq: Roles, Challenges & Capacities
- Analytical Study of Curricula of Education in Iraq
- Mobile Phone Technologies to Enhance Self-Management & Education for Iraqi Diabetics
- Child Health in Iraqi Higher Education: Needs assessment for psychosocial training

Elements of six further IRFP projects have been drawn on in places throughout the book to provide further amplification or enable fresh illustration of points under discussion. These projects are:

- Potential use of Trees in Phytoremediation and Phytostabilisation of Heavy Metals in Iraq
- Transfer of Expertise in NMR Spectroscopy from the University of Liverpool to Iraq
- Upgrading of historical areas in Iraqi cities: reviewing the utility of space syntax in Baghdad
- A comparative study of the genetics of Behcets disease in Iraq
As Editors we are two women academics teaching and researching in UK universities with direct knowledge of the IRFP since each of us has worked on the programme from 2009 till the present. We are, of course, acutely aware of the limitations of our own outsider insights and perspectives into the IRFP. Critical questions need continually to be asked about the centrality of Western academic approaches in the IRFP, including in the compilation and production of this book. The medium of English as the language of IRFP scholarship obviously imposes particular power relations and tensions upon research activities and outputs, shaping the collated personal narratives gathered together for the book in particular ways. Some chapters, or sections of chapters, were first written in Arabic for example and their fluency has been compromised by translation into English. We have deliberately left moments of uncertain translation untouched where these do not devalue the content of what the writer is saying. Such moments convey the enormity of the task faced by Iraqi scholars seeking to engage with CARA’s wish for their academic work to hold up within an international – predominantly English language – academic audience. They also give insight into the capacity building role and tremendous achievement of the IRFP. And so, in line with other literature concerning authentic representation of voice in research, we have not sought to smooth out difficulties relating to language and communication but to reveal these and ask the reader to consider them (Moore, 2000; Clough, 2010).

To bring the book to life and give the research projects a human face, many contributors have excavated personal collections of notes from IRFP meetings to capture emergent images, moments of clarity or conversely confusion, impressions of shifting ideas, emotional responses and changing sentiments. All who have done so have no sense of the ‘validity’ of their considerations but know that these details elucidate something very real about developing research in Iraq in that they demonstrate the strength and force of Iraqi resilience. This certainly means that not all of the material in this book makes for easy and comfortable reading. We have had to work carefully with the genuine anxiety that inclusion of personal voices brings a possible danger of exposing vulnerable people, of creating ambiguity or of ‘telling tales out of school’ for which there will be repercussions. However, for many contributors recollected conversations, scribbles in a diary or extracts from systematically garnered field notes help give a backdrop to their research accounts which make up the main part of this book. The research accounts presented are therefore not confined to descriptions of knowledge production, but express in personal detail the minutiae of processes of enquiry that have evolved throughout the IRFP years within the political context of HE in Iraq. As Editors we ask the reader to reflect upon these details as we believe it to be in these minutiae that we might touch upon possibilities for change, creativity and wisdom and for resistance and hope that will enable the rebuilding of the academy in Iraq.
COUNCIL FOR ASSISTING REFUGEE ACADEMICS (CARA)

CARA was initiated in the 1930s to foster the work of refugee academics fleeing persecution from fascist regimes (Seabrook 2009; see also http://www.academic-refugees.org). It was originally called the Academic Assistance Council and was founded to assist Jewish academics dismissed by the Nazis from German universities who were threatened with expulsion from Germany or worse. Whilst the organization was originally seen as a temporary arrangement, Seabrook (2009) draws our attention to the fact that sadly, the need it sought to meet persists three generations later. CARA’s work, both past and present, has encountered a great deal of resistance, both official and popular, since its overarching concern is for the fate of educated, often socially committed, economically active and politically involved people in their country of origin. In the current political climate, in which to be a refugee or an asylum seeker is perhaps to be vilified, CARA defends the contribution, over the past 75 years of academic refugees to Britain’s social, intellectual, economic and cultural life. Indeed, Seabrook (2009) argues, intellectual and cultural capacity often explains why academics suffer: they are targeted or singled out by ideologically driven regimes as ‘threats’ to that regime’s maintenance and stability. This is the lived experience of the Iraqi scholars who have contributed to this book.

CONTEXT OF THE IRAQI RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME (IRFP)

CARA’s mandate for support of academics was inherited from its predecessors, The Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, ‘to ensure their special knowledge and abilities may continue to be used for the benefit of mankind’. Until the present moment in world politics CARA supported the refugee academic externally to the country from which asylum was sought. Arguably, the term ‘refugee’ is unhelpful. Under current international law it requires the individual concerned to have crossed their national border, that is, to be outside of their country of origin. When the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning was incorporated in 1959 Articles describe ‘refugee’ to mean ‘a person who has left his country or his occupation as a result of political, racial or religious oppression or discrimination or the fear of such oppression or discrimination’; that is to say, they do not have to have left their country. The focus is much more on their continued contribution to mankind, such as their ability to fulfill their role as academics and educators. The IRFP (http://www.academic-refugees.org/Iraq-Programme.asp) is situated differently and is unique in the history of CARA since its mandate is sustaining the academic capital of HE in Iraq itself. The first level aims of the IRFP are ‘to enhance regional and Iraqi research and teaching capacities; to undertake and deliver innovative research outputs of relevance to Iraq’s future; to nurture lasting international research collaborations and to reengage selected Iraqi academics in exile’. There is a tension here which remains unresolved and to which we return in the final chapter of the book: sustaining scholars in their academic environment involves the necessity for some of the academics in the research projects to which they are attached to be classified as
refugees before they can apply for funding from CARA. Refugee status can take a long time to acquire; and the scholars themselves eschew the term ‘refugee’ since they don’t consider themselves to be refugees but rather as post-2003 invasion exiles who go back and forth to Iraq; in reality not all are able to go back and forth and some must adopt different persona depending on who they are talking to. For this reason, the term ‘refugee’ is not used within the IRFP. The term ‘exile’ is used so that there is no refugee requirement placed on the Iraq Programme. CARA accepted at the launch of the Iraq Programme in 2006 that Iraqi academics were being targeted as a group so that the first activities, namely a Hardship Fund and UK Fellowship Scheme were available to all Iraqi academics, inside or outside of Iraq. Szenasi (2010) places emphasis on seeking to understand ‘refugee’ identities from the perspectives of those so-labelled in order to connect knowledge and power discourses that have greatest potential to contribute towards developing justice. This is a tension which the IRFP fully recognises.

Baker, Ismael and Ismael (2009) provide a social description and political analysis of the cultural cleansing, the looting of museums, the burning of libraries and the murder of academics in Iraq in the years following the Occupation by the United States and Coalition forces. Fuller and Adriaensens (2009) elaborate on one specific aspect of this, namely the killing of Iraqi scholars and intellectuals and the decimation of the academy. They argue that of the many tragedies that have be-fallen Iraqi society since 2003, ‘one of the most heinous and overlooked’ is that of the ‘elimination of hundreds or thousands of Iraqi academics’ (2009: 149). In the words of IRFP scholars ‘there have been terrible losses’. Another explained ‘key members of our research teams have been assassinated. This creates a feeling of darkness’.

Although the killings of academics in the aftermath of the invasion took place within the broad context of attacks against Iraq’s professional classes, and thus the plight of academics is not to be understood in isolation but as a lens through which to view the wider horror that afflicted occupied Iraq, the questions of who has been killed, how or even why, have not been substantively addressed (Fuller and Adriaensens, 2009). The height of the assassination campaign was 2006, and although Basra, Mosul and other Iraqi universities witnessed a substantial number of killings the majority of murders took place within the various HE colleges and institutions in Baghdad, especially Baghdad University itself. Fuller and Adriaensens (2009) point out that the high level of murder at the universities of these three cities does not correspond with the overall levels of violence in their respective provinces, and they conjecture that it reflects the leading position of these universities, as well as the potential role of these latter as capitals in an Iraq divided along major ethno-sectarian lines. There was general agreement at the first IRFP meeting in Jordan also in 2009, when one Iraqi scholar told those listening ‘I am glad CARA have invited us. But for all of us Iraqis here, we have taken many risks to take part’.

In the wake of targeted assassinations, Fuller and Adriaensens (op cit) have also described as explicit an implicit threat of assassination familiar to IRFP participants; always somebody to be heard wondering ‘I have not heard anything
from the other two scholars which is worrying ...’ and further along the corridor ‘no word from Anees yet ... I hope everything is okay with him’. As with targeted assassinations, there is very little evidence of who is directly responsible for issuing the various forms of intimidation, but like the murders themselves, threats and intimidation have become a widespread phenomenon. The explicit messages and demand contained within the threats serve two functions, both of which are underlined by the actual violence: the first is to hound academics out of their social roles, their homes, and frequently their homeland; the second is to ensure that all those academics who remain in Iraq, whether or not they are the immediate object of death threats, exist within a pervasive culture of fear in which they are encouraged to seek refuge abroad or to relocate within the country, effectively becoming internally displaced ‘I feel uncomfortable if I disagree with my colleagues’. There is apprehension, ‘I don’t trust. I fear’. Abiding horror stifles academic participation, ‘my mother used to be a Professor but she will not leave the house now. She cannot pass through our front door since my brother was killed right in front of it’.

The climate of fear in universities is exacerbated by the rise of religious fundamentalism. Where the academy in Iraq before the Occupation had been secular, representing a backbone of the nation in the face of potential partition along ethno-sectarian lines suppressed by the previous regime, powerful factions emerged out of the political vacuum opened up by the demolition of the previous political regime. One of the manifestations of the unleashing of sectarian violence was the demands issued by anonymous or unknown groups for students to be segregated by gender and for the institution to stop teaching ‘Western ideals’ (Fuller and Adriaensens 2009). All of these experiences have been encountered by the researchers whose work the reader will come to engage with through the pages of this book, as a short illustration puts across:

In conversations with one of the researchers in Basra about personal and safety issues for our research meeting it sounded like something from a carefully crafted movie plot with lots of secrecy. Security would be enhanced by keeping a very low profile, in moving to a safe sanctuary with no-one knowing who we are or what we are doing. The risks would be in moving about. Apparently the campus is safer.

With regard to the particularity of this research team’s work, ‘given what has happened to [the Principal Investigator’s] home, with the hand grenade being thrown, I formulated the opinion that the research meeting would not be safe and so declined the invitation’.

Whatever one’s own views of the invasion of Iraq and of regime change, the reality is that numerous scholars fled from Iraq and dispersed into different countries, in particular neighbouring Jordan. The carving out of an apolitical, independent and neutral space in which CARA can continue to operate, driven solely by academic considerations, is delicate and deeply contentious in an extremely polarized environment.
NOBEL PRIZES FOR IRAQI RESEARCHERS?

IRFP PROJECTS

By 2009 the IRFP was up and running and ready to receive its first round of research teams. As articulated in the earlier description of ‘first level’ activities, the IRFP encompasses a number of complementary activities responding to the following objectives: to fund research projects which facilitate the well-being and re-building of Iraqi society; to re-engage with and enhance the research and teaching capacities of recent exiles and those academics still working in Iraq; and to foster international collaboration opportunities. At the time of writing in 2011 the IRFP has facilitated the twelve research projects listed at the start of this chapter with further projects under negotiation, subject to future funding. Each project team consists of Iraqi Research Fellows, typically two early- to mid-career Iraqi academics in post in Iraq, and an Iraqi academic in exile, for example in the UK, Canada or Jordan. Western academics, reflecting CARA’s connections rather than who would be eligible to be involved, work for the IRFP voluntarily, and they occupy one of two possible positions: one is that of the Principal Investigator (PI) and another is that of Facilitator. The role of the English speaking, usually Western PI with professorial status typically based in the UK, is to ensure that the team meets its objectives, international standards, budget and time-lines. It is assumed that PIs bring international academic experience to the table in this collaboration. In addition, each team is supported by an English speaking Western academic who takes the role of Facilitator and works both with and across research teams in response to needs and requirements articulated by the team and embedded in the wider programme aims. The Facilitators ensure, in consultation with all team members, that mentoring is productive, that Research Fellows are consulted about their perspectives of the programme, and that the group dynamics are supportive both to individuals and conducive to the larger IRFP aims. It is true however, that when the IRFP began, Western academic contributors travelling to the first meeting in Amman knew little about the predicaments of Iraqi scholars, ‘we on the outside – had hardly any sense of what was going on when we first went to Jordan and little sense of how the war in Iraq affected the daily lives of Iraqi academics’.

In the context of these starting points, research projects have had to be operationalised across many very different and culturally diverse university settings, often thousands of miles apart. There is only one team, working on extraction of heavy metals from uranium contaminated soils, in which all of the Iraqi scholars are effectively hosted in the UK for the major part of their project. In all other cases workshops were convened to allow the teams to meet every four months in Jordan to avoid security pressures in Iraq and circumvent visa restrictions for people in exile. All projects contend with technical challenges and ongoing disruption due to fragile infrastructure in a post-conflict country. Poor broadband connectivity for example, compromises email contact and all teams report seemingly endless material, environmental and attitudinal obstacles to their research in Iraq. The day to day lived reality of barely tolerable conditions experienced by academics in contemporary post-conflict Iraq have been vividly detailed elsewhere (Rowlatt and Witwit, 2010). Accounts of curtailed academic freedoms are not new. The accounts of IRFP scholars assembled for this book
reaffirm the critical imperative for keeping CARAs work alive. They show how CARA continues to assist academics in need to rebuild their lives in practical ways. And how, through this assistance, commitment to academia is fortified which enables academics who live with fear to develop new knowledge, forge new networks and capacities to drive forward their aspiration to ‘condemn violence, to live quietly’; ‘what we are trying to discover through our research is only one part of our work, we want our research to restore peace’. IRFP project teams are only at the beginning of a process of re-imagining research for a reimagined Iraq but they will frame a contribution to the next generation and play a vital role in shaping society as Iraq’s educators.

Despite multiple barriers to research in post-conflict Iraq, powerful projects are being carried out through the IRFP. Many have reached the stage of both national and international dissemination with publications in print or pending. A number of teams are responding to a Call for Papers for a Special Issue in 2013 of the journal *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* (originally published under the title of *Medicine and War*) a world leading peer-reviewed international journal for all those interested in health aspects of violence and human rights. A forthcoming Special Issue of *Al-Raida*, an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published twice yearly by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University, on women & disability in the Arab World emerges directly from regional collaborations inspired by an Iraq Research Fellowship Programme project. Although IRFP projects are each concerned with specific academic sites of research, unity is to be found between the diverse research teams in that they all contend with the incontrovertible externally observable effect on their work of the current political situation of post-conflict Iraq.

**CHALLENGES FACING IRFP RESEARCH TEAMS**

The connections across experience for IRFP scholars remind us that research does not occur in an academic vacuum but is always an activity located within a complex set of relational, situational, cultural and political conditions (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002; Lavia and Moore, 2011). The actual nature of these conditions remain largely impenetrable, certainly unfathomable, to scholars working in the relatively protected context of the Western academy. The circumstances of IRFP microbiologists, for example, are chastening. They struggled tirelessly to overcome problems of live cough sample transportation through road blocks. Travelling to Baghdad to buy materials important for their work routinely ended in meeting another road blocked or encounters at check-points which prevented visits to suppliers. There was nothing to do but return day after day to try to get supplies but meanwhile the clock ticked away and precious samples deteriorate in unrelenting heat of the day. Their samples required refrigeration and so, as no electricity was available in their university until 4pm, researchers had to take samples home to the domestic fridge and later process them on the kitchen table to avoid risk of incomplete experiments.
Research teams studying social awareness and social change encountered daily powerful control political and religious parties exerted on the environment of the University. In such circumstances where interference, usually with violence, from religious parties and militias has been an inescapable issue, research has had to proceed with much caution. Our colleagues said ‘sometimes we prefer to keep quiet and keep low profile so that we don’t face danger’. We have had to take on board this message to help locate the tone of this book.

Women researchers have had to find creative ways to circumvent obstacles to their participation in the IRFP presented by colleagues who believe male academics should be privileged to take up such opportunities. When first presenting their work at an IRFP meeting some women were warned by an observer not to underestimate extremism or to neglect ‘a wider trend towards social conservatism of people who want to backward the women in Iraq’. Rowlatt and Witwit (op cit) have described the need for Iraqi female academics to sometimes operate or travel in clandestine ways to pursue their research interests. In addition to workplace barriers to participation in academic life, Iraqi women involved with IRFP juggled their research work with multiple family commitments – as do academics who are parents world over – but carrying an additional mantle of fear; thinking about research with dread in the heart as described on one memorable occasion by a researcher who had left her child at home in a city where a bomb exploded only days before near to the child’s school picnic. Researchers studying policy issues find workers in Iraq too afraid to be interviewed. On more than one occasion, having completed a rare interview, text messages from interviewees tipped off by friendly colleagues, warned respondents they were deemed to have caused offense, to have conducted politically dangerous conversations and the researcher was urged immediately to seek hiding. Working in an internet café brings risk as there is ongoing uncertainty over restricted and non-restricted websites and partisan interpretation of acceptable enquiry. A social science researcher downloading a picture of Bill Clinton shaking the hand of an Iraqi government minister at Harvard told how ‘the police came to my colleague and put a hand on his shoulder and said “don’t you know it is illegal?”’. The first meeting of the Soils Contamination team imploded when researchers on the road from Iraq failed to arrive amidst rumours of targeted persecution and then kidnapping. Sudden disappearance of colleagues is familiar to all of the teams. An Iraqi scholar noted ‘there should be a Nobel Prize awarded to Iraqi researchers for working in such conditions’.

Perhaps it is in response to the shifting tensions embedded in the unchartered landscape of research in post-conflict Iraq that each of the research teams is dynamic, transforming academic and professional communities. Even while projects are not yet finished, they are contributing research data and evolving research practice in ways which impact on the international academic scene. The work of the TB team is known beyond small research communities in Iraq, now having important links with the World Health Organisation and with the STOP TB global campaign which aims to save a million lives by 2015. Similarly the work of the team studying gender issues has crossed boundaries of global academic and
professional significance. Work on strategies for managing diabetes in Iraq has culminated in discussions of regional importance showing the strength and influence of research and education links forged through the IRFP.

When the IRFP began in 2009 tension was evident in the first meeting which was not only the product of the collective heightened expectations, hopes, and dreams, and of differential views about how to carry out research. There was clear personal wariness between Iraqi scholars arising perhaps from knowledge of each other’s political affiliation as these were defined along sectarian lines in post–invasion Iraq. What we have discovered by working on the IRFP is that the response of the Iraqi academics to the Western invasion is complex and sometimes divided. Some scholars have claimed, tentatively in the presence of Editors, the invasion was a neo-colonial act, namely the Western occupation of a sovereign territory for its own purposes; others have put forward its benefits in terms of the freedoms afforded by the imposition of normative liberal values. On the whole all Iraqi scholars, at least overtly, accept the authority of Western academics belonging to the CARA. The assumption is made, rightly or wrongly, that Western academics bring knowledge and experience to expedite reengagement, such as familiarity with ‘how to publish internationally’ or ‘how to ensure your research is rigorous within the terms of its field’.

Throughout the chapters which now follow, we wish to be mindful of the huge distance between research and academic lives with which scholars in Iraq and scholars in the West contend. These can be glimpsed even in the most elementary exchanges about how a UK university will authorise a mode of purchase and payment for essential equipment:

Dear All,

Just to clarify, the accounts people here will not release our funds unless they have the proper paperwork. This consists of a formal estimate/quote before the order is placed and a receipt for it after it is placed. For laptops they prefer you to buy from places who will support the equipment by way of a receipt and a guarantee.

Dear Dr,

The steps which you are talking about for purchasing laptops are probably what that are in the UK. Here in Iraq we cannot find such a facility. Here purchasing has to be achieved from markets directly by people who want to buy.

And then later,

Dear Dr,

I would like to inform you that in Iraq we cannot easily find the computer programme but we can easily find a cracked version of C++, then do the required calculations, however I do not know whether the calculations can then be used for our project in view of putting the achieved results in an
international journal or conference. If we can use the cracked version then we can go ahead but we do not have a way to buy from a supplier formally.’

Hello All,

No, we cannot use a cracked version.

A friendly expression of care between colleagues summarizes challenges facing IRFP research teams: ‘best wishes for your research ... be careful out there and watch your back’.

CHAPTERS FROM IRFP TEAMS

What will be found in the following chapters is a collection of personal reflections by Iraqi academics on experience of participation in the IRFP, testimonies which reveal an appreciation of the strenuous efforts made by all involved to take forward the complicated problem of revitalising research in the Iraqi academy. The chapters are steeped in what participants in the IRFP were seeing and thinking and hearing during the two years or so which they spent on the project. They provide a record and analysis of the processes which took place, between 2009–2011, in facilitating and in developing projects within the IRFP which were designed to help pave the way for the rebuilding of the academy in Iraq. The chapters show unerring commitment to research and to research freedom in the context of post-conflict Iraq.

When the idea of a collectively produced book was first mooted it had seemed barely possible that researchers writing about such diverse spheres of intellectual activity as, for example, ‘community theatre’ in contrast with ‘diagnosis of tuberculosis’, might share a platform of commentary on their experience of the IRFP. There were two schools of thought in the early days of the IRFP–on the one hand those who felt it impossible to pursue generic research strategy across disciplines and on the other those who were looking to encourage the cross fertilization. These perspectives were held together by CARA’s overriding commitment to privileging the development of research that could make a difference to Iraq. It soon became clear, as very different research teams struggled to find a co-operative mode of working together, that recurring themes, to do with identities and participation in post-conflict enquiry operated as overarching, exciting and unifying points of deep interest.

To respond to these interests, and to enable the project of shared writing which has ultimately led to this book, CARA funded a Writing Workshop held also in Amman, to which teams indicating an interest in, and readiness for, reflecting and writing together were invited. The book writing process began in a spirit of open mystification, with ready acknowledgement that contributors from different cultural worlds, and divergent worlds of scholarship, would feel uncertain about how to approach the task of shared writing. In the workshop we set out to build on our differences, to exploit the existing wealth of contrasting expertise amongst us, so that participants mentored each other as writers of the
chapters that now form the basis of this book. Through plenary sessions, team based workshops, independent writing time, peer review work in small groups and individual tutorials, research teams began to work on specific parts of their chapter (such as the beginning, the key arguments, the conclusions they wished to draw). Chapter authors were able to benefit from focussed discussions with their own project team members but also from feedback on their writing plans from the wider group of contributors, thus benefiting from a range of different world views and perspectives on research, on writing and on experience of the IRFP. Our shared motivation was to get the work of the Iraqi scholars in to print and to show case the critical role CARA had played in enabling the production of their work.

The central questions posed to offer a coherent conceptual framework for the book were: ‘What has actually been involved in your efforts to work collaboratively on research projects intended to help rebuild the academy in post-conflict Iraq and what are the implications of this?’ ‘What do we mean in theoretical and practical terms by the idea of ‘collaborative research in a post-conflict setting?’ ‘Why is reflection on our varied experiences of developing research to support the rebuilding of academy in Iraq important?’ ‘What are the possibilities offered by our work for future collaborative research endeavours seeking to regenerate academic life in contexts moving beyond conflict?’ ‘What is the link between our research endeavours, the development of academic life and rebuilding of a post-conflict society?’ ‘To what extent is this link central to the rebuilding of Iraq?’

During the course of the IRFP it had become plain to all that these questions could not be considered lightly. Rather, they had come to determine the utility of our shared endeavours over the years, to signify the enormity of difficult conversations which traversed cultural, personal, political and disciplinary boundaries and had led each and every participant to challenge previously held assumptions about the process of research, the production of research knowledge and social transformation. Coming together in a project of shared writing was a challenging undertaking but it enabled recognition that the unlikely synergies of research collaboration made possible through the IRFP forged new communities of research practice that will be central to those who are concerned with histories and experiences of exclusion and oppression encountered in communities and societies almost, but not quite, destroyed by conflict and war. Each chapter addresses some or all of these questions through discourses that are reflective of the specific context/s in which the researchers are working. As Editors we have sometimes intervened to make use of English accessible to the international reader but, as already made clear, we have taken great care not to lose the quality of original voice which pervades the writing.

In the first of the chapters from research teams Mohanad Ahmed, Hassan, Suhad Ahmed, Ali Al-Zaag and Michael Barer discuss their efforts to conduct research on diagnosis of tuberculosis in Iraq. They knew that tuberculosis research, as similarly with research studies of malaria, does have a history of being conducted in unstable environments and so chose appropriate research technologies as part of
their research design to accommodate context variables. Nonetheless they describe how they soon felt themselves to be ‘trapped in an endless circles’ as never-ending bureaucratic and institutional barriers were put in front of them. Their project has achieved huge success, much against the odds, growing from a time when Mohanad and Suhad Ahmed saw themselves as medical researchers destined to remain isolated from the rest of the world and decided to spend their housekeeping on getting research trials started without any connection to a like-minded academic community. Nowadays their research findings have come to the attention of the World Health Organization, they are able to discuss sustainability of their enquiries within Iraq and they are foremost advocates of new modes of research-led teaching within the medical schools of the Iraqi higher education sector.

In the next chapter, Amir Al-Azraki, Nadia Sekran, Michael Pomerantz and Bruce Wooding seek to understand and illustrate conflicts between Iraqi and non-Iraqi perspectives which impact on implementation of new strategies for teaching and learning in the context of Higher Education. They take Forum Theatre as a vehicle for potentially developing self-expression and self-determination within the academy but encounter what appear to be multiple sources of resistance to the possibilities of their project for transformation and change. The chapter develops ideas on ways of understanding this resistance and recognizes the profound cultural conflicts and perceptions on which research is based, with important consequences for development education.

In Chapter Three, Nadje Al-Ali, Huda Al-Dujaili, Inass Al-Enezy and Irada Al-Jeboury draw attention to the difficulties facing female academics in the context of Higher Education in Iraq and the double jeopardy facing women academics seeking to develop new approaches to research with regard to the collection of qualitative data. They challenge the existing value attached to quantitative approaches to research in Iraq persisting in pioneering qualitative research practice in a context in which their methodologies are often viewed as inadequate or even ‘un-scientific’. Through presentation of personal narrative in the main body of the chapter they affirm the potentially transformative role of female academics in the endeavor to renegotiate assumptions about scholarship in Iraq and for constructing new ones through raising the seldom heard voices of female Iraqi academics.

In Chapter Four Yahya Al-Kubaisi unravels many apparent contradictions and controversies that have characterised his journey as a researcher of school curriculum in Iraq. He discusses intensely problematic boundaries between academic and political activity which have been thrown into sharp relief through his focus on schools as social institutions which is pointing out more and more directly how, within school curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the culture of schools messages are conveyed about the kind of society we want. He views research as an immensely important resource for understanding the relationship between schools and society but has suffered many setbacks as the visibility and power of his research has begun to increase. In the context of Iraq, in which governance of schools has been deeply disrupted during episodes of war and conflict, curriculum matters and Yahya Al-Kubaisi’s work gets to grips with this in important ways.
Abdul Kareem Al-Obaidi, Ali Ghazi Kamees and Tim Corcoran develop a discussion in Chapter Five about the urgently needed, complex and yet uncharted field of training for paediatricians involved in working with children affected by conflict in Iraq. They each use their personal and professional experience of research and practice in differing cultural contexts of troubled children’s lives to explore the issue of sufficiency in terms of paediatric training in Iraq but also to extrapolate understanding of the relationship between insightful research and intervention, children’s well being and development and the future development of Iraq.

In Chapter Six, the difficulties of setting up research in conditions shaped by the continuing and long-lasting realities of war have required Alaa Musa Khuttar, Karim Al-Jeboury and Kevin McDonald to rethink major points of practice concerning ethical, methodological and practical dimensions of enquiry. Drawing on their experiences of developing research using new technologies to respond to the urgent health crisis of diabetes, they discuss their attempts to build new modes of research intervention through a series of complex cross-cultural collaborations. They have had to actively grapple with the protractedness of obstacles facing researchers in post-conflict Iraq but have managed to forge new pathways for research with potential to generate durable new solutions for health management.

MOVING ON

As IRFP Facilitators our initial involvement was inspired by huge optimism and the desire to contribute, in however small a measure, to healing the devastation to the Iraqi Academy which we felt our own government’s actions had helped cause. Our optimism has subsequently been tempered by the academic and political obstacles and challenges which our Iraqi academic scholars eloquently portray in the following chapters. Iraqi fellows still tell us ‘the scholar is an easy target’ because ‘if a scholar is assassinated it means something in terms of reactions from others’. Through the book we hope to expose some of these difficulties as part of a process through which oppression and marginalization of academics in Iraq – or researchers in situations of conflict anywhere in the world – are resisted. We recognise there is no room for complacency:

And we leave Jordan ... I got to the UK just fine and only a little late. Where I live in England there is snow and home looks just like a Christmas card (PI, December 2010)here there are still suicide bomber and people injured in attacks. We are sitting in a restaurant hearing explosions. They may be streets away but the shock waves resonate through our homes and communities (Researcher in Iraq, December 2010).

Commitment to stay with the project is re-affirmed through the serious engagement with the struggles and political circumstances of the different research teams as they attempt to situate themselves both in the modern global context of Higher Education and the well-defined expectations of CARA which is helping to fund them. To uphold the critical importance of placing Iraqi voices at the heart of the
IRFP, and to build new communities of knowledge and academic practice requires all of us, including those academics ensconced in the safety of the West, to try to re-imagine research for the rebuilding of Iraq. The accounts of IRFP scholars, whose projects were selected for funding according to criteria focused on potential, reflects the IRFPs underlying capacity building goals and begin to exemplify just what is involved here.

REFERENCES


1. PROGRESS THROUGH OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN TUBERCULOSIS RESEARCH: A SYNERGY BETWEEN DEVELOPING THE ACADEMY AND HEALTHCARE

‘Making Tomorrow Better than Today’

INTRODUCTION

Our project originated in the minds of two Iraqi academics. One provided a spark for the CARA Iraq programme, the other saw how development of tuberculosis (TB) research could serve both regeneration of the academy and the Iraqi community. In engaging with the programme we discovered common motivations and aspirations. We planned many activities that succeeded and many that failed. Our work required many sacrifices and encountered difficult attitudes amongst colleagues and within institutions. Finally we are confronted by how to make our progress permanent.

BACKGROUND

Although the problem of tuberculosis is well recognized and methods for diagnosis based on direct observation of cough samples and lab cultivation of the organism have been established for many years, the organism is dangerous and handling of live cultures requires demanding biosafety measures (e.g., Boehme, et al, 2007). Our project started with an appreciation that the problem of TB is not well described in Iraq and that modern methods based on detecting the TB bacillus’ DNA without growing the organism could remove the need for expensive facilities. So the work grew from the experience of our two Iraq microbiologists in molecular DNA studies and the opportunity to apply this to an important disease.

While thinking these points through Mohanad went to a biotechnology meeting in Turkey where he happened to see a stall promoting molecular TB diagnostic kits. Mohanad recalled a prior discussion with his wife Suhad, in which he had proposed that some of the family’s money should be reserved to purchase scientific materials. Why should she accept this? Why should the family’s capacity to build a house or buy a car be reduced to support his career? In the final analysis Suhad is also a committed scientist and was persuaded that this investment would be in the
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interest of their careers and the wellbeing of the family. Mohanad subsequently purchased TB molecular diagnostic kits and returned to Iraq, still with his plans relatively unformed.

Mohanad had seen an important career opportunity in TB because there was no current research in this field in Kerbala, a city that receives annually more than twenty million pilgrims to the shrine of Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Mohamed. This situation raises interest in the degree to which the problem of TB in this city originated from within its own population or from the travellers. A discussion with Dr Hassan about the clinical situation for TB diagnosis and management in the city reinforced enthusiasm for the project and the spark from CARA was turned into the candle of the first application.

So now the project needed to make its English connections and, with the minor detail of successfully competing amongst more than 30 other applications, a UK participant was sought. Out of the blue, Mike received an email suggesting his involvement with an Iraqi and an organization he had never heard of. Why should he participate? Could the notion that the project offered limited scientific value and feasibility be balanced against Mike’s commitment to global development and sense of responsibility towards the Iraqi nation following the invasion? Ultimately, despite an equivocal initial assessment of the proposal, he was impressed by the thoughtfulness and originality of the Mohanad’s draft document. When in due course he learned the background to CARA, its history and its aims, his commitment was secured.

CARA arranged for Mohanad to visit Leicester to discuss the project. From his experience in working in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and the Gambia, Mike was concerned that, while the basic molecular principle proposed was sound, the specific method required reliable and sophisticated equipment that might be challenging for successful application in Kerbala. He thought that a different method of DNA analysis should be used and was nervous that Mohanad would feel insulted that his proposal might be altered. In the event, the meeting in Leicester was a triumphant exchange in which Mohanad’s eagerness to learn and gain new experience was mixed with Mike’s need to appreciate the realities of working in Kerbala and we approached the first workshop with optimism.

PLANNING

Our first plenary meeting was a mixture of excitement, bewilderment and frustration. In the beginning we were at a loss to think why should we listen to the apparent ramblings of social scientists who we assumed would know nothing of the rigors involved in scientific proof? Through the mists of confusion there emerged the beginnings of recognition that we had common problems and a respect for our very different disciplines. The IRFP participants faced the need to focus on achievable objectives that could be recognized by all research teams.

While all parties appreciated the opportunity provided by the CARA and its IFRP programme there was concern that plenary sessions and a ‘one size fits all’ approach to developing project plans could impose a pattern of progress that was
PROGRESS THROUGH OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IN TUBERCULOSIS RESEARCH

retardant for the TB group and too fast for others. It was a challenge to complete the first planning phase in this context but also fascinating and pleasurable to hear about areas of research quite alien to biomedical scientists. Possibly as a consequence of this, within our group we felt a genuine personal warmth and sense of common purpose. Against this backdrop, our plan was produced to address four principle research questions:

- Would application of our chosen molecular analytical technique, known by the acronym LAMP, to standard coughed up (sputum) samples improve detection of TB cases over the standard microscopy-based analysis?
- Would this comparison (LAMP vs. microscopy) be affected in patients who had recently received antibiotics (these are widely available without prescription)?
- What was the frequency of resistance to rifampicin, a key antibiotic for TB treatment and was this related to prior use of antibiotics for other conditions?
- Most human TB is transmitted from person to person but some comes from cattle. Could we determine the balance between human- and cattle-derived TB in Kerbala?

All of this fell within jointly recognised motives to relieve the stigma of TB for patients and doctors alike and to create a positive progressive atmosphere. In this context patients often refuse diagnostic tests and hide their conditions. Doctors working at TB centres may have certain issues. For example, they may feel they have been sent there as a punishment for being perceived as trouble makers. Our aspiration was to counter these attitudes and raise awareness of TB.

It is not our purpose to report on our findings here but our experiences should be set against the nature of our task. The first IRFP workshop broke up in good spirits and the UK team returned to a frozen Christmas the Iraqis to their routine daily perils and frustrations. Something more than a plan to deliver some prosaic TB research had been achieved; the experience had opened the door for many of us to re-examine the arts/science alleged dichotomy in academia.

PROCESS

Over the next few months Mohanad was charged with setting up the collection of samples, establishing his laboratory base and engaging both co-workers and collaborators. Though sensitive to the constraints expressed by Mohanad and Hassan, our plans had been developed along the lines of a UK based project where three years would be a standard cycle; it soon emerged from Mohanad that even to sustain an operational plan that could last three months would be a major achievement.

Much of the work involved collection and storage of samples and reagents by Mohanad. There were numerous physical, organisational and attitudinal obstacles:

In travelling Mohanad frequently faced roadblocks and delays so that his meetings or collections were missed. Once he was locked into a TB centre processing samples at night because his schedule was so disrupted. He is now adept at talking to security guards to extract himself.
The seasons are an issue for TB researchers in Iraq: ‘when I was processing my samples in summer the temperature inside my lab was above 50 degrees and for safety reasons it is not possible to switch on air con even if there is electricity ... every 30 minutes I was suffocating and having to take off my personal protective clothing and gloves and breathe and then go back into the laboratory’. Electricity supplies are unreliable: ‘we have two supplies in Kerbala, regular and emergency ... it was decided the university did not need emergency supply so they cut it and we must rely on generators... this means no lab technique that requires more than a few hours elect supply can be viable’. Provision of generators is no doubt a major undertaking; they are easily installed but equally, either the generator or its fuel are easily stolen unless continuously attended. Mohanad’s lab cannot afford this.

‘Then they constructed a new road near the university and cut the whole supply of electricity ... then there was a conflict between the university and the electricity supplier which went on for 4 months so we had NO electricity ... I had to store my samples then in the college of science where they had some electricity’. Sometimes samples had to be stored overnight in Mohanad’s home. ‘We were researching TB in the kitchen ... we had to think about what happens to the children ... we had to get the samples out either when they were sleeping or before they came back from nursery.’

ORGANISATION AND ATTITUDES

We met with many organisational and bureaucratic obstacles as the project went on. Suddenly, for instance, Mohanad would be required to find an essential collaborator ‘I need official confirmation from the minister of health’– he phoned supporting the research. ‘I need a letter from the minister of health’– a letter was sent supporting the research. ‘I need permission from the coalition forces!’– this was offered as a possibility. And then, ‘don’t worry about that but now I want a letter from the minister of health establishing an official research team’– this was established! HOORAY!!!

We planned to collect samples every other day but through a confusion of professional relationships it was found to be impossible and many valuable samples were thrown away in a way which was disastrous for the project. Mohanad describes how ‘the first agreement between me and the Centre was to collect samples on different days ... but then I found they only stored negative samples because they were afraid to store positive samples but they did not tell me because they thought I had connections and would make trouble so they got rid of the positive samples and gave me only positive samples from days I was there – they would not store any. When I went through the records I found positive cases but no samples ... I did not want to make it embarrassing or difficult for them so I had to go every day to collect samples and I had to go early and stay late so that they would not burn the samples.’

Life within his own institution was not easy: ‘I hope I am encouraging my colleagues as they see the efforts I make but there is also jealousy and bad feeling
...structural and attitudinal difficulties ... people think I am doing something private for personal ambition and gain ... even in the meeting amongst Deans of the College and the President of a senior colleague criticized my stay in the UK ... saying TB had disappeared from Iraq 2,000 years ago ... my Dean said he was proud of me but it is a difficult situation ...

Some people say that Mohammed has been affected by his trips to ‘the outside’, ‘even contaminated, and we cannot take seriously the changes he proposes.’ These objectors, Mohanad feels ‘do not want to change ... they do not want tomorrow to be different from today’. Others who Mohammed tells about the research think his work is for his personal interest and gain and insist that there is no wider benefit. They tell him they do not want him to ‘build his research on their shoulders’.

In spite of these difficulties Mohanad collected a valuable initial set of samples, which, in view of the practical difficulties in Kerbala, he brought to Leicester for processing. The initial results indicated a significant excess of LAMP positive over microscopy positive results. On his return he focussed on further collections and on surmounting the obstacles to establishing LAMP in his own lab. However, he faced many new challenges as his work and his results became more widely known.

TRIUMPHS, JEALOUSIES AND DISASTERS

As with any research that impinges on clinical practice there is an imperative to consider what should be done in response when results indicate that improvements in patient care could potentially be deployed. When Mohanad reported our results to the second CARA funded IFRP workshop the opportunity arose to discuss them with the regional World Health Organisation office. Our work was received with genuine interest and various suggestions were made regarding further studies and the way in which our research might support the clinical services. This is a major challenge and just how research can be pursued in this context to build capacity in the academy and enhance healthcare at the same time.

A simple interpretation of our results was that a significant number of cases of TB were being missed by the routine diagnostic services and that LAMP might be used more widely to support the TB service. However, there are many levels at which the consequences of tests influencing clinical care must be considered especially where the local infrastructure faces the kind of challenges prevalent in Iraq. Moreover, in many cases of TB the diagnosis is made clinically (without lab tests) so some of the patients with negative microscopy and positive LAMP had received treatment. Thus it was important to emphasise that the primary purpose of our work was academic and capacity building for the academy as opposed to work aimed at improving clinical service.

As is the case in the UK, no matter how many times these cautions are explained, many will apply simplistic interpretations, see unrealistic opportunities and attribute sinister motives to results of this sort. However, unlike the UK and
for obvious reasons, the basic infrastructure in Iraq is less robust and has less regulatory counterbalances. Thus Mohanad had many more new challenges to contend with.

He gave numerous talks about the research project in Kerbala and at other centres. On one occasion colleagues from outside turned on a Kerbala physician and asked in an accusatory tone ‘why don’t you treat these people? ’Colleagues developed unrealistic expectations that Mohanad would include them in his publications and presented arguments such as ‘I have the same specialty as Dr Hassan!’ Another attitude was that his time and molecular analyses might be available to physicians for any target they selected.

Of course there were also suspicions and jealousies. Some colleagues asked why a foreign charity would wish to donate to Iraq. Why are they not supporting their own people and why is Mohanad’s work being supported? Is there some hidden purpose here? These are not easy questions to answer in a cultural context that is so different from the UK.

And there were disasters. ‘Once I found the labelling of my samples was not very clear ... the markers were water resistant but not alcohol resistant ... my wife will tell you, I was about to cry; I felt each sample was a fortune for me and they were lost.’ Much later there was a catastrophe. Several hundred samples brought to Leicester were rendered useless by a change in processing and storage that, unknown to us, profoundly undermined the LAMP technique. ‘we were very, very upset ... so much effort had gone into the collection.’

THE MEDIA AND ASSASSINATION OF ACADEMICS

Then of course there was the question of the media. Mohanad has found himself regularly invited to speak to reporters from within and outside Iraq about his work. But he faces threats of assassination if he takes part in public discussions of this sort. This is part of the background of academic life in Iraq. It appears that academics, who presumably can be seen as authoritative sources, are particularly targeted in this regard. This may simply reflect that, as a group potentially in the public eye, they are not security protected and are therefore easy targets. Mohanad has so far refused to be interviewed partly for this reason and partly because of his understanding of the political context. He believes that if a scholar is assassinated it is significant in terms of reactions from other countries. However, politicians do not care about the individuals assassinated; rather they are concerned with projecting particular images globally. For example if Mohanad revealed to a reporter that there were difficulties with pursuing research he knows that his words would be quickly hijacked for propaganda purposes. ‘The issue of assassination of academics and doctors has been with us for years to create fear so that people would be silent ... the real message was ‘keep quiet and shut up’ and this message is now perpetuated by those who have political power ... they think that academics and highly educated people are a threat to their authority.’

Analogies could be drawn between this experience and the environment in the UK relating to animal experimentation. Although the moral issues are quite
different and the threat of a different order, there has been for some quarter of century a silencing of academics variously by individual choice, by pressure from colleagues and by some institutions. The situation has changed substantially in the last five years with a combination of a tough policing approach to animal campaigners who perpetrate or threaten violence (there have been car, nail and fire bombs in the UK) and individuals and groups who are prepared to be publicly recognised as animal researchers. Mike had contemporaneous experience of this in his own institution where he has been interviewed about their new animal research building. No one else involved in the journalist’s visit was prepared to be named so anxiety is still prevalent. Subsequently Leicester has been publicly praised for its open policy to the debate on animal research. ‘At some level academics have to stand up for what they do’. Mike takes this view but recognises that the security situation would have to be transformed before this could apply in Iraq.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through all these trials, a body of robust research has been achieved and now needs to be reported. But has the primary purpose of the project been achieved and will there be a sustainable effect? As is so often the case, the final delivery of the research outcome will now take place after the resources and allocated time for the project have passed. Nonetheless, we can comment on what has emerged so far from the process. Out of necessity Mohanad has emerged with diplomatic skills he never thought would be his ‘remember I grew up in a village ... we are the leaders of the tribe ... to resolve difficulties in the community we have to say things frankly, not seeking diplomacy ... this has created many problems for me in my life ... when I lived in Baghdad I needed to say things in a very diplomatic way and not rush through problems with people ... and now, in this project, I have had the opportunity to engage with people who have great skills for open and diplomatic communication and I am learning new things and new dimensions for my future through these engagements ... from Hasan and Mike I learned different ways of communication ... usually I tell what I feel nakedly ... I just tell it ... but they have taught me to say things with strength but less provocatively.’ He has learnt that problems faced in delivering our work have to be discussed with great care. Simply to complain about obstacles, no matter how ludicrous, can be counterproductive. In particular, it is often security considerations that mean the work promised cannot come to fruition. Sensitivities in all areas are such that criticisms can rebound and the only way though is to make cooperation seem inviting and to deal with disasters in a blame free manner.

Suhad commented on sustainability saying ‘I think the legacy of our IRFP involvement will be sustained. We will have postgraduate students and MSc students focusing on a TB programme and TB research. We will keep on working to establish a system for quality for research within the college is important as is accreditation of quality assurance. We must work to develop an exciting science curriculum, there is a great deal more to be done.’ But she wonders, ‘how can we create something sustainable when the environment is so out of control?’ Strength
accrued from participation in the IRFP can be discerned, ‘the benefit of having someone doing research and publishing research in high impact journals cannot be underestimated and good practice cascades. For example, my dean became interested and asked me to convene a Round Table Discussion – but most lecturers in Iraq are tasked with being descriptive only, teaching without research and there is no culture of research-led teaching’. The excitement of the research journey is sometimes stifled by thoughts of the distance to be travelled and at one point of writing this chapter Mohanad looked up to reflect ‘we are so far behind in microbiology in Iraq that if I study day and night I can’t bridge the gap alone ... I feel like a researcher in infancy ... like a child, I need a good father, I need to take everything from you [Professor Barer]. I think what I want to learn is everything, the A-Z of your research career and life’. Mike replied ‘well it’s better if you have A-F maybe but then create your own F-Z of research and life – and you will do it much better than I’.

REFERENCE