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The city-wide electrical grid went down here in Najaf this morning during breakfast. This is not such a big deal as it is daytime and the sun is up. More importantly, the weather is not oppressively hot now and fans and A/C are not an absolute necessity. I can only imagine what it was like in July, August and September when the electricity was off. I was told while in Basra yesterday, that the lack of electricity is a major problem there as well. I left the U. S. a week ago to travel to Iraq for a six-week visit. And the electricity has gone off non-stop since I arrived.

I had mixed emotions as I set out on this trip. Excitement at the thought of seeing old friends, I have not been back to Iraq since late 2003. But also some apprehension as to what I will find after such a long time. It has been nine years, a fact hard for me to believe. Of course we've gotten news over the years, through Iraqis in the states and refugees in Jordan and Syria, and contacts we've been able to
maintain within Iraq. But it is quite another thing to be in the country again…. to try and get a sense of how things are with respect to everyday living, basic needs and security. I am hopeful that I can meet with Iraqis whom we know from Syria but who have had to flee back to Iraq. How are people faring? What are people feeling and thinking?

And so we come back to electricity. Here are a couple of photos showing the twisted mass of electrical wires from the neighborhood where I am staying.

This sight evokes memories from post-invasion days in Baghdad when the electrical system was down and the deafening noise of generators was everywhere. It is nine years later and people still have no functional electrical grid! These wires are representative of the crippled city-wide backup generator system that kicks in when the city-wide grid goes down. The city electricity costs a family about $5.00 to $10.00 per month, while the local men who run the generators every couple of blocks, I'll call them "bosses," get perhaps $50.00 per month from the same family. Unfortunately though, it seems that the hands of the "bosses" are gripped in a tight handshake with the higher-ups of the municipal electrical system. And it is no secret that this is the reality nationwide.
This is one of the many different generator sites which charges families excessive fees for backup electricity.

Well, let me leave you with this to be continued journal of sorts. I have much more to write, but want to get some word off to you so you know that I’ve landed and am in good hands, warm and loving hands. I hope and trust that you too are well.

Cathy Breen