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The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan: FINAL REPORT

John Hogan and John Trumpbour



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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This is the Final Report* of the research project into *The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan*, led by Dr. John Hogan and Dr. John Trumpbour. The project has been supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in particular.

1.1 Research Aims and Purposes:

In embarking upon this research project, the aims and purposes were as follows:

- a. To investigate the performance of the press and its relationship with other actors within the political process responsible for the dissemination and processing of information and debate.
- b. To evaluate government press practices, public accountability and civic responsibility in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan.
- c. To investigate how the role and performance of the press in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan is understood by the main stake-holders within society and polity.

* This document written in English is the definitive document. Translations are to be made available, but in the event that clarification is required reference should be made to this document. Please feel free to contact Dr John Hogan at jhogan@law.harvard.edu for further information.

- d. To compare the practices, development and understandings of the press environment in Iraqi Kurdistan with environments in different national settings.
- e. To build on this data to provide:
 - i) Vital research evidence about the quality of press coverage and its contribution to democratic discourse in contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan.
 - ii) An action plan based on good practice for the benefit of the Kurdistan Regional Government, policy makers, educators and press representatives to strengthen the democratic role of the press in Iraqi Kurdistan.
 - iii) Suggestions, where and if appropriate, for reforms and initiatives in the fields of public policy, law and regulation to strengthen the role of the Press in promoting democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan.
 - iv) To be a catalyst for an ongoing public debate about the role of the print media in society and the limits and possibilities of legitimate journalism for the functioning of the nation and democratic representation in Iraqi Kurdistan.

1.2 Iraqi Kurdistan Region:

Iraqi Kurdistan Region is made up of three governorates: Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok. Kurdistan Region is part of the federal State of Iraq, enjoying constitutionally recognised status as a “semi-autonomous” region. The Constitution of Iraq recognises the Kurdistan Region Presidency, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament. Iraq’s Constitution also recognizes the *Peshmerga* as the legitimate military force of the Region.¹ With its own parliament, President and government, a standing army, along with diplomatic missions and the reception of the President and Prime Minister by their counter-parts in the major capitals of the world, the Region has many of the hallmarks of an independent state. Iraqi Kurdistan borders Syria to the West, Iran to the East, and

Turkey to the North. The area is estimated at 40,643 square kilometres with a rapidly increasing population of around 4 million.² However, Kurdistan Region also lays claim to territories beyond its immediate jurisdiction in Iraq, under the terms of the Iraqi Constitution, in particular Article 140, recognised as “disputed territories”, but which in Kurdistan Region are now called “Kurdish territories outside the Kurdistan Region”. We might add that Kurdistan Region is not just a territorial entity, but also the homeland of the diaspora, the many Kurds who were forced to flee in the past and who have yet to return.

1.3 Background history

The Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslims, but there are also Shi'i sects, as well as the *Yezidi* and Christians. Their country, Kurdistan (the 'land of Kurds'), is a territory that stretches way beyond the confines of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. It is a land that ranges over approximately 200,000 square miles, taking in parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and the former Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Although united by the common language of Kurdish and with tribal and familial ties that straddle the borders imposed, there are different dialects spoken and written, most notably Sorani and Kermanji. Until the end of the First World War, Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, which, according to the Zuhab Treaty in 1639, divided East from West along the Zagros Mountains. At the end of the First World War, the Treaty of Sèvres proposed a division of the Ottoman Empire and its territory so as to include amongst other things an autonomous homeland for the Kurds. This treaty, however, was ultimately superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.³ Thereafter, Kurdistan was divided between Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. Since then, Kurds have been involved in a number of military struggles against the nation-states to which they were “assigned” by the Great Powers.

Since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1923, the Kurds have fought against different Iraqi regimes, taking up arms and forced to seek refuge in the mountains.

During this period, there were ceasefires, negotiations and unfulfilled promises by Iraqi governments followed by the resumption of military hostilities.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was founded in 1946 under the leadership of General Mullah Mustafa Barzani, taking up the leadership of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq. His son, Massoud Barzani, is now leader of the party and is the current President of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. In 1975, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was established, led by current Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani.

The Kurds of Iraq were presented with the most destructive and violent foe with the establishment of the Ba'athist regime (1968-2003). In the late 1960s, the KDP agreed to a ceasefire and talks with the new regime, but the Ba'ath government failed to fulfil the demands for autonomy by the Kurds, who insisted on the inclusion of Kirkuk and Mosul into an autonomous Kurdistan. Military resistance resumed. The Ba'athists combined military warfare with a policy of *Arabization*, the systematic redrawing of the ethnic map through moving peoples and populating Kurdish areas with Arabs, a policy that was pursued right up until the fall of the regime in 2003.⁴ Under Ba'athism, the Kurds were subject to very close surveillance and brutal repression, where freedom of expression was suicidal. In his book, *My Father's Rifle: A childhood in Kurdistan*, the acclaimed film director Hiner Saleem tells his story and captures the nightmare of the time, in the late 1970s, where "If a person pronounced so much as one word that displeased the government, he would disappear".⁵ In the 1980s, during and after the Iraq-Iran war, the Iraqi regime launched several military campaigns against Kurdish combatants and civilians in Iraq. The most notorious operation, named *Anfal*, took place in the spring and summer of 1988.⁷ The campaign included a series of military offensives. Thousands of villages were destroyed. The most notorious episode occurred with the use of chemical weapons on the people of Halabja. A large number of villagers who survived deportation, imprisonment and mass murder, were put together in concentration camps called "*Mujamma'at*". Throughout the *Anfal*, approximately 200,000 Kurds were murdered or disappeared. Recent research suggests that during the *Anfal* a

number of Kurdish women were abducted and sold as slaves by the Ba'athists across the Middle East and as far afield as Egypt⁸. The Anfal was a campaign of genocide.

Western powers and world opinion turned a blind eye to what was happening to the Kurds of Iraq. The Ba'athist regime represented for many national security planners a bulwark against the Iranian revolution, as Iraq and Iran fought each other to a standstill during their long war which filled most of the 1980s and left more than a million dead.

Following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and subsequent expulsion in 1991 by US-led forces, Iraqi Kurds took to the streets against the regime in a popular uprising which saw the liberation of most of Kurdistan from Ba'athist agents. However, with the Ba'athist regime still in place, the uprising ended in a mass exodus of the population towards the Turkish and Iranian borders in March 1991, when the Iraqi army regrouped and attacked Kurdish territory. It was then that Western Coalition forces established a no-fly zone or 'safe haven' in Northern Iraq. The Iraqi Army withdrew, along with the Ba'athist administration, but continued to place the Kurds under pressure through a blockade on Kurdistan.

In 1992, the *Kurdistan Front*, comprising various Kurdish political parties, held general elections establishing the Kurdistan National Assembly and formed the Kurdistan Regional Government.⁹ In 1994, the two main Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) began a fratricidal war that lasted four years.¹⁰ The war led to the end of power-sharing arrangements¹¹ and the division of the territory with the creation of two separate administrations, the KDP-led administration in Erbil and the PUK-led government in Sulaymaniyah. Although the military confrontation ended officially in 1998, the region remained divided. As the build up to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 unfolded the two parties were presented with the imperative and opportunities for greater cooperation. Unity was achieved after the KDP and PUK entered into a strategic agreement. Following the 2005 elections, the two administrations merged¹² and a unified coalition Kurdistan government was formed under the

leadership of President Massoud Barzani and Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani. Under the terms of the strategic agreement, the post of Premier has been rotated, with Nechirvan Barzani making way for Barham Salih of the PUK in 2009 only to return in 2012 to take up the post once more.

In 2009, the two parties faced the electorate as a coalition bloc, the *Kurdistani List*. President Barzani was elected back into office with nearly 70 per cent of the votes cast. The Kurdistan List did suffer losses in the parliamentary election as *Gorran* (The Change List), a split from the PUK headed by their former long-standing deputy general secretary turned media entrepreneur Nawshirwan Mustafa, pulled support from their former comrades, primarily but not exclusively, in the governorate of Sulaymaniyah. Gorran, working in tandem with The Islamic League (Komal) and Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), currently represents the main opposition force in parliament. In the 2009 elections, the *Kurdistani List* retained a clear overall majority.

Politically, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region is remarkably stable. It is true that there have been the occasional acts of civil disturbance, most notably the brief period of rioting in Zhako at the end of 2011 and the more prolonged protests which began in Sulaymaniyah in February 2011. Nevertheless, it is much more secure in Kurdistan Region than anywhere else in Iraq. In fact, many Iraqis, across ethnicities and religious belief, have moved to the Region in order to flee sectarian and political violence.

In “Kurdish territories outside the Kurdistan Region”, most notably Kirkuk and Mosul, the situation is very different. Tensions are running high and violence is on the increase. In January 2013, for instance, ten people died when a suicide bomber attacked the offices of the KDP in Kirkuk. Ethnic tensions, particularly involving Arabs and Turkomans, are combined with what is presented as a grab for power by Prime Minister Nouri al-Malaki in Baghdad. Amidst various attempts to suppress Kurdish autonomy and constitutionally grounded territorial claims, the stage is set for very fraught times ahead. It is thus no surprise that security and stability are ever present concerns.

Yet, the Kurds of Iraq have emerged so far as the big winners from the fall of the Ba'athists. Kurdistan Region has enjoyed a transformation in its economic development, one that has been clearly visible to anyone who has travelled in and out of the country over the last few years. New buildings, homes, hotels and retail outlets have been springing up at a remarkable pace. Electricity supplies have improved and there has been some positive movement in the reconstruction of villages, road building, public transport, schooling, higher education and health care. There is still some distance to travel and there are concerns about the allocation of resources, dependency on imported labour and commodities, efficiency and allegations of corruption. According to the Iraqi constitution, 17 per cent of the Iraqi budget should be allocated to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Also, within the legal frame of Iraq, the Region benefits from its own trade activities. Of particular significance has been the activity of the KRG in developing the oil and gas industry. The KRG at first brought in small players, but now they have managed to entice big companies such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Total, and Gazprom. This represents major inward investment. It is also being combined with a rapprochement with Turkey, which is looking to build a pipeline to allow for the export of Kurdish oil and gas through its territory. As Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani explained in an interview with *Time* magazine in December 2012, the use of natural resources and the cultivation of relations with major multi-national oil companies and development of investment partnerships with other countries in the wider region allow the KRG to promote the interests of Kurdistan Region and to resist attempts by Baghdad to dissolve hard won freedoms.¹³

The people and leadership in the Kurdistan Region have a great deal resting on their shoulders. Aside from the challenges faced within Iraq and the growing pains that inevitably burden a maturing democracy, the success of Iraqi Kurdistan places it at the head of the wider Kurdish struggle. The frontiers imposed by the Great Powers with the Treaty of Lausanne are negated by Kurdish families who straddle the imagined borders of imperial imaginations. Kurds in Syria are caught between the

rampaging military machine of Assad's Ba'athist regime and the brutality of insurgent Islamist militants. The KRG is looked to for solidarity and leadership. Military and humanitarian solidarity are being extended. The importance of the KRG is central to the possibility of peace for Kurds in Turkey. While the influence of Iran may be bemoaned, the very fact that Tehran invests so heavily in maintaining a dialogue with the KRG is again testimony to Kurdistan's emergence as a force to be reckoned with and that the Kurds cannot be ignored as was the case for so long before. It is perhaps not surprising that a National Conference, designed to bring Kurdish groups together from different parts of Kurdistan to set out a roadmap for the world's 30 million Kurds, has been scheduled to be hosted in Erbil at the behest of President Barzani.

As the Kurdistan Region faces the future, it does so as a nation with a high proportion of young people emerging into adulthood. There is a new generation with no memory of occupation or the sacrifices which that entailed. It is a generation hungry for new ideas and at times impatient to take its place at the decision-making table, to have its say and to make its mark. Opportunities for mobility and access to new communication technologies are presenting a host of previously unavailable cultural experiences and opportunities for interaction. The internet, satellite TV, mobile telephones, along with a range of other communication devices, provide ready access to the rapidly changing images of a hyper-modern globalised world. Women have been at the forefront of pushing the boundaries but have also been on the front line and receiving end when it comes to the reassertion of tradition. While Kurdistan Region is certainly going through rapid economic development and is experiencing mass movement from the land to the city, many traditional customs and practices associated with settled rural and small town patterns of life remain intact and are in some quarters jealously guarded. Oil and gas give Kurdistan Region leverage and power in relation to neighbours, but the riches from the earth create their own dynamics and perhaps unintended consequences. Change is not always or universally welcome. Nostalgia and a longing for the return of old certainties are easy to understand.

Some may find solace in denial or the retreat into faith. Others confront the storm of “progress”, conceptualize its motion and try to identify the correct course to navigate the tempestuous sea ahead. Kurdistan is truly at the crossroads of history. How the challenges facing Kurdistan Region are understood and acted upon is in no small measure determined by the quality of information and argument produced in the newspapers of the nation. When *all that is solid melts into air and when all that was once held holy is profaned*, then at a minimum serious reflection is the order of the day. The following section outlines how the research team went about collecting the data necessary to provide an empirically grounded discussion of the challenges faced in Iraqi Kurdistan Region in relations between the press and political processes.

1.4 Research Methods

In order to address the aims of the research project, the research team sought to identify the most significant newspapers and magazines in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. A number of government ministers and KRG officials were asked for their assistance. Parliamentarians and the main political parties of Iraqi Kurdistan were also invited to contribute to the research process. In addition, contact and dialogue was established with experts and practitioners in the law, along with journalists and their representatives, as well as newspaper editors and managers.

The research project began in the latter part of 2009 and continued through to the completion date of this final report in 2013. Field work was carried out both in Kurdistan and in Europe to talk directly with and interview relevant actors. Over 200 hours of interviews were recorded with journalists, representatives, advocates, editors, newspaper managers, politicians, government officials, academics, students, representatives of the legal profession and of religious denominations. In addition, telephone and internet based communications were used to draw in additional contributions along with follow up interviews with some of those whom we had the pleasure of meeting in person. In addition to these interactions, the research team produced a Preliminary Report at the end of 2009 and further discussion documents

in the form of Interim Reports released in 2011 and 2012, containing a number of observations and propositions about the media environment in Kurdistan Region which then acted as catalysts for additional commentary and insight. These reports have been hosted at <http://kurdistanresearch.blogspot.co.uk/>. Notice was provided of postings and invitations were made for feedback. Email communications and the reports were sent out in English and also in Kurdish (Sorani dialect) translation.

The insights of our interviewees and contributors to calls for dialogue were combined with textual analysis, including the inspection of laws and regulations, press content and Government and party communications, along with secondary research materials related to Kurdistan in particular and the relationship between democratic governance and political communication in general.

The project took a lot longer to complete than anticipated. There were certain events which meant that the journey to Kurdistan could not be made and that presence on the ground would be fruitless. There were also ongoing structural constraints. Several translators and research assistants were employed. Mindful of the partisanship that prevails amongst many Kurds from Kurdistan Region, when it came to sensitive materials it was often necessary to get the same piece of information checked and reported upon by more than one pair of eyes. This is in no way a criticism of any of the people who worked with us. It was just good practice. To illustrate the lengths that we went to, on one occasion, we asked a research assistant to look for a particular story in the online version of the paper that was under scrutiny. It was reported back to us that the article could not be found. To be absolutely sure that the article we were looking for was in fact absent, we asked another research assistant to check. They found the piece. Having looked for the piece online, we also sought to get a research assistant on the ground to find a hardcopy of the paper from the newspaper market in Erbil. This illustrates the cumbersome and slow process, indeed the very careful approach we took to performing our duty to engage in rigorous research.

Throughout the lifetime of this research project, the research team sought to draw in as many perspectives as possible. Kurdistan Region has a vibrant and energetic political culture, in which passions can sometimes run high. While we appreciate the enthusiasm shown, there were times when some newspapers and individuals in their reception and interactions with the research team over stepped the bounds of decency. Thankfully, we have been able to maintain a civilized dialogue and are grateful to all those who shared their understandings and wisdom.

Finally, in addition to thanking all those who contributed to this research project by giving up their time and agreeing to be interviewed or by sending us their comments and engaging in dialogue, we would like to extend a particular debt of thanks to the Philosophy Department at the University of Salahadeen. The scholars Rebwar Siwayli and Nawzad Jamal organized a meeting for the research team so that we could meet with the students and have what turned out to be a very productive discussion about the press and political processes in Kurdistan. One female student drew attention to arguably the central dialectic at stake: in a statement that reminds us of the Greek myth of Icarus, she told the seminar,

"Freedom is like being exposed to the sun. If you get too close you will be burnt and destroyed, but if you are too far away you will live in darkness and the cold".¹⁴

Chapter 2:

Press and political processes in theoretical context

Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact, very momentous to us in these times. Literature is our Parliament too. Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable.¹⁵

Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 1840

When in 1898, exiled Prince Miqdad Badrkhan established the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*¹⁶, in Cairo, a message was relayed from his refuge that Kurds recognized the importance of communication technologies in reproducing and building their political community. In so doing, Prince Badrkhan and his newspaper drew upon a much older tradition. The concern with communication, the subject of Rhetoric, occupies a special place in philosophical and political inquiry at least as far back as ancient Rome and Greece. Closely associated with this concern was the idea of Republican virtue, a preoccupation revived in the civic humanism of the Italian Renaissance, to be reproduced later in the American and French Revolutions. Here, we see stress placed upon the responsibility of the people to debate, contemplate and engage in public life and the affairs of state.

The model of democracy derived from the Ancient city states of Rome and Athens was premised upon the possibility of mass assembly in the *forum* or *agora*, with small scale and localized constituencies. In ancient Rome, the community could enter the Forum and read on its walls the *Acta Diurna* (Daily Events), which some

regard as a distant forerunner of the newspaper and the government gazette. With mastery of paper production and printing through carved woodblocks, China in the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE) published the first widely distributed court gazette. Artisans in Song dynasty China of the eleventh century then created the first moveable type, four hundred years before Johannes Gutenberg's revolutionary invention in Europe.

In ancient Athens and Rome, political activity might be informed by familiar rituals that in their best moments delivered constant visibility of decision making processes and outcomes. Hence, citizens came to regard close-knit community as a key precondition for active participation in political discourse and decision making. But when populations are dispersed the promise of collective deliberation, decision-making and mobilization through face to face interaction can easily be eroded. Several political philosophers of the eighteenth century Enlightenment harboured severe doubts that democracy could thrive in large, sprawling nations, and they celebrated the compact city-state as the home of republican virtue.

However, with the advent of print media and generalized literacy, we witness the creation of a connective tissue to draw together the geographically dispersed people into a form of virtual adjacency that historical sociologist Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities". According to Anderson¹⁷ in his study of nationalism, the press has played a crucial role in dissolving localism by making readers aware of spatially separated constituencies, the unity of which is the object and precondition of nation building. Likewise, it is this capacity of print media to re-connect communities which informed the above observations by the great Victorian social commentator Thomas Carlyle, during one of his more democratic phases of reflection. These reflections draw our attention to the longstanding concern of students of democracy with the relationship between the print media, government, political communities and republican virtue.

In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and particularly since the fall of Saddam Hussein the press began to flourish. According to *Rudaw* weekly newspaper there have been as many as 800 magazines and newspapers in publication in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, the terrain has been changing shape rapidly. We should note that some newspapers

are making bold bids to increase market share, most notably *Hawlati* which from 2012 became a daily newspaper while *Rudaw* newspaper company is extending its reach into other media, including TV. During the course of our research project, Gorran abandoned publication of *Rojname* and Komal (Kurdistan Islamic Group) ceased having a presence in the print media world, as both parties transferred resources to TV and web based forms of communication. In addition, *Aso* newspaper ceased publication. When the research team interviewed newspaper wholesalers as well as a number of street vendors in Kurdistan at the start of 2012, it was confirmed that newspaper sales have been in decline. Also, in early 2012, the Kurdistan Journalists' Syndicate (KJS) noted that numbers are dwindling. The KJS put the number of printed publications at 470, with approximately 100 newspapers.¹⁸

Even with these declines, this is still a considerable achievement. But what is the impact upon the polity?

While print media is correctly identified as an important means for transmitting information within the political community, it would be reckless to assume that relations of power are absent from these processes. As reported above by Carlyle, the political philosopher Edmund Burke long ago took the view that the Press should be regarded as a power in its own right, a Fourth Estate of the political realm¹⁹. Clearly, the press can act as a bridge between the government and people, serving to lubricate mechanisms of government transparency and accountability. However, power is not only reflected in the concrete decisions and action of the bearers of institutional leadership. Individuals or groups can limit decision-making to relatively non-controversial issues by influencing community values and political procedures and rituals. Power may also be located in the capacity to enact what Schattschneider²⁰ termed the "mobilisation of bias", the creation or reinforcement of barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, to express what Bachrach and Baratz²¹ termed the power of non-decision making. And, as the principal modern theorist of power Steven Lukes²² has argued, there is a third dimension of power that needs to be understood, the capacity to shape perceptions, understanding and desires so that the "victims" of power internalise and naturalise their own subordination, to effect

compliance with an order and political agenda defined behind their backs and at variance with their interests.

To understand and mobilize the press appropriately is a concern of all citizens. But this is a responsibility which rests with greater weight upon the shoulders of serious journalists and for all those who wish to claim the title of "public intellectual". The prominence given to print media places intellectuals in a privileged position and even more so in the context of nation building. As Anthony Smith claims: "It is the intellectuals....who have proposed and elaborated the concepts and language of the nation and nationalism and have...given voice to wider aspirations that they have conveyed in appropriate images, myths and symbols"²³. Nevertheless, it is important to be mindful of Michel Foucault's observation in a debate with Noam Chomsky that "One knows ... in a general way, all teaching systems, which appear simply to disseminate knowledge, are made to maintain a certain social class in power; and to exclude the instruments of power of another social class...." He adds: "The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent, to criticize and attack them in such a manner that the political violence that has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them".²⁴ Elsewhere Foucault adds that "a system of power... profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power...."²⁵

Evidently, it would be rash to dismiss the contributions that can be made by those who by virtue of training and education may have great insights and skills to offer their fellow citizens. But, it is perhaps instructive to receive words of wisdom with caution and for purveyors of knowledge to transmit their understandings with humility and reflection upon the reliability of their own interventions. Of key importance in providing responsible worthwhile intellectual leadership in public discourse is the search for dialogue. Closing off discussion can be a dangerous step because, as the cultural historian and critic Christopher Lasch liked to say, the most important function of a free press is not just supplying information but rather asking the right questions. As he expressed it, "What democracy requires is vigorous public

debate, not information. Of course, it needs information too, but the kind of information it needs can be generated only by debate. We do not know what we need to know until we ask the right questions, and we can identify the right questions only by subjecting our own ideas about the world to the test of public controversy".²⁶

One area of controversy that seems to dominate the press is that of corruption. Press historian Marcus Daniel suggests that "scandal and incivility" seem "closely linked to the creation of a more democratic and participatory political culture".²⁷ So, a certain amount of scandal-mongering and incivility can be expected in democratic polities, but media institutions have a responsibility to put bad behaviour in proper perspective and not fuel beliefs that an entire people are sunk in depravity.

Even a cursory glance at the indices of development and markers of peace and prosperity tell us that there have been great leaps forward and that the problem of corruption is not the only and certainly not the most important aspect of Kurdish society. Other areas of controversy could well take up greater space in the press, not least the position of women and the continuing problem of honour crime. Without for one moment condoning wrong-doing, responsible commentators could consider the possibility that manipulation is at hand in the contemporary representation of Iraqi Kurdistan. The hostility of states facing dismemberment is combined with the ambiguity if not open opposition of world powers to the establishment of an independent Kurdistan. Hence, when Kurdish politics is presented as irredeemably corrupt, one might be forgiven for thinking that a "mobilisation of bias" is being mounted, where world opinion is being prepared for fragmentation of Kurdistan Region and the re-imposition of external rule, justified on the grounds that the Erbil administration fails to be representative and that Kurds are venal and incapable of self-government.

As we have observed, playing to the gallery of foreign observers has been combined with the unexplained public questioning of the contribution of returning exiles. Kurdistan is hardly alone in harbouring fear of returning "outsiders": Pakistan long resisted prosperous muhajirs, and China's bureaucracy debates whether the so-

called Sea Turtles deserve to be on the fast track to the command posts of Chinese institutions. Yet suspicion of the “outsiders” is curious. Surely, opinion formers are aware of the experience of forced dispersal and the antecedence of the Kurdish press in the life of exile. The history of national and social liberation movements is replete with the contribution of exiles. Oppressors have not been shy to target the most talented leaders for exclusion or annihilation. Yet suspicion of the outsider is rife in the Kurdish press. The articulation of such localism is perhaps indicative of the legacy of the traditional social structures identified by Martin van Bruinessen²⁸ as directing the trajectory of Kurdish society and politics, but is it really the case that this is the best way forward for a nation that has been starved of opportunities to develop, has been robbed of some of its best talent and which faces encirclement by hostile states? If Prince Miqdad Badrkhan had followed the logic of the suspicion of the outsider, then perhaps the Kurds would have been forced to wait longer before entering into the world of modernity.

A degraded media environment is one that erodes the promise, to use the language of the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas, of a mature “public sphere”, a zone for “discourse” in which ideas are explored and a “public view” can be expressed. Or, to put in the terms expressed by Roberto Michels²⁹, one time student of Max Weber and a key theorist of elite domination, the impoverishment of the masses in the field of communications and access to information and knowledge, underpins popular subordination to oligarchy, the rule of the few over the many. However, such a state of affairs cannot be regarded as an iron law of history. There may be considerable barriers to popular participatory political community and democracy, not least the sheer size, complexity and spatial separation of modern societies; but as is suggested in the work of media theoretician John B. Thompson the press has a vital role in generating a deliberative form of democratic citizenship.³⁰ A print media encouraged to pursue and committed to executing high quality and accurate debate and reporting can play a crucial role in generating republican virtue, in the cause of national and democratic aspirations.

Yet, in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, there is very little disagreement that the current state of affairs in the press is a cause for serious concern. We have found widespread agreement that newspaper journalism and the conditions under which it operates require reform. However, thus far there is an absence of consensus in the specification of the causes of the problems faced and in the definition of what is to be done. The media critics Robert W. McChesney and John Nichols have suggested that “a healthy journalism” should seek to achieve the following goals:

1. *It must provide a rigorous account of people who are in power and people who wish to be in power, in the government, corporate and nonprofit sectors.*
2. *It must regard the information needs of all citizens as legitimate.*
3. *It must have a plausible method to separate truth from lies, or at least to prevent liars from being unaccountable and leading nations into catastrophes – particularly wars, economic crises and communal discord.*
4. *It must produce a wide range of informed opinions on the most important issues of our times – not only the transitory concerns of the moment, but also challenges that loom on the horizon. These issues cannot be determined primarily by what people in power are talking about. Journalists must provide the nation’s early warning system, so problems can be anticipated, studied, debated and addressed before they grow to crisis proportions.³¹*

Chapter 3

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter we present findings from the study and discuss the implications. Each of the discussions fall under the following headings:

3.1 National unity

In all of the interviews that we conducted throughout the lifetime of this research project, not once did we hear of opposition to the establishment of the Kurdistan Region. In fact, celebration of autonomy was often combined with the expressed desire for formal and full national independence, an aspiration which for some was explicitly articulated within a pan-Kurdish vision.

Clearly, the papers affiliated to the political parties wishing to speak to and on behalf of the nation aspire to have national coverage, so it is no surprise to see the KDP organ *Khabat* and the PUK's *Kurdistani Nwe*, along with the official organs of other parties, perform that role. But the desire to reach beyond the local is also evident in the endeavours of the private press. The work of Behcet Hirori, of *Evro* newspaper based in Duhok, and Ako Muhammad's paper *Rudaw*, which operates out of Erbil, have both drawn praise for making space for the coverage given to and the dialogue with those parts of Kurdistan that lie outside of the confines of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, addressing readers not just in the Sorani dialect and Arabic script but also in Latin script and Kermanji. As the former editor of *Hawlati*, Asos Hardi, pointed out to the research team when we met him in June 2010, the origins of the paper lay in the attempt to bridge the territorial and rhetorical divide that had separated the KDP

and PUK during their military confrontation, so as to create a space for dialogue. In 2010, Kemal Rauf, the then editor, told us that he and *Hawlati* remains true to these aims. According to Dr Farzal Omer, Editor-in-Chief of *Warr* newspaper based in Duhok, journalists and newspapers in Kurdistan have a crucial role to play in generating and reproducing collective discipline, a responsibility which he made clear should involve the subordination of localised affiliations and individualistic egotism to the national liberation struggle.

Nevertheless, despite these laudable aims it is apparent that localised thinking and orientation have yet to be overcome fully. As Barham Ali, the editor of *Bas*, put it to us in May 2012,

*"Another major visible problem within Kurdish journalism is the geographical constraint within which journalists operate in relation to the way they think and the way they cover the news. The newspapers published in Duhok and Erbil are not read in Sulaymaniyah and vice versa. In Sulaymaniyah, psychologically journalists and intellectuals have placed a cultural embargo on the population, for example when a newspaper which is published in Sulaymaniyah manages to sell 3000 copies in Sulaymaniyah its editor in chief thinks that he has achieved a great task....he does not care if he cannot manage to sell 100 copies in Erbil. This problem affects all newspapers and magazines."*¹⁸²

That some journalists and newspapers might wittingly or otherwise promote national disunity was a concern that the research team came across when we met Dr. Arsalan Bayz, first chief editor of the PUK daily *Kurdistani Nwe* and currently Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly. He reflected upon the demonstrations that had taken place from February 2011 in Sulaymaniyah and elsewhere in Kurdistan Region. The protests which started in February 2011 began peacefully and expressed legitimate demands for reform. But when a minority of demonstrators were led on a provocative and violent attack upon KDP offices in Sulaymaniyah, a series of further violent confrontations were sparked and raised tension across the Kurdistan Region and in Sulaymaniyah in particular. The attack on the KDP offices raised the nightmare of the fratricidal war. As Sulaymaniyah-based writer Ata Qaradaghi pointed out, it is no secret that the KDP is marginalised in the city. The administration of the city lies in PUK hands. After a number of weeks of street

protests in Sulaymaniyah, the authorities reasserted control. But in the interim and for some time after there can be no doubt that tension was running high in the city and elsewhere in Kurdistan Region. Dr. Arsalan Bayz pointed out to us that *Hawlati* newspaper ran a story in January 2012 which claimed that the attacks upon the KDP offices in Sulaymaniyah back in February 2011 had been the work of the PUK. He stated that PUK representatives denied this claim vehemently and did so publicly, including through television broadcasts, and that running this story in the paper was irresponsible, highly provocative and divisive.

The desire to maintain unity in Kurdistan is expressed in the strategic agreement between the two main parties, the KDP and the PUK. In May 2010, the research team met up with Fuad Sdeeq, who up until the week prior to our meeting had been Editor of the KDP owned and controlled magazine, *Gulan*. According to him, the KDP had decided to remove him from his post. His explanation for the dismissal was that he had published an article critical of the then Prime Minister, Barham Salih. Fuad Sdeeq claims that it was following complaints to the KDP from Barham Salih and Jalal Talabani, both from the PUK, that he was removed from post.

There are various ways of understanding this account. It might be seen as a crude manoeuvre to silence a critical voice. This might be true. But, it might also or instead be viewed as a price that had to be paid, certainly a regrettable sacrifice from the point of view of the dismissed individual and even seen as unfortunate from the perspective of his patrons, but one worth paying in order to maintain the peace with a strategic ally.

That national unity should be regarded as the key priority today has been reinforced further by the deterioration in relations between Kurdistan and Baghdad. There are ongoing disagreements over territory and security, along with oil exploration, extraction and revenue. Presidents Barzani and Obama met for talks in Washington in 2012, where concerns were raised about the implications of the Iraqi military procuring fighter aircraft from the USA. The potential for military aggression from Baghdad was signalled by the formation in the summer of 2012 of the Dijla Operation Regiment by Iraqi PM Malaki. The Iraqi PM deployed this newly formed military unit, one which has been constructed in defiance of the Iraqi constitution,

along the border of Kurdistan Region in what until recently was referred to as the “disputed territories”, but which in Kurdistan Region are now called “Kurdish territories outside the Kurdistan Region”. While Baghdad claims that the intention is to preserve security, the fear is that there is a bid underway to centralise the state at the expense of local autonomy and independence, a fear compounded by the decision of Maliki to punish and obstruct foreign multi-nationals, most notably Exxon Mobil, that reach agreements and sign contracts with Erbil independently of Baghdad. President Barzani has staged meetings with Kurdish party leaders, including Nawshirwan Mustafa (see:

<http://krp.org/kurdish/articledisplay.aspx?id=26037>;

<http://krp.org/kurdish/articledisplay.aspx?id=26028> and

<http://rudaw.net/kurdish/index.php/news/13237.html>). The aim has been to maximise national unity and the President has sought to mobilise media leaders in this direction too (see: <http://krp.org/kurdish/articledisplay.aspx?id=26017> and http://xebat.net/attachment/PDF/2_25787_11139.pdf). The Editor-in-Chief of *Xendan* wrote two editorials in support of Barzani’s approach to Maliki and Baghdad. But he mentions that Kurdish media is not producing a united front (see: <http://www.xendan.org/drejaWtar.aspx?NusarID=4&Jmara=4126>). Likewise, people close to Talabani have criticised some Kurdish politicians for lack of discipline and failure to safeguard the image of Kurdistan domestically and internationally. (See: <http://hawler.in/article2898-522.htm>). Nevertheless, as reported by *Rudaw* on December 13, 2012,

*" The Islamic League (Komal), Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) and Change Movement (Gorran) all said they had received invitations for talks by Maliki, but had turned them down because they believed the premier was trying to drive a wedge among the Kurds."*³³

In this context of intensified anxiety, where the nation lives in fear of external threats and the lived memories of war and nightmares of genocide return with renewed force, it is little wonder that mutual suspicions are given space to roam freely. Ali Fatah Hamajid from *Shan* Magazine told us that the Kurdistan Regional Government is not comfortable providing “independent” press with information because it views this section of the media as a force for chaos and disintegration of

the nation. Halala Muhammad, from the Islamic Women's Union, told the research team that false stories are published in some papers in order to boost sales, but that by so doing the newspapers concerned failed the nation as they infected emerging generations with false understanding and information. Hana Shwani of the *Rewan* Centre in Sulaymaniyah told the research team that too often narrow sectional party political or even internal factional advantage will motivate and shape whether and how an incident might be reported in newspapers. It has been drawn to our attention that the decision of *Awene* newspaper to present an extensive interview with Malaki in 2012, which was then translated into Arabic and then posted on the Prime Minister of Iraq's official website (see: <http://pmo.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=522>), raised questions, not least about where the priorities of journalists and newspapers should lie during a national crisis. On the other hand, Hiwa Osman, in a piece called "The War of the Few, the Peace of All" (<http://hiwaosman.com/2012/12/the-war-of-the-few-the-peace-of-all/>) reminds us that truth and freedom of expression are the first casualties of war and of the dilemma of trying to allow maximum space for debate while maintaining the unity and discipline necessary to safeguard collective interests. It is to the consideration of freedom of expression that the next section turns.

3.2 Freedom of Expression

When looking at the extent to which freedom of expression prevails in the Kurdistan Region it is necessary to acknowledge the central role played in the history of the Kurdish press by the political parties. When the research team met with Nazhad Aziz Surme in 2010, while he was Editor of *Khabat*, he explained that the paper had acted as a training ground for journalists within the national liberation movement, including the young Jalal Talabani, current President of Iraq. During the decades of resistance to Ba'athism, the papers of the KDP and PUK, most notably, *Khabat* and from 1992 *Kurdistani Nwe*, and also the papers of smaller parties, played the role of transmission-belts for party ideology and perspectives for militants in towns and cities and for peshmerga in the mountains. Under the conditions of clandestine

organisation, total discipline and strict hierarchy left very little room for open and critical debate.

Since 1991 the objective conditions have been transformed. With imminent external danger removed the space for critical discussion opened up. However, the party press retains a measure of conformism. As Masoud Abdl-Kaliq of *Standard* newspaper expressed to the research team when we met him, the party press in his opinion do nothing more than act as "cheer leaders" for the their political masters. Hawzhin Omer of the Kurdistan Islamic Group, KOMAL, told us that he identified with the "independent" press when he stated that the newspapers of the governing parties could not be relied upon to provide critical and balanced commentary. In an article by media academic Maggy Zanger back in 2002, it is claimed that the party press in Kurdistan displays what is referred to as "red carpet journalism", where the emphasis is upon the reporting of the activities, achievements, thoughts and speeches of party leaders. She goes on to say that,

"To be sure, individual journalists within party organs strive to move beyond red carpet journalism. Some try to seriously debate issues, such as the role and intent of Islamic groups in the political sphere, or document on-going social issues such as Iraq's Arabization policies or so-called 'honor killing' of women. But self-censorship is rampant and most papers and newscasts are heavy on opinion and historical commentary and short on well-researched news and analysis".³⁴

This is a quite balanced assessment and one that still holds true. Having said this, it would be wrong to dismiss the value of the party press. They do carry news stories. Given the privileged access that the papers of the governing parties have to government and the obvious preference of leaders to present their ideas first in their own party newspaper, it is no surprise, for instance, that *Khabat* is the best place to read the latest news from President Barzani or that *Kurdistani Nwe* is a valuable source when trying to find out what is happening with President Talabani. Latterly, critical debate and discussion has emerged. Space has been provided in the party press for non-aligned voices. Critical writers have emerged such as Ahmadi Mala, a Kurd who fled Ba'athism and who is now an academic based in Spain. He writes a bi-monthly column in *Kurdistani Nwe*, while the Erbil based philosophy scholar and

writer Rebwar Siwayli, who also leads the Philosophy Department at the University of Salahadeen, has made contributions to the KDP-affiliated *Gulan* magazine.

The main problem the party papers have, however, is that they can be slow to react to events, especially if they have to wait for a lead from their respective party leaderships. What is more, as they are charged with presenting the official line of their party, the space for full and frank discussion is not always easy as the demands of diplomacy- whether that be imposed by the need to maintain political alliances, be they internal or with external coalition partners, or as a result of the demands of governance itself- dictate that transparency might well be sacrificed.

Clearly, the logic of governance and the reproduction of political parties as organisations mean that the press of governing parties are very unlikely to meet fully the need for broad ranging and critically inspired journalism.

Kurdistan Region has seen an explosion of interest in all sorts of media, including the press, in order to supplement or even go beyond established titles. There is an appetite for good sources of information. Many new titles have appeared in the market place, professing independence from party political sponsorship. Yet, according to some of our interviewees, the route taken to reach this point has not been straightforward. Shwan Daudi, Editor-in-Chief of *Hawal*, told the research team that the tradition of critical journalism, one that professes to be independent of party affiliation, is actually the product of party sponsorship during and after the fratricidal war. According to him, the parties supported "independents" in order to foster criticism of political opponents in the name of objective commentary. By the time the region was reunited, freedom of the press had become embedded.

In Kurdistan today there is relatively free access to news outlets. As Dr Kurdistan Mukryani, a well known Kurdish female scholar, pointed out when we met her, the media space in Kurdistan is far freer than elsewhere in the Middle East region. Likewise, in the summer of 2010, Gazi Hassan from *Barzan* magazine explained to us that it is easy and quick to get a license in order to publish and that there is no censorship prior to publication. When the research team spoke with Anwar Abdullah and other representatives of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, we were told

that the press today challenges taboos and presents a plurality of views which together demonstrates the movement towards greater political maturity and freedom of expression. In his 2011 text *Historical Dictionary of the Kurds*, the American academic Michael Gunter states that in Iraqi Kurdistan Region a civil society is emerging "...with dozens of newspapers, magazines, and television and radio stations representing a broad spectrum of opinion. People have freedoms impossible to imagine in the rest of Iraq."³⁵

President of the Journalist Syndicate, Azad Sheik Younis, quoted in *L'Essentiel Des Relations Internationales*, a leading French periodical, states in its September 2012 edition that,

*"As journalists, we function in a perfectly democratic manner and the government encourages that. We are completely free to say, to film and to write what we like with the condition that we stay within the limits of morality and don't engage in vilification. This right is guaranteed by law no. 35 voted for in 2007. What is more, access to the internet is completely open and lots of young people are now relying on the big international media bodies. A veritable culture of information is being born in our country."*³⁶

As the article "A Society open to information" by Dimitri Friedman reiterates, the Journalism Law voted through in 2007 by the Kurdistan National Assembly banned terms of imprisonment for journalists practicing their career, whatever the reason. Nevertheless, there are concerns about the functioning of this law. When the research team met Meriwan Hama-Saeed, who in the summer of 2010 was with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), we learnt there are concerns that the courts in Kurdistan are under the influence of political parties and that it is Iraqi law and not the 2007 Journalism Law which is still being used as the reference point for adjudications. Shwan Daudi, Editor-in-Chief of *Hawal*, was convicted by a court in Sulaymaniyah to a prison term in 2008 for an article published four years earlier that was judged to be defamatory. We understand from interviews carried out in November 2012 that the KRG Minister of Justice, Sherwan Haidra, acknowledges the conflict between the law of Kurdistan Region and Iraq and has stated that there needs to be an amendment of the law.³⁷ In 2012, there was also the case of Karzan

Karim which divides opinion. He was employed by the security services but also wrote and had published online a number of articles critical of his employer.

Sentenced to a prison term of two years, KRG officials claim that his crimes are related to misconduct threatening to national security (*See:*

<http://www.krg.org/a/d.aspx?r=223&l=12&s=02010100&a=44963&s=010000>)

while media and human rights campaigners claim that he is being detained so as to stifle freedom of speech (see: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/14/iraqi-kurdistan-journalist-gets-two-years-prison>).

In May 2012 the editor of *Chirpa* magazine, Hemn Ari, was detained after violent protests by Islamists erupted in Kurdistan following the reproduction in his magazine of a Facebook posting by Halmat Goran, a Kurd living in Norway, which included allegedly blasphemous content. Suggestions were made that the law should be amended to stipulate that any person criticising or caricaturing a religion should face up to 10 years in prison

(<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/22/iraqi-kurdistan-insulting-religion-bill-threatens-free-speech>).

While the proposed amendments to the law have been resisted and even though Hemn Ari was released after seven days in custody, concerns remain that there are forces in Kurdish society which seek to threaten hard won freedoms.

There is widespread agreement that there are significant problems with regard to laws affecting journalism and print media. Time and again, the research team were told that poor quality and defamatory journalism is widespread in Kurdistan. When we met the former President of the Journalism Syndicate Farhad Awni, he expressed the fear that the 2007 Law had established a framework which is too permissive and open to abuse and misuse by a profession still too immature to exercise its duties to act with professional balance. According to Hiwa Osman, a highly respected Kurdish media analyst who has worked with the *BBC* and *IWPR* as well as providing expertise to budding newspapers and journalists in Kurdistan Region, problems with the profession are partly explained because the government does not make sufficient information available. Writers are left frustrated by the absence of cooperation and are thus more inclined to be antagonistic to what they see as

uncooperative politicians. Meriwan Kareem from *Roshangry* magazine highlighted to us the claim repeated by a number of other interviewees that critical newspapers are sometimes excluded from official press conferences. When the research team interviewed leading Gorran Member of Parliament, Kardo Muhammad, he told us that there is a pressing need for Kurds to have freedom, underpinned by law, to access government information. On the other hand, Halkawt Abdullah, from *Xendan* Magazine and website, told the research team that there are good grounds upon which to reform existing law, so as to protect the right of individuals to privacy. There is a significant tension between privacy and public disclosure.

The law must uphold the freedom to explore and disclose facts and ideas, but these freedoms are made vulnerable to attack if they are exercised irresponsibly. Responsible journalism is not passive or tame, but must be underpinned by accuracy and respect for the law, most notably rights to privacy and strictures against incitement to hatred or violence, as well as paying due respect to the need to preserve collective security.

In the course of this research project, it has been revealed repeatedly that formal law does not have deep roots in Kurdistan. In the words of Rebin Rasul, formerly Deputy Editor of *Hawlati* and now a Senior Advisor on political and civil society issues at the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, there is a very weak attachment to the rule of law. The rejection of accountability applies across the board. We are told that leaders resent “disrespectful” questioning of their decisions. Yet, it has not been uncommon to hear that politicians are quite capable of being undisciplined. Ali Fatah-Hamajid, from *Shan* magazine, was not alone when he told us that it is common for information to be leaked with the purpose of weakening political rivals, even when the target may be someone from the same party as that of the perpetrator. It is apparent that newspaper owners and editors also aggressively reject questions being raised about their own integrity. Journalists are frequently criticised for asserting the freedom to express whatever it is that they want to say

and in whatever idiom they chose to express themselves, no matter how offensive. Govand Baban, prominent Attorney at Law in Kurdistan Region, has told the research team of his frustration at the failure of fellow citizens to recognise that if the rule of law is to prevail then the law needs to be respected. If individuals fail to respect the law then they must expect to face punishment, sanctions sufficient to act as disincentives for recidivism. This is fundamental to any society which rests upon the rule of law. When we spoke with Karem Sinjari, Minister of the Interior, he explained that a story was published about ministerial performance, that facts were fundamentally misrepresented, the paper which published the story refused to correct the mistake or apologise and that a court case therefore ensued. According to the Minister, the paper should have just corrected the error and apologised, instead of trying to build a ridiculous campaign claiming that the freedom of expression was under attack.

To portray attempts to get newspapers and journalists to comply with the law as an attack upon the freedom of expression is not confined to Kurdistan. *The Press Gazette*, the trade publication for journalists in Britain, has been detailing the arrest of journalists following the revelations dating back from April 2011 about unethical, unprofessional and illegal activity by members of the profession at major UK newspapers. The misdemeanours include bribing public officials, perverting the course of justice, breaching privacy and data theft. As William Turvill revealed, between April 2011 and March 2013, no fewer than 59 UK journalists were arrested³⁸. Dominic Ponsford³⁹, editor of the *Press Gazette*, has speculated that if the majority of those charged are eventually sent to prison then the UK will rival the likes of Iran and Turkey in the journalism incarceration stakes. All very dramatic! To be able to compare the UK's treatment of journalists with the most repressive of regimes serves to fuel the rhetoric of indignation. However, it sheds very little light on reality. The journalists who languish in the prisons of Turkey and Iran are overwhelmingly "regime-critics", the vast majority of whom are Kurds who refuse to be silenced. To compare the fortune of these dissenters to the well heeled foot soldiers and officers of the Murdoch Empire is absurd. Disregard for privacy, the

proper course of justice and the fate of the weak, just to meet the base appetite for the sensational has nothing to do with advancing the freedom of speech. If the journalists concerned have a fair trial before the courts and are found to be guilty of violating privacy rights and paying bribes, then they should expect no less and no more severe a punishment than would be imposed on any other citizen. If there is desire to live according to the rule of law then all members of society need to be compelled, through persuasion and punishment, to observe and uphold the law of the land, whether that be in the UK or Kurdistan.

It is perfectly understandable that leaders should resent criticism. When Kawa Qader Nader, from *Media* magazine, told us that leaders and officials want to be praised this was not a great surprise. However, it is the case that politicians in Kurdistan can see the benefits of having a critical press. Himen Kareem Abdul of *Fshar* magazine told the research team that through the commitment to transparency, the press can promote social justice and that this function was supported by society and also by some politicians and members of the Kurdistan Regional Government. We had the privilege of having a long meeting in January 2011 with the first ever Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly, Jawhar Namiq Salem, a few weeks before he sadly passed away. With his experience as politician and as former Editor of *Khabat* for 15 years, he declared that the duty of the press and other media is to speak the truth to those in power, to expose injustice and not to flatter.

As we have stated above and elsewhere, this type of critical approach can assist the process of governance. When we met with Ahmed Mira and colleagues at *Livin* magazine we were told with pride of their positive contribution made to governance by drawing attention to a detention centre in an article called "*The Bastille of Kurdistan*" in 2008. There are many examples from other newspapers that could be cited and we have already drawn attention to the positive work of *Awene* and *Rudaw* in this respect.⁴⁰ In 2012, the research team had a meeting with Karim Sinjari, Minister of Interior, who summed up his understanding of the benefits to be gained:

"The press should be positive, point us to a better way of doing things, but to do this on the basis of facts, the truth....We want the press to talk about reality and that would serve our society a lot...We respect critical media and we want that because it will help us to make it right....."

....I am a Minister in the office, with thousands of police. If officers somewhere make a mistake I don't know, I cannot be expected to know...but if the media point out the mistakes, tell me what they have seen, then that will help me correct it....The press can be very helpful. With many eyes they can help us."⁴¹

So, here we have expressed high hopes for the positive impact of free expression.

However, the flow of information is not always so benign. Newspapers can be used and manipulated to present or suppress the stories that reflect the interests of those in power. One journalist told the research team that she knew of colleagues who would readily take bribes in exchange for writing and publishing stories to the benefit of their patrons. Asos Hardi told us that stories are leaked by politicians and officials to the papers in order to produce factional advantage or to satisfy personal grudges. We have also heard that manipulation is conducted by foreign powers, with one interviewee telling us that in Baghdad he overheard an Iranian intelligence officer boast about the ease with which his government had a disruptive and damaging story placed, for a relatively small fee, in a leading Kurdish publication.

How true any of these claims are is hard to measure with precision. But they are not especially surprising and they are plausible. They indicate that appearances can be deceptive. To be able to read between the lines or to probe beneath surface appearances does require the development of critical reading skills. The research team have heard from Halala Muhammad, from the Islamic Women's Union, who expresses disappointment with Kurdish newspapers that she sees using sexualised images of women in order, as she put it, to sell more copies. Hana Shwani of the Rewan Centre in Sulaymaniyah told the research team of how when a newspaper produced pictures of Jennifer Lopez, the US singer and actress, the paper sold rapidly. According to Hana Shwani this episode is just one example indicating the

absence of a reading culture, as the public, especially young men, reveal an appetite for surface appearances and show little concern for in-depth content and analysis. Shayda Maruf, a writer and journalist, told us that because Kurdish society is sexually repressed, that sex and sexuality are taboo subjects and therefore unavailable for discussion. Consequently, Kurdish youth are almost inevitably drawn to reading about the forbidden, to read about sex and sex scandals, at the expense and to the neglect of more important issues such as politics, society, economics and philosophy.

When we spoke with Karwan Salar, Editor of *Chatr* weekly newspaper, he told the research team that what attracts readers is the trivial, that there is little interest in history and that language has to be simplified in order to allow for the public to understand. He stated that it is essential to build a critical reading culture in Kurdistan within the public. A similar point was elaborated by Regay Kurdistan from the Communist Party who observed that readers are not used to dialogue and debate and that the preference is for simplicity. Stevan Shanzini, Editor of *Newand* monthly magazine, summed up admirably the extent of the problem as he saw it and the consequences of having a weak reading culture when he told us,

*"Newspapers and intellectuals have a duty to promote a culture of reading amongst the public, a culture which is currently lacking. It is very sad to see that there are thousands of students at the University of Sulaymaniyah, yet with all these newspapers and magazines we barely see 100 copies sold. We have very few readers and expectations are very limited and so newspapers are under little pressure to improve."*⁴²

While we agree that writers and publishers have their role to play, we should also add that the KRG in general and educationalists in particular, at all levels, have vital contributions to make in promoting a critical reading culture.

Part of the process of developing a reading culture is to cultivate a critical understanding of the politics of language in all its forms. It is to this specific domain that the report now turns.

3.3 The politics of language

Readers and writers in Kurdistan might do well to insist upon clarity of expression. Terms and concepts need to correspond with reality. The research team have observed the imprecise use or even misuse of important categories.

Great offence has been taken when individuals or groups have been identified as champions of *treason*. Treason is a very serious crime. Evidence needs to be produced if such claims are to be transmitted.

The use of the term *totalitarian* to describe Kurdistan is truly a school-boy error. A totalitarian state is one that has mastery over all of its territory, conducts extensive surveillance, permits only one reading of reality and banishes opposition. Competing political parties are suppressed and the freedom of expression expunged. Kurdistan has problems, but totalitarian it is not. There is no doubt that the KDP is the dominant political force in Kurdistan. That is a fact. Opponents of the party quite understandably regret that they do not match the KDP in terms of its political weight and popular support. But to translate the hostility to the dominant party into categorising Kurdistan Region as a space of totalitarianism is perverse. The reality is that the KDP governs in a coalition with a number of parties, including the PUK. Sulaymaniyah, both city and governorate, is dominated by the PUK and the break-away Gorran movement. The KDP is very much marginalised in this territory. Political power is not felt evenly over the entirety of the territory. When the research team met Stran Abdulla of the PUK in the spring of 2010, he pointed out the absurdity of the newspapers which declared at that time the arrival of state repression, by questioning the very possibility of state repression in the absence of an established unified state.

Nevertheless, in certain campaigns and various small street protests conducted in a number of European capitals, the authorities in Kurdistan have been portrayed in the most lurid terms. In 2011, during protests in Stockholm staged by oppositionists

based in the diaspora, for example, photographs of the President and symbols of the people from Barzan territory were set ablaze, most notably red and white turbans, in public acts that some commentators regarded as an open incitement to ethnic hatred.⁴³ Readers and viewers from outside of the Kurdish community might be perplexed. However, when we consider the suffering inflicted on the Kurds as a people and specific acts of violence, such as the massacre of over 8,000 Barzanis in 1983 by the Baathists, then it becomes clear that cool reflection is being sacrificed for the sake of the incendiary.

The rule of the KDP is probably best understood as that of the leadership of a broad coalition of forces aimed at maintaining and promoting the Kurdistan national liberation struggle. The KDP itself contains widely divergent ideological perspectives and traditions, from religious conservatives through to Communists. As with other parties, not least the PUK, the KDP has historically been an amalgamation of separate tribal and military formations. Quite clearly, members of the Barzani family sit at the head of the party and have provided the leadership, although not exclusively, to this nationalist movement since its inception. General Mullah Mustafa Barzani enjoys iconic status. In a society where family ties are so important and where tribal loyalties are still valorised, the status and authority of the Barzanis in some quarters is held up as being beyond question. As a society in the process of transition, Kurdistan's traditional social structures and patterns of loyalty are inevitably under strain from the challenges of modernity, with all the attendant contradictions that are experienced wherever the promise of the new finds itself expressed. However, while the pace and direction of development cannot be known from the outset, what is clear is that the leadership provided by the KDP does not involve attempts to systematically deny alternative voices nor does it involve the imposition of a thoroughgoing unified popular imagination. Here, it should be noted that the dominant dialect of the Kurdish language in Kurdistan Region is Sorani, despite the fact that Kermanji is spoken by the vast majority of people in wider Kurdistan and despite the fact that in Kurdistan of Iraq, in the Bahdinan region, which has Duhok as its centre, it is Bahdini (the local name for the Kurmanji dialect) which is the idiom of this Barzani and KDP dominated heartland.

Beyond the clear countervailing evidence, it is also the case that to claim totalitarianism as a suitable concept for understanding the reality of Kurdistan is, to borrow a phrase from the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas, an obvious *performative contradiction*.⁴⁴ If someone truly believes that they live in a totalitarian society then they need to explain how it is possible for them to express dissent. Here, the words of George Orwell come to mind,

*"The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink."*⁴⁵

The high value placed upon the insights and learning of intellectuals in Kurdistan is to be commended. The ability to absorb and digest data and to synthesise the understandings derived into knowledge then shared is to be celebrated. There is a clear need for technical and administrative skill, capacities which this report reflects upon. Nevertheless, this is not to argue for the rule of the technocrat or for the tyranny of the expert. As the late Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, Paul Feyerabend, argued there is a need to defend society against all elites, including those of science. As he put it,

*"Scientists may be consulted on important projects but the final judgement must be left to the democratically elected consulting bodies. These bodies will consist mainly of laymen. Will the laymen be able to come to a correct judgement? Most certainly, for the competence, the complications and the successes of science are vastly exaggerated. Science is not a closed book that is understood only after years of training. It is an intellectual discipline that can be examined and criticised by anyone who is interested and that looks difficult and profound only because of a systematic campaign of obfuscation carried out by many scientists (though, I am happy to say, not by all). Organs of the state should never hesitate to reject the judgement of scientists when they have reason for doing so. Such rejection will educate the general public, will make it more confident, and it may even lead to improvement."*⁴⁶

Government, educationalists and newspapers need to devote resources to understanding the language of science, for there is a danger that big and important

questions can end up being left out of popular debate and therefore beyond the reach of popular control. Part of the process of demystifying the language of science is to attune the reading public to the limits of statistical data. Statistics are notoriously unreliable sources of knowledge. In a phrase that has been attributed to a number of notable historical figures, including the 19th century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as well as the American author Mark Twain, it is claimed that there are three basic types of falsehood: "Lies, damned lies and statistics!" In saying this, it is not being suggested that numerical data in all its forms is deceptive. Opinion poll data, however, needs to be handled with care. There are many questions that need to be asked before accepting pollster findings, not least whether or not the sample population is representative of the broader constituency in view. In a society such as that of Kurdistan, where women are far less visible and accessible than men it is not clear how the opinions of this half of the population can be readily gathered. With gate-keepers in place, it is harder to hear the voice of women. Thus, when statistics on public opinion are quoted, both writers and readers would do well to at least question reliability.

Just as data is open to question so too are those who are presented as experts or who adorn the title, "intellectual". It has been a great source of surprise that during the course of gathering data and exploring the field, the research team have come across a great number of individuals who claim to be intellectuals. But, as we have already demonstrated, with the discussion of totalitarianism, which could well be extended to other lines of argument, it is apparent that the misuse of concepts and addiction to slogans excludes some writers from being considered "intellectual".

The reception of "intellectuals" is also somewhat curious. The opinions of "intellectuals" are deferred to, all too often not because of the quality of their discourse, the rigour of their thinking and the power of their logical command of data and theory, but for no better reason than they have spoken and done so as "intellectuals". Here, authority is derived from their status. It is akin to the power of the priesthood. It is the reproduction of the logic of clerical domination. It is hierarchical and typically masculine. When the voice of the "intellectual" is heard

thus it is advisable for devotees of democratic politics to dismiss vanity and exhibitionism and to demand that arguments and policy be judged on their merits and merits alone.

Further misuse of language has been in evidence with the reports concerning the decision to extend the term of office for the current President of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. It is perfectly reasonable for a variety of perspectives to be aired and debated on this issue. Ambiguity in relation to the legality of decisions made and the implications for the future of leadership succession require clarification. However, some political opponents of Massoud Barzani have insisted that the extension of his term in office constitutes a bid for dictatorship.

This is a very bold claim. It is not sufficient just to assert such a charge. Evidence and reason need to be mobilised to sustain the case. It is not difficult to understand why such attention seeking headlines may be regarded as obscuring the facts and be damaging to the authority of the nation's leadership on the international stage. Kurdistan is clearly at the cross-roads of history and is practically on a war footing. There is an acute awareness that the nation needs international recognition and assistance. President Barzani has built strong ties with other world leaders and has immense authority in all parts of Kurdistan. The reach of the Barzanis into Kurdistan of Turkey and the forging of closer economic cooperation and diplomatic ties with Ankara have been very important in promoting the peace process in relation to the Kurdistan of Turkey and in providing the PKK with space to manoeuvre away from crippling military confrontations. It is important to place Kurdistan in its proper geopolitical and historical context. To seek a change of leadership now might be regarded as reckless.

Presidencies which go beyond two terms have been criticized for leading to entrenched political cliques, but there are examples in which an extended term in office has led to the achievement of crucial national goals. For instance, according to a panel of historians assembled by the American *Newsweek* magazine, Franklin D. Roosevelt is considered the greatest U.S. President of the 20th century.⁴⁷ Steering

the United States through the traumas of the Great Depression and World War II, Roosevelt was elected to office four times consecutively! With regard to President Barzani, the research team have witnessed formidable loyalty from his supporters, as he gained nearly 70 per cent of the vote during the last and very closely internationally monitored election. Oppositionists are not obliged to renounce their views and neither is it reasonable for the majority to expect submission. The space for argument must be kept open to allow for the exchange of views and the possibility of persuasion. However, over-heated rhetoric about an incipient totalitarian dictatorship closes off the spaces which need to be kept open if dialogue is to prevail. Loyalists and oppositionists might consider that lowering the temperature of rhetoric is an important way to keep open the channels of communication, in particular making it possible to have a reasoned debate about whether term limits are the right or wrong solution for invigorating Kurdistan's political order.

There is nothing wrong with disagreement. But without dialogue, understanding and the possibility of reaching a consensus are driven further from view. Attention to the importance of precision in the use of language and concepts is crucial to building and maintaining the possibility for understanding. Let there be no doubt, this is not a demand for conformity. In fact, the opposite is true. It is lazy, unthinking and cliché-ridden modes of expression, no matter how radical or impassioned the sounds might be, that assist in the delivery of a passive citizenry. Critical thought and the promise of radical action are destroyed. Writers and readers in Kurdistan, as in any polity, need to be more demanding of themselves and those whom they listen to. To return to George Orwell,

"Orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style..... When one watches some tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases..... one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is

not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity".⁴⁸

3.4 The internet and social media

The internet and social media further complicate our understanding of the relationship between language, communication and power. The internet and associated digital technologies have obvious appeal for those wishing to communicate and organise outside of traditional social structures. Digital distributed technologies can be operated at low cost and high speed to make the local transparent to a global audience. Through intersecting with a multitude of pathways, internet based communication allows for the receipt, broadcast and relaying of sounds, images and text in ways that central authorities, including governments, find challenging to monitor and control. The facebook and twitter uprisings of 2011 in Egypt, Tunisia and other parts of "the Arab world" followed on from earlier established practices of digital counter-coordination and politics of contestation that have been opened up by the digital revolution.⁴⁹

During the course of this research project it has been noted that in Kurdistan the latest palm-top technologies have been adopted rapidly and the presence on social media sites, such as facebook, quickly established. Kurdish youth, as well as their older compatriots in the press and government, are sharing information online. News outlets are investing more and more heavily to provide online content. Information is being accessed from both local and international sources. We see very little evidence that popular access is being curtailed. On the contrary, the research team have seen plenty of examples of how the internet has been deployed to circulate information within the Kurdish diaspora to and from Kurdistan. The isolation of the Kurds has been broken. It was not long ago that communicating to

and from Kurdistan was a very difficult and expensive business. Today the story is very different.

Clearly, anything that makes it easier for citizens to gain access to information is to be welcomed. Without doubt the flow of information has increased in volume and speed. And, likewise, the benefits are witnessed in various ways. We can see that at high speed politicians and newspaper editors can present their ideas straight to the palmtop devices of those who follow their facebook pages, while popular political participation can be enhanced as street protests now accommodate the rapid recording of audio and visual data, interviews and images, which can be relayed to the world.

Nevertheless, while different perspectives can now be articulated and perhaps be heard and made visible, it is still necessary to inspect and question the motives and strategies, if any, of those who broadcast messages. Hana Shwani of the Rewan Centre in Sulaymaniyah told the research team about the disturbing use of new communication technologies to dishonour and marginalise women in Kurdistan. She told the story of a female TV journalist who when on an assignment with colleagues, inadvertently had part of her back exposed. This "display" was surreptitiously captured on camera by a colleague of the journalist and then relayed electronically. The woman was publicly "shamed". As a direct consequence, her marriage ended. With the added burden of the stigma of separation, according to Hana Shwani, the technology permitted easier and faster forms of public dishonouring and was clearly used to send a signal to other women in Kurdistan that there is a high price to be paid if they wish to enter the journalism profession. Many such accounts of the misuse of new communication technologies to abuse women in Kurdistan and the diaspora have been presented to the research team.

The authenticity of that which is presented to the viewer, listener and reader must also be questioned. During the course of the research project we noted the circulation of inflammatory stories, ones that were obviously concocted to inflame passions and to provoke public rage. On inspection, these stories appeared to lack verisimilitude. They had all the hallmarks of being selectively edited or even staged to present political opponents as "monstrous enemies of the people". It has not

been uncommon to hear of manufactured stories of disunity, there to confuse and disorientate. Questions have also been raised about European based webmasters and internet activists, some of whom have no obvious source of income, other than social security payments, yet are able to afford inter-continental travel and even meet legal costs and fines imposed for libel. As one contributor pointed out,

"It is good that the truth is now harder to hide. But we need to be careful. Just because something is placed on the internet does not mean it is true. There have been a number of legal cases which have led to rulings that some Kurdish websites have been placing stories on the internet which are untrue. Kurdistanpost has been punished more than once for placing untrue stories on its website and has been successfully prosecuted in the UK and Swedish courts for publishing untrue statements (see: <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=47067&c=1>). KurdishMedia have also been brought before the courts in the UK after placing defamatory reports. (See: <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=16413>). But very little has been reported about these cases inside Kurdistan. It is strange that advocates for freedom of expression should be so unwilling to let readers in Kurdistan know what is happening. There is a great need to be cautious when it comes to reading and accepting what is said either in the press or through the internet or other forms of social media. Readers in Kurdistan need to be treated with respect. If our newspapers are really interested in freedom and discussing the truth then they should be reporting on these cases, educating them not to accept everything on face value".⁵⁰

Without doubt the internet has opened up a series of new and exciting possibilities for the creation of better informed citizenship, but this potential needs to be safeguarded through encouraging recipients of information to read intelligently and to question sources from no matter where they come from, whether that be local or external news sources.

3.5 International coverage of Kurdistan

The Kurds of Iraq are acutely aware of the importance of international media coverage. But the rationale for such a preoccupation and the aims and purpose of

interacting with the international media scene vary. The authorities are enthusiastic in developing a positive democratic and human rights image, to demonstrate that Kurdistan is a progressive and peaceful land which can distinguish itself with pride from the authoritarianism which characterises much of the Middle East region. The emphasis upon stability and relative tranquillity is important for encouraging growth in the key economic activity of tourism. Demonstrating the movement towards the rule of law presents a safe space for the location of foreign investment, allows Kurdistan to increase its visibility internationally and to deepen the economic development which has taken place at an accelerated pace in recent years and which involves international partners who now have compelling material interests to stand with and not against Kurdistan. With so much at stake it is imperative that the KRG invest in the systematic monitoring and recording of foreign news coverage of Kurdistan Region, so that government representatives and policy makers are better placed to present a positive message and attend to areas of concern that arise over time.

There is the belief among some Kurdish commentators that reports from the outside world have greater authority and impact than domestic productions. Typical in this regard are the comments made by Ali Fatah Hamajid, from *Shan* Magazine, who when we met him told us, "We believe in these reports from abroad, they are sympathetic to our cause, to the cause of free-media and to telling the truth about Kurdistan and the behaviour of the nation's leadership." Others have emphasised the importance of challenging foreign media and putting resources into the task of translating critical Kurdish commentary for consumption in the international news market. As Himen Kareem Abdul of *Fshar* magazine, recalled to us "We criticise foreign coverage of Kurdistan that presents it as paradise and just relies upon the government for information. It is important for us to translate critical articles into foreign languages, to present the truth to the outside world". Our attention has also been drawn to the possibility, the accusation one might say, that certain domestic forces can be seen as the agents of foreign powers. According to Azad Abdul-Waheed, Erbil based publisher and editor-in-chief of *Raman* Magazine, political Islam

is suspected of being little more than the advanced guard of Iranian foreign policy. Likewise, it is argued that the activities of the Iranian state-sponsored TV outlet *Press TV* reveals the historical and geographically close links between Iran and the border city of Sulaymaniyah and politicians. Hence, there is coverage of stories which elevate the PUK and Gorran and denigrate the KDP. Others have pointed out that when political groups are small and represent very few people, one of the few non-violent routes to achieve influence is by mobilising international news agencies. When foreign media channels are persuaded thus, the noise and visibility to be generated far exceed any representative pretensions. In fact, no mandate of any description is required.

Clearly, it is a mistake to believe that all foreign coverage of Kurdish society and politics is wholly benign or completely malicious, naive or cynical. Foreign news stories, opinion pieces and reports of NGOs or academics, for that matter, need to be critically examined on a case by case basis. Critical readers should be asking themselves, whose agenda and interests are being served when a story is presented and in the way in which it is being presented? A small measure of scepticism is always required, no matter who or which institution speaks, or from where they operate.

An inspection of the U.S. media treatment of the Kurds illustrates this point admirably. When Saddam Hussein had been a strategic asset for the United States against Iran, the U.S. media largely ignored the plight of the Kurds. But with the Ba'athist regime's decision to invade Kuwait, Saddam became an official enemy, and suddenly the U.S. media discovered the full horror of what he had done to the Kurds. Critical media researchers Edward S. Herman and David Peterson studied five major U.S. print media sources and uncovered between 1990 and 1999 as many as 24 front-page stories specifically referring to Saddam's "genocide" of the Kurds, compared to only one front-page story mentioning "genocide" carried out by official ally Turkey, even though the latter country since the mid-1980s has destroyed an

estimated 3500 Kurdish villages, banned various expressions of Kurdish identity, and turned as many as 3,000,000 Kurds into refugees who have found themselves on the march for new homes.⁵¹

The contribution of NGOs cannot be accepted blindly either. Esam Al-Amin, the author of *The Arab Awakening Unveiled: Understanding Transformations and Revolutions in the Middle East*, has drawn attention in an article for the U.S. magazine and webzine *CounterPunch* to the inconsistency of NGOs in their response to the massacres perpetrated in Egypt by the security forces in mid August 2013 which followed on from the removal of the democratically elected President and the restoration of military domination of the body politic. In his piece titled "Bloodbath on the Nile" he observes that "As human rights and civil liberties organizations around the world such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch strongly condemned the massacre in Egypt, the Arab Organization for Human Rights, dominated by secular and liberal elites, strangely enough blamed the Muslim Brotherhood for the bloodbath".⁵²

That international NGOs might present sectional interests rather than uphold universal claims can be discerned from a reading of some of the reports commenting upon Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Elsewhere in this report we note the controversy which accompanied a Human Rights Watch report in 2011. This study provided valuable insights but was launched with the scandalous claim that the KRG is no better than the Ba'athists. In November 2010, the international NGO Reporters Without Borders produced a very well presented and thought provoking paper on the state of press freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan, titled "Between Freedom and Abuses: the Media Paradox in Iraqi Kurdistan".⁵³ Plenty of space was given over to celebrating and broadcasting critical voices and rightly so. Yet, as one of our research team was quick to point out, the report gave very little attention to the position of women but instead served to elevate to heroic status the masculine voice in the field of Kurdish journalism.

There have been other critical analyses of Iraqi Kurdistan's media. IREX (the International Research & Exchanges Board) in partnership with the Kurdistan

Institute for Human Rights decried violations of journalists' rights and party domination of press institutions, even though the authors saw much virtue in television and radio outlets that are open to minority cultural production from Chaldean, Assyrian, and Turkmen media. So this particular critique may on some scores have recognized greater media diversity in Iraqi Kurdistan than in many conventional accounts. Nevertheless, the promise of diversity can be undercut when funding sources are scarce for good journalism. Of course, many critics complain vociferously about the political parties having too heavy-handed a role in funding newspapers. Yet some voices apt to scold the political parties suspend critical judgment when NGOs are backing certain currents and lines of analysis. NGOs are seen as high-minded defenders of human rights and press freedom. These are undoubtedly worthwhile principles to defend, but many NGOs have political and ideological interests that can be masked by these altruistic and public-spirited appeals. An earlier generation of social critics were more alert about identifying these political and ideological interests. The sociologist of ideas Lewis Coser spoke of how the major foundations funding the NGOs have become "important gatekeepers of ideas", and their officers use resources "to foster certain lines of inquiry while neglecting or de-emphasizing others". Christopher Lasch developed analysis of how the NGOs played a pivotal role in what he called "The Cultural Cold War". Alas, Coser concluded that the Trustees of the great foundations regard themselves as "men of good will animated by great public spirit, and they would be appalled at being accused of bias".⁵⁴ Most institutions expect to have the public's trust. But as Ronald Reagan liked to tell the Soviet leadership, it is always necessary to "Trust but verify." To establish trust, to be held up as reliable sources of information, newspapers and journalists are required to adhere to some basic professional standards. It is the consideration of professionalism to which we now turn.

3.6 Newspaper and Journalistic Professionalism

There is widespread recognition that there is a lack of professionalism in the work of newspapers and journalists in Kurdistan Region. Provocative and violent language has been identified as particularly worrying, especially amongst the generations and exiles who remember Ba'athism as a lived experience and the other violent conflicts of the past. Hamid Ali from the KIU Media bureau complained to the research team about lack of training and widespread "amateurism". Scholars in the Journalism Department at the University of Salahadeen noted the absence of professionalism and the lack of resources devoted to teaching the basics of the profession to new and aspiring entrants. Ahlam Mansor, who at the time we interviewed her in 2010, taught journalism at the University of Sulaymaniyah and who had been writing since the 1970s, told us that,

*"These days there are people who claim to be journalists, but they are far from being journalists. They are not highly educated. They are not rational people....To be professional, you need to be well educated, to get access to good local information, to look for information from international sources. You need a wide range of scientific, social scientific, literary and artistic knowledge. We have thousands of reporters, but only a handful can really report the news in a good way."*⁶⁵

Hawzheen Mawlood, a female journalist the research team interviewed in Erbil, commented that many editors "come straight from the market". Gazi Hassan, from *Barzan* magazine, claimed that plagiarism and the constant search for the sensational marked the "work" of too many colleagues. Dr. Arsalan Bayz, the current Speaker of the Kurdistan National Assembly, recounted his days as a lecturer in Journalism at the University of Sulaymaniyah, working alongside Nawshirwan Mustafa. He emphasized the importance of training and the importance of truth being central to the profession. He lamented, however, that all too often journalism was a hobby. Saman Siwali and Kamaran Chrostani, of *Hewr* magazine, pointed out to the research team the need of readers to be constantly alert, as all too often articles appear in papers in Kurdistan that rely upon unknown and unacknowledged

sources, such that the reliability of what is presented is left in doubt. Behcet Hirori, who had been trained at the University of Baghdad in the 1960s, reiterated the need to get young journalists to understand the primacy of accuracy in their work, while observing that many stories are fabricated. These themes were emphasised by Habeb Muhammad, from *Koch* magazine, who complained that,

*"there are newspapers who call themselves independent but they produce reports and stories which are not based on facts but which rely on using abusive language, picking up rumours and crossing the line of ethical journalism."*¹⁵⁶

The research team has also observed poor practice in detail. Dr. Frédéric Tissot, who was Consul General of France in Kurdistan – Iraq between 2007 and 2012, agreed in July 2012 to be interviewed by *Awene*. He asked for the transcript of the interview to be provided prior to publication. *Awene* complied with this request. However, when the interview was published in the paper on July 24, selective editing had taken place. Most significantly, a quote from Dr. Tissot which originally ran as "...the principles of democracy are not totally established in Kurdistan", instead read as "the principles of democracy are not established in Kurdistan". This edited phrase was used as the headline introducing the interview to readers of the paper. It is obvious why Dr. Tissot came to the conclusion that the removal of the word "totally" changed the meaning of what he had said radically. Dr. Tissot wrote to the Editor-in-Chief of *Awene* and the director of the company on July 26 by email. He sent a statement in writing and demanded the right of reply and for this to be published in the paper and presented on *Awene's* website. Dr. Tissot did not receive an apology or explanation, although there is some evidence of compliance with his requests.

This episode is most unfortunate. The research team has been in contact with the paper several times to generate an explanation. But no satisfactory explanation has been forthcoming. It is inexplicable how such an edit could have taken place, other than as the product of mischief. Although it might be amusing for some to have played this game, there might well be consequences. Everyone is entitled to expect to be treated with respect. But Dr. Tissot was no ordinary citizen. He is a highly

regarded friend of Kurdistan, sympathetic to both the government and mindful of the difficulties faced and contributions made by critical journalism. As a diplomat and as part of the growing network of foreign emissaries who have gravitated to Erbil, Dr. Tissot has experiences that might well be of interest to a range of representatives who have between them a global reach. Yet, to play games with his text and not even offer an apology sends out a very bad signal. Others, on hearing what happened, might well conclude that the paper or the individuals involved are not reliable or trustworthy and should therefore be refused access or the time and effort involved in agreeing to be interviewed. Once destroyed, reputations are very difficult to rebuild.

Many of the observations about poor practice were reproduced by Rebin Rasoul when we talked with him about the situation in Kurdistan. As a former deputy editor at *Hawlati* newspaper, he told the research team that too many journalists fail to put enough time and effort into their work and reveal a worrying lack of awareness and care about professional norms and standards. He also highlighted the case of Begard Hussein, known also as Begard Qalati, to illustrate lack of professionalism in the reporting of a murder and the reproduction of a sensationalist story without regard for the proper course of justice (Further details are provided in Table 1 below).

Some of these observations are alluded to in a report written following a visit by a delegation of UK Members of Parliament in January 2011. They stated,

*"We have previously noted a less than robust approach to the balance between transparency and the rights of the subjects of press reports. We were once told by a journalist that he simply reproduced a report from the Internet 'to convey information' but a free press has responsibilities to verify information."*⁵⁷

Such is the concern with the journalism profession that questions are often raised as to what it is that makes one person a journalist and another not. This is a question

that has been rehearsed by many of the journalists and editors who we have interviewed. Questions have been raised about the membership of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate and whether all who claim membership should be regarded as professional practitioners. It has even been suggested that some individuals are signed up to the syndicate to provide votes to ensure that particular political interests are represented. Others have pointed out that the label journalist is adopted by opposition agitators so that when confrontations with security forces take place on the street it becomes easier to portray the authorities as enemies of free speech rather than as custodians of public safety. When we met Govand Baban, a leading Attorney at Law in Kurdistan, he wondered why it is that his profession, or that of medical professionals, is governed by pre-entry examinations and rules of association and exclusion, while journalism remains an open profession, where no formal qualifications or adherence to a set of rules are required in order to practice. We understand that President Barzani has also felt moved to raise this question.

While it might be profitable or wise for newspapers to hire only those who adhere to professional standards and meet certain educational requirements, for society to prescribe in law pre-entry qualifications and professional standards of behaviour is perilous for it would necessarily have to be underpinned by a legally enforceable statement defining who does and does not have the right to speak. Frustrating as it might be, if the freedom of speech principle is to be upheld, it can only be that which is said which can be judged. Journalism is and will remain an open craft, quite unlike the closed professions of medicine, law and even the academy.

Nevertheless, this is not a license or invitation to unprofessional activity. It is necessary for all to be aware of what constitutes professional behaviour, for all members of society require a press that is reliable. Unfortunately, there are too many examples of poor practice. We have highlighted a number that have been brought to our attention and which we have investigated separately. These are presented below as vignettes. There is an urgent need for newspapers and journalists to consider their own practices and for policy makers to consider ways in

which assistance might be provided so that at bare minimum members of the profession receive and act upon the training they require.

Table 1: Perverting the course of justice?

The case of Begard Hussein known also as Begard Qalati⁵⁸

Begard Hussein, 27 years old, was a poet and journalist. She was a single mother, living with her six-year-old daughter in a rented house after she separated from her husband (She was married by a Mullah and her divorce was not registered in the court either.) She was stabbed to death, allegedly by her ex-husband on 18 April 2008 at her house in Erbil.

The next day, the ex-husband was interviewed by Hawlati newspaper and admitted publicly that he had killed her because she was in love with another man. Her ex-husband remains at large.

Source: Adapted from Begikhani, Gill and Hague, 2010

Table 2: Making false claims

Following the death of Jawhar Namiq Salem, who had just died in hospital in Sweden where he had been receiving treatment for cancer, Hawlati newspaper carried a story on March 23, 2011 claiming that the former speaker of Parliament had been poisoned. Even though no verifiable evidence was produced to support the story, and as family members disputed the story and the fact that an assassination through the use of poison would have been easily uncovered by the Swedish medical authorities, the paper continued to promote their claims. This story was released during a very tense time in Kurdistan. It might easily be interpreted as a high profile attempt to stir up suspicion and conflict. If the story were true, then of course it deserved to be published. But with no evidence and the absence of credible circumstances, in particular the fact that Jawhar Namiq Salem died under the medical care of Swedish health professionals, then one is confronted by very curious editorial judgement.

There are other examples of provocative and irresponsible journalism. There have been attempts to suggest that Arab troops were deployed in Sulaymaniyah and that protesters had been subjected to the same gas as used in Halabja. When false claims are made, the whole of society is undermined, left without reliable sources of information with which to make rational judgements

Source: Examples submitted in response to public call for dialogue by the research team. See Hogan and Trumpbour (2011)

Table 3: Journalistic Ethics

Many people who go into journalism do so without proper training, a vital part of which is learning about ethics. There are people who have made a difference by providing professional training. Hiwa Osman, for instance, has contributed greatly with his work through the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. However, more needs to be done. Judit Neurink, who runs the Independent Media Centre in Kurdistan, published a very good piece which was published in both *Rudaw* and *Awene* that serves as a good reminder of the importance of proper training and ethical behaviour. The piece deserves to be read in its entirety (see: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/op-ed-contributors/3755.html>). Leaving aside some of the specific remarks on Lvin, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders, here are some of the main points she made:

"Many Kurdish colleagues still write stories based on one source who is often anonymous. A source that tells them something they like, which they write down without checking the information. This is not journalism, as it breaks the most important rules in journalistic ethics codes.

Let me remind you of the first three points in the International Federation of Journalists' Code of Conduct:

- Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.*
- In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.*
- The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.*

Also look at this one:

The journalist shall regard as grave professional offenses the following: plagiarism; malicious misinterpretation; calumny; libel; slander; unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.

Regarding all this, journalists can almost never report on the information that they got from only one source. 'Facts', the code says. The chance that a source is using a journalist is too serious. The chance that what the journalist is reporting is slander becomes enormous."

Neurink goes on to say, it is wrong

"to write stories based on a single unnamed source; that press freedom is absolute; and that journalists are under and above the law. If journalists believe this, it would be very bad for the future of journalism in Kurdistan, and for the Kurdish society.

Because the press should be a mirror of what occurs in a society, we should reflect what is happening to the people and politicians, so that both can function well in the democracy. We, journalists, are not part of the political system: we watch, report and criticize; we hold individuals and institutions accountable by publishing facts, by checking information and by avoiding libel."

Source: Submitted in response to call for dialogue by the research team. See Hogan and Trumbour, Interim Report (<http://kurdistanresearch.blogspot.co.uk/>)

3.7 Education and training

If it is accepted that professionalism requires strengthening, education must become a key battle ground for improving the prospects for the future. The research team has been told on many occasions that far greater attention is needed in the field of education. This perspective was summed up eloquently by one of our contributors, when this person said

"If there is to be high quality and meaningful discussion, the government must address educational needs. The KRG has been weak and has given in to protests when it attempted to reform the examination system. But reform is essential. There are children who do not have schooling and many who spend too little time in the classroom. Schools are poorly equipped. Many good teachers have left. Teachers are under pressure, with children of the powerful provided with preferential treatment. The system is divided, with good facilities for those who can afford it and very poor provision for those who cannot. There are not enough schools and they are poorly regulated and inspected. If students are poorly educated, how can it be expected to build an economy and society which is sustainable? When people are poorly educated they can neither serve the community to the full nor are they able to critically examine the world around them and to make informed and independent judgments. Training is needed not just for journalists, officials and politicians, but also for the public, to be able to read with a questioning mind. If the government abdicates responsibility for education, the space is left open for Islamic extremists to fill the vacuum and it is already seen that

*there has been a rapid increase in the publication of texts which are poisoning the minds of the youth.*¹⁵⁹

The development of a deeper and stronger reading culture is called for:

*"We should talk about the tendency of newspapers (including private and official) to focus primarily on politics to the exclusion of vital issues, such as the environment, economy, archaeology, education, heritage and religion. They have created a group of readers who have a low level of culture and understanding. This means that they have led Kurdish readers in a way so that they do not care about such issues. Hence, today's readers in Kurdistan are vulnerable, because these newspapers play on their emotions. Readers not only see very few news stories, reportage, or interviews about these important issues, and consequently look to newspapers to do no more than speculate and comment upon politics. In brief, Kurdish newspapers do not help to broaden the insight of readers. On the contrary, they limit their thoughts/understandings around just a few topics within a limited geographical location."*¹⁶⁰

In order for journalists to intervene to the greatest effect, it may be advisable for newspaper editors to inspect the capacity of their columnists to make a contribution to knowledge. It is not entirely clear that a qualification in journalism on its own is sufficient. Indeed, when the research team interviewed journalist Nabaz Goran at the offices of *Hawlati* newspaper, he claimed that in Kurdistan it is best to develop the craft of journalism through on the job practice and by learning from foreign NGOs. This route he regards as superior to attending journalism courses at local Universities, which he sees as outdated.

In the view of the research team, the study of journalism is primarily the examination of technique to perform the task of presenting a story. It is probably best approached as a post-graduate qualification, a bridge between serious undergraduate study and professional endeavor. If a writer is going to talk about society, politics or the economy grounding in the social sciences would be more useful. Training in history and of course philosophy will always provide solid foundations, while mastery of modern languages and literature can provide alternative insights from other cultures and an appreciation of form and style.

Likewise, commentary upon the worlds of science and technology might be best approached by those who have some kind of knowledge of the relevant disciplines.

The area of language training has been specified as particularly important. The absence of standardization is not just expressed in the use of several dialects and even the appearance of the Kurdish language in Latin as well as Arabic script, but is also expressed in significant variations within dialects, from one locality to another. The research team had the great honour to meet up with the late and very great historian, Professor Eric Hobsbawm back in October 2010. The research project was discussed and we are grateful for the advice he provided. Professor Hobsbawm reminded us that historically, nationalists have placed great store in the production and dissemination of a standardized language. It is the means by which a national citizenry is constructed.

As one of the contributors to our call for dialogue stated,

"The issue of language is very controversial and important. We lack a standardised and unified reference for our language. There are divisions based on dialect but also within dialects. Depending on where a writer is from, the use of language can be quite different across Kurdistan Region. This can present a barrier to understanding. There are strong tendencies for there to be expressions of a local identity which draws people away from building towards a national identity. As champions of the written word and with responsibility to their readers, it would be good to see press and government work together to advance development of the Kurdish language and improve the prospects for greater understanding between people in Kurdistan"⁶¹.

This is no easy task. Kurds are well aware of the degrading experience of being subject to language assimilation by external aggressive nationalisms. Yet, in the course of the research programme, interviewees time and again wanted to discuss the debilitating effects of not having access to a standard for written language. Bahra Hama Rash from *Warvin* magazine, as well as Dr Kurdistan Mukyryani, to name but two sets of interviewees, placed these concerns on record. Concerted effort and the deployment of resources into the task of at least recording local variations and some form of mediated standardization for the use of the main written dialects might bring some form of order. This would need to be handled

with great care and sensitivity. But it could assist newspapers, as well as those involved in the production of texts designed for national consumption, such as government bodies, the law, medicine and academies.

A further area of concern in the field of education is how relations between the generations are unfolding. It is important to understand that the discourse of the older generation is formed in the experiences of the military struggle, away in the mountains and where the enemy was clearly defined in the institutions and politics of the Ba'athist regime. Today, there is a generation of young people for whom these memories are not a lived experience. The KRG could do well to remind the nation of the history of the national liberation struggle and to connect that history with the present, to present the aim of freedom within a clear appreciation of the current constraints upon the freedom of the nation, both in the south and in the other territories of Kurdistan. As Chris Bowers, former British Consul General in Erbil, has pointed out,

*"The pre-1991 generation laid the foundation stones for Kurdish autonomy by fighting or reaching accords with the various rulers in Baghdad, but never losing sight of the cause and commitment to Kurdish nationalism despite years of persecution and hardship. ...freedom and the sudden prosperity has come at a huge cost. Freedom is never free, as the saying goes. It is the task of the pre-2003 generations to explain to younger generations how precious that freedom is, to know how it came about, to encourage them to exercise it and to treat it with respect."*⁶²

This requires a dialogue and an appreciation of the specific requirements of youth, their needs for spaces of social interaction, access to opportunities for meaningful production, education and training, along with the prospects of a better life, such that they can embrace willingly the responsibilities that come with new found freedoms and opportunities. There needs to be a conversation between young and old. How this is done is important. It is important to listen. But it is also important to present suggestions of how things could be done differently, to be constructive, not to list failures and arrogantly assert an alternative agenda.

This point has already drawn the following response,

*"In a Patriarchal society like Kurdistan the merits and role of youth are consistently undermined. Fathers and elderly male family members infantilize their children. It is time that this problem is seriously addressed through education and a democratic culture based on mutual respect rather than fear and control."*⁶³

The research team agrees with this point. We are reminded of the discussion that took place in our own preliminary report when we investigated the work of the then Ministry of Sport and Youth (See:

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_zP3I6J0nRENWM2ZjY4OTUtY2RjZC00NjgxLTkxMTctY2M1MmE3MGU0OGYx/edit?hl=en&pli=1 or

https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B_zP3I6J0nRENjQ0MjkwYzUtMjgwOS00NmQ0LTgyZDktZWRhMDI3YmIxODYz/edit?hl=en_GB&pli=1). To quote our earlier observations,

*"We have had the opportunity to meet with Taha Barwary and a number of his staff and the many volunteers he has persuaded to come to Kurdistan to lend their energy, expertise and commitment to the service of the nation, through the NGO, known as KOMAK. Together with the Education Ministry, KOMAK and MOSY have made great strides forward. Particularly impressive is the mobilisation of experts and volunteers to promote a new set of teaching techniques in Kurdish schools, in a programme of training that promotes democracy in the curriculum and looks to improve the welfare of youth, to build democratic capacity for the future. By promoting a less authoritarian teaching environment and encouraging students to be empowered in the learning process, to critically analyse and discuss issues in view, MOSY is laying the groundwork for future generations to intervene more effectively in the decision making processes of their nation and to bring independent critical minds to the task of analysing and even formulating the policies of government."*⁶⁴

The research team has remembered the work of this Ministry. However, attempts to follow up on the progress that was witnessed at first hand have proven fruitless.

The Ministry was abolished when Barham Salih became Prime Minister and the number of ministries was reduced. Sadly, the initiatives of MOSY and KOMAK seemed to have died. The Kurdistan Region does not have an effective civil service,

nor is there very much evidence of a national archive containing records of past initiatives, policy formulations, reports and programmes of action which can be assessed for success, failure and lessons for the future. This example illustrates the need to construct such an infrastructure for maintaining the nation's historical memory, for the sake of education, governance and the proper functioning of the press and other media.

Finally, when discussing education and the empowerment of youth, it is worth considering the benefits to be gained from instituting civics into the education curriculum and exploring the benefits of critical reading. As part of the task of learning to take their place in society as full citizens on reaching adulthood, young people can be prepared to take responsibility by learning how to read between the lines and to delve beneath surface appearances. Equipped thus, they might be better able to resist manipulation from which ever quarter it might come. Again, newspapers, along with other media outlets as well as voluntary and government institutions, are crucial in building such a critical mass. To meet this potential commitment to truth is required from all.

3.8 Transparency, Objectivity and Independence

There are a number of different approaches taken to the task of distinguishing between different types of publication in Kurdistan Region. When it comes to the party press, they are readily identifiable as organs of their respective parties. So, *Khabat* is the mouth piece of the KDP, *Kurdistani Nwe* represents the perspectives of the PUK and so on. There are going to be few surprises. Readers know what they are going to get. Privately owned papers, however, can prove to be a little more enigmatic. There are some papers that prefer to refer to themselves as being "independent", as operating outside of the control and direction of political power. According to Beston Noori, Editor of *Civil*, something different is being done: rather than acting as transmission belts from political leadership to the people, a

professional, objective and ideology-free task is being performed, where public opinion is being formed and presented back to government.

Claims to independence and objectivity are hotly contested. When we interviewed Serwan Rasheed of *Sbey* Website from the Wusha media company owned by Nawshirwan Mustafa, leader of the Gorran movement, we were told that no newspaper can survive in Kurdistan Region without a subsidy of financial support. The prominent lawyer Govand Baban told us that he once tried to establish a newspaper and that his own experience and observation of how other papers operate led him to the conclusion that it is impossible for newspapers to function as self-funding commercially viable enterprises, which therefore raised the question from where do self-proclaimed "independent" newspapers derive the income necessary to survive?

There is the suggestion that subscription and advertising revenue might provide the answer. However, the market for newspapers is extremely crowded, there are a number of papers that are given away for free and it has been made clear to the research team that there is considerable downward pressure on the uptake of newspapers by the public, not least because of the convenience and low to zero cost access to news material through internet based platforms, including those that operate on mobile phones. The secular decline in newspaper sales is not unique to Kurdistan. It is seen across most of the developed world. All of this raises questions. Why would rational business actors seek to advertise in newspapers that have limited and perhaps declining take up and coverage? How much are advertisers prepared to forgo for the privilege of such low levels of market penetration? Can advertising really be regarded as a credible source of funding in the context of low production runs and downward pressure on take up and sales? What are we to make of the claim that political power dominates all aspects of Kurdish society, including and especially economic activity, while at the same time being asked to believe that freedom from political power is possible and actually

being enacted through the receipt of advertising from the self same economic agents who are it is claimed in fact the bearers of political power?

It has come to our attention that there is the accusation that “the independent” press is nothing more than a shadow media operation acting on behalf of the Gorran movement. These claims were made in a piece that appeared in *Chatr* on November 30, 2011 (http://issuu.com/chatr/docs/chatr_82). This link was emphasised when we met Stran Abdulla, at the time of interview Editor of the PUKs *Kurdistani Nwe*, who told us of the many close family links between personnel of the opposition parties and the “independent” press. Although he thought it normal for writers to be critical, he questioned claims of objectivity and pointed out that many journalists go from working with the “independents” onto working with Nawshirwan Mustafa’s Wusha company and his Gorran movement.

The Gorran movement has certainly benefitted from their support, especially at election time. However, there is more to this story than meets the eye. The relationship is a little more complex. Lanja Ebdulla, amongst a number of other contributors, has pointed our attention to the perception that the independents are noticeably less hostile to PUK politicians than to those from the KDP. In part this might be explained by the fact that the Gorran movement is populated primarily by ex-PUK followers and led of course by the former deputy leader of that party. It therefore follows, we are led to believe, that there are close personal ties binding the two organisations. It is not inconceivable that they may reintegrate at some later date. Both Gorran and the PUK share the governorate of Sulaymaniyah as their stronghold, which in turn has been a territory unwelcoming to the KDP. The KDP, instead, draws its strength from the governorates of Duhok and Erbil. With Sulaymaniyah dominating their horizon and as a space under the tight political control of Gorran and the PUK, it is perhaps unsurprising that the independents should be directed wittingly or otherwise to express local political hegemony. Certainly, we can confirm that when the research team met the Editor-in-chief of

Hawlati, Kemal Rauf, he was fulsome in his praise for the positive attitude of the local senior PUK politician and former Prime Minister Barham Salah towards the “independent press”. Yet, it is still questionable as to whether the independents should be seen as no more than advocates of local political power. Asos Hardi of *Awene* is in no doubt that his mistreatment in the recent past was the end result of challenging leading local politicians in his home city. The picture is complicated.

There are further layers of analysis to consider. A convincing assessment is presented by commentators such as Rebwar Sirwali, Head of the Philosophy Department at the University of Salahadeen, and Rebin Rasaul, former deputy Editor of *Hawlati*. They have both stated the belief that the independents play the role of an opposition party and display the desire to be politicians, or to use the phrase of Hiwa Osman, they are “failed politicians”, people who wish to exercise power but who lack the popular mandate and authority necessary to do so. While this remains unannounced and concealed, there could be a problem. As Barham Ali, of *Bas* newspaper, put it to us,

*“Journalists in Kurdistan, particularly editors in chiefs of newspapers and magazines, those who consider themselves private and independent, often forget about their position and profession and behave like the leaders of a movement or as political leaders. This affects their professional integrity as journalists, at the same time creating suspicion about their papers and magazines.”*⁶⁵

In presenting this account, it is not to argue against campaigning journalism. It is not compulsory to praise the government and the leadership of the nation. Well informed and critical debate is the life-blood of an efficient and democratic body politic. But readers need to be able to trust the media upon which they are asked to rely. When the call for transparency is raised it should be no surprise that the practices of all come under scrutiny. It is imperative to warn that damage to professional reputation is not to be shouldered lightly and to point out the dangers of misrepresentation.

3.9 Intimidation, threats and violence

One area where reputation for accuracy in the field of representation is perhaps more important than in any other is with regard to accusations of intimidation and violence against journalists. When violence is perpetrated against individuals because of their activities as journalists the space for freedom of expression is diminished. To attack a journalist for conducting his or her legitimate business is an attack upon the democratic aspirations of all. It is therefore quite natural that our sympathies should be drawn to the victims of violence and threats.

The research team met Niaz Abdullah, now director of the Metro Center for the defence of journalists, earlier in 2012. A number of reports have been compiled by her organisation documenting various acts of violence perpetrated against journalists. In addition, we have recorded the account of her own mistreatment at the hands of security personnel. In addition, the research team have observed the unfolding account of attacks upon Asos Hardi, as well as the disappearance of Mouloud Anfand, Editor of *Kurd-Israel*, who went missing in June 2012. We have followed the claims and counter-claims surrounding the murders of Sardesht Osman in 2010 and Soran Mama Hama, killed in 2008. Fuad Sdeeq, former editor of *Gulan*, has talked to the research team about his fear of violence from radical Islamists, while we have also been made aware of accounts of violence directed at KDP and PUK journalists during the demonstrations that took place from February 2011 in Sulaymaniyah. More recently, Omar Abdulla Aziz spoke with the research team about the Zhako riots and the grievances of the KIU following the destruction of media stations belonging to them and the arrest of a number of their journalists. And, not least of all, the research team are thankful to those women who have shared their experiences of harassment in the workplace and spoken out against the threats issued by some religious leaders determined to silence them in their efforts to promote gender equality.

The research team has no desire to question or challenge the accounts that have been presented. However, we do note that there has been a great deal of disquiet expressed about how violence is understood and then presented to the outside world. As one contributor to our discussion document put it

"The Human Rights Watch report produced in May 2011 raised a number of important points (See <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/05/24>). However, the claim that the KRG is no better than the Ba'athists was a disaster for all concerned to promote civil liberties and human rights. The highly respected scholar Professor David Romano explored the absurdity of such a claim in an article for Rudaw (see: <http://rudaw.net/kurdish/index.php/opinion/6615.html> or <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/columnists/3737.html>). HRW has lost credibility. Kurdistan needs assistance. Expertise is to be welcomed. But, if expert opinion is exposed as biased and wildly wrong, then any forces which prefer to disregard human rights will have more space to operate and less reason to fear condemnation. With HRW (and this also applies to some other international NGOs), when they lose credibility the force of their work is lost. They now have considerable difficulty in advocating for human rights. International NGOs need to do their job properly and for everyone in Kurdistan to help them do their job properly."⁶⁶

HRW has taken courageous stands in condemning Turkey's imprisonment of a great many journalists, the majority of whom are Kurds. Turkey is now regarded as the world leader in imprisoning journalists. But, alas, HRW may have obscured these disturbing findings by simultaneously treating the KRG as the second coming of Ba'athist Iraq, the quintessential "Republic of Fear" and the benchmark for bloodsoaked oppression in the region. In fairness to HRW, too many Iraqi Kurdish critics of the KRG like to shout "Ba'athist" when they are unhappy with policies, but the overseas human rights NGOs seem all too eager to accept these types of crude lampoon as being grounded in sober reality. The human rights community and proponents of press freedom must do better. Part of the task of producing more accurate descriptions of the reality on the ground might be to have a more expansive definition of harassment and threat, one that includes gender based violence. The killing and the representation of the murder of the journalist Begard Hussein has been a source of particular angst for many women journalists and activists concerned with Kurdistan, women and the media. Further and more nuanced distinctions might also be made. Analysis might take into consideration

whether an attack is the act of a private individual, whether there were witnesses, documented and photographic evidence, whether members of the security forces were involved, whether violence described was premeditated or part of an exercise in crowd control during demonstrations or even riots, what action, if any, has been taken to pursue perpetrators in law and so on? But, in any case, Niaz Abdullah and others like her are to be commended and supported in the aim of doing away with harassment and violence faced by journalists.

3.10 Cultures of honour, shame, taboos, gossip and localism

No account of the press environment in Kurdistan can be complete without a consideration of the importance invested in reputation and honour or the concept of 'shame' or *ayb*. It has been made clear to the research team that the ability of individuals and by extension their wider families to command respect in their extended families, communities and society more broadly is founded upon their perceived virtue in the eyes of the collective. To be dishonored is to be socially destroyed and anyone who threatens to invite shame can quite easily face harsh penalties, including death. So, for example if a woman enters into an extra-marital relationship she might easily find herself regarded as a deviant from the norm and her behavior dishonouring to both her and her family. To restore the honour of the family, some form of publicly recognized and observed violent punishment usually follows in such circumstances, with death not being an uncommon result. While women are the most visible victims, the enforcement of harsh honour codes is a problem that permeates all parts of society. The honour of individuals can lie in a number of different traits which are valorized in Kurdish society, including honesty, generosity, religious observance, intellectual achievement and wisdom, bravery and fidelity to the nationalist cause. To publicly question an individual's attachment to such "virtues" is to attack their standing in the community and to damage their pride. Society is so unforgiving that to admit being different, to weakness or to having made mistakes can be very damaging.

The enforcement of honour codes places such a high tariff on deviation that it acts to generate practices of deception. So, individuals feel compelled to conceal thoughts, desires and practices, to avoid ruination. Behind pride, a climate of fear prevails, where potential threats to reputation preclude transparent, honest social interaction and erodes possibilities for trust. As Rebwar Siwayli told the research team, in Kurdistan people have a great deal of difficulty thinking and acting freely: everyone must wear a mask. Individuals, made thus fearful, can even turn to violence to protect their honour or to restore it once it has been called into question. Thus, there are very strong cultural constraints and practices that stand in the way of open and transparent communication.

Communication in Kurdistan is also shaped by a strong appetite for gossip and a widespread willingness to circulate rumours. This is a problem which affects all. As Kemal Rauf, when Editor-in-Chief of *Hawlati*, pointed out in *Hawlati* on May 11, 2011, this culture of hearsay indicates a failure to create a healthier society based on a culture of reasoned debate. At the end of this very revealing editorial, he states

*"Currently, all of us, including the opposition, independent media, authorities, people of all trends- secular and Islamic, left and progressive- even though we all call for change, freedom and the acceptance of each other, it doesn't seem that we understand the meaning of our slogans and demands. Hence, we have transformed society into a big factory producing accusation and gossip."*⁶⁷

By circulating accusations against an individual it is possible to destroy their reputation and honour in their community. Again, it is widely claimed and by members of the industry that the press, along with other forms of media, is used to target individuals. Some journalists and newspaper editors are provided with damaging stories about individuals by their enemies. One effect of this practice is to "provoke" violent retribution against journalists. In the course of the research project, it has been made apparent that a number of incidents of violence against journalists have been the product of published attacks upon the perceived honour of

the perpetrators or patrons. According to Kareem Abdul of *Fshar* magazine, some journalists are open to bribery, to write stories designed to erode the reputation of the families of critical journalists, to produce the effect that society will look down upon the whole family and to distrust the writings of the defamed. It has also been pointed out that female KRG officials are particularly vulnerable to being targeted by journalists and threatened with “exposure” if they did not cooperate and provide confidential government documents and testimony about their department’s operations.

The nefarious exploits of unscrupulous journalists are one way in which the ideal of transparency might well be corrupted. But when the consequences of full disclosure are considered fully, in the context of prevailing traditions and social norms, then the call for transparency can appear utterly naive and even dangerously reckless. When the research team talked with representatives of Ala Azadi, the Toilers party, the situation in Kurdistan was explained with great eloquence:

"Here we are facing lots of problems as a society. When producing articles on social issues, I do so with the aim of rebuilding society, not destroying society...."

Honour controls our lives. It is different from Europe....Here, if someone makes a mistake, the whole family will suffer, the whole family will get punished.....

.....There was a case in a town near Sulaymaniyah of a father who raped his daughter. Some newspapers published this story in a bad way. The girl's photograph was published. This might be normal in Europe but in this society this is unacceptable..the problem is that the girl is not regarded as a victim but as tainted. Society looks down on the girl and also on the whole of her family...Is it really appropriate for news to be published regardless of the consequences, regardless of whether, say twenty people might end up suffering or people even get killed?'⁶⁸

When thinking about the “red lines” demarcating the sacred from the profane in Kurdish culture it also is necessary to recognize that “new red lines” have been created. It has been pointed out to the research team that, in some circles, most prominently within the Kurdish diaspora, significant swathes of opposition opinion

have mobilized to deem it unacceptable to have any dealings with the KRG. From this perspective, to work for or with the KRG is to invite dishonor and damage to personal and family reputation. To have any relationship with the KRG is therefore unacceptable.

This is even the case when the KRG sponsors research. Academic research commissioned or supported by the KRG can be ignored or its integrity questioned, without there being any consideration of the content of the work produced. This ignores the fact that the KRG has sponsored scholars who have produced work which is of great benefit to Kurdistan, work that has raised difficult, uncomfortable and critical questions. Dr Choman Hardi in her book on the Anfal and the experience of survivors raises a whole series of important issues. Dr Hardi is transparent. She makes no secret of the fact that the KRG provided her with a measure of support and she declares thanks openly for all to see in her book published in 2011⁶⁹. Likewise, we have the research project on honour based violence driven by Dr Nazand Begikhani and published in 2010⁷⁰. The report and its recommended action plan have been applauded internationally, in particular singled out for high praise by the UK Foreign Office. It forms the basis for further progress in promoting gender equality research and policy, which has been highlighted in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*. The research posed difficult and challenging questions to the authorities and called upon them to overhaul their approach to honour based violence. Yet, it was the KRG which sponsored this major piece of research. Dr Hardi and Dr Begikhani did not submit to the regime of the “new red lines”. If they had, Kurdistan would be more impoverished. With reasoned, rigorous and scholarly research, the level of understanding and debate can be raised. But, with the production of “new red lines”, dialogue and reasoned debate are undermined.

The production of these “new red lines” certainly suits political opponents of the KRG, but it can also be seen as complimentary to and functional for certain local interests in Kurdistan who are dismissive of the talents and experiences that are found within the diaspora. The KRG would do well to focus on redressing this problem. It is to the reception and interaction of the diaspora into the communication space of Kurdistan that we now turn.

3.11 The diaspora and the communication space of Kurdistan

The contribution of the Kurdish diaspora to the media landscape has been facilitated further by the internet and development of new forms of electronic social media. Friends, relatives, colleagues and comrades can now interact and broadcast. Messages in the many forms available are readily transferred from within and back into Kurdistan. The Kurds of the diaspora play a vital role in relaying messages and in providing perspectives, born out of the different experiences and wisdom derived from exile.

The networks of the diaspora interact with other networks, crucially with the individuals and institutions of the host societies who are the gate-keepers to power and resources. Over time, members of the diaspora and even more so the children who have grown up and been educated in host societies have come to occupy positions of power within host networks. They have become government officials, academics, journalists, lawyers, business and labour leaders and even elected representatives. By becoming more embedded in the host society, by being able to exercise greater leverage as an organised lobby, the Kurdish diaspora has placed itself in a position to exercise greater persuasive force with foreign governments to support the interests of the Kurds and Kurdistan.

Many people in Kurdistan welcome the contribution of exiles. Artists, writers and scholars have returned to make their contribution. There are a number of notable figures. We have already mentioned in passing Ahmadi Mala and Rebwar Siwayli. In addition, we might also mention the great Kurdish artist Rebwar Saeed, who has just completed his KRG funded doctoral studies in London and returned once more to Kurdistan. The research team has also had the privilege of interacting with Nawzad Jamal and his wonderful students in the Philosophy Department at the University of Salahadeen. Nawzad was educated in the Netherlands at a first class institution where he gained a mastery over the subject of Philosophy, a stream of learning way beyond the capacity of many Dutch students. His return is of great

benefit to Kurdistan and we had the pleasure of seeing him with his students and witnessing the knowledge transfer at first hand. Based in Germany, members of the Rahand Group and Bakhtiar Ali in particular enjoy a popular reception in Sulaymaniyah.

However, barriers to communication remain. In some circles, the voice of the diaspora is viewed with suspicion, as expressive of ideas alien to local and traditional thinking, or even as the fruit of mercenary intent. This tendency to dismiss the knowledge, efforts and sacrifices made by Kurds from the diaspora has effects. It places a barrier in the way of positive skills and ideas being returned to the homeland. It also places unnecessary limits upon the quality of discourse. The proposition that one locality above all others should be regarded as the primary source of all warranted knowledge is nothing less than infantile. There are human experiences and understandings from all parts of the planet which deserve consideration.

The suspicion of deracinated Kurds can be seen as a continuation of the logic of localism. Kurdistan is a society in which family and tribal structures have been and arguably continue to be central to the reproduction of political, economic and even military power. Here, patriarchies prevail. It is the head of the family who monopolizes resources: material, moral and intellectual. This monopoly control is weakened and even broken when members of the collective live outside of the territory of surveillance and therefore enforcement. Hence, traditional tribal and family based societies are typically marked by localized systems of thought and cognitive control.

These traditional social forms, however, should not be dismissed out of hand. The Kurds, as with other peoples who have faced terrible persecution and endured great struggles, can take pride in the sacrifices and solidarity which their family structures and kinship networks have permitted. But when the local and familial are given excessive primacy, horizons are restricted, enlightenment dimmed and opportunities for progress squandered. The clan mentality extends into structures and

associations which have no obvious familial core and which in fact declare against tribalism in the name of modernity. As Dr Nazand Begikhani, Editor in Chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Kurdish language version-Sorani dialect), put it,

"In Kurdistan there is a "them and us" mentality. You are either with "us" or "them". It is like saying, are you part of our family, or an outsider? If you are an outsider, you cannot be trusted. It does not matter how good your ideas are, how much training you have done, your educational achievements. It does not matter that exile has forced and allowed you to see the world from a different point of view. All of this does not matter.....

*If you are not part of the right family or come from the right place, town or city then you can be ignored. This "them and us" mentality affects the whole of society. Inside families. In the parties. Sometimes, Kurdish intellectuals are as bad if not worse. The society is divided into camps, tribes of one sort or another....which do not and cannot accept the idea that others might be worth listening to, might have something to contribute."*⁷¹

The breakdown in communication between the diaspora and Kurdistan can only weaken the Kurdish cause internationally. Many people in Kurdistan Region look to the outside world as a mirror to allow them to have another perspective on their own circumstances and for inspiration for ideas about how life might be improved. The Kurdish diaspora provides a vital gateway to that experience. If members of the diaspora are going to add to the debate about the future of Kurdistan and contribute to its further development then there needs to be far greater dialogue and shared understanding. The KRG will need to take the initiative in a strategic and well resourced manner that allows the wider community of Kurds, both at home and abroad, to communicate creatively for the common good. The statements by Noor Matti in Table 4 and by Rigien Bagekany in Table 5 below indicate perhaps untapped energies and enthusiasm, and a desire to engage by the diaspora which might be unleashed with greater help from the KRG.

While the prevalence of closed forms of thinking and refusal to entertain dialogue are particularly pronounced in relation to the diaspora, it is necessary to examine the problem of communication breakdown more widely and deeply, looking to the legacy effects of war and the preeminent position occupied by a culture of violence. It is to a consideration of these issues that we now turn.

Table 4: To Return and Rebuild

I have lived in Erbil since 2008 and while the city and the region have improved in terms of every aspect of life from year to year, that improvement has been coming very slowly. The main reason for the slow progress is the lack of expertise within the local population. The kind of expertise that the Kurdistan diaspora currently possesses, after living decades within other communities around the world.

It is no secret within the Erbil public sector that businesses prefer foreign employees to locals. This of course is due to the level of efficiency and expertise a foreigner has as compared to a local resident. Because of this, the Kurdistan region now boasts well over 100,000 foreign workers throughout various industries from education to architecture. With this in mind, why can't the KRG try to attract more of the well over 250,000 diaspora community of Kurdistan? This would encourage many former refugees to finally come back to their country and built something they feel passionate about. Former residents of Dohuk, Erbil, and Slemani are now doctors, lawyers, mayors, principals in Europe, the Americas, and Australia. If the hard work that is being done by the diaspora was invested instead in Kurdistan, then our community's progress would dramatically speed up. The local electrical engineers have had 10 years to fix the electricity, yet it still has not been fully restored. I believe the problem of electricity would be a thing of a past had there been some kind of mechanism to encourage the diaspora to come back and help build the country.

Nobody helped me find the road back to Kurdistan after living 15 years in the US. I took the risk of taking a one-way plane ticket to Erbil and started my new life. A risk most people in the diapsora would not take without some kind of encouragement or support from the KRG.

Noor Matti, Assyrian TV journalist

Table 5: Profiting from the rich capacity of returnees

"As an expat returning to the region, I have many ideas and suggestions which I would like to make here in Kurdistan. I am not the only one who has these ideas and ambitions, most of my friends are returnees from Europe, the US or Australia who are all well educated and efficient in their work. Some people very much appreciate our contribution and try to profit from our bilingualism, our understanding of cultural differences (especially when working with Westerners), and organizational efficiency. However and sadly, others accuse us of being arrogant and not wanting to adapt to the Kurdish way of working. I know for a fact that the Kurdish government has the ambitions of profiting from the rich capacity of the returnees. This is especially visible through the employment of many returnees as advisors for the ministries and other institutions. This rather works for those

returnees who have an established name and reputation and long-lasting experience. However, the government should also endeavor to benefit from the competence of the younger generation of the returnees. If we had a body or organization formed by the government to speak to us and try to allocate our capacity as needed, it would be productive both for the government and the returnees."

Rigien Bagekany, Oil Industry Consultant

3.12 Legacy effects of War and Violence

Warfare has been part of the fabric of Kurdish culture for many decades. When not at war, military confrontation has been an ever-present threat. The mobilisation of armed forces has been central to resistance and even part of the resolution of internal differences. The Peshmerga occupy centre stage in the popular imagination. Almost continuous military confrontation with the Iraqi state, reaching its most horrifying depths with the *Anfal*, the genocidal campaign launched by the Ba'athist regime against the entire Kurdish population of Iraq in the 1980s, has left deep scars. The traumas of war and exposure to violence have been highlighted as key elements shaping the tone and content of communication in Kurdistan. It has been pointed out by several contributors that the language used by some newspapers and politicians is needlessly aggressive and abusive toward political or even personal opponents. Commenting on the language used during and following demonstrations in February 2011 in Kurdistan Region, it was pointed out to us that

"What worries many Kurds is the language that is being used is very provocative. It reminds those who witnessed it before of the language used in the press in the build up to and during the course of the fratricidal war. Violent and abusive language produces effects. It is essential that everyone remembers the mistakes of the past and avoids repeating those mistakes".⁷²

This is not to advocate the complete neutralisation of tone, to suggest that the language of critique should be stripped of passion and colour. Moral outrage has its

place, but it can easily lose its potency when rhetoric is overheated, at best appearing ridiculous when calmly faced by the facts and at worst constituting an incitement to unfounded fear and even physical violence. As Rebwar Siwayli lamented when we met him in 2012, unfortunately there are some writers and editors in Kurdistan who communicate not for the sake of dialogue and generating greater understanding, but in order to wound and cause pain. When reflecting on the subject, Rebin Rasul pointed out that the legacy of war meant that "Killing people is something that is respected in our culture, that is being a fighter". He also said,

*"We have a culture of violence, of temper. We do not hide our temper. It is used in the home and mobilised on the street. Violence is part of our society. Responding to challenges through violence is normal....You will be beaten at school, students will be beaten for not knowing the right answer. Even police officers might be beaten by superiors. Violence is all around. In every home, you will find firearms. That is why we need a lot of training, to build a culture of mutual respect so that we can resolve differences peacefully through dialogue."*⁷³

Many newspaper professionals and politicians are aware of these problems and the dynamic created. However, several of our interviewees claim that there are writers in Kurdistan who actively want to become martyrs through their writing, to be "*peshmerga of the pen*", hailed as heroes and to command "respect", as they are willing to face violence, imprisonment and even death. When we met with Dr Farzal Omer, Editor-in-Chief of *Warr* newspaper based in Duhok and also a trained medical doctor, he told us of his grave concern about what he sees as a deep-seated "death-wish" expressed by a number of young writers, which he saw as part and expressive of a culture and mass psychological malaise carried over from the experiences of war, mass murder and genocide.

The emergence of Kurdistan from the experience of dictatorship has clearly left scars and also generated problems around the disclosure of information. Barham Ali, the editor of *Bas*, has presented the paradox to us as follows

"There are two distinct and extreme categories of writer. Because of the bad experience in the past in Iraq, most people have an aversion to, if not a phobia of, documenting their views for fear of implicating themselves. But

*there is also the opposite category, those who write down every thought that comes to mind and every discussion supposedly private and confidential or politically incorrect or morally improper.*¹⁷⁴

As we have been informed, it must be remembered that under the rule of the Ba'athists, it was a matter of life and death for all members of families to be ready to conceal the truth about the whereabouts or activities of themselves or other family members. To be completely open would be a recipe for disaster. Those who lived under Ba'athism were brought up from an early age to hide the truth. There was no other option. This legacy of the culture of secrecy continues. It is reinforced further by the constant and ever changing pressures created for the Kurdish leadership from multiple external forces. It makes many officials and private individuals wary of embracing the call for transparency and unable to decide what should be open for public disclosure and what should remain confidential.

As the legacy of Ba'athism and the Anfal become more widely recognised internationally, it is hoped that the foreign governments and multi-national corporations who collaborated with and made possible Ba'athist rule and genocidal campaigns face up to their responsibilities and atone for their errors by helping the KRG lead a process towards some form of healing. Evidently, the healing process requires a great deal of time and action on several fronts. However, there are initiatives that the KRG are urged to embrace now. According to Hiwa Osman, a key to understanding aggression and unprofessional activity of some journalists and papers is to see their behaviour as a response to the refusal of officials to make information available, as acts of revenge upon a polity that stands accused of excessive secrecy. It is to the consideration of information flows that we now turn.

3.13 Government systems, bureaucracy and performance

We have found considerable disagreement over whether or not journalists and newspapers are provided with fair and equal treatment concerning government

information and about the extent to which citizens should be provided with full access to data. Opinion is divided. On the one hand, we have heard that,

*"The authorities fail to give the right information. The government is slow in providing information and the parties are secretive. The government does not invite privately owned newspaper journalists to press conferences and so they in turn feel excluded. All of this adds fuel to the suspicion that the government is hiding the facts from the press and the people."*⁷⁵

While, it has also been suggested that,

*"It is not true the authorities do not provide any information. There is a great deal of information made available. For example, if you go to the KRGs own website, you can see KRG Ministry of Natural Resources Production Sharing Contracts. Part of the problem is that when it comes to international commercial contracts most of these will be concluded in the English language. In order for our journalists to make sense of what is going on and to pass such understandings on to Kurdish readers they are required to have the language skills necessary to translate from English into Kurdish. Unfortunately, many of our journalists have not been trained and do not have the skills necessary to do the job properly."*⁷⁶

Complaints about lack of access and the shortage of information were heard from most people that we interviewed from the newspaper industry, almost regardless of whether or not they were sympathetic or in opposition to the politics of the KRG. This is not surprising in our view. Part of the problem is the fact, as illustrated above in section 3.12 on the legacy effects of war and violence, where we drew attention to the culture of secrecy and its roots in the struggle against Ba'athism, as well as Section 3.10 where we highlighted the argument that traditional social structures and associated honour codes militate against openness. It is also the case that journalists have a constant and unquenchable thirst for information, as it is the very substance from which they manufacture their own final product. In the very crowded market place of Kurdistan's newspaper industry, with its multitude of journalists and outlets, the demand for access and copy is bound to be more intense and the frustrations felt greater than in more mundane media environments.

In order for government to be able to provide information, such information has to be available in reality, presented in accessible form, after having been collected, collated and stored in a uniform manner in keeping with the basic principles of bureaucratic governance. We are convinced that one of the big problems facing the press and government in Kurdistan Region is that there is an absence of proper record keeping and reliable data. Statistics are made available, but very often they are inaccurate and at times contradictory figures are produced. Kurdistan lacks a professional bureaucracy, trained properly to follow clear rules and procedures for the recording of decisions, the monitoring of policy implementation and the presentation of failures and success in meeting targets. Effective bureaucracy comes with a mature state apparatus and a society which has the educational facilities capable of producing competent experts. Iraqi Kurdistan does not yet meet these preconditions for effective accountability. Attention to the development of personnel and systems is essential. The comments of Pakhshan Zangana, head of the Kurdistan Women's High Council, are instructive, when she told the research team that the KRG was in danger of failing to see and understand people's problems due to a lack of properly collected data. The KRG requires clear data for its own efficient operation and needs to help the press with reliable data to provide the public with a clear and true picture of the strengths and weaknesses of their government over time.

The manner in which journalists, politicians and officials interact is also of relevance when it comes to the dissemination of government performance. There has been a great deal of discussion of how journalists require training, but it is also the case politicians might do well to reflect upon their own practices. When we met with Karim Sinjari, Minister of Interior, he told us that experience had taught him to be

focussed when managing meetings with journalists, to record his meetings and to insist on seeing questions in advance. As a Senior Advisor to the Council of Ministers explained,

*"It is important that politicians and officials take time to answer questions. It is a good idea and reasonable to ask that journalists provide written questions prior to interview. It is also a good idea if interviews are recorded. There is a tendency to feel compelled to answer questions immediately and to provide the impression that officials should be able to answer any question that may be posed. This is a mistake. There is no shame in admitting that an answer may not be available immediately. It is better to give and to get a considered answer rather than one forced out under pressure or because vanity insists that one is always in a position to deliver judgment. If journalists are really concerned about uncovering the truth they will understand that the best answer may take a little time."*¹⁷⁷

The opportunity to place officials and politicians under scrutiny is crucial for the functioning of any system of democracy. In July 2013, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani signed into law legislation passed by parliament that promises to guarantee the right to information and impose sanctions upon officials failing to accede to reasonable demands for data. However, it needs to be understood that some measure of secrecy in government is unavoidable. Kurdistan faces threats from every quarter, with troops lined up along its borders and with a horrendous living memory of what military threat can translate into. Total transparency is simply not an option. Protection of the right to privacy is also paramount, especially in a culture where honour codes are activated to such ill effect upon occasions. Defining the balance between rights of access and national security, and between the public interest and the right to privacy requires new legislation but will also have to be tested and possibly refined through the courts.

In addition, this is a programme which will require careful consideration not only so as to safeguard the rights of citizens to information pertaining to how public office holders perform and discharge their duties, but also because it is necessary to consider which systems of monitoring and execution will be necessary as a

consequence. If the personnel and systems for implementation are absent, then no amount of legislating will permit realisation.

3.14 Politics and Religious Faith

Religious faith plays a very important part in the lives of many people in the Kurdistan Region. Many faith leaders can and do play a progressive role in shaping popular perceptions. There are clerics attached to the political parties in Kurdistan, even those which are officially secular. While emphasising the aim of seeking a clear separation of the clergy from the emerging state in Kurdistan, Regay Kurdistan from the Communist party confirmed that there are even preachers attached to his party. There are in fact clerics who condemn honour killings, reject FGM (female genital mutilation), and call for women to be treated with greater dignity; but all too often their voices are given little coverage compared to those shouting in determined defence of violent reprisals and repressive practices.

The fear of extremist political Islam has become more and more pronounced. In late 2010, Mullah Ferman heaped opprobrium on women who dared to challenge male domination and was seen to be inciting violence against writers who might dare cross the "red lines" defining the correct behavior for women. Assyrian media representatives have made it clear their disquiet at the attacks upon fellow Christians during the Zhako riots in December 2011. However, when the research team visited the Kurdistan Parliament and talked with Omar Abdulla Aziz from the Kurdistan Islamic Union he told us that it was his party's belief that the riotous behaviour in Duhok and Zhako were an expression of anger with the ruling parties. He complained that members of his party, including journalists, had been arrested during the disturbances which had followed alleged incitement from local preachers to attack hotels and liquor stores in the locality.

In the course of our research, it has been made clear to us that there is great concern that the voices of reactionary clerics are amplified and presented as the only

Islamic perspective and expression of traditional values on offer. In June 2010, Stran Abdulla, delivered a prescient commentary, when he stated in an interview with the research team,

"At the moment we have a group of journalists- their ideology is political Islam. It is like Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood. It is like they are controlling the media. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is nearly controlling all the media. In Kurdistan now there is a new group of journalists, who wear modern clothes but their mentality is political Islam (Stran Abdulla named a couple of publications and said that one had close links with supporters of Al Qaida based in Europe). They write against the PUK and KDP, not because they are the government but because they are two secular parties, they are not religious parties. It is an ideological attack!"⁷⁸

Other commentators have stressed the importance of understanding the reception of political Islam in Kurdistan through an appreciation of the localised and opportunist character of opposition to the dominant position occupied by the KDP and its ally the PUK. It is argued that the overwhelming power of the Kurdistan Alliance has meant that oppositionists, who would otherwise identify themselves as secular and even atheistic, will line up with any force that might make a dent in the support base of the ruling parties. The ruling parties in Kurdistan evidently need to appreciate the intensity of critique and the extent of the alienation expressed. However, observers must also not lose sight of the fact that the reasoning which states that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" can have perverse consequences. When the riots, arson and looting were unleashed upon Christian store holders in Zhako and elsewhere in December 2011, some commentators who regard themselves as independent, secular and progressive took the opportunity to celebrate the breakdown in order as an expression of opposition to the ruling parties. Inspection of the video footage, accounts of the destruction and reports of the fear unleashed, as well as the danger to inter-communal relations, indicate that such violence does nothing to help promote the future of Kurdistan and acts to polarise opinion rather than keep open channels of communication.

This is not to say that religion should be regarded as the sole or even main cause of discord under all circumstances. That would be ridiculous. Clearly, there are times when the breakdown in law and order or tensions between different faith groups has routes in other forms of discontent, especially over the distribution and management of resources. We have noted the allegations that surface from time to time about land ownership and the evident tensions that occur as a result of historic disputes. There are real and ongoing disputes over land ownership which have their origins in the poisonous games played by the Baathists when they sought to disrupt social cohesion and resistance through redefining the ethnic map by displacing and relocating particular faith and ethnic groups. The record of the KRG in attempting to negotiate historic disputes and in providing a safe space for various faith groups has been lauded by the Roman Catholic Church and by various international NGOs, including Human Rights Watch.⁷⁹ With the appalling sectarian conflict that prevails in the rest of Iraq, the success of the KRG is to be cherished and built upon so as to deepen understanding between the peoples in the Region.

A climate of intolerance and polarisation is utterly destructive of the preconditions for meaningful dialogue. Rebwar Siwayli has told the research team that some Mullahs treat Christians and practitioners of other religions as "sub-human". That this perspective has advocates and an audience was highlighted by one member of the research team, who reported that they had challenged a member of their own family who claimed that non-Muslims are unclean. To demonstrate the authenticity of this perspective, the local preacher was telephoned and he declared that not only was this correct but it is also blasphemous to deny that non-Muslims are unclean. Clearly, the government needs to do more to promote inter-faith understanding and tolerance. This is a theme that was mirrored in the comments of Meriwan Naqshibandi when the research team met him at the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs in 2012. Citizenship and commitment to dialogue require mutual respect and equality before the law.

In January 2011, Dr Farzal Omer expressed the fear that chaos in the media sphere was creating the space for Islamists and agents of foreign powers. According to Salam Sa'di of *Rudaw*, religion is the greatest threat to free speech in the Kurdistan Region, while Pakhshan Zangana, head of the Kurdistan Women's High Council, in January 2012 stated that Kurdistan is in a period of flux, between Islamists and progressives, but that there had been very little counter-mobilisation against Islamists in the media, including the press. On the contrary, when the research team met Meriwan Naqshibandi in 2012 he pointed our attention to the activities of the Gorran movement which he claimed targets anti-government mosques. Their TV station, KNN, then broadcasts from these religious sanctuaries. Such is the compromised relationship. When in January 2012 we met Rebin Rasaul, formerly of *Hawlati* and now a Senior Advisor on political and civil society issues at the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, he stated that many secularists were turning their back on Gorran.

Concern with the future relationship between the clergy, society and politics has been clearly articulated in correspondence with the research programme:

"It is important to recognise that Kurdistan is a place in which religious belief plays a very important part in the lives of many ordinary people. Widespread religious devotion does not necessitate intolerance towards alternative faiths or for the domination of public debate and law. There are forces that look to the Gulf states for inspiration. But is Saudi Arabia really a model which we should copy? As Xendan reported (See: <http://xendan.org/dreja.aspx?hewal&jmara=39161&Jor=18>), on Saudi TV, Sheikh Ghazi Shumari has a TV phone-in programme where members of the public call in to gain his advice. As the article reports, the Sheikh has even been asked what action a husband should take when his wife supposedly fails to ask permission before travelling. Live on TV, following the advice of the Sheikh, the husband declared his divorce from his wife. Is this the kind of future people want?"⁸⁰

How future campaigns to rein in the power of extremist political Islam will fare is yet to be seen, but what is clear is that the outcome will have important ramifications for the future of free expression and the shape of debate in the press. There has been a lot of talk about the Arab Spring. It is good that dictators have been

toppled. But as Prime Minister Nechivan Barzani pointed out from very early on, spring does not last forever and soon leads on to winter. The promise of progress in Egypt, for example, has been stalled. Women have seen achievements slip away (see: <http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=129705>). While the blood soaked restoration of military domination over politics in Egypt has caused considerable alarm, it is questionable as to whether the victories of political islam across the region should be viewed as an unqualified gain for progressive politics and social equality. In an article in *Bas* newspaper, an author who worked for KIU for 18 years points out that there are big divisions inside the organisation between leaders who have power and wealth and those who are just ordinary members of the party (see: <http://www.bas-news.net/ArticleDetail.aspx?articleid=971>). It is important that there is a properly informed debate about what political Islam represents, where it stands in relation to inequality, democracy and the national liberation struggle.

As Kurdistan Region contemplates the future of its constitution, which at the time of writing is in draft form and open to amendment on return to parliament, the opportunity to contemplate the role of religion and Islam in particular within the governance process is now very much open to debate.

Islamic parties have been successful in placing Islamic Sharia centre stage. Apparently, "Article 6 of Kurdistan's draft constitution Islamic Sharia is the basic source of legislation and that no laws can contradict the established tenets of Islam". However, the whole of the draft constitution has been placed back in the hands of parliament, at the insistence of the opposition bloc. The pro-Iranian, *Press TV* broadcaster, has publicised the opposition of Islamic parties to what they perceive as attempts by the KDP and PUK to secularize the constitution. Kurdistan Islamic Union MP, Hawraz Sheikh, has been quoted as saying,

"The identity of the majority of Kurdistan's population is Muslim. It is very unacceptable to create a constitution that is opposite the identity of the majority of people,"⁸¹

It has been reported that Shiwan Qaladizayi, a senior leader of the Kurdistan Islamic League, has said,

*"If they try to make Islam the only source of legislation, that is fine....Other than that, any amendment to that article is unacceptable."*⁸²

These kinds of statements denote little willingness to engage in dialogue and raise questions about openness to democratic politics and possibilities. Given the secular pretensions of the Gorran movement and the Kurdistan Futures Party, the controversy over the status of Sharia is surely likely to place their oppositional alliance with Islamic parties under strain. It would appear that civil society organizations are looking for a different outcome. According to a report from *Rudaw*, they have called on Parliament to amend Article 6, saying it does not conform to freedoms and democracy. Ali Mahmoud, an Erbil-based activist, is quoted as saying,

*"Article 6 says Islam is the source of all laws, but that should be amended...It should say that Islam is only one of the sources of legislation. The rest should be based on democracy, people's needs and the culture, like the constitutions of all advanced countries."*⁸³

3.15 Women and the press

In discussions about the state of the press and the desire to see a more expansive and participatory space for all citizens, the position of women necessarily and correctly occupies centre stage. Throughout this report and in the previous preliminary and interim reports and discussion papers, the research team have been concerned to relay the voices of women in general and women writers, officials, scholars, activists and newspaper professionals in particular. In approaching the position of women and the relationship to the press and governance in Kurdistan Region, the research team have been content to follow the guide established by English writer and book editor Ernest Rhys who once reflected that "The woman's

predicament is the test of the moral and human worth of any given state of society.¹¹⁸⁴

Women in Kurdistan face considerable problems. There are significant barriers to participation in social, economic and political life. It is very difficult for women to move and live independently of the controlling gaze of their families and community, institutions structured along patriarchal lines. Freedom to form relationships is restricted and violence against women and girls, as an actuality or perceived threat, is widespread. As Begikhani, Gill and Hague have eloquently documented the problem in their path-breaking work carried out at the request of the KRG, the predicament faced by women in Iraqi Kurdistan Region is cause for great concern. Centre stage for any remedial strategy is the promotion of the voice of women in the communication space of political decision-making.

To move the situation forward, it has been suggested to the research team that women need to take the lead. According to Masoud Abdl-Kaliq of *Standard* newspaper there are many opportunities for women to participate in journalism. When we spoke with Serwan Rasheed, from the *Sbey* website, part of the Wusha company, he commented that female representation in the media in Kurdistan was held back in part by the lack of bravery of women themselves. According to him, women need to be more courageous.

If it were the case that the barrier to female participation could be overcome by no more than the exercise of courage and will, to do no more than "seize the day", then the path to liberation would be straightforward. It is true that building confidence is important. Tanya Kamal Darwesh of the women's organisation *Rassan* echoed these thoughts when she told us, "We need to encourage women, to build their confidence, to get them into journalism". Saywan Rostam of *Zhyanawa*, a women's newspaper affiliated to the PUK, in an interview has spoken with force on the subject, stating "...we need women to believe in themselves, that they can do this

job. When women try to free themselves from all the obstacles then women can participate actively in the field of journalism”.

However, greater depth of understanding is required. It is essential to appreciate structural constraints placed upon women. If it is assumed that the only barrier to female participation is their own will then the fault for any persistence in gender discrimination will fall upon women themselves. Saywan Rostam made clear her understanding that it is also the case, female participation in journalism is held back because of the nature of Kurdish society, a society which is closed and which does not expect or encourage women to participate in public life or to occupy positions of leadership. As the journalism lecturer Ahlam Mansoor from Sulaymaniyah pointed out to us, “Women face considerable problems leaving the home and returning at night. Women cannot stay out at night. To carry out the work of a journalist in the field, freedom over time and space is needed. Women do not have the freedom to control their time and movement. Their families restrict their freedom.”

Hana Shwani of the *Rewan* Centre in Sulaymaniyah indicated that the position of women in general is denigrated by Islamic newspapers promoting the practice of polygamy. But more specifically she elaborated in detail the problems faced by women in the media. The industry is marked by sexual harassment of women by men at work. In addition the conduct of journalism, by taking women out of the home into public spaces, places women in positions of greater vulnerability to sexual harassment and in direct confrontation with a society that is generally unsupportive of women taking up roles outside of the private confines of the home. With this in mind, families are often reluctant to permit female members to take the step of going into the profession. As she pointed out,

"Kurdish society is very conservative. Women who wish to be journalists have to fight their families, against society, conservatism and fight against Islamicisation. They have to fight against male domination. Women are pulled by the demands of childcare, running a home and the restraints placed

*on them by family. These restraints place limits upon how much women can contribute. Women working in the media are in a very difficult situation.*⁸⁵

Tanya Kamal Darwesh has elaborated upon the contribution of newspapers to the reproduction of traditional restrictions upon the freedoms of women:

*"Unprofessional behaviour of papers can have severe consequences and cause a lot of problems; for example, we have some papers that have published stories about the problems faced by a woman, without giving her the opportunity to comment or printing pictures of a woman without her consent. Women have faced terrible violence at the hands of family members because of inaccurate stories published in the press."*⁸⁶

The threat to reputation and the perils of being dishonoured is also mobilised inside the journalist profession. As Barham Ali, the editor of *Bas*, put it to us in May 2012,

*"In Kurdistan you have a considerable number of female journalists and media professionals. This is positive. But when these female journalists publish a critical article or when they advance in their profession and become more visible, some web sites and magazines attack them in the worst way, trying to stain their reputation and accuse them of immorality. This has made those women who would like to specialise in media and journalism to keep their distance."*⁸⁷

Gender inequality is also embedded in the language and modes of interaction displayed by the press. With the very aggressive use of language and public denunciations of opponents, fear is generated that if one becomes the target of critical news coverage then dishonour will be brought upon family and community and that outcast status will quickly follow. Women are much more vulnerable. They have fewer resources to resist this dynamic. The logic of honour permeates representation across the newspapers in Kurdistan Region, to the detriment of women, even amongst those papers who like to regard themselves as avant-garde. According to Salam Sa'di of *Rudaw*, even the so-called independent press deploy their own masculine code of honour. They are very aggressive if questioned. There is no space for dialogue. One either agrees with them or risks being publicly

attacked. They behave in a patriarchal fashion, like men at the head of families unable and unwilling to accept disagreement. They pay only lip service to gender equality.

The problem of mobilising honour codes in public discourse is not the creation of press or politicians but is more deeply embedded in society. Nevertheless, this is not to say that such destructive practices are forces of nature, irresistible and therefore beyond remedy. As Dr Begikhani has said, when reflecting upon the problem,

*"All media outlets show respect to traditional values derived from the dominant notion of honour among the Kurds. No media outlets have seriously challenged such values. There have been attempts by some papers such as Rudaw, Awene and Hawlati, to go beyond the norm, but they too are cautious not to undermine the public understanding of honour which is centered on the control of women's bodies and sexuality. If progress is to be made, it is important for journalists and newspapers to avoid sensationalizing and descending into gossip to promote sales. Instead, the focus must be upon the human cost to Kurdish society and the search for strategies to remove this blight from our society."*⁸⁸

The struggle to place gender equality on firmer footing is at the core of any meaningful strategy to democratise society and politics. According to Hana Shwani,

*"There needs to be open debate in the newspapers about the role of women in journalism. There needs to be a clear signal that female participation is not forbidden. This is very difficult as society does not accept women as human beings. Under Islam the voice of women should not be heard by men. ... Media organisations should pursue policies for equality and social justice."*⁸⁹

There is far too little attention given to the dignity and rights of women. The concerns of women are marginalized in the mainstream press and it is left mainly to the specialized womens' press to take up the cause. The government would do well to direct more resources into helping women journalists and their papers. But it is also the case that the mainstream press needs to address its own practices. Here,

we note the contrast between the coordinated agitations organised by some papers, following the murder of the young man, Sardasht Osman, in May 2010, with the complete absence of activity around the forced suicide and murder of women. Saya Fatih died in June 2010. She is alleged to have committed suicide but her ex-husband was arrested for allegedly causing her death. Newspapers which had mobilized so forcefully following the Osman murder were suddenly silent. When Begard Hussein, a journalist of long standing, was murdered, there was no dramatic call for a mobilization or evidence of “freedom lovers” climbing local and international stages to call for justice. With the power to shape and lead debate comes responsibility. Advocating human rights and calling for transparency requires crucial questions to be answered. Is it the case that the daily abuse of women, including horrifying acts of murder, are not worthy of attention? Are women less valuable as human beings than a male journalist or male political leader?

How these problems can be addressed is evidently the discussion for reform and will be addressed in the final section where this report concludes with a series of recommendations.

Chapter 4

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a genuine desire to improve the quality of journalism and for newspapers to contribute to the development of democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Kurdistan is under massive pressure. There is concern that national unity be maintained. This is understandable, but it is hoped that such unity is built through consensus born out of reasoned debate. This aim is shared by politicians, KRG Ministers and officials and by the newspaper industry.

Responsible journalism does not necessitate uncritical commentary. Professionalism and a measure of sobriety are required, which in turn necessitates the desire to perform properly and to examine practices and seek the help necessary to reform. Resources need to be made available to educate and train journalists. The misuse of terminology opens up the user to ridicule. The attempt to draw comparisons between current conditions and life under Ba'athism displays a reckless disregard for the truth, both offensive and stupid. Transparency in the presentation of political perspectives and in the links that bind newspapers to particular parties, ideologies, economic interests and politicians might serve to defuse suspicions and gossip.

Extremism, exaggeration and over-heated rhetoric are to be avoided. It is suggested that some form of mediation and arbitration mechanism might help. There is certainly no space for physical or psychological violence and intimidation. No one can benefit from this and what is more intimidation cannot and will not work to silence difference or disagreement. Yet, the addiction to confrontation needs to be broken if reasoned debate is to prevail. Respect is required for the different perspectives that can be drawn from the experiences of exile and to that end the constituency of the diaspora is a vital part of the communication landscape. The KRG can assist here, but also by providing more information to the newspaper industry and to that end it must look to build the institutions necessary to provide that material, in particular a communications department and civil service but also to

train officials, ministers and parliamentarians to engage effectively with the press. Finally, it needs to be recognized that the under-representation of women in journalism and the newspapers impoverishes the quality of public discourse and that therefore affirmative action to remedy such deficiencies is required, both by the industry and with the help of the KRG.

While we have identified a number of problems, we are confident that there is space for building greater understanding. There is much that the newspapers, politicians and the KRG can do to assist in the construction of better outcomes and we have presented a number of recommendations below to that effect.

The Kurdistan Regional Government could assist the press in attenuating some of the deficiencies identified. In May 2013, the research team submitted a presentation to the conference, *"Media, Politics and Democracy in Kurdistan: Towards a Better Understanding"* which was opened by Prime Minister Barzani and staged in Erbil on the initiative of the KRG, with the support of the British Consulate and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). In this forum, the recommendations of this research project received a public airing.⁹⁰

4.1 Government Communications Department

At the very outset of this research project⁹¹, it was apparent that in Kurdistan the government did not have a centralised press and media strategy, nor a centralised Government Communications Department. Early on, we pointed out that such an office is of critical importance in modern democratic government and is seen in governments around the world. We have previously pointed to the many advantages that could be derived in Kurdistan with the establishment of a Government Communications Department. It could be useful for journalists, acting as a port of call when pursuing a line of inquiry, to verify claims, to provide opportunity for the right of reply, and so on. For the government, by having a centralised communications department, news stories can be more speedily brought to the attention of journalists. Professional and informed responses to news events

can be shaped and disseminated, and through devising and adhering to a good record keeping system, the government would benefit from gaining information from journalists which might be used to improve specifically the systems and performance of government and more generally act as a bridge to bring government and people closer together.

We are delighted to see that on 28 July 2013, the KRG, at the Council of Ministers, decided to establish a Media and Information Department. As the communiqué from the KRG reports,

*"With the establishment of this Department, the relationship between the Government and media channels will be regulated so that media channels can receive information from government institutions on the activities and decisions of the government. The Department will work towards setting up effective mechanisms for regulating and managing the relationship between media channels and government institutions."*⁹² (See: <http://www.krg.org/a/d.aspx?l=13&a=48279>)

As we have noted previously, journalists from opposition parties often complain that they do not get access to information delivered to the sympathetic party press. The new official government communications office should strive to develop protocols that allow for equal access to information among competing press organizations. This calls for the development of a professional civil service in handling government communications.

4.2 Developing a professional civil service

There is a need to develop a professional and independent civil service in order to ensure continuity in administration and to bring together properly trained expert advisors. One of the problems is that Ministerial change too often leads to the loss and disregard of programmes, projects and policies that have been worked hard upon by departing Ministers. Some form of continuity is required. Frequent breaks in direction and loss of momentum are highly inefficient. Experience and knowledge

gained, from mistakes as well as successes, must be archived and open to retrieval and inspection. Kurdistan requires long-term strategies.

Ministers need to have a loyal but also professional and independent bureaucracy. While they must be governed by the requirements of maintaining confidentiality, bureaucrats should be prepared and encouraged to express disagreement. Advice should be recorded in confidential minutes, to be released under circumstances defined by law. While good advice is to be welcomed, final decisions must rest with the Ministers and politicians who are placed in positions of leadership by the people through the democratic mandate.

The development of a professional civil service is a crucial step towards producing the information and knowledge necessary for governance, but also for the establishment of expertly generated scientific data that will allow citizens to understand better what is happening in their society and for journalists to develop a proper appreciation of reality. More specifically, educationalists and language experts might well assist elected representatives to develop policies to address language standardisation and the promotion of a critical reading culture.

4.3 Press and Media Commission and Executive

We recommend that the KRG establish a Press and Media Commission and Executive.

We suggest a fifteen-member body that it is made up of journalist rights advocates, lawyers, academics, representatives of public interest groups, and chaired by a leading figure in the Judiciary, who knows media law and would strive to keep the body independent from the domination of politicians and media organizations. The judge's duties would include leading an appointments committee of five members,

who would be asked to vet applications for commission posts with three-year terms that are openly advertised and require interviews.

The judge and the initial appointments committee could be selected by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Office of the President; but they will have to recognize that choosing steadfast party loyalists threatens to de-legitimize the whole enterprise. So they should follow criteria that are closer to those expected for the selection of a permanent civil service. In some nations, there are vigorous press institutions that supply the personnel for the original appointments committee, but the fledgling status of the KRG and the heritage of fierce political conflict have kept these parts of civil society relatively underdeveloped up till now. Once the body is established, it can continue to appoint new members without having to get direct approval from the nation's political leadership.

The Commission will be responsible for:

- A. Arbitration, Conciliation and Adjudication. Its power must be its moral authority.
- B. Reviewing the law, government policy, procedure and practice
- C. Identifying the needs of the industry and profession, as well as those of the reading public, so as to encourage outcomes beneficial for all stakeholders. It would have the authority to make recommendations in every area of public policy it identifies as having an impact upon the effective functioning of the press and other media.

The full commission would meet six times a year. In the interim and as and when needed a smaller delegated body could act on behalf of the full commission. There could be a quarterly report identifying bad journalistic practices, as well as showing occasional meritorious examples of the newspaper craft.

The full commission and its sub-committees would be served by an executive, made up of officers whose task would be to follow through on the decisions of the commission on a day to day basis.

In all matters, the authority of the commission would be advisory.

Its power would lie in its public judgements, the trust generated following the wisdom of its judgements and suggestions, along with its capacity to assist in arbitration and conciliation. In many nations with lucrative newspapers, media organizations supply the funding for a Press Commission, and they do so in part because the arbitration systems save them the expensive costs when aggrieved elements seek lawsuits in the courts. In the case of the Swedish Press Council, fines of offending member organizations supply 20 percent of the body's overall revenues. Nevertheless, the KRG probably does not yet have the capacity for a large base of funding from media organizations in whatever form, and thus the state will have to provide substantial subsidization of a press commission. Germany's government provides 49 percent of the funds to the nation's press commission, but the state is strictly restricted from interfering in the body's rulings and activities.⁹³

While it may be appropriate to amend the law, so as to make it compulsory for disputes to be heard in the first instance, there is no reason why litigation should not follow if satisfactory outcomes are not forthcoming in this particular forum. In some nations, a Press Commission eventually appoints a Press Ombudsperson who hears complaints and can ask newspapers to publish corrections and apologies when they have been shown to have published something egregiously wrong. In the Netherlands, newspapers seem to comply with these requests to publish a correction approximately 80 percent of the time, and some newspapers take pride in publishing them as a way of showing their readers that they are operating in good faith. If the Press Ombudsperson rejects a complaint, a person who feels he or she has been wronged by sloppy or dishonest journalism can make an appeal to the wider body, the members of the Press Commission.

It is disappointing that some commentators have reacted with hostility to these proposals. It would appear that for some, there is greater profit to be gained in confrontation. This dynamic is familiar. Yet, it is not clear how it can be productive. The people of Kurdistan deserve better. To reiterate, the advantage of having a ***Press and Media Commission and Executive*** is that it seeks to take anger and aggression out of interactions in structures designed to defuse controversy and solve problems, rather than create martyrs or inflame matters more. Moreover, a well-functioning press commission can create mechanisms for citizen participation that will encourage media institutions to perform more in the public interest rather than in the narrow private, corporate, or political party interest.

4.4 Ministry of Diaspora

The Kurdish diaspora has a great deal to offer Kurdistan Region, and there is much that the KRG can do to integrate and utilise exiles and subsequent foreign born Kurds. As we have observed above, there are reasons to believe that the contribution of exiles is recognised but perhaps under-appreciated. Governments around the world are being made increasingly aware of the contributions that exiles from their lands do make and can continue to make, for example in the form of remittances, knowledge transfer, business networking, partnerships and inward investment. Likewise, states are urged to make the appropriate investments in developing relations with diaspora communities, in ways that go beyond and are organised separately from foreign ministries and diplomatic offices (See: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/thediasporahandbook.pdf>).

Nurturing the relationship between Kurdistan and the diaspora requires commitment at the most senior level of government. It requires a discrete set of policies and programmes. It is for this reason that we recommend the establishment of a separate Ministry of Diaspora.

If the contribution of diaspora is harnessed properly positive outcomes for the quality of public debate and discourse can be anticipated. With the network power of the diaspora at its disposal, Kurdistan can be strengthened immeasurably. But the relationship between the diaspora and KRG needs to be cherished and nurtured. The alliance between diaspora and Kurdistan has to be coordinated. As the strengthening of the campaign to project the Anfal within the minds of world opinion has demonstrated, the KRG and diaspora can work together effectively, to produce positive results for Kurdistan.

Building these relationships takes time and resources, resources which in turn can best be utilised when directed strategically by personnel who are familiar with the terrain and can navigate the diaspora networks.

The Ministry can look to coordinate with other ministries to address the specific demands of the diaspora. Through its interactions with other parts of government the ministry, in advocating the concerns of returnees, can act as a catalyst for wider reform. Thus, for instance, if concerns are raised about educational opportunities for the children of returnees or about the availability of high quality health care, to match the resources available in places of exile, then the whole of Kurdistan Region can benefit as expectations are debated and benchmarks raised. And, of course, in order to discuss these and the whole host of other issues which might be raised, it will be necessary to draw in commentary from and to turn attention and debate towards the outside world.

A strong signal is required. Kurdistan must be made aware of the contributions that returnees have to make and the sacrifices made to make return possible, while the diaspora must be reassured of the welcome that awaits if a positive contribution is offered. Every great national liberation movement in history has drawn upon the strength of its exiles. If directed well, Kurdistan too can have a mighty force at its disposal.

4.5 Press Subsidies

Many democracies around the world have provided a range of assistance to the press:

- 1) indirect subsidies – preferential postal rates, lower fees for transport, and reduced taxes;
- 2) direct government funding from general taxes;
- 3) taxes on commercial media and telecommunication companies that are then directed to public media.

Public broadcasting is sometimes supported through license fees on television sets. In a very indirect way, the license fee that supports public broadcasting frees up advertising revenue to flow to commercial press institutions. Nevertheless, the ideal behind public support for media is to create a space for news and cultural output that is free from the pressures of both politicians and advertisers.

If a subsidy system is to increase a diversity of voices, the public and politicians have to understand that funds will flow to many publications with editorial views displeasing or outright repellent to the majority. In the case of France, where public funding in the early twenty-first century supplied approximately 13 percent of the funding of newspapers, the subsidies are designed to be content neutral and reach out to a wide gamut of the political spectrum ranging from the far-right *Présent* to the Roman Catholic *La Croix* to the communist *Humanité* to the hipster socialist *Libération*. France has put a tax on television advertising and then re-directed some of these funds to press institutions.

New York University communication scholars Rodney Benson and Matthew Powers add that in a time of economic crisis France has tried to inject new lifelines of support for press institutions:

"After a lengthy process of consultation with publishers, journalists, and concerned publics ('Etats généraux de la presse écrite') during the fall of 2008, the French government announced additional measures totalling \$946.7 (600 million euros) over three years beginning in 2009 to help newspapers during the current economic crisis, including: a 'ninefold' increase in funding for home delivery of newspapers (from 8 million euros to about 70 million euros, about \$100 million), reductions in taxes, free weekly newspaper subscriptions to 18-24 year olds (given by publishers, with the state paying

*for delivery), and grants (20 million euros, or \$28.2 million) to support online-only news operations as well as to help newspapers improve and expand their websites.*⁹⁴

Some of the earliest experiments in democracy were constructed on foundations consisting of heavily subsidized press institutions. In the United States, it is often forgotten that Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, founding fathers and early presidents of the new republic, demanded generous subsidies to the press, though they often regretted how much they came under attack in these very same newspapers.

In the early decades of the United States, it has been estimated that newspapers made up 70 percent of the total weight carried by the postal service, but they provided only 3 percent of the revenues, which indicates that newspaper subsidization was considerable.⁹⁵ Madison affirmed that "A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives". Madison had elsewhere reflected that "to the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity over error and oppression". He fully understood that public assistance to a free press would likely help some bad practitioners of journalism, but that this risk was worth the public investment because "... it is better to leave a few of its noxious branches to their luxuriant growth, than, by pruning them away, to injure the vigour of those yielding the proper fruits".⁹⁶

Some nations have abandoned direct subsidies for the political press or newspapers controlled by political parties, and they instead focus on preserving cultural diversity. Finland curtailed direct support to the newspapers of political parties in 2008, but the government allocated approximately \$700,000 for funds to minority language publications and \$1.4 million for cultural and opinion publications. With 150 publications receiving some of this assistance, it is admittedly tiny in many cases. Still all newspapers are shielded from the VAT tax and receive postal delivery subsidies, which have been estimated at \$400 million per year.⁹⁷

In a very critical report about Iraqi Kurdistan's media, IREX (the International Research & Exchanges Board) in partnership with the Kurdistan Institute for Human Rights called for progress against violations of journalists' rights and party domination of press institutions, but the authors judged that there are many positive examples of television and radio outlets that are open to minority cultural production from Chaldean, Assyrian, and Turkmen media. Thus, some critics regard cultural diversity in the media as less urgent a task for Iraqi Kurdistan right now than is the case in many other nations. The difficult challenge for Iraqi Kurdistan is how to build funding sources for good journalism. The current complaint is that political parties supply too much of the funding, while independent journalism has frequently turned to NGOs who regard themselves as nobly committed to human rights and the common good. But the same NGOs who demand accountability from the political parties often seem to regard themselves as above scrutiny or as having no agenda beyond the basic defence of press freedom. The recent history of the cold war suggests that NGOs often intervened in the political and cultural battle of ideas in numerous nations, and they have pursued many agendas beyond simply defending human rights. So a good critical journalism must be alert to not only the heavy hand of party influence over media production, but also the political tendencies of NGOs, however well-intentioned or noble their goals may seem.

Businesses in Iraqi Kurdistan have sometimes expressed frustration about the low circulation of many newspapers and a certain lack of professionalism in business management among the local media. They are thus hesitant to carry out advertising in many newspapers. For some media outlets, a professional advertising department might generate revenues that allow for some independence from the aforementioned party and NGO sources. But advertising has its own dangers, as some media institutions refuse to carry stories or investigative journalism targeting their advertising clientele. U.S. broadcast journalism is a sad example where Big Pharma companies spend billions of dollars on media advertising, far more than they do on Research & Development for drug cures. Many U.S. news editors reward them in turn by quietly avoiding inquiry into the abuses and failings of this pivotal industry. The legendary consumer advocate Ralph Nader condemns the

commercialized excesses of the U.S. media system, which has the lowest public subsidies of any major nation in the West:

“When one of America’s leading newspapers decides to lighten up or stupefy – take your pick – its content at a time of grave developments and degradations in our society – local, regional, national and international, “We the People” need to be part of the conversation....

“Space and time for serious matters are also increasingly limited in other news outlets. Over 90 percent of commercial radio is music and advertisements. Commercial TV entertainment and ads are not far behind. There are fewer examples of serious, compelling programming by the national afternoon entertainment shows than there were in the Phil Donahue, Mike Douglas and Merv Griffin shows. These shows found some time to inform readers about auto safety, unsafe medicines and other consumer and environmental subjects. Now, it is nonstop sadomasochism, reality show family drama or other similar kinds of cheating and betrayals in relationships. Forget about local television shows – most are long gone, having been displaced by these syndicated shows”.⁹⁸

Advertising is a significant component of media funding in most democratic societies, approximately 60 to 70 percent of newspaper revenues, according to the media scholars at the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*.⁹⁹ But if advertising becomes too dominant, it can have suffocating effects. Kurdistan’s business community may have grounds for demanding the development of better advertising personnel in the newspaper industry. But newspaper editors and entrepreneurs need to protect their editorial independence from commercial concerns. Because market-driven journalism so often fails in guarding editorial independence, Iraqi Kurdistan needs to debate and explore the funding mechanisms that many nations have pursued to create more space for a civic and public journalism able to confront powerful interests.

In exploring how democracy works, the political scientist Pepper D. Culpepper of the European University Institute has contrasted what is called “noisy politics” with “quiet politics”. Noisy politics involves active press coverage of the issues and on occasion rambunctious legislative debates. Quiet politics are too often the pattern in democracies, as highly organized special interests seem able to “dominate the policy process in arenas shielded from public view”.¹⁰⁰ A well-functioning press should be

able to expand the domain of noisy politics and prevent organized interests from quietly dominating the agenda. Under quiet politics, many decisions get removed from the sphere of politics. In these conditions, democracy can shrivel and die.

4.6 Under-Representation of Women

The under-representation of women in media institutions is a global problem that frequently contributes to poor newspaper coverage of issues concerning half of the population. In the United States, female ownership of television and radio stations is less than 7 percent. There is a continuing debate in the U.S. on allowing for tax breaks to media firms that sell franchises to female and minority community owners. Pressure groups have called on media organizations to pursue a version of what professional footballers call the "Rooney rule", which demands that at least one person recruited on the short list for job interviews is either a female or comes from an under-represented minority community. In Kurdistan, political party press organizations in particular need to recognize the imperative of being more responsive to female voters and working to make sure that party-affiliated media organs advance gender equality. Expanded journalism training and seminars in the universities should be funded with a directive to help get more women in the pipeline for media careers.

The government would do well to direct more resources and funding into helping women journalists and their papers. Targeted subsidies as well as strong messages of support from government celebrating the participation of women in the journalism profession would send a clear and encouraging message to women of all ages seeking to make their contribution to public debate. But it is also the case that the mainstream press needs to address its own practices, not just in recruitment and promotion of female personnel but also in how the treatment of women within society is reported upon and debated. The Human Rights agenda is an equality agenda and this should never be forgotten.

Evidently, there is a pressing need for the perspectives of women in Kurdistan to be broadcast and heard. Day to day experience of observing and recording the facts on the ground by women journalists, researchers, scholars and activists provide the multitude of insights which can form the foundations for constantly evolving strategies to meet the specific challenges faced. It would be useful if a newly proposed press commission took issues of gender justice under its authority and appointed women to key posts.

4.7 Training of journalists

It is not necessary for aspiring journalists to pursue four-year degrees in journalism or mass communications, as is sometimes the case in the United States. In Britain, journalism perhaps retains more of a tradition of being a trade where people learn by doing. Nevertheless, even in the UK, there has been an expansion of certificate programs in which students get three months of intensive training and improve their knowledge of the craft through academic instruction.

Because of the precarious finances of many publications in Iraqi Kurdistan, journalists commonly hold two or three jobs, some of which have no relation to their media work. It is the conclusion of our team that the quality of journalism could be significantly enhanced if journalists in Kurdistan made some effort at getting outside training. It is the case that there are now more opportunities for online training provided by universities and professional societies, particularly those based in the U.S. However, Iraqi Kurdistan would benefit if there were more Kurdish efforts in this direction, particularly at so-called brick and mortar universities, which could then develop online curricula responsive to local needs and conditions. The Kurdistan Institute for Human Rights is one NGO that has taken up the mission of training journalists and has provided many seminars seeking to improve professionalism. There is room for other educational institutions and groups to take up this mission. While political officials on occasion disagree with this NGO for how they measure violations of press freedom, the KIHR has been vocal in also criticizing journalists for

an absence of professionalism and a frequent unwillingness to follow a journalism code of ethics.

Finally, Kurdish universities may need to develop the field of critical media studies, which can help students from many disciplines learn how to understand the ideological impact of press institutions as well as to decode how politics intersects with the communications system. For instance, the build up of hostilities between Erbil and Baghdad from 2012 were first portrayed in some newspapers as the product of President Barzani. But as military confrontation loomed on the horizon this discourse fell from view, which raises a number of questions, including why has silence now prevailed and was it the case that the original analysis was incorrect? Earlier in this report, we noted how the U.S. media often ignores or gingerly treats the oppression of Kurds in official ally Turkey, whereas these same institutions gave ample coverage of Saddam Hussein's vicious assaults on Kurds once he became identified by the U.S. State Department as an enemy of U.S. interests. Ideally, with knowledge of international developments in the field, practitioners of critical media studies might go beyond simple pedagogy and contribute to ongoing efforts at media reform and renewal in Kurdistan. In many nations and institutions, the citizen is said to have a "right to dissent", but few people in fact exercise this right. Critical media studies and journalism should infuse citizens with the sense that they have more than just a "right", they have "an obligation to dissent". Once political leaders and media institutions see this obligation and duty as indispensable, only then can democracy fulfil its promise.

Appendix 1:

2009 Parliamentary election results:

- Kurdistan List, 1076370 votes, 59 parliamentary seats
- Change List, 445024 votes, 25 parliamentary seats
- Reform and Services List, 240842 votes, 13 parliamentary seats
- Islamic Movement, 27147 votes, 2 parliamentary seats
- Freedom and Social Justice, 15028 votes, 1 parliamentary seat

Parliamentary Seats reserved for minority groups:

- Turkoman Democratic Movement, 18464 votes, 3 parliamentary seats
- Turkoman Reform List, 7077 votes, 1 parliamentary seat
- Turkoman Erbil List, 3906 votes, 1 parliamentary seat
- Chaldean Assyrian Syriac Council, 10595 votes, 3 parliamentary seats
- Al-Rafidain List, 5690 votes, 2 parliamentary seats
- Aram Shahin Dawood Bakoyian, 4198 votes, 1 parliamentary seat

Source: *Electoral Commission announces final results of Kurdistan Region elections*, posted on www.krg.org

Appendix 2

The Leveson Inquiry: Culture, Practice, and Ethics of the Press (2011-2012)

The Leveson Inquiry in the United Kingdom received perhaps the most sustained global coverage among political investigations into the performance of the press. Noting that this had been the seventh time in less than seventy years that the UK government had commissioned an inquiry into the press, the Leveson Report expressed disappointment that scandalous media behavior had again necessitated hearings and national scrutiny. Various tabloid journalists and news organizations were routinely violating the privacy of British citizens by hacking into their telephones and computer accounts, and on occasion publishing nasty stories from these illegal forays.

A hefty product of 1,987 pages, the Leveson Report is a vast, sprawling assemblage of knowledge about the UK press followed by many recommendations. Reflecting on the low state of affairs that led to this report, *The Economist* (8 December 2012) observed:

"It is easy to see why British journalists rank so low in public esteem. An inquiry into media ethics (or lack of them) by Lord Justice Leveson has heard in excruciating detail how tabloid reporters and their sidekicks bullied, stole and cheated with impunity, while their bosses hobnobbed with police officers and politicians. The public is rightly fed up".

While Leveson regarded the frequent postwar inquiries into the performance of the press in Britain as a mark of national shame, there is a case to be made that an inquiry every decade or so could be a valuable tool for assessing whether media is contributing to the flourishing of democracy – or acting as a hindrance. For the

purposes of our inquiry, it could be useful as we go forward to see whether Leveson provides any valuable ideas for the press of Iraqi Kurdistan and other emerging democracies.

Leveson argues that political parties and leaders should take steps to make the citizenry, their supporters, and members of the loyal opposition more aware of their media practices and connections with journalists. According to the report:

"As a first step, political leaders should reflect constructively on the merits of publishing on behalf of their party a statement setting out, for the public, an explanation of the approach they propose to take as a matter of party policy in conducting relationships with the press.

"Party Leaders, Ministers and Front Bench Opposition spokesmen should consider publishing: (a) the simple fact of long term relationships with media proprietors, newspaper editors or senior executives which might be thought to be relevant to their responsibilities and, (b) on a quarterly basis: i. details of all meetings with media proprietors, newspaper editors or senior executives, whether in person or through agents on either side, and the fact and general nature of any discussion of media policy issues at those meetings; and ii. a fair and reasonably complete picture, by way of general estimate only, of the frequency or density of other interaction (including correspondence, phone, text and email) but not necessarily including content. The suggestions that I have made in the direction of greater transparency about meetings and contacts should be considered not just as a future project but as an immediate need, not least in relation to interactions relevant to any consideration of this Report".

Leveson has sought a Press Trust, a kind of commission that would have remarkable levels of autonomy from the press, the government, and parliament. This autonomy may be hard to accomplish in Kurdistan and, relatively speaking, in fledgling political systems that may not have a large pool of people with previous government and press expertise. There are risks that a totally independent advisory and regulatory body may have too many appointees without knowledge of the workings of press, media, and political institutions. But, nevertheless, here are some of Leveson's recommendations for making the appointments to a press commission:

"The members of the Board should be appointed by the same appointment panel that appoints the Chair, together with the Chair (once appointed), and should: (a) be appointed by a fair and open process; (b) comprise a majority of people who are independent of the press; (c) include a sufficient number of

people with experience of the industry who may include former editors and senior or academic journalists;(d) not include any serving editor; and(e) not include any serving member of the House of Commons or any member of the Government”.

Leveson also suggested that too many journalists hide the sources for their stories or do not make an effort to find multiple sources to make sure that information and revelations are based on sound, reliable evidence. The report, therefore, asks for more sustained efforts at transparency on sourcing:

"A new regulatory body should consider encouraging the press to be as transparent as possible in relation to the sources used for stories, including providing any information that would help readers to assess the reliability of information from a source and providing easy access, such as web links, to publicly available sources of information such as scientific studies or poll results. This should include putting the names of photographers alongside images. This is not in any way intended to undermine the existing provisions on protecting journalists' sources, only to encourage transparency where it is both possible and appropriate to do so”.

Kurdistan has had several controversies about whether people deserve protection as whistleblowers when they expose corruption to the media. Leveson calls for better mechanisms for addressing the whistleblowers, but the inquiry did worry that some people were abusing this status by turning personal grievances and efforts at gaining revenge into some high-minded calling. Detective Chief Inspector April Casburn was convicted of seeking to make money by divulging sensitive confidential information on citizens to *News of the World* journalists and then claiming she was acting as a whistleblower. While some journalists argue that Casburn was wrongly convicted, Mr. Justice Fulford accused her of "a corrupt attempt to make money out of sensitive and potentially very damaging information".¹⁰¹

Leveson said that a committee of inquiry needs to show discernment over what type of complaints and activity justly deserves protection. The Lord Justice also made the case that many institutions such as the police need to have mechanisms to handle whistleblower complaints internally and correct problems from within, so that employees do not have to run immediately to the media:

"within the IPCC [Independent Police Complaints Commission] itself, there is a need for an enhanced 'filter system' whereby the nature of complaints are appropriately addressed at an early stage so that (a) they can be investigated at the right level, and (b) sufficient structures are put in place to maintain confidentiality of the complaint, and differentiate as soon as is appropriate between genuine whistleblowers and those who are merely ventilating a personal grievance...."

Leveson irritated crime reporters with the recommendation that senior police officials keep a public record of their contacts with journalists. Many journalists fear that proposal is going too far and will make police hesitant to communicate background on crime stories. Nevertheless, Vikram Dodd of *The Guardian* clarifies that "The report does not recommend a blanket ban of officers chatting with reporters over drinks, but says the dangers should be set out by police chiefs".¹⁰²

Leveson also recommends the establishment of a public-interest disclosure hotline in which journalists can report situations when their employers ask them to carry out tasks that violate the journalistic code of ethics and other standards. Indeed Leveson proposes setting up a Code committee, though the National Union of Journalists and others have produced standards followed by many media workers. Here are two samples of testimony before Leveson showing how editors asked British journalists to carry out tasks that are a travesty of ethical reporting practices:

"I readily admit that I stole, bribed and cheated to obtain information. But it was the indiscriminate way this was carried out, as well as for what I felt were increasingly spurious 'public interest' justifications, that fuelled my disillusionment and prompted me to leave and freelance."

"On numerous occasions, knowing all too well that whatever balance or neutrality I incorporated into my stories would be changed or removed, I asked the news editors to remove my byline from the final piece. This earned me the reputation and nickname of the 'token leftie' in the newsroom – and in what was often portrayed as a 'joke', solely for the amusement of the news editors and reporters, I was targeted to produce the highest number of anti-Muslim stories".¹⁰³

Critics of the Leveson report focus on two shortcomings: 1) the wild west show of the contemporary internet makes it hard to maintain geo-specific regulation of journalism and 2) the lack of measures for addressing media concentration. Harold

Evans, the former editor of the *Times of London*, maintains that the concentration of media ownership has had powerful ramifications for press performance, specifically the changes ushered in by the Rupert Murdoch-owned News International:

"The biggest disappointment in Leveson is how far he skates over the crucial issue of ownership. It matters very much that the law on competition was broken by Margaret Thatcher's participation in 1981 in a secret deal by which Times Newspapers came under News International's control. All Leveson's fine language in his report about the need for future transparency is justified by the vaguest of references to what made it necessary in the first place. It surely matters a great deal that the greatest concentration of the British press was achieved by a backroom deal that gave News International such sway over British public life".¹⁰⁴

Leveson listened to many proposals and international examples of media regulation and self-regulation. While many other models may have been rejected, the report is often respectful toward alternatives, and it provides background for those seeking out pathways that depart from the predominant British approaches.

Endnotes

¹ Name for Kurdish freedom fighters meaning, 'those who stand in front of death'.

² *The Kurdistan Region in brief* and *A few facts about the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*, www.krg.org, retrieved January 2013

³ The Treaty of Lausanne was signed in 24 July 1923, between, on the one hand, the victorious allies of the First World War and, on the other hand, Turkey. The Ottoman Empire was rolled back to the frontier of what is now modern Turkey.

⁴ See, Yeldiz and Blass (2004)

⁵ See, Saleem, H (2005): 86

⁶ *Anfal* is an Arabic word taken from Qur'an, *Surah* 8, literally meaning 'spoils/booty of war'.

⁷ For more information on *Anfal*, see Hardi, C (2011); Middle East Watch (1993); and also, Randal (1997).

⁸ See, *Dozens of Kurdish Women Kidnapped Under Saddam Found in Egypt*, *Rudaw*, 8/9/2013

⁹ See Begikhani (2005): 209

¹⁰ The military confrontation between the KDP and the PUK continued until 1998, when the leaders of the two parties signed a ceasefire agreement under the supervision of the Clinton administration and in the presence of Madeleine Albright, then United States Secretary of State.

¹¹ See, *The Kurdistan Region in brief* and *A few facts about the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*, www.krg.org, retrieved January 2013.

¹² Although the government has been officially unified, several Ministries remain separate and affiliated to the old administration system of the Erbil-led and Sulaymaniyah-led administrations. Today, there are still three Ministries, including the Asayish (intelligence and security), Peshmerga forces and Finance, which are yet to complete the process of unification started in 2006, and to end, once and for all, the legacy of the era of dual administrations. Thus, the legacy of division still undermines the goal of a unified and properly functioning system of government, covering all parts of Kurdistan Region. While steps have been taken to bring greater administrative unity and considerable progress has been made, this legacy of division can be witnessed still.

¹³ See, *An Interview with Nechirvan Barzani: Will There Be an Independent Kurdistan?* in *Time Magazine*, December 21, 2012 (available at <http://world.time.com/2012/12/21/an-interview-with-nechirvan-barzani-will-there-be-an-independent-kurdistan/#ixzz2JrnhANbZ>)

¹⁴ Unnamed female student speaking at Seminar organized by The Philosophy Department, University of Salahadeen, January 2012

¹⁵ Carlyle (1840)

¹⁶ See, Fuad (2006)

¹⁷ See, Anderson, B. (1991), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso. 1991.

¹⁸ See the pessimistic report of Hana Raouf, "End of print media: newspapers keep closing in Iraqi Kurdistan" at <http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=3004>

¹⁹ In Burke's time the three other states of the political realm were church, nobility and commoners, or in the language of today: clergy, military/political/economic elite, and masses.

²⁰ See, Schattschneider, E. E. (1960)

²¹ See, Bachrach P. and Baratz M. S. (1970)

²² See, Lukes S., (2005)

²³ See, Smith, A.D. (1991)

²⁴ See, Chomsky, N. and Foucault, M. (2006), This debate in the Netherlands took place in 1971.

²⁵ See, Foucault, M. and Deleuze, G. (1972): 207

²⁶ See, Lasch, C. (1995)

²⁷ See, Daniel, M. (2009)

²⁸ See, Van Bruinessen, M. (1992)

²⁹ See, Michels, R. (1915, reprinted 1962)

³⁰ See, Thompson, J.B. (1995)

³¹ See, McChesney and Nichols (2010), pp. 163-164.

³² Barham Ali, the editor of *Bas*,

³³ See Rudaw, (<http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurds/5538.html>)

³⁴ See, Zanger, M. (2002)

³⁵ See, Gunter, M. (2011): 187

³⁶ See, Dimitri Friedman, "A Society open to information", *L'Essentiel Des Relations Internationales*, September 2012

³⁷ See, *Journalism law needs amendment, interview with Kurdish Minister of Justice, The Kurdish Globe*, page 3, Issue Number 377, Tuesday November 27, 2012

³⁸ See, William Turvill, "The accused: At least 59 UK journalists arrested since April 2011", *The Press Gazette*, 20th of March 2013, accessed at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/accused-least-59-uk-journalists-arrested-april-2011>

³⁹ See, Dominic Ponsford, "As global jailed journalists total reaches new high - will 2013 be the year UK joins China, Turkey and Iran at top of the list?", *The Press Gazette*, 11 December 2012, accessed at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/content/global-jailed-journalists-total-reaches-new-high-will-2013-be-year-uk-joins-china-turkey-and>

⁴⁰ See, Hogan, J. And Trumpbour, J., (2009)

⁴¹ Karim Sinjari, Minister of Interior, interviewed January 2012

⁴² Stevan Shanzini, Editor of *Newand* monthly magazine, interviewed May/June 2010

⁴³ See, reports posted on CNN's website for example: <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-559145>

⁴⁴ See, Habermas, J (1987): p119

⁴⁵ See, Orwell, G. (1946)

⁴⁶ See, Feyerabend, P. (1975)

⁴⁷ See, *The 10 Best American Presidents* (Newsweek, Special Commemorative Issue, Fall 2012). It should be acknowledged that, despite FDR's many political triumphs, the U.S. Congress soon after his death restricted the U.S. Presidency to two terms.

⁴⁸ See, Orwell (1946)

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- ⁴⁹ See, Hogan, J., Nolan, P. and Trumpbour, J.(2010)
- ⁵⁰ Response to call for dialogue. Comments sent by email. A Kurd living in the diaspora in Germany.
- ⁵¹ Herman, E.S., and Peterson, D. (2011): pp. 87-88.
- ⁵² See, Esam Al-Amin, "Bloodbath on the Nile" at CounterPunch, August 2013, available at www.counterpunch.org/
- ⁵³ See, Reporters Without Borders (2010)
- ⁵⁴ See, Coser, L. (1997). See also Lasch, C. (1968).
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Ahlam Mansor, University of Sulaymaniyah, Spring 2010
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Habeb Muhammad, from *Koch* magazine, Spring 2010
- ⁵⁷ See, All Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq (2011)
- ⁵⁸ See, Ahmad, N. (2008)
- ⁵⁹ Response to call for dialogue: Kurdish exile of long standing living London
- ⁶⁰ Response to call for dialogue to call for dialogue: newspaper editor from Erbil
- ⁶¹ Response to call for dialogue: Kurdish writer and academic based in France
- ⁶² See Bowers, C. at <http://rudaw.net/kurdish/index.php/opinion/7498.html> or <http://www.rudaw.net/english/science/columnists/3861.html>
- ⁶³ Response to call for dialogue: Kurdish academic living in the USA
- ⁶⁴ See, Hogan and Trumpbour (2009)
- ⁶⁵ Response to call for dialogue: Barham Ali, Editor of *Bas*
- ⁶⁶ Response to call for dialogue: Kurdish Academic, France
- ⁶⁷ See, *Hawlati*, May 11, 2011
- ⁶⁸ Interview with representatives of Ala Azadi, the Toilers party, 2010
- ⁶⁹ See, Hardi (2011)

⁷⁰ See, Begikhani et al (2010)

⁷¹ Response to call for dialogue: Nazand Begikhani

⁷² Response to call for dialogue: Kurdish exile, living in Amsterdam, Netherlands

⁷³ Rebin Rasul, interview January 2012

⁷⁴ Response to call for dialogue: Barham Ali, the editor of *Bas*,

⁷⁵ Response to call for dialogue to call for dialogue: Journalist, Sulaymaniyah

⁷⁶ Response to call for dialogue, KRG Official, Erbil

⁷⁷ Response to call for dialogue: Senior Advisor to the Council of Ministers, Erbil

⁷⁸ Stran Abdulla, interviewed June 2010

⁷⁹ See, *The status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*,
A short report by the Kurdistan Regional Government UK Representative, December 2009. Available at
http://www.krg.org/uploads/documents/Status_Christians_Kurdistan_Region_Dec_09_2009_12_22_h16m26s16.pdf

⁸⁰ KRG Official, Erbil

⁸¹ Report: "Iraqi Kurdish opposition lawmakers at odds over draft constitution"
Sun Jun 23, 2013, Press TV

⁸² See, *Kurdistan Region's Ruling Parties Agree on Delaying Presidential Poll*, Rudaw
16/6/2013

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ See E. Rhys quoted by Craig, G.A (1978): 207

⁸⁵ Interview with Hana Shwani of the *Rewan* Centre in Sulaymaniyah, Spring 2010

⁸⁶ Interview with Tanya Kamal Darwesh, Spring 2010

⁸⁷ Response to call for dialogue: Barham Ali

⁸⁸ Response to call for dialogue: Nazand Begikhani

⁸⁹ Hana Shwani, interview Spring 2010

⁹⁰ See, Hogan, J. and Trumpbour, J. (2013)

⁹¹ See, Hogan, J. and Trumpbour, J.,(2009)

⁹² See, KRG communiqué, 28 July 2013, declaring the decision of the Council of Ministers, to establish a Media and Information Department (See: <http://www.krg.org/a/d.aspx?l=13&a=48279>)

⁹³ Data on Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands (below) comes from the official report of The Leveson Inquiry: Culture, Practice, and Ethics of the Press (2011-2012).

⁹⁴ See, Benson, R. and Powers, M. (2011)

⁹⁵ See, McChesney, R.W. (2007): 125. We are also indebted to McChesney's work for several of the Madison quotations below.

⁹⁶ See J. Madison in *Exposition of the federal Constitution. Contained in the Report of the Committee of the Virginia House of Delegates; to whom were committed the proceedings, of sundry of the other states, in answer to the resolutions of the General Assembly, of the 21st day of December, 1798, commonly called Madison's report. To which is subjoined a series of papers under the signature of Hampden*, (originally published in the Richmond enquirer of June, 1819.), Richmond, VA: printed by Thomas Ricjie, 1819, p. 44. J. Madison, *The Writings of James Madison: 1790-1802*, vol. 6, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906, p. 389.

⁹⁷ See, Benson and Powers, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁸ See, Nader, R. (2013)

⁹⁹ See, Smith, A. and Harmon, G. (2003)

¹⁰⁰ See, Culpepper, P.D. (2011)

¹⁰¹ See, "Policewoman jailed for 15 months after trying to sell story to the News of the World" (2012), *Press Gazette* online, 1 February 2013 at <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/policewoman-jailed-15-months-after-trying-sell-story-news-world>

¹⁰² See, Dodd, V. (2012), "Leveson warns police whistleblowers not to contact media: Leveson report criticises relations between journalists and police and recommends a public interest disclosure hotline", *The Guardian* online, 29 November 2012 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/nov/29/leveson-police-whistleblowers>

¹⁰³ For a discussion of this testimony, see Donnacha DeLong, outgoing president of the National Union of Journalists "Media Ethics: Leveson's support for the Conscience Clause is a significant gain", Ceasefire website, 2 December 2012 at <http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/media-ethics-levesons-support-conscience-clause-significant-gain/>

¹⁰⁴ See, Evans, H. (2012), "Leveson: a clever report – but why the silence on ownership? Leveson's system of regulation is hard to fault – but it is a great pity that he skates over the issue that matters most", *The Guardian* online, 29 November 2012 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/nov/29/leveson-inquiry-clever-silence-on-ownership?intcmp=239>

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