

**The Role of News Media in Supporting Democracy
in Kurdistan Region**

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Abstract

This thesis has chosen the Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a case study to examine the media's function in newly democratised countries. In any new transitional democracy, the media will be influenced by the new political system and they will frequently be criticised for being unable to act as a watchdog because of the close relationship with the political elites. However, there are also many other factors, such as cultural, political and economic pressures that affect the development of the media. This thesis makes an original contribution by furthering understanding of the role of the media in supporting an emerging democracy in the Kurdistan Region after 2003. It argues that there is also an assumption the news media will try to keep their independence from political dominance, and work actively to expose the political and government wrongdoings. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine the state of the news media in playing the role of watchdog and holding power to account. It also assesses the working environment for journalists in Kurdistan to see whether the general situation encourages media to the same degree as in established democratic societies.

To understand the current situation of the media and how the news media take a critical stance towards political corruptions, this thesis has conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The results show that the media have demonstrated good practice in exposing corruption and malfeasance in the government. It argued that the media are present in the political scene and have performed their task as a forum for the public, providing the public with the necessary information. However, as a newly democratised country, the general environment in the political system is not helpful, for example, the executive, legislative and judicial authorities do not have enough power to play a key role in the democratic system. Various pressures on the media still exist, and the country lacks effective democratic institutions supporting the media, which are essential to build a strong democratic system. This has certainly limited the media's ability to stand against political corruption and hold the government to account.

Dedication

To God, be the glory.

To those journalists who struggle to develop democracy in Kurdistan.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPJ: Committee to Protect Journalists

IGK: Islamic Group of Kurdistan

IMK: Islamic Movement of Kurdistan

IMS: International Media Support

IREX: International Research & Exchanges Board

IWPR: War and Peace Reporting

KCP: Kurdistan Communist Party

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party

KIU: Kurdistan Islamic Union

KJS: Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate

KNN: Kurdish News Network

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisations

NRT: Nalia Radio and Television

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

UN: United Nations

USA: United States of America

Introduction

An essential condition for any new democratic country is the emergence of professional media that are able to report reliable information from a variety of viewpoints and play a watchdog role in society. A central focus of this thesis is the participation of the news media as a watchdog, which in turn enhances democracy. Thus, this thesis makes an original contribution by furthering understanding of the current media position within the process of democratisation after 2003 in Kurdistan.¹ The suggestion that the media play a role in the political processes within all societies is generally agreed upon by political scientists and communications researchers. Many scholars (Downes and Monten, 2010; De Mesquita & Downs, 2006; Walker & Orttung, 2014; Barakat, 2013) have examined the impact of political transitions on the media, and the latter's role in the process. The findings concluded that, despite the different circumstances and events leading to transitions, most of the media will have been influenced by the new political system and at the same time they will have helped shape emergent political systems. Salgado (2009, cited in McConnel & Becker, 2002) also stated that because the media have a potential impact on political decisions, their role in the early stages of democratisation can therefore be very influential. In this regard, the role that the media could play in a place like Kurdistan following democratisation will be central in this study.

This thesis contributes to a broader understanding of democracy and the process of democratisation. It considers the argument that asserts that, in general, the process of

¹ Kurdistan is not a country, it is part of Iraq. As a region in Iraq, Kurdistan shared the same experience as in the process of democratisation of Iraq.

democratisation has brought many changes in Iraq and Kurdistan but as a newly democratised country it bears a lot of problems. In some ways, the changes are part of the process of democratisation and in others not. For example, a positive aspect of an emerging democracy in Kurdistan, several elections have been held with strong competition among dozens of political parties. In addition, many civil society organisations and professional associations have been established, estimated at between 8,000 and 12,000 within the first few years following 2003, as well as the democratic development of the media. All these changes are considered positive in the process of democratisation. However, this research also agrees that the process of democratisation will face some flaws such as the lack of law enforcement, the weaknesses in the democratic governmental institutions and the insufficient enabling environment provided by the media.

This thesis examines the changes that occurred in the media considering the liberal media theory, and assesses the extent to which the news media contributed to the democratic change in Kurdistan in recent times, since 2003. Therefore, it explores whether the media is inspired by the western liberal model. It is clear from the democratic perspective that a free media is considered to be a prerequisite of democratic consolidation, by providing the public with information and maintaining an informal check on the government. Therefore, this research first examines the role of the media and evaluates whether they have acted as ‘defenders of democracy’, and second, examines the working environment for journalists in Kurdistan to see whether it has enabled or hindered the democratic media. By addressing these issues effectively, this thesis enables a greater understanding of the role of news media in an unfolding democracy. For example, it questions, how far are the media free and independent from political interference? What kind of information do the news media present in Kurdistan?

Do they play a watchdog role or something else? What progress has been made in the media towards being the voice for the public? What progress has been made in journalists learning to take responsibility and consider the consequences of their work. Are the news media acting responsibly when trying to improve government accountability?

This study aims to prompt an in-depth analysis of the development and challenges for the media in the period of political transition in Iraqi Kurdistan. Generally, in any democratic transition the media will undergo development but there will also be failures and challenges. Democracy requires principally that the media provides sufficient information for the public, in order to perform a ‘watchdog’ function. Hallin and Mancini (2004) examined the relationships between media system and political system variables. Based on the empirical patterns and in order to describe how political and economic systems influence the media system, they identified three fundamental and ideal models of the media, which are: the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model; the North/Central Europe or Corporatist Model and the North Atlantic or Liberal Model.² Jakubowicz (2007) uses the Hallin-Mancini (2004) framework to place the newly democratised countries’ media systems and he argues that post-communist countries appear to be located around the Mediterranean Model because they share similarities with this model. As there is an increase of media outlets, the news media struggles to keep its strong connections between the media and politics while demonstrating political independence (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Jakubowicz, 2007).

In this regard, tracking media developments within Kurdistan is a particular interest to this research. There is a tendency to point to the quality of media in Kurdistan,

²Details of the three models are presented in the literature review in Chapter One

for example, the large increase in the number of the Kurdish media outlets, and the benefits of this increase to democracy. Within an area of 83,000 km² and a population of nearly five million, there were 959 media outlets registered in the Kurdistan Region in 2013. This included 36 satellite television stations, 73 local television stations, 138 radio stations and 712 newspapers and magazines (Kurdistan Syndicate of Journalists, 2013). Other developments that have appeared in the media include the diversity of media ownership and the provision of a space for a wide expression of opinions. By law, the people are allowed to criticise the government and discuss political and economic issues explicitly via the media. These developments of the media should not be disregarded, and should be considered as a positive sign in the new era following the fall of Saddam Hussein, when there were only few daily newspapers and television channels.

One of the greatest steps that moved the media from the typical political dominance to the private media was the establishment of the private/ independent media in 2000. This new model made the media independent from the political parties' subsidies and improved the capacity of the media to practise their role as it is in a democratic society. The media began to criticise the government and expose the misconduct of politics in Kurdistan. They created civic awareness among Kurdish people, reported on aspects of reality and they give the 'truth' which was hidden from them for a long time. The appearance of the first private daily newspaper *Hawlati* was a turning point in the history of the news media in Kurdistan.

The aim of this thesis therefore is to develop intersecting theoretical concepts to examine the complex relationship between the media and politics in Kurdistan. In this matter, it considers the limits and the nature of the media in Kurdistan. This thesis analyses news media ownership and the relationship between media and politics.

Currently, media ownership is divided into four groups in Kurdistan: Group 1, the media directly associated with the ruling political parties; Group 2, the media indirectly associated with the ruling political parties, also known as ‘shadow media’, these media outlets are sponsored by wealthy and powerful individuals in the ruling political parties, the KDP and PUK;³ Group 3, the media group directly associated with opposition parties; Group 4, the private/independent, these media outlets are run by independent companies (see Chapter Four for more information). Using this division of media clearly points out that the structure of the media in Kurdistan has seen a lot of changes. The media represents a diverse ownership. However, except for the private/independent media, all the other types of media are aligned to political parties. A strong connection between media ownership and their political allegiances is clearly seen; most media outlets rely on direct funding from one particular party.

In regard to the democratic role of the media, Coronel (2010) indicated that government/political interference in the media has a direct influence on media in term of professionalism and watchdog reporting. Therefore, this thesis aims to examine whether this is the case within Kurdistan, where most of the media are run by political parties, do the media have the capacity to perform their function as a watchdog?⁴ Also, as stated above, despite the intervention of politics in the media, in the case of Kurdistan there is an assumption that the media are active in exposing corruption and malfeasance of the government and politics. There is therefore, a question as to how the media can be effective in this situation, or what the enabling environment is for the media to perform

³ Shadow media is explained in detail in Chapter Four.

⁴ A simple description of the function of the free media is to provide information free from government interference (Coronel, 2010).

their essential functions? To explain this situation, there is a detailed analysis of the role of the media in newly democratised Kurdistan in post 2003 (see Chapter Seven).

This thesis presents an exploratory analysis of interference in the media and their role in Kurdistan by framing the issues of connection between media and politics. The Kurds want their voices to be heard via the media, because since the collapse of the Great Ottoman Empire, at the end of the First World War, Kurdistan officially divided into four territories among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Since then, the Kurds have been involved in an armed struggle and demand for independence. The Kurdish national movements have used the media for political purpose. Since the beginning of the Kurdish media which started in 1898, the Kurdish media have been concerned with the Kurdish rights for independence (see Chapter Two). Therefore, throughout the modern history of Kurdistan, the importance of the media was clear among Kurdish society and the tight connection between the Kurdish media and political issues is clearly noticeable (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011; Rasul, 2012; McDowall, 2003). Even when the Kurdish people gained autonomy in 1991,⁵ the Kurdish political groups devoted a considerable amount of effort into developing the media, and in 1992 the two major political parties launched their official newspapers and television stations. All the political parties had a handful of the media outlets at that time. As a result, there was a significant increase in the number of media outlets controlled by the political parties.

More recently, in the era of democratisation the Kurdish political parties have no intention of loosening their connection with the media, after 2003, a number of news media networks were established by individual wealthy politicians in the political parties.

⁵ In 1991, the Iraqi Kurdistan gain autonomous, and became independent from Saddam Hussein's rule.

For example, *Rudaw* Company by Nechervan Barzani;⁶ Kurdistan 24 by Masrour Barzani;⁷ and *KurdSat News* by Hero Xan.⁸ Establishing these powerful news media outlets has influenced the media situation in two ways. On the one hand, although the establishment of these media outlets are considered by scholars as a new type of party political dominance of the news media in Kurdistan, they have served the development of the media, because the owners give ‘shadow media’ organisations a huge budget, beside the technological development, they have attempted to develop the media content as well. On the other hand, these media networks have had a negative impact on the Kurdistan private/independent media because the ‘shadow media’ are not initially required to be profitable. Also, establishing these channels, which are entirely financed by individual politicians in Kurdistan, made the control of the media by political parties even stronger.

Research Problem

Examining the impact of the medias’ role in the democratisation period since 2003 was selected for study because of the interest, challenge and the personal experience of the researcher on this topic. First of all, my interest in the process of the democratisation⁹ of Iraq and Kurdistan is that the process marks a turning point in the

⁶ Nechervan Barzani is Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region and a son in law of Masoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region.

⁷ Masrour Barzani, born in 1969, is the son of President Masoud Barzani.

⁸ Hero Xan is the wife of the former President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani.

⁹ It is clear that democratisation of Iraq was not the only goal in the intervention of the United States. The US had several complex reasons for intervention in Iraq in 2003, such as planning to reshape the Middle East and make it easier to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Iraq, as the world’s second largest reserve of oil can also not be overlooked (Harnden, 2003 Heinrich, 2015).

history of the region, which has attracted the attention of many experts and researchers. Selecting this event, as a period of study, is of interest because the democratisation of Iraq was unique in the Middle East since the country did not have any experience of democracy and was ruled by an extreme autocracy for nearly a quarter of a century. The most important point in the process of democratisation is that the whole process was arranged from outside of Iraq by the United States, which means that the country was not ready for the democratic changes. However, although Iraq and Kurdistan were not ready for the transition, many elements of democracy have appeared, and the practises of the media has noticeably improved. The media has witnessed a growth in the number and diversity of outlets (Rohde, 2005; Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; Moon, 2007; Ricchiardi, 2011; Al-Mljawi, 2009).

Another factor that motivated me to select this topic which examines the relationship between the media and politics in Kurdistan, is that I have many years of experience as a researcher in the field of media and politics. Also, I have worked as a journalist in Kurdistan for more than fifteen years and personally witnessed the dramatic political changes over a period of more than twenty years. For example, when I was younger, I witnessed the first Gulf War (the Iran-Iraq war) during 1980-1988. I saw the outcome of this war, which was very harsh, such as the attack on Halabja¹⁰ with chemical weapons on March 16, 1988, which resulted in around 5,000 civilian deaths and 10,000 injured. I was one of the residents of this city at that time and saw the humanitarian disaster it caused. I also witnessed the Kurds' resistance, fighting for independence during war time and the aggressive response of the Baath regime against the Kurds in

¹⁰ Halabja is a city in Iraqi Kurdistan, located in the Iran-Iraq border, about 150 miles to the north-east of central Iraq Baghdad.

Iraq. I saw how the extermination campaign of Iraqi forces under the so-called *Anfal* campaign killed 188,000 Kurdish civilians, and forced hundreds of thousands into exile. I also witnessed the second Gulf War in 1991, which brought new circumstances in Iraq and Kurdistan. After October 1991, northern Iraq (Kurdistan) was liberated from the Saddam Hussein regime and formed an autonomous regional government in 1992, and I personally had the opportunity to vote in the election in the Kurdistan Region in May 1992. I also saw a dramatic change in the media during 1991-2003, especially in terms of quantity, a large number of the media outlets were established in that period. During 1991-2003, unlike the areas Saddam Hussein controlled, the media in Kurdistan witnessed an increase in numbers, satellite dishes were free for all and Internet access spread widely (Relly et al, 2014). However, I also saw the civil war¹¹ between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and how the media was used as propaganda for their political parties. At that time, despite their autonomy from Baghdad, the media served political interests and the majority of media outlets were sharply divided between the KDP and the PUK. The media were active but with a very strong dominance of party political influence. These attempts have inspired me to pursue an in-depth study into the media situation during the dramatic political changes since 2003 in Kurdistan.

I should also mention that writing this thesis was challenging for three reasons. Firstly, the lack of academic and reliable sources for my research. There is a very limited number of in depth studies about the massive changes to the media and the challenging working environment for the media in Kurdistan in recent times since 2003. What does exist are the international surveys such as Freedom House Index and IREX's MSI and

¹¹ Please see Chapter Two for more details.

United Nations surveys reports about the media situation in Iraq since 2003. Since 2003, enormous efforts have been made by the United States and NGOs to help develop media performance in Kurdistan. According to David Rohde, the United States spent \$200 million in two years in Iraq which is the highest amount ever to have been spent to help develop and create an independent media, but very little went into developing academic research. Many short-term training programmes were conducted by the international NGOs such as The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Media Support (IMS) and International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), but they did not offer any scholarship for an in-depth analysis of the media in Iraq and Kurdistan. Of the very limited research that has been conducted into the role of media in Kurdistan as a newly democratised region in the Middle East, only a small amount of studies have centred on an extensive analysis of the news media contribution to enhancing democratisation, for example, playing the role of watchdog and holding power to account by exposing corruption in the transition period since 2003.

The second reason is that, in most of the international surveys, the media have been described very poorly in Iraq including Kurdistan as well¹². Most of the previous research does not differentiate between Iraq and Kurdistan in their conclusions. Also, specifying Kurdistan as an autonomous region is rarely seen in the international reports. Although Iraq and Kurdistan share some similarities, especially in terms of the political system, they are certainly different in many areas. The big differences between the two are: firstly, the Kurdish journalists have more experience, since 1991, almost 12 years before the rest of Iraq, they have experienced a better situation and freedom, although

¹² See the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Freedom House Index and IREX's MSI and United Nations surveys reports.

this freedom was limited it was certainly much better than in Saddam Hussein's controlling areas. After the withdrawal of the Iraqi Army from Kuwait in the second Gulf War in 1991, the Kurdish people in Iraq are enjoying independence from Baghdad. At that time, large numbers of newspapers and magazines emerged and the media were exercising their rights differently from the Saddam Hussein's time (see Chapter Two for more details); and secondly, Iraq and Kurdistan are not alike regarding security and the media working environment. Kurdistan is considered a relatively safe place compared to the rest of Iraq (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008). In terms of the media security situation, Kurdistan has a very small number of journalists who have been victims of war, while Iraq is considered a most dangerous and difficult place for journalists in the survey from the Committee to Protect Journalists (see CPJ reports in 2008, 2009, 2010-2016). For example, between March 2003 and January 2008, in Iraq 125 Journalists were killed while on duty, 82 media co-workers were murdered, and 43 were caught in crossfire or other acts of war. However, in that period, no similar cases were recorded in Kurdistan. The history of violation against journalists is much less in Kurdistan, in the five-year period of 2008-2013, three journalists were murdered because of their reporting activities.¹³ This is the only negative outcome for journalists' security recorded in Kurdistan. Thus, because of these differences between Iraq and Kurdistan, specifying the media in the Kurdistan Region is imperative to avoid any generalisation.

The third challenge of this thesis is to examine the multi-dimensional links between the media, democracy and the government in Kurdistan. As a Kurdish researcher, I conducted this thesis to fill the existing gap of academic research on the

¹³ These three journalists were Soran Mama Hama, who was killed in 2008; Sardasht Osman, who was kidnapped and murdered in 2010; and Kawa Garmyane, who was also kidnapped and murdered in 2013. Please see Chapter Six for more details.

media in Kurdistan. In this thesis, I provided an empirical analysis focusing on the current situation of the news media in Kurdistan and the relationship between the media and politics in the period since 2003. In this research, I explain the complex connection between the media and politics and the performance of the media as a watchdog in Kurdistan. In a region like Kurdistan, where democracy is fragile and in a fluctuating state, the media are also defined differently. To date, there has been a significant disagreement among scholars in their writings about the role of the media in Kurdistan; every researcher has different conclusions about the situation of the media in the newly democratised Kurdistan since 2003. Some have defined the Kurdish media as having a high level of democratic representation, by placing emphasis on the freedom of the media in Kurdistan Region. However, others have ranked the media's role in contributing to and enhancing democratisation very poorly. For example, Abdulla (2014), Hama-Saeed (2010), and Hogan & Trumpbour (2013) have pessimistic views about all the changes in the media, such as the increase in the number of print, online, and broadcast news outlets in Kurdistan, and say that these do not necessarily indicate a real development of the media because most of the media outlets are run by the political parties. Also, they have ignored all the development in the quality of the content of the media that has occurred in the last few years. Therefore, this thesis needs to be conducted to understand the complicated situation of the media in Kurdistan. As mentioned earlier, due to limited access to resources in Kurdistan and also language barriers, there is a limited amount of academic research about the media in Kurdistan as a newly democratised region.

Research Questions

The main research questions of this thesis are:

1. How have the media developed in the transition process of Iraqi Kurdistan Region?
2. In which way has the legal and economic environment enabled or hindered the role of the news media in the democratisation process?
3. To what extent has the challenging political situation hindered the development of democratic media in the Kurdistan Region?
4. To what extent have the news media been active in playing a watchdog role and contributing to government accountability in the newly democratised Kurdistan Region?

Methodology

The current study concentrates on a critical review of the role of the news media in the process of democratisation. It has chosen the Kurdistan Region as a case study to examine the media's democratic functions in the newly democratised countries. As the most known of methods in qualitative usages in communication research, this thesis is based on in-depth interview and focus group discussions. The researcher's personal experience and insights are an important part of the inquiry and are critical to understanding the phenomenon. This study employs a semi-structured interview method because it is a more flexible interview tool and commonly associated with qualitative research. For both the interviews and the focus group discussions, open-ended questions

are used in this research because it allows participants to develop their own responses and there is then an opportunity for the researcher to ask for more clarifications.

A series of interviews was also conducted in order to obtain detailed information about the role of the media in contemporary Kurdistan. For this purpose, 20 participants from the Iraqi Region of Kurdistan have been chosen. In the in-depth individual interviews, there is more opportunity for the researcher to gather detailed information about the questions because trust builds up when employing face to face communication. In addition to the interview method, two focus group discussions were also conducted in order to obtain more qualitative data, the first group questions which includes media experts and academic focuses on the development of the watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan, while the second group questions are for editors and staff members of the media organisations, the development of the media in the process of democratisation.

All of the participants that have been selected to be a part of this research have a deep understanding of the media in Kurdistan; their experience is between 20 to 35 years in the media industry. The politicians have also experience in journalism because they started as writers or journalists. Some of the interviewees hold positions in the government for example ministers or former ministers, parliament members or former parliament members. This research did not focus on the different viewpoints. However, for obtaining more reliable data, it attempts to take into consideration every significant aspect of the participants' thoughts and beliefs in the interview process. As the majority of people in Kurdistan strictly belong to either Secular, Communist views or Islamic thought. These various categories are chosen to gain a deep insight into the participants' opinions and judgements about the development of the media in Kurdistan in the democratisation process.

For analysing the data, this thesis uses a thematic analysis strategy to manage the data that was gathered from the in-depth interview and focus group discussions; this will be done through the application of coding and the creation of themes. Thematic analysis involves searching throughout the data that has been gathered from the interviews, focus groups, or texts for identifying and analysing patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, following the introduction, Chapter One reviews the process of democratisation and the role of the media in Iraqi Kurdistan. It argues the effective role of the media as one of the democratic principles, is assumed to be a prerequisite of a democratic consolidation, however a sudden change from a very authoritarian system to a liberal democracy will not be easy. The journalism environment often seems to lack the qualities to play a key role in the democratic system. Since the main focus of this thesis is to examine the state of the media in the new democracies, it is important to establish a link and focus on the most important works of the thinkers and media scholars to understand the role of the media in the new emerging democracies. This review of literature begins with defining and explaining the democracy concept and its essential elements; then goes through reviewing the process of democratisation in Iraq and Kurdistan after 2003; finally presenting the relationship between the media and democratisation, this is through determining the main role of media in democracy, and reviewing the environment of the media in the early period of democratisation process in Iraq and Kurdistan.

Chapter two represents the political history of Kurdistan before 2003, and the history of media in the 20th century. Due to the linkage of the media with politics in this study, it is imperative to have an overview of the modern political history in Kurdistan, such as the history of Kurdistan and the Kurds as the largest nation in the world without an independent state. This chapter has two main sections; first it will have an overview of the history on Kurdistan and the Kurds efforts for independence. Secondly it will present the history of media in Kurdistan, starting from the first Kurdish newspaper in 1898, then, the early history of the media from the beginning of the 20th century until 1970 and then finally the period of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime.

Chapter Three represents the methodology, which employs qualitative research methods to analyse the primary data gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions. The purpose of employing these methodological approaches are to complement each other; while the interviews provide deeper understanding by collecting narratives from participants so that the researcher can explore new information about the topic and discover details that may not have been expected. The focus group discussion did help the researcher to gain more information and it allowed the participants to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings comfortably. Finally, the researcher applied thematic analysis and formed some themes to support analysing the research question and recognised several key codes from the context of the participants' views.

Chapter Four presents a response to the first research question which aims to look at the extent of the media development in the political transformation process in Iraqi Kurdistan after 2003. The chapter widely presents the main changes of the media landscape, mainly through observing the degree of political interference and the

ownership designs of the Kurdish media. Then, the analysis covers the Kurdish media ethics and its development with regard to professionalism.

Chapter Five is designed to analyse the second research question, which is: what is the working environment for the journalists and the media in Kurdistan? This is addressed by observing the current legal and economic working environment for journalists, and examines whether the current situation encourages or hinders the media. The analysis is arranged into two themes, which are: (i) Legal environment of the media in Kurdistan, (ii) Economic environment of the media in Kurdistan. Each of these themes is organized into several codes.

Chapter Six discusses and analyses the current situation of the media as it appears in Kurdistan through the data which has been collected from the interviews. This chapter aims to answer the third research question, which is concerned with revealing the main challenges and problems of the news media in the democratisation process of Iraqi Kurdistan. This chapter, therefore addresses the main threats that journalism faces in Kurdistan.

Chapter Seven attempts to analyse the fourth research question and investigate the state of the watchdog role of the news media on building democracy in Kurdistan. This chapter examines the media in Kurdistan in light of the democratic changes, including, the role of the media as a forum for public debates as a provider of information, and as a watchdog. This investigation digs deep into the affairs of governments and other political actors.

Chapter Eight presents a summary of the findings, along with the main conclusions and finally it come out with recommendations for future research.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Media Transformation in Kurdistan in the process of Democratisation

1.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this thesis is to understand the media transformation in Kurdistan and developments in the role of the media in the democratic transition. In the following analysis of media changes and transformation of the media in Kurdistan, it is important to have a review of literature about the most important work of the philosophers and media scholars in democratic societies to understand the role of the media in the new emerging democracies in the world. In this matter, it is worth taking note of the development and liberalisation of the media throughout history in Europe, which emphasises the importance of the crucial role media has in modern and democratic societies. The libertarian philosophers of the media and political theorists believe that the media are the power behind a modern democracy, was the central idea that provided much of the foundation of the liberal media principle. The media functions as a channel for disseminating information, which significantly contributes to the development of societies, and helps people to be aware about their rights. The effective role of the media as one of the democratic principles, is assumed to be a prerequisite of a democratic consolidation. In his famous declaration, Jefferson clearly indicated the importance of the media in a democratic system: “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter”. Thomas Jefferson said this more than 200 years ago, thus it seems

that the notion of a free and responsible media in both new and old democracies is widely accepted.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first part presents a review of the process of democratisation in Iraq and Kurdistan after 2003; it begins with defining and explaining the democracy concept and its essential elements; While the second part indicates the linkage between the media and democracy, it covers the most significant function of the media in modern and democratic changes in order to place the media of Kurdistan in the democratic society.

To explain the democratic transition and the process of the democratisation of Kurdistan, I must refer to the process of democratisation of Iraq because Kurdistan is not a country and it is still a part of Iraq, furthermore Kurdistan and Iraq share the same experience in terms of economics and politics. Indeed, the U.S. intervention in Iraq in 2003, effected 'regime change' and ultimately brought about the democratisation of the country. This event led to political transitions, and the fact that the media were affected by the political systems. The process of democratisation has brought many changes in Iraq and Kurdistan. Although, performing democratisation in Iraq and Kurdistan is at a very basic level, the status of the media in Iraq and Kurdistan has improved considerably. After 2003, the media have witnessed a growth in number and diversity, looking towards getting to a better situation and a healthy environment in the new transformation model. The increase in the number of media outlets and the diversity of the media are a positive sign in the new era following the fall of Saddam Hussein. The development of quantity and quality of media makes a turning point in the history of the Iraqi media, and draws the attention of many experts and researchers. Before discussing democratisation in Iraq

and Kurdistan, it is crucial to have a review about democracy itself and its essential elements.

1.2 What is Democracy?

Democracy is a complex and ambiguous concept which can be seen from different perspectives. In attempting to find a comprehensive meaning of the concept, many scholars (Rozumilowicz, 2002; Moon, 2007; Diamond et al., 1990; Diamond and Morlino, 2004) have focused on the differing definitions of democracy. For example, Rozumilowicz (2002) presented twelve definitions of democracy from twelve different scholars in chronological order. Among all the definitions two features were central; the first one is competition among political actors, and the second is citizen participation to ensure proper constituent representation. She also found some general agreement on democracy, in relation to civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to organize; these features would certainly help create a healthy and democratic society.

Diamond et al. (1990) were among the twelve-scholarly works mentioned by Rozumilowicz. Their definition of democracy is important to this research because they offer a more extended meaning of democracy. Diamond et al. (1990) defined democracy as a political system rather than a social or economic one, he said, democracy is:

“a system of government that meets three essential conditions: meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of governmental power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force; a ‘highly inclusive’ level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded; and a level of civil and political liberties—freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join

organizations—sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation” (Rozumilowicz, 2002: 12).

In this definition, Diamond et al. (1990) stated that the first condition of democracy is meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups. This indicates that a party system should include parties that represent genuinely alternative policy choices. Effective opposition, both inside and outside parliament, is a key condition of a functioning democracy, providing an element of checks and balances. Civil society organisations also serve to organise and mediate political, economic, social and other interests, *vis-à-vis* the state and government. Diamond et al. (1990) also indicated the significance of regular and fair elections, as a core element of democracy is the right to participate and to stand for and vote in elections.

According to Diamond’s definition, one of the most important democratic condition is elections. Since 2003, several elections have been held in Iraq with a very strong competition among dozens of political parties. Then, there were also a considerable growth in the number of national non-governmental organizations; for example, between 8,000 and 12,000 organizations were registered in the years following the invasion in 2003. The establishing of many organizations such as women’s associations and networks, student associations, youth organizations, and professional associations are considered positive signs in an emerging democracy. As a result, three of the main elements of democracy have been adopted in Iraq and Kurdistan which are considered as symbolic of the arrival of democracy.

However, democracy is more than just elections (Moon, 2007). There are other elements of democracy which also have importance to this research. These are:

i) *The Separation and Balance of Power*: the power of the three branches of democratic government –the legislative, executive and judiciary– should not be concentrated in any one branch, but should be distributed such that each branch can independently carry out its own respective functions. The idea of a separation and balance of power emerged in an historical context as a protection against tyranny. The separation of power is most clearly defined with respect to the judiciary, which must be independent from the other branches.

ii) *The Rule of Law*: the state must assume a democratic form in which executive power is subordinated to the rule of law. Mechanisms and procedures must be empowered to keep office holders accountable to the public. Democracy must guarantee that no individual or public or private institution is above the law (Diamond & Morlino, 2004).

iii) *Accountability and Transparency*: the essential idea of democracy is that the people have the right to determine who governs them and hold them accountable for their actions. Without exception, this applies to all bodies of government and authority (Diamond & Morlino, 2004; Schmitter, 2004).

The following section provides a detailed review of the growth and the failure aspects of the process of democratisation of Iraq and Kurdistan.

1.2.1 Democratisation Progress in Iraq and Kurdistan

In order to have a clear understanding about the democratisation of Iraq it is imperative to have knowledge about the four different types of democratisation (transformations, transplacements, replacements and interventions) which were described by Samuel Huntington (1991). He states that transformations occur when the

elites in power initiate the process by themselves. In other words, the authoritarian regime causes its own transition through reforms within the same regime, transformations were a common mode of transition in many Latin American, Europe, African and some Asian countries such as Spain, Taiwan, India, Turkey, Hungary, and Brazil. Transplacements occurs when both government and opposition groups lead the democratisation process together, as has been the case in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Nepal, and Bolivia. Replacements occurs when pressure leads to a forced transition which ends up driving the authoritarian regime out of power, such as Portugal, Greece and Romania, and more recently has been the case in Tunisia and Egypt. The fourth type is foreign interventions, which instigates a transition, as was the case in Grenada, Panama and most recently in Iraq in April 2003 (Huntington, 1991:133; Rioba, 2012).

Perhaps the best example of foreign intervention¹⁴ in a process of democratisation is the intervention in Iraq in 2003. The United States invasion of Iraq was the culmination of a long series of events and the product of many complex, different but interrelated factors, such as fighting the nuclear weapons programme, handling the causes of the problem of terrorism and ensuring uninterrupted global access to oil reserves. Whatever the aim was for the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003, it has resulted in a 'regime change' and brought about the democratisation to this country (Lawson & Thacker, 2003; Heinrich, 2015). The democratisation processes are imposed by force from abroad without local support. In fact, this is likely to be extremely challenging and unsustainable because it seems that the intervention in Iraq doesn't have any domestic

¹⁴ Many scholars (Huntington, 1996; Downes & Monten, 2010), however, addressed the question of whether intervention is an effective means of spreading democracy. It seems that there is no consensus on an answer to this question, the debate being divided between optimists, pessimists and those who make conditional arguments. Huntington (1996) warns that even when external factors create favourable conditions for building democracy, this will only occur if domestic conditions exist with adequate levels of economic and political development.

support and the country still remains a long way from democracy (De Mesquita & Downs, 2006).

To identify the status of democracy in Iraq and Kurdistan, it is crucial to have a more detailed review about democratisation's stages. According to McConnel & Becker (2002) moving towards democracy has starts and stops, "the process of democratisation does not always move in a single direction". Perhaps Rozumilowicz's outline is the best example of the process of democratisation and media reform. He categorized four stages of democratisation which are: pre-transition, transition, consolidation and stable. The first is a *Pre-transition Stage*, this stage places the groundwork for subsequent change. In this period, the regime shows a greater willingness to tolerate criticism and alternative views. The second period is termed the *Transition Stage*, during this stage, there is a systematic change within the formerly authoritarian regime. This phase actually aims to work towards a consolidated democracy and the structures of democracy are put in place during the transition stage. Next is the *Consolidation Stage*, in consolidating a state to a democratic regime, several elements must be in place and the state must be fully committed to the democratic process. In this stage, the development of media professionals will be seen and journalists will receive training in new skills such as investigative journalism and operating as an objective media. The final stage is the *Stable Democratic*, which is the best period for functioning democracy principles (Rozumilowicz, 2002; McConnel & Becker, 2002).

The question here is, where would be the position of Iraq and Kurdistan in these stages? According to Rozumilowicz's outline of democratisation stages, Iraq and Kurdistan are in the early phase of democratisation which means they are still in a

‘transition’ stage. According to Moon (2007) democracy in Iraq needs several decades to become consolidated.

First of all, what is transition? The use of the word ‘transition’ as a change in the political system is relatively new. The term was first discussed by Dankwart Rustow in his book *'Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model'* in 1970 (Walker & Orttung, 2014). The concept of transition has been central to discussions of democratisation since the 1970s (Huntington, 1991; Walker & Orttung, 2014). Transition has been the primary term used to describe such political changes; Samuel P. Huntington labelled it the ‘third wave’ of democratisation. The waves of democratisation started from Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s, then the following decade the world witnessed major political transitions in many countries such as South Africa, Communist countries and the Middle East.

Haynes (2013) defined transition as the period between an authoritarian and an elected government. With a closer look at these definitions, one can find concerns about the democratic transition in Iraq and Kurdistan; the definitions raise some issues, such as the meaning of an election or the terms ‘elected government’, ‘authoritarian’ and ‘regime change’. The current definition regarding the democratisation of Iraq and Kurdistan would be a good starting point to understand how far Kurdistan can be referred to in the Haynes definition. For example, after 2003, parliamentary elections are held every four years in Iraq and Kurdistan, which involves competition between party members for representative posts.

Haynes refers to ‘fair elections’, however this term appears to be the most indefinable terms in political science, especially during the transition period. There are many factors that may affect the fairness of the election, such as buying votes, especially

among illiterate voters who are easily manipulated to vote for the candidates of those in power, or sometimes by the threat of losing their jobs. In Iraqi Kurdistan for example, the two ruling parties, in particular the KDP and PUK, enjoyed power and legitimacy as an elected government of the region. Almost all of the resources of the state were under the ruling party's control and directed towards the campaigns before and during the elections.

Haynes (2013) argues, during democratic transitions, there is always a risk of reversion to authoritarianism because some of the legacy of the old regime, such as controlling powers, remains in the emerging post-authoritarian state (Ricchiardi. 2011; Al-Mljawi, 2009). Perhaps a good example of this is Pakistan, which has seen the failure of democracy and democratisation several times (Rizvi, 2011). Pakistan started with the parliamentary system of governance at the time of independence in August 1947, but since the beginning, democracy in Pakistan faced a host of difficulties which did not let the democratic principles, institutions and processes develop. Whenever Pakistan returned to civilian and constitutional rule, the quality of democracy remained poor. For example, in October 1958, the military overthrew the tottering civilian government and its bureaucracy and established direct rule with General Muhammad Ayub Khan as president. Since then the military has directly or from the background influenced the country's governance and policy management. In 1988-1999 the elected civilian governments functioned but the top commanders closely monitored the performance of these governments and made their views on political and security matters known to them. Therefore, governance for Benazir Bhutto (December 1988-August 1990, October 1993-November 1996) and Nawaz Sharif (November 1990-July 1993, February 1997-October 1999) was a delicate balancing act between the civilian government and the top brass of the military. The military returned to power on October 12, 1999 after dislodging the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif (Rizvi, 2011).

Another example of this is the recent failure in the democratisation process in Egypt. The country experienced democratic changes for only a short period. On January 2011, thousands of demonstrators began gathering in Cairo's Tahrir Square, and in the following days, the number increased to about a million.¹⁵ The revolution lasted for over 18 days, where the protesters were demanding that Mubarak leave the presidential position. Corruption of the Mubarak regime was the main reason for the uprising; during his rule, which had lasted 30 years, the country suffered from many economic and political problems, such as poverty, unemployment, low wages, lack of freedom of speech or freedom of the press. Then, in June 2012, in a democratic election, Mohammad Morsi won the presidential election. However, in the following year, on 3 July 2013, in a coup led by the Egyptian army, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi took over Egypt's presidency and removed the elected President Morsi. Egypt returned to the authoritarian political regime. Therefore it could be said that the process of democratisation in the middle east is not easy and faces a lot of obstacles (Rezaei, 2015).

In the case of Kurdistan, however, the region has not returned to the authoritarian system. The Regional President, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Masoud Barzani has led the Kurdistan region as President from 2005 for two and a half executive terms. First, he was elected by the parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan in 2005, then in 2009 the draft constitution amended the law to allow the direct election of the president by popular vote, diminishing the parliament's power at the expense of the presidency. His last term had previously been extended in 2013 by the ruling KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) for two more years on the condition that he could no longer run for

¹⁵ Al Jazeera, 1st February, 2011. Protesters flood Egypt streets:
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/02/2011215827193882.html>

president after this period. However, in 2015 the KDP¹⁶ asked to have another extension for the president for another two years, the justification for their demand was the war with the Islamic State (IS).¹⁷ As a result, the judicial body of the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) called to extend the period of rule of the current President Massoud Barzani by a further two years¹⁸. The council's announcement was met by a strong response from opposition politicians. This might be considered as sign of reversing democracy in Kurdistan. Exactly as Haynes suggests because of the legacy of the old regime, such as the controlling powers, the newly emerging democracies may return to authoritarianism.

The important question here is to ask, was Iraq including Kurdistan as ready for democratisation? or was the United States intervention successful in Iraq?¹⁹ In spite of their huge efforts to drive the process of Iraqi democratisation,²⁰ some scholars (De Mesquita & Downs, 2006; Walker & Orttung, 2014; Diamond and Morlino, 2004) indicate that the United States interventions failed to lead the country to democracy, in their study of 'Intervention and Democracy', De Mesquita & Downs (2006: 647) stated

¹⁶ Barzani is a leader of the KDP since 1979. KDP is one of the two historical Iraqi Kurdish parties.

¹⁷ Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (IS or ISIS) is a radical Sunni militant Islamic group. In Arabic, the group is known as Daesh. It is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and has control of some territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria. The earliest clashes between Kurdish and IS forces began on December 2013. In 2014, IS captured several cities in northern Iraq; however, Kurdish military forces '*Peshmerga*' resisted IS and successfully defended the Kurdish cities in northern Iraq.

¹⁸ The KRG Consultative Council (Shura) stated on August 17 that Barzani should remain in office for two years while retaining his full powers and declared that Barzani should stay in his current role until elections can be held, according to local news media.

¹⁹ Americans were not able to overcome the huge obstacles to the process of democratisation. The country has currently entered into a civil war, without being able to establish a democracy.

²⁰ According to the Watson Institute for International Studies (2013), the American government spent more than 3 trillion dollars on this war. The Defence Department meanwhile, reports that the government kept between 150 and 200 thousand troops in Iraqi territory throughout the years of occupation.

that the intervening goal in the process of democratisation is rarely achieved. They derived their view from a deep dissection of many scholars. In this respect, De Mesquita & Downs (2006) divided scholars' views into three groups. The first quoted group (Kegley and Hermann 1997; Gleditsch, Christiansen, and Hegre 2004; Rueschmeyer, Stephens, & Stephens, 1992) view is that "democratic interveners succeed in promoting democratic reform in the short term but that the target states end up with unstable political systems" (De Mesquita & Downs 2006: 628). The second group (Hermana & Broadhead 1984; O'Donnel, Schmitter & Whitehead 1986; Karl 1990; Whitehead 1991) focus on the more limited issue of the impact of intervention because of the fundamental contradiction between the idea of democratisation and its imposition by force. However, the third group (Meernik, 1996; Hermann & Kegley 1998; Wantchekon and Neeman 2002; Enterline & Greig 2003) "contends that the emerging consensus that interventions are an ineffective method of promoting democracy is overdrawn and unwarranted. They argue that a closer reading of the record suggests that under the right circumstances the United States is an effective agent for promoting democracy or at least for promoting generally liberal regimes" (De Mesquita & Downs, 2006: 628).

It seems that western scholars have doubts about the applicability of democratic principles in Iraq under current structural conditions; this is due to the existence of these obstacles, which hinder democracy in Iraq. This is clearly stated by Larry Diamond (2004: 54, 55).

Although the U.S. occupation and the CPA's²¹ effort to design and foster democracy in Iraq were deeply flawed, there were other, more positive aspects of the story, and these offer real hope for the future. Through various offices and mechanisms including the U.S. Agency for

²¹ The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA; Arabic: سلطة الائتلاف المؤقتة) was established as a transitional government of Iraq following the invasion of the country on 19 March 2003.

International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy, the CPA presided over an ambitious effort to promote pluralist democracy in Iraq. Some financial assistance and technical support was delivered very quickly and sensitively to emerging Iraqi civil society organizations, such as women's groups, youth organizations, professional associations, and think tanks working to expand and stimulate democratic participation.

Generally, the most important obstacles that are likely to impede democracy in Iraq can be concluded as follow:

- 1) Iraq's extreme autocracy history: for nearly a quarter century Iraq was ruled by Saddam's extreme Ba'th party. Even in the mid-1970s, Saddam Hussein was clearly the major force in the government through his control of the security system and the party. Certainly, the transition from extreme autocracy to coherent democracy for countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, or North Korea, the average is about half a century. Plus, another two to four decades for that democracy to become consolidated (Moon, 2007).
- 2) Experience with democracy: It is rather difficult to build democratic institutions from scratch (Moon, 2007). Iraq has never experienced a democratic system. Iraq was ruled by extreme autocracy for nearly a quarter of a century, during this period nearly two-thirds of all Iraqis were born. This entire generation does not have any experience of democracy. For example, experiences to create leaders or establishment of democratic institutions. The worst part of this is that this generation is holding political power in contemporary Iraq.
- 3) Iraq is a multi-ethnic and multi-language state: Iraq is defined along ethnic-religious lines, constituting three main contending groups: the Sunnis, the Shias and the Kurds. Although 95% of Iraqis are Muslim, these are divided into a majority of Shias (60%) and minority Sunnis (35%). The remaining 5% of the population comprise other religious minorities, including Christians. As for ethnicity, there is a majority of Arabs

(80%) who live in the central-south part of the country and a minority of Kurds (around 15%), located in the Iraqi northeast. Among the Kurds there are also Sunnis. The Kurds have never accepted Arab central control; after several decades of fighting with the Iraqi governments, they eventually obtained their autonomy in 1991, with the support of the United States and the UK.

In theory, democratisation is a process that does not happen overnight because the state has to go through a transition phase and consequently to a stage where democracy is consolidated. In Iraq and Kurdistan, as stated above, since 2003, several elections have been held, dozens of political parties registered to compete in elections. Furthermore, thousands of youth organizations, women and student associations were registered. However, some important elements such as, the separation and balance of power; the rule of law; accountability and transparency are still not practised properly, as required in democratic societies. Therefore, some scholars such as (Moon, 2007) pointed out that the chances of democracy emerging out of Iraq's structural arrangement appears extremely remote. According to Moon (2007), a democratic transition is pending in Iraq. He stated that from the view of the most optimistic observer, and considering its historical record, the process of democratisation in Iraq requires more than 70 years in order for it to become consolidated. Therefore, Iraq will remain in a transition phase and more needs to be achieved.

What is clear is that the United States intervention of Iraq led to transitions, but the country has not become the symbol of freedom that the United States officials envisioned (Rohde, 2005:19). However, in terms of media, scholars (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; Sheyholislami, 2011; Ismaeli, 2015; Rasul, 2012) indicate that the media are affected tremendously by the political transition in 2003. The media, as an important

element of democracy in the new transformation era, are looking towards getting into a better situation and a healthier environment. The effects of the media in this process are tangible, as many efforts have been done to develop the circumstance in Kurdistan and Iraq.

Many other scholars (Downes and Monten, 2010; De Mesquita & Downs, 2006; Walker & Orttung, 2014; Barakat, 2013) have examined the impact of political transitions on the media, and their role in the process. Their findings concluded that, despite the different circumstances and events leading to transitions, the fact is that most of the media were influenced by the political systems. This argument has been discussed by many in both political science and communication science. McConnel & Becker (2002) cited Berman and Witzner (1997) as an example of those who argue that the free access and exchange of information is crucial to the notion of democracy. McQuail (1992) has no such reservations, offering the view that the media do indeed follow, rather than lead. As in the case of Iraq, as stated above, the whole process of democratisation was arranged from outside Iraq; the United States was the main player in this process. In this case, the answer that the media followed the institution of democracy will be obvious. Indeed, the United States was the main player in designing and planning for the post-war media in Iraq, in addition to some efforts in this direction by other Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Rebuilding the media was one of the most important topics on the table in planning for Iraq after Saddam Hussein. According to (Al-Mljawi, 2009) preparations for new media projects and planning to rebuild the Iraqi media, as well as drafting of the framework for the media in Iraq, was planned for at least two years before the process of democratisation. Several departments and organizations within the United States were

asked to give their visions and suggestions for the framework of the post-war media in Iraq. The United States Department of State, in October 2001, gathered more than 200 Iraqi engineers, lawyers, businessmen, doctors and other experts to develop a strategy on several topics relating to the transitional phase in Iraq. Among them, the result of the media project group included a plan for a transition to private ownership of the Iraqi media and training of a group of Iraqi journalists to develop a strategy for the media in Iraq (Al-Mljawi, 2009).

Directly after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the Pentagon developed a plan for the rebuilding of the national media in the country. Within the first month of occupation, Iraq's Ministry of Information, Journalism Syndicate, and government censorship offices were abolished. At the same time, non-governmental organizations developed strategies for the development of the media (Al-Mljawi, 2009). The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) worked on short-term training programmes that are helpful for post-totalitarian societies to develop a number of journalists who are then able to inform the public with accurate and balanced news during a transition period. The IWPR in 2004 in partnership with media groups worked on the establishment of press freedoms. The Institute worked with the local media to create the Metro Centre for the Defence of Journalists. Over the past few years IWPR reported that at least 900 journalists have been trained in news reporting, editing, and investigative journalism. Since 2003, it has received around \$28.2 million for media development in Iraq; the majority of it from the U.S. State Department, followed by the UK's Department for International Development (Ricchiardi, 2011: 32).

On April 24, 2003, twenty media organizations met in London to discuss future media development in post-war Iraq. Amongst the organizations that participated were

International Media Support (IMS), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Interviews, and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). IREX also helped develop a training centre for media and new media technologies. According to Mark Whitehouse, IREX's vice-president for media, the organization is working with local media advocacy groups to push for press-related law reforms. As of November 2010, it was estimated that the organization had trained 4,500 journalists since it began working in Iraq. As of January 2011, IREX had received around \$24.2 million, much of it from the US State Department (Ricchiardi, 2011). David Rohde, (2005) examined American efforts to create a vibrant free press in Iraq and Afghanistan. He stated that the United States spent \$200 million in two years in Iraq to help create an independent media. He said that this expenditure on media development in Iraq is six times more than it has ever spent in any other nation.

As stated, a huge amount of money and effort has been spent locally and internationally to rebuild the media in Iraq and Kurdistan. Many scholars (Rohde, 2005; Barakat, 2013; Al-Mljawi, 2009) refer to the fact that, while the democratic project was not successful in the field of economics and politics, it has successfully cultivated the building of a new media system in Iraq and Kurdistan, and the transition was the sign of a new era of media. So, what is the position of the media in the new democratic change in Iraq and Kurdistan? This is discussed in the next section.

1.3 Media Transformation in the Political System

The media are one of the areas that has seen a dramatic change in the process of democratisation of Iraq (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; Sheyholislami, 2011; Ismaeli, 2015). It is clear that in any new transitional democratic, the media will be influenced by the

new political system, however there will also be many factors such as culture, political and economic pressure that affect the development of the media. For example, in the post-cold war, many of the countries that were adopting communist media models have moved towards democratisation, such as the formerly communist countries, however, the news media in those countries struggles to keep their independence from political dominance. Generally, the linkage between government/political actors and the media is high (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Jakubowicz, 2007).

In the review of the process of change and transformation of the media in Kurdistan, it is worth taking note first, the process of media transformation in the history of the European media and then the change and transformation of the media in Kurdistan. For further understanding the changes observed in the media systems and the current position of the media in Kurdistan after the fall of Saddam Hussein, is important to establish the linkages between the development of the independent media in Kurdistan and its origins in Europe. For example, the liberalization and development of the media throughout history in Europe required a long time to become accepted by European societies in both economic and political senses. Media liberalism started in the seventeenth century, with further development of the theory in the twentieth century, finally completely shifting Europe towards democracy, especially after World War II.

In order to understand the normative role of the media, media systems and changes within the media in the new emerging democracies such as Iraqi Kurdistan, it is worth reviewing the normative theories of the media. To begin with, the 'Four Theories of the Press' are considered, as well as the development of a 'Liberal Media Theory', particularly in relation to Europe, since almost all of the new democratising countries share the same transformation in media development.

1.3.1 The Four Theories of the Press

In an effort to understand the transformation process among media systems throughout the world, Siebert et al., (1956) constructed the 'Four Theories of the Press' which has had a significant impact on media research. These theories explain the background functioning of the media and represent the first systematic efforts to investigate the relationship between the media and politics. The authors of these theories said that "the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates." The Four Theories are: the authoritarian, the libertarian, the Soviet and the social responsibility. Although they are all rooted in a specific period of time and are closely tied to specific political conditions, the categorisation and explanation of the Four Theories is relevant in analysing the relationship between the media and politics in the modern era.

The Authoritarian Media Theory: It is the oldest among the four models. This theory was developed in the 16th and 17th centuries and was mainly based on the absolute power of the monarchy. It was essential that the press supported the monarchy and couldn't criticise it, but this does not diminish the validity of the interpretation of the relationship between the media and politics in the modern era. This approach has been designed to protect the existing social system, and to set clear limits on media functions. Private ownership is permitted under this authoritarian system; however, the government was practicing tight control over the media by imposing licensing, and censorship (Siebert et al., 1956). As a consequence, no criticism of the political machinery or officials in power was tolerated. Censorship of the press was justified on the grounds that the government always took precedence over the individual's right to freedom of

expression. Any offense to the existing political values had to be avoided and the government may punish anyone who questioned the state's ideology.

In recent times, after the dramatic transformation towards democratisation many countries in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, as well as Latin America and the Middle East have transformed from authoritarian and communist regime (the Soviet Media Model) to a Western democratic system (the Liberal Media Model). After these changes the impact of the Four Theories of the Press Model on the system became very clear. This provides the platform for this study to observe the changes in the Iraqi media in the transitional era. For example, before the process of democratisation Iraq and Kurdistan were an authoritarian system (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; Hogan & Trumpbour, 2013; Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011) which means that the media professionals were not allowed to have any independence within the media organisations. The media were not allowed to print or broadcast anything which could undermine the established authority of the government.

Soviet Communist Media Theory: The Soviet Communist Media Theory arose in the early twentieth century with the revolution in Russia in 1917, and with the influence of Marxism, there appeared to be a very different approach to dealing with the media. The concept of the Soviet media clearly reflects certain Marxist notions. The media are seen as an institution of the state, designed to assume responsibilities for interpreting party doctrine. The media are only given the instrumental roles to disseminate the revolutionary ideas of the Communist Party and promote the party image. The Soviet theory does not favour free expression, but suggests a positive role for the media in society and the world. This is closely linked to the Marxist concept of party/state unity, which would not permit the media to function as a 'fourth estate' to independently

criticize government, or serve as a forum for free discussion as in most liberal-democratic societies. The Soviet theory differs from the authoritarian theory in that the media organizations have a certain responsibility to meet the desires of their audience. The theory advocated that the only purpose of the media is to educate the great masses of workers (Siebert et al., 1956).

As stated, most of the scholars indicated that the Iraqi media system was an authoritarian press system. On the other hand, scholars (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008) put the position of the media in Iraq and during Saddam Hussein regime in the Soviet Communist Media Model. They stated that although media systems are viewed in the Middle East as authoritarian press systems, structurally Iraq's media during Saddam Hussein's regime were closer to the Marxist-Leninist Media Model, in which the media were subordinate to state interests and were bound to serve only the Baath political party. Under the Baath regime party in Iraq, the doctrines of media model were exactly the same as the Soviet Communist Media Theory, the media were serving the ruling party. They were closely tied to the Baath ideology. The government was superior to the media institutions.

The Liberal Media Theory: The concept of liberal media first started its evolution in the seventeenth century in Europe, with contributions from such influential thinkers as John Milton, Thomas Jefferson, John Locke and John Stuart Mill (Nerone, 1995; Merrill et al., 2001; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009). These intellectuals and theorists had an impressive place in history and a significant impact on the debate about the concept of liberal dissemination of new material and, conversely, the use of censorship. The theorists provided much of the foundation of the liberal media principle. Emphasising the importance of freedom of opinion and expression to the modern and democratic societies

was the central idea of the libertarian philosophers. This initial call by the philosophers was an historical milestone; they believed that freedom of speech and later freedom of the press was necessary for social growth and development.

Scholars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, argued that the notion of free press provided the best protection against tyranny and excesses of arbitrary rule, and continued to inspire most political thinkers in the West for many years to come. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with contributions from libertarian thinkers such as John Milton, Thomas Jefferson and John Locke, the concept of liberal and free media has significantly developed. Of special note for his contribution is John Stuart Mill, who expanded the philosophers' notion by attacking the restrictions on and censorship of newspapers. In this regard, Siebert et al. (1956: 70) described the function of the media in a democratic society having a long and hard history. This history has paralleled the development of democratic principles in government and institutions in the free economy (Nerone, 1995; Merrill et al., 2001; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009; Mill, 1999-1869).

In Britain, for example, the end of the seventeenth century was an end to pre-publication censorship after the British parliament signed the Printing Act to lapse in 1695. This was considered as the result of John Milton's *Areopagitica* in 1644, which was the first great article about defending freedom of the media in Europe. In fact, the principles of media freedom as practiced today are a product of classical liberal political philosophies which appeared in the last few centuries. For example, in the eighteenth century, media freedom had increased as a result of classical liberal political philosophy's debate about the fundamental rights of the political democracies and liberties in Europe. This fundamental right had a great deal of influence throughout subsequent centuries in

the development of media law in western countries and officially became a universal right. The First Amendment is a result of the Constitution of the United States (1791) and the British Libel Act in 1792. This came to a head in 1776, when Article 12 of the Declaration of Rights was published in the State of Virginia on the public record (Jamerson, 2007). These historical events in parts of Europe and the West help to illuminate significant factors that gave rise to the notion and practice of press freedom in Western democracies.

The Social Responsibility Media Theory: According to this theory the media has an obligation to be responsible to the public and carry out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society. Society expects that the media perform a particular role such as educating people, criticizing government policies and exposing other wrong doings in a society. The sense of responsibility has been emphasized more in this theory as compared to any other. In the Social Responsibility Theory, freedom is associated with obligations; in other words, there is no absolute freedom. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956: 97) also note that "freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory". The philosophy of Social Responsibility, is an extension of the libertarian philosophy, however the media are responsible to society.

According to Denis McQuail (2010) the basic principles of the Social Responsibility Theory are: the media should accept and enforce self-regulation'; this argument is against Libertarian Press Theory's firm grounding in the ideas of John Stuart Mill, 'free market principles.' The effectiveness of self-regulation depends on the individual journalists or media organizations, and depends on the media's professional standards. Social Responsibility Theory emphasises the role of moral codes in regulating

the media organizations. Social Responsibility Theory is an outgrowth of Libertarian Theory. However, social responsibility goes beyond "objective" reporting to "interpretive" reporting. McQuail (2010) suggests that the media should avoid publicising information that can lead to crime, violence, or civil disorder or cause harm to minority groups. According to the theory, the media must be controlled by community opinions and ethics. Media cannot violate people's rights. The media, according to this theory, is pluralistic and reflects the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and rights of reply. The media should fulfil its responsibilities by requiring professional journalists and media organisations to be accountable to society.

In looking beyond the Four Theories of the Press presented above, many important debates in journalism and democracy have emerged. Scholars such as Christians et al (2009), Hallin and Mancini (2004) and McQuail (2010) have their own views on the theory. For example, Hallin and Mancini (2004) state that the theory tends to focus on how media ought to be under different political systems. It also focuses more on the state–press relationship. It has been argued that the Four Theories of the Press did not anticipate the changing nature of society and media systems, especially as its primary focus is on traditional media outlets and excludes new media types such as the Internet. The theory focuses more on structural factors and ignores the individual journalist's autonomy, professionalism and enduring values. Furthermore, political changes in the world have limited the explanatory power of the model.

Therefore, it is difficult to apply this theory in explaining current developments in media systems and society (Christians et al., 2009; McQuail, 2010). All the changes in the media and society after World War II mean that the role of the media and the relationship between the media and politics need to be re-examined, because from that

time, the concept of the role of journalism in democratic societies, theories of public communication, and models of democracy have all expanded.

Perhaps the most influential explanation of the media in democratic society is the four roles of the media by Christians et al (2009). In their project, based on the media's relationship to the dominant political-economic powers in society, Christians et al (2009) formulate four critical roles of the media, which include the Monitorial, Facilitative, Radical, and Collaborative:

1) The Monitorial role: this function of the media refers to surveillance and observing. Christians et al (2009: 139-196) identified this task of the media as the main democratic role. Previously, Harold Lasswell (1948, mentioned in Christians et al., 2009) described the monitorial role of the media, pointing to the surveillance role of the media expressed in the process of observing and providing information about events. In this way, the surveillance task of the media is guided by systematic criteria. In addition, the news media in their monitorial role acts in conjunction with the public by giving the space to participate in this process, providing the citizen with essential information regarding their political worlds at the time. Christians et al (2009) indicate that the term surveillance sometimes translates as spying, therefore they substituted the term monitorial because of the implications of its hidden purpose of control, and spying is more likely to be used in the military. However, the term monitorial is that of an organized scanning of the real world of people, conditions and events.

2) The Facilitative role: in this role, the media promotes dialogue among the public. The aim of this interactive mode is to promote democratic pluralism in the media, as the facilitative role seeks to provide citizens with a platform for expressing themselves and participating in the political process. The facilitative role of the media tends to be

described as the process of negotiation over the social, political, and cultural agenda. In this perspective, only within active communities the media, with the public, can discover what is advantageous for the people. The media creates a space for an interactive dialogue in which citizens engage one another on both practical matters and social vision. The public are more likely to take a broader view of the issues. Hence, the facilitative role is highlighted in terms of providing a platform for debate and the interactions between citizen journalism and professional journalists.

3) The Radical role: this refers to the oppositional stance of journalism and the radical role for the media in society. The role of the radical media goes further, as the media stands up against injustices of any kind and supports equality and freedom for all members of society. Liberation movements used to belong to this category. This role is mostly realized through independent information, criticism and comment. In the radical role, injustice is not tolerated; the media in this function work for the maximum level of equality and freedom of all members of a democratic society.

4) The Collaborative Role: this refers to the traditional position of the media. The idea of collaboration clashes with the libertarian ideal of a free media because it implies a relationship with the state or the interests of those in power, since the loyal and ‘collaborative’ media directly serve governments and authorities like “lapdogs”. Christians et al (2009) state, among the democratic media roles we discussed, a collaborative role is unique in that it deals as much with the needs and expectations of the state.

These monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative roles that have been suggested by scholars (Christians et al, 2009) are considered a useful classification of the normative functions of the media in modern society. These normative theories of the

media in a democratic context draws the attention to the connection between the media and society and indicate the functional approach of the media as an integral part of democracy.

Presenting these theoretical models of the media's function has provided analytical opportunities to establish linkages between particular functions of the media in society. For example, the monitorial role refers to typical cases where media providers see themselves as neutral observers reporting "objectively" about the world, like a "watchdog". In this research, the watchdog task of the media is one of the core roles that will be assessed in relation to the development of the media role in Kurdistan Region in the period of democratisation. Also, the facilitative role as an information tool for citizens or as a platform for expressing themselves is widely emphasised in the empirical chapters.

Based on the above literature regarding the media function theories in democratic societies, this thesis has identified some core roles that the media could have in any democratic society, including Kurdistan, which has seen a new democratic change. In the sections below, this chapter will discuss the role of the media as a 'watchdog' and as a 'Fourth Estate' to hold government accountable, the informative role, as a forum for public debate, and finally as a 'marketplace of ideas'.

1.3.1.1 The Role of the Media as a 'Watchdog' and as a 'Fourth Estate'

Watching the role of media in the light of the liberal media as a requirement of a democratic society is essential in this study because the primary aim of this research is to see the role of the Kurdish media in enhancing democracy in Kurdistan. The main function of the media in the liberal and democratic societies is to provide information free from government interference. This could be by constantly digging for information,

and forcing the government and the private sector to release documents to the public (Coronel, 2010). When the media represent and speak on behalf of all society's institutions, particularly the otherwise voiceless, it makes democracy a truly representative regime.

The media have been considered as a central power of the modern democracy. The key assumption of the media's role as a watchdog can also be described as to be the "eyes and ears" of the public, represent the interests of the people, and serve as checks on the government. The media, thus become an instrument working on behalf of the people to bring their governors to account for its performance. Christians et al (2009: 237) in identifying (monitorial, radical, facilitative and collaborative) as crucial roles of journalism in democracy. They point out that the monitorial role of journalism always remains at the core of the task of informing the public. Schuepp (2000) summarised the watchdog role as a guard for the owner, to represent those loyal to the society, and attack anybody who threatens social rights and freedom (Lai Oso, 2013).

Scholars Karin Wahl-Jorgensen & Thomas Hanitzsch (2009:8), Whitten-Woodring, (2009) and (Malakwen, 2014) justify that the media should act as a 'Fourth Estate'²² or play a 'watchdog role' over the excesses of state power. As the characteristic of the media in the modern society is to speak for the people, represent their interests, and act as an inspector on government.

As a part of the 'Fourth Estate' the watchdog role of the media has appeared since the late 17th century Coronel (2010). Classical liberal theorists argued that the media as a

²² The phrase Fourth Estate was attributed to Edmund Burke when he said "there were three Estates in Parliament, but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all" (Raymond Kuhn & Nielsen, 2014).

watchdog role should have a power upon government, responsible to inform the public, and support human rights. The liberal great thinkers (Curran, 1996; McQuail, 2005; Price, 2002; Van Belle, 2000) state the principals of the Libertarian media model with the hypothesis that a responsible media is necessary for the protection of the civil and the promotion of liberal reform. It is also expected from the media as the fourth estate to act as a guardian of public interest, and as a watchdog on the activities of government. Accordingly, the media can be considered one of the most powerful tools of modern democracy, binding all the democratic executive, judicial and legislative power (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009).

1.3.1.2 The Media as an Informative Tool and as a 'Marketplace of Ideas'.

Many western scholars (Christians et al., 2009; Siebert et al., 1956; McQuail, 2010; Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle, 2014) emphasis on the informative role of the media. In their view, the first role of the media is to provide reliable information because it is the public's right to have relevant information about the actions of the government officials. McQuail (2010) identifies Informativeness, Truth, Accuracy, Objectivity, Balance and Truth as features that will provide media freedom, comprehensiveness and at the same time will ensure it is socially responsible. Färdigh (2013) mentioned that in order for the media to play a substantial role as a fourth estate, three important elements must exist: first accessibility, this element is about the necessary information that is obtained by the media to give to the people; second, the responsiveness with which governments respond to their citizens; and third, the accountability links which give access to the public authority. If any of these elements are missing, then the media are less likely to play the fourth power in the government. The role of the media in Kurdistan

is examined in the respect of the watchdog function of the media in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Another slogan which has been created as an integral part of the great march of democracy is a 'marketplace of ideas'.²³ It has been the guiding principle of Western civilisation for more than two hundred years. Since the 17th century, liberal philosophers have recognised the crucial role of the open public debate and free speech. The "marketplace of ideas" concludes that ideas and truth are allowed to be revealed without restraint from the state, and it is a population's decision to choose 'right' from 'wrong' ideas (Asard and Bennett 1997).

Some of western scholars, have also questioned whether the confrontation of competing views is really the best way of revealing the truth (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). Sani (2005) indicated to "logic" in applying this model; here the press is free, the marketplace of ideas sorts out the irresponsible from the responsible. He cited Goonasekera (2000) who believes that applying the marketplace of ideas cannot be applied to all countries. The free marketplace of ideas in multicultural, multiparty democracies in Asia can result in heightening of racial and religious tensions, mobilising sectional constituencies and arousing emotions.

In this regard, the term of 'marketplace of ideas' as one of the free media functions has widely appeared in the Kurdish media. Each media outlet is attempting to produce more watchdog reports and debate programmes to expose each other's corruption in the governmental bodies and political issues in Kurdistan. Although, some scholars (Sani,

²³ The slogan "free market of ideas" was an integral part of the great march of democracy which led to the tremendous advancement of the wellbeing of humanity. This was the guiding principle of Western civilization for more than two hundred years.

2009; Goonasekera, 2000) have concerns about the function of the media as ‘marketplace of ideas’ and they believe that applying the marketplace of ideas cannot be applied to all countries. Applying free marketplace of ideas in multicultural societies can result in heightening of racial and religious tensions. Thus, this research investigates about how widely this notion is applied and its result in a place like Kurdistan (see Chapter Seven for more details).

In general, scholars (Sani, 2005; Sani, 2009; Norris, 2008; Färdigh, 2013) indicate that the free media functions in the democratic society which is required for every democracy. In other words, both the free media and democracy are complementary. By practicing its functions, a watchful media can strengthen freedom, human development, and hold authorities accountable. In monitoring the exercise of power, journalists are charged to ascertain whether a government is fulfilling their responsibilities towards their people. The prime role of media could be concluded as a disseminator of information that may provide the best public protection, also as a maladministration exposure in the official sector can function to promote government transparency.

From a Western liberalist point of view, one of the necessary requirements for any democracy to function properly, is a free media. According to Dennis & Merrill, (1991: 5), free media is simply defined as the right to communicate ideas, opinions, and information through the media outlets without government restraint. Jeffery (1986) defined media freedom as freedom from legal restraint, the absence of prejudice, independence from government domination, and immunity from the influence of stakeholders or business owners. Hachten (2005) also characterises a free media as possessing the right to report on, to comment on, and to criticise its own government without threat from figures in authority.

1.3.2 Do Free Media Exist?

The media, in liberal philosophy, were charged with the duty of keeping government from overstepping its bounds. Within this theory, the media are expected to serve as the public's eyes and ears. In its basic form the media will watch the daily workings of government, and examine government performance. In the liberal view of how media systems work is the notion that the media serve as guardians and as a watchdog covering a range of wrongdoing, including political corruption, bribery and misusing public funds (Coronel, 2010). The media thus contribute significantly to a system of checks and balances that are essential to the functioning of the modern democratic system (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010).

However, this does not represent all media scholars' thoughts about the concept of free media. In fact, there is a lack of conceptual agreement among them, as one person's comprehension of the literature is different to another's. Therefore, it is important to consider the multiple dimensions of the concept. Free media have been outlined from economic, social, cultural and political perspectives. Definitions of the concept after the Second World War primarily focuses on freedom from government control (Lowenstein, 1970; Weaver, 1977; Picard, 1985; Hachten, 1987; Hagen, 1992). However, later definitions of the concept focus on differentiating from a classical liberal perspective on media freedom, namely that the media should serve to protect the individual from the abuses of the state (Curran, 1996; Price, 2002; McQuail, 2005). Several definitions have been provided by scholars in an attempt to illustrate and classify free media. From a minimal definition of media freedom as Munck and Verkuilen (2002) who simply define media as 'good media', to a further complicated definition from Hagen (1992), which conceptualized in more detail the democratisation of media. This

definition is involved with 'contrasting ideals' regarding the role of a free press (Van Belle, 2000).

Nevertheless, Critics (Salmon 1923; Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, 1988) claim that absolutely free media do not exist in the real world and that it is a distant dream that is rarely obtained. Salmon (1923, cited in Van Belle, 2014) considered absolute media freedom as an unreachable ideal and described the idea of free media as always fluctuating, never stable. In one country, they might be censored by the government, in another by political parties or authority; elsewhere, it might be controlled by religious thoughts and in another country by the ascendant industry.

Regarding Dennis & Merrill definition, the common view of the 'free media' is media existing free from government control. However, Doris Graber (2003, 142) argues that there are no media that are free from government controls. While everyone acknowledges that free media is essential for democracy, one expects to find most free media in democratic states and most controlled media in autocratic states, but this is not always the case. A good example of this is from 1981 to 1995, both Greece and Portugal were coded as democratic (Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2003, cited in Whitten-Woodring, 2009), but the media were coded as "controlled," which means that democratic forms in these two countries did not allow the media to criticize the government freely (Van Belle, 2000; Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

According to Jeffery (1986), this problem might occur as a result of the owner's control over the media. For instance, the big media companies have the power to control the content of what the media produces. Since owners generally have political views that will significantly affect the operation of the corporations they own, it is likely they will also control the character of news reporting. Christians et al (2009: 221) contend that, in

real ity, media institutions are not really ‘free’; they are constrained by the concerns of the societies in which they operate.

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988) also have concerns regarding the role of the media in society, as well as how the structural and political-economic elements influence overall patterns of media performance. Chomsky and Herman describe the role of the media as a means of propaganda in the western democracies. They state that the media serve the interests of dominant elites and protect the interests of industrial companies. Furthermore, journalists, via news coverage, have their own self-interests or ideological motives. This in turn affects the performance of the media, for example, diverting the public's attention away from important issues to less important issues in order to legitimize and promote the interests of the elite and mislead the public. Herman and Chomsky also have a big concern regarding the forces that cause the media to play a propaganda role (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009; Klaehn, 2002).

Both Chomsky and Herman have doubts about the liberal media’s claims to ‘freedom’ and ‘objectivity’. The period after the September 11th attacks and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq have seen a rise in the scholarly critiques about media objectivity (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009: 241; Miller, 2004; Tumber & Palmer, 2004; Maltby & Keeble, 2007). Since September 11th, journalistic objectivity has been a matter of frequent argument among Western media. Robert and Jan (2004) analysed news reported by Al-Jazeera, CNN and Fox News during the days leading up to the fall of Baghdad. They found that Al-Jazeera showed the horrible and horrific side of the war. At the same time, it also attempted to get close to the ordinary Arab citizens - its target audience. On the other hand, Fox News and CNN appeared to

favour the war to rally support for the American action in Iraq. Carney (2006) found that Arab channels identified the Iraqi war as an occupation, while CNN referred to it as liberation (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2009).

Critics have expressed a belief that private media are free from government control, but are slaves to the market (Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Wahl-Jorgensen, & Hanitzsch, 2009; Klaehn, 2002; Sawant, 2001; Sani, 2009). A big concern now is the problem with the identification of the free media with the free market. Currently, the media enterprises are owned by capitalist corporations whose total revenue comes from advertising, and profit-making is the central goal of the owners. In fact, this has been the reality since the 1980s in the U.S, after the small and medium enterprises disappeared or were subsumed within big media corporations, which are controlled owned by a few individuals and families.

In fact, most major media in the United States are mainly owned by very rich people and run by very large corporations. The major media are part of large chains owned a very few corporations controlling all of the famous newspaper networks and cable news channels. For example, General Electric media-related holdings include television networks, NBC and Telemundo, Universal Pictures, Focus Features, 26 television stations in the United States and cable networks MSNBC, Bravo and the SciFi Channel (McChesney, 2004). General Electric had \$183 billion revenues in 2008, this was the highest figure of all the big six media corporations in the United States. This is one of the corporations that dominates the media (GE 2008 Annual Report, 2008).²⁴ One problem about this is that, such an orientation yields to profit concerns in order to

²⁴ http://www.ge.com/ar2008/pdf/ge_ar_2008.pdf

maximise their audience(s), and in order to achieve this aim, they overemphasise “news of crime, sex, and violence and oversimplify serious news” (Sani, 2009: 15).

Scholars Sawant (2001) and Sani (2009) observe that the media influences are not only coming from the perspective of the government, there are also some other external and internal factors that might influence the media. The external pressures come from groups and institutions such as “social, religious groups, politicians, political parties, police” (Sani, 2009: 14). Examples of internal pressures are: the media could be used by owners, advertisers and investors, or even personal biases and corrupt motives of the editorial staff from the editor down to the reporter. All of these can have their own role and affect the honesty of the media (Sani, 2009).

While there is sufficient evidence that the media are subject to economic pressures, it is difficult to monitor the intentions of media owners, or to fully regulate editorial matters. Perhaps the most effective way to maintain the diversity of views in the media is to prevent media power from being monopolised by the government, politicians, particular commercial interests or one or two individuals (Sani, 2009). If the media are politically independent and objective, surely they can play their role actively and provide credibility to serve as a check on government behaviour and therefore be linked to improved government transparency (Whitten-Woodring, 2009).

1.3.3 Media Environment in New Democracies

The relevance to this research of what has been presented above, is to help understand the democratic role of the media and the observed changes in the media in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. Before going through comparisons

between Kurdistan and other newly democratised countries, it is worth presenting the general media position in those countries.

In studying the effects of political and economic systems on media systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004) studied eighteen Western European and North American democracies, to examine the relationships between the media system and political system variables. Based on these empirical patterns and in order to describe how political and economic systems influence the media system, Hallin and Mancini also identify three fundamental ideal models which are:

First, the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist model - which characterises countries relatively late to undergo democratisation, in southern Europe, with political systems of polarized democracy where there is strong government intervention in the economy and usually this is clearly linked to the dominant political system. The parallelism between government/political actors and the media is high, such as in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain.

Second, the North/Central Europe or Corporatist Model usually represents earlier democratisation that resulted from consensus and a strong state with a well-grounded legal system. The media system is characterised by a tradition of state intervention ensuring external pluralism, a balance between the role of the state and freedom of the media and media markets, and where journalism is professional, such as in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany.

Third, is the North Atlantic or Liberal Model such as in the US, UK and Ireland. The political systems are characterized by early democratisation, strong and widespread media freedom and newspaper circulation, which is relatively high, with market-

dominated media systems, except for strong public service broadcasting in the UK and Ireland (Hallin & Mancini 2004; Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008).

In the era of the transition of many countries toward democratisation, in the last three decades most post-communist countries fit the Mediterranean model first and then adopted in the Middle East (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008), a question which should be answered by scholars is where do we place these countries on this map of the media? Should they be placed in the liberal system of northern Europe, or the democratic-corporatist system of Central Europe, or finally in the polarized pluralist model of the Mediterranean? Jakubowicz (2007) uses the Hallin-Mancini framework for this matter. He states that post-communist countries appear to be located around the Mediterranean. Jakubowicz points out that if countries like Spain, Portugal and Italy have not yet been able to create conditions for truly public-spirited and independent public service media, then it is unrealistic to expect that post-communist countries could have done it in less than three decades. Post-communist countries share similarities with the Mediterranean Model, such as the explosion of media outlets. Where there are strong connections between the media and politics, the news media struggles to keep its independence and to demonstrate political independence (Jakubowicz & Sükösd, 2008; Jakubowicz, 2007).

With respect to Kurdistan, Kim & Hama-Saeed (2008) said, the media model in Iraq and Kurdistan were a mixture between the Authoritarian and Marxist Leninist press model. However, in the new era, the Iraqi media have moved away from these two models and are slowly stepping towards the liberal media model. Kim & Hama-Saeed (2008) review the changes of the media in Iraq. They studied the media environment in the transition era and highlighted the growing number of media outlets. Their study stated

that there are free media in Iraq, because there is no longer official government censorship and the media are now open to everyone.

To stick to the point and have more understanding to the nature of the media in the new democratic phase, it is useful to examine the media in other newly democratised countries, such as Russia and other former Soviet Republics. For example, according to scholars, the media in Russia developed considerably in terms of plurality and freedom during the 1990s (Becker, 2004; Lankina, 2009; Obydenkova, 2008; Voltmer, 2010). At the beginning of the political changes towards democratisation and during Yeltsin's rule, the government had taken some actions that had a positive impact on the media field. This has led to improving media outlets' performance and media freedom. For example, journalists and writers were allowed to criticise and comment on corruption, state policy and political issues, even criticising the elites for their involvement in the Chechnya war. Furthermore, during this time several private media organisations were established. The ordinary citizens were allowed to participate in debates concerning common and political issues (Becker, 2004). However, as commonly happens, the media also faced various challenges in these newly democratic countries. In Russia, the state's intervention in the media was clear although there was an assumption that the government were encouraging media freedom. Becker (2004: 148) states that during Putin's rule, the conditions of the media declined, and the government attempted to build self-censorship among journalists by creating an environment of distrust and suspicion; unlike under Boris Yeltsin, the control upon the media increased.

During Putin's rule, although there was permission for establishing private or independent media outlets, various pressures from the government and the political parties impeded the democratic role of the media, such as preventing the private media

outlets from accessing government subsidies. The political elites were controlling advertisements in order that they would not reach those media organisations. Furthermore, as elsewhere in newly democratised countries, the judicial systems do not always function effectively or independently and are mostly under political elites' or political parties' control. The implementation of the law is very weak in newly democratised countries, and journalists therefore risk facing an unfair decision in court. In fact, the poor economic and legislative power in those countries impedes the performance of the democratic role of the media (Becker, 2004). Another restraint that has impeded the media and silenced free voices of Russian journalists is the issue of media ownership. In Russia, many of the media outlets are run by powerful economic companies that are very close to the political powers. As a result, the media might be subjected to control by the government and political parties, as they were before during the Soviet Union in previous decades.

In comparing the media in Kurdistan with the media in Russia after the period of democratisation, one can find similarities, and the same problems can be seen in the Kurdistan Region as in Russia. The situation of the media in Kurdistan and Iraq after 2003, is similar to the post-communist countries in terms of dramatic change in all sorts of media. There has been a real increase in the number of media outlets. For example, according to statements made by the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate in September 2013, there are over 900 media outlets, including 54 satellite televisions in Kurdistan. Now, the news media provide opportunities for Iraqi citizens to express their opinions on governmental issues, politics and economic development. The media are beginning to serve as a means of furthering participation in civil society. Most media networks especially the television news channels have programmes to demonstrate the problems people have and how the government can alleviate their situation. Furthermore, the Iraqi

media increasingly criticize the government and address issues such as corruption in the government or how various ministries operate. The media has also seen a considerable progress in terms of law. In 2007, after the adoption of the Press Law, obtaining a print media license became simpler; the procedure for getting a license has become quick and easy, and the censorship prior to publication has been abolished (see details and analysis in Chapter Five).

However, in Kurdistan like many new transitional democratic countries such as Russia some of the legacies of the previous regime remain (Hogan and Trumpbour, 2013). For instance, there is a strong relationship between politics and the media and the use of media as an instrument of political propaganda is widespread. Furthermore, intimidation of journalists, especially those who seek to expose corruption or criticise prominent figures is still high in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. In fact, journalist protection has clearly been mentioned by the Kurdish press law. However, in practice many journalists are subjected to threats and physical attacks which resulted in questions about the existence of media freedom in Kurdistan. Unfortunately, producing media reports in Kurdistan sometimes involves great risks for journalists. The news media reporters have often been under pressure and physical attacks; these physical measures will definitely impede the process of media freedom (please see Chapter Six for more details).

Kim & Hama-Saeed (2008) explained this phenomenon; they stated that the case of Iraq is not unique in transformation of the media system. For example, in other newly democratising countries such as in the post-communist countries alongside Eastern Europe, emerging freedom of press and diversity in the media has been repressed by new political elites. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin have both tightened

control over the media. As Coman (2000), cited in Kim & Hama-Saeed (2008) argues that in the post-communist transition era the media have seen the emergence of hybrid models of the media' Four Theories without the necessity to create a new form.

In general, there would be two major problems that might limit media independence. These are political challenges and economic pressures. The commercial type of media such as the typical American media, which involves advertisement revenue and media moguls, is very remote in Kurdistan. To date, the Kurdish media are not profitable. Since sales do not support the media's revenues and the circulation of many of the newspapers are relatively low, this causes weakness in advertising revenue as well. Currently the most difficult challenge for Iraqi Kurdistan's media is how to build funding sources for good journalism. The current complaint is about the provision of funds and revenues for the media; while individual politicians and political parties supply their media outlet(s) generously. Due to the long term practise of using the authoritarian and communist model in Iraq and Kurdistan, the media in Kurdistan have been closely involved in political issues. The media are not commercially oriented. They often depended on political parties or wealthy private companies; this certainly hinders the development of the media as autonomous institutions (Hallin, 2002). There is a limit to the development of media markets, which means that the media are less likely to be self-sustaining. Therefore, political pressure may be considered as the main problem in Kurdistan. Media ownership in contemporary Kurdistan is strongly connected with different political allegiances (Hogan and Trumpbour, 2013). As the majority of the media outlets are owned by political parties, each media outlet is financially dependent on one particular party for its survival.

In this regards, Hallin and Mancini (2004) have drawn up four different dimensions to analyse countries' media systems: First is the media markets, which emphasise strong or weak circulation; Second, political parallelism which concerns the link between the media and political parties, and how the media system reflects the division of political parties; Third, the development of journalistic professionalism; Fourth, the nature of state intervention and functioning of the media system (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 2).

With regard to the relationship between the media and politics, in Kurdistan it is very strong since the establishment of the first Kurdish newspaper *Kurdistan* in 1898. Rasul, (2012) asserts that throughout the modern history of Kurdistan, the importance of the media was clear in Kurdish society. Most of the newspapers which were published by the Kurds had a strong connection with the Kurdish question. The Kurds want their voices to be heard via the media. Therefore, most of the newspapers that were issued between the beginning of the 20th century and 1970 have promoted the Kurdish issue national and had a political concern. Even after 2003, the political parties have always played a large role in the media in Kurdistan. To date the ruling political parties own a significant portion of the media. Consequently, the existence of an independent media is still questionable, because the media are dependent on the government or are funded by some political parties. There is therefore, a question as to how the media can be effective during a transition period, or what the enabling environment is for free media to perform their essential functions. As all these interventions have resulted in a lack of fulfilment of the democratic role of the media in Kurdistan. I have included a separate chapter on this issue because it is one of the core parts of this research (see Chapter Two for more details).

Another issue which has impeded the development of the media in Kurdistan is the violence against journalists. Within the space of five years (2008-2013), three journalists were murdered in Kurdistan because of their reporting activities. Furthermore, the number of attacks on journalists and media organizations peaked in 2011, the Metro Centre recorded 359 attacks in that year. Perhaps the best example of this is the burning of *Nalia TV (NRT)*, the first independent TV station in Kurdistan. The violence committed against journalists in the region is restricting journalists' freedom and might prevent them from writing about sensitive topics.

The key element in an empowering environment for an independent free media is the protection of journalists in their professional activities. There are at least two components of this category. The first relates to the matter of journalists' job security, and focuses on the relationship between journalists and media owners. The second concerns the matter of physical security, and the extent to which the legal system protects them. Price & Krug (2000) clearly state that the key element for enabling an environment for an independent free media is the protection of journalists in their professional activities (there is a critical argument about the overall environment of the media in Chapter Six).

With regards to the Hallin & Mancini's third dimension, which is the development of journalistic professionalism, there is widespread recognition that there is a lack of professionalism in the media field in the Kurdistan Region (Sheyholislami, 2011; Hogan & Trumpbour, 2013; Reporters Without Borders, 2010). Many academics have criticised journalists for an absence of professionalism and a frequent unwillingness to follow a journalistic code of ethics. For example, Rahman Gharib, Director of the Metro Centre to Defend Journalists, emphasised that some journalists do not know the difference

between opinion and information, or criticism and defamation; such a lack of professionalism has resulted in many press offences (Reporters Without Borders, November report, 2010). As most of the journalists come from a particular political group, they, therefore, have not had any journalistic training (There is more analysis on this topic in Chapter Four).

1.4 Conclusion

The media has improved in spite of structural weaknesses, and inherent political behaviour. However, in the transition era, the role of the media should be viewed in its specific context, in order for it to be clearly understood. For example, taking into account the role of the media in advanced democracies may not necessarily present similarities with the media's role in the political landscape of democratising countries.

This chapter has attempted to review the origin and development of the media in Iraq and Kurdistan in respect to the western liberal model and the free media. It seems that the notion of western liberal democratic notions has an impact on the media system in Kurdistan in the era of transition. Overall, the transition process marks a turning point in the history of the Iraqi Kurdistan media, since the media has made great progress in terms of number and media landscape. Despite the fact that Kurdistan and Iraq have seen many changes in the field of media after 2003, they have been placed in last position in terms of international scales. For example, the World Press Freedom ranked Iraq and Kurdistan 158 out of 179 countries in its 2016 and 2017 worldwide index of press freedom. Also, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2016) has placed Iraq (including Kurdistan) in the 7th to last position out a total of 177 countries. The question here is, what is going wrong with the media which has resulted in such a

poor rating in these international scales? This big question opens an argument to review all the aspects of the media environment and role of the media.

It is important to bear in mind that democratisation is a process that does not happen overnight because it has to go through a transition phase and consequently to a stage where democracy is consolidated. Many of the newly emerging democracies fall short of the basic standards for democracies. The media environment often seems in many new democracies, to lack the qualities to play a key role in promoting accountability. The media is frequently criticized for being unable to act as a watchdog due to being very close to the political elites. Scholars (Price, 2002; Price & Krug, 2000) attempt to explain this phenomenon, because establishing a free and independent media in the process of transition may provide foundations for the future stability of democratic institutions. Democracy requires principally that the media provide sufficient information for the public, in order to perform a watchdog function.

The following chapters in this thesis, try to answer how the democratic changes are articulated in the media. The analysis chapters mainly examine the role the media might play in consolidating democracy in Kurdistan; inspect the current economic, political and legal environment of the media. Also, finding the nature of relationships between the media, politics and democracy is central to this thesis. Finally, this thesis, takes into account the assumption that the media plays a ‘watchdog’ function in enhancing democracy, which certainly requires the media to provide information and hold the political actors to account.

Furthermore, since Kurdistan is in the process of democratisation it is crucial to also present a review about the media and associations to the democratic system, or the intersection between the two throughout the modern history of Kurdistan. Therefore, the

next chapter gives a detailed review of literature about the political history of Kurdistan before 2003, and the history of media in the 20th century.

Chapter Two

History of Kurdistan and Development of the Media in 20th Century

2.1 Introduction

Since this thesis aims to explore the development of the media during the transition period in Kurdistan, it is necessary to illustrate the relationship between the media and politics in past and present. In the previous chapter, a review of literature was undertaken on the democratic role of the media in the western liberal scholars' perspective and the process of democratisation of Iraq and Kurdistan. The current chapter looks at the political history of Kurdistan before 2003, and the history of media in the 20th century. Reviewing the history of Kurdistan before the period of transition is imperative for several reasons: firstly, it provides background knowledge about the primary purpose of using the media by political parties in Kurdistan. Secondly, to increase understanding of this connection between politics and the media and why this relationship has been emphasised throughout the thesis. Thirdly, understanding how the media have been used to serve the political purposes of the Kurdish throughout the 20th century because of the uniqueness of the Kurdish political situation. Many scholars (Hevian, 2013; McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011; Yıldız, 2004) have stated that the Kurdish media mainly tended to focus on gaining national rights and highlighting injustice against the Kurdish people.

This chapter, accordingly, consists of two main parts; in the first part, there will be a brief history on Kurdistan and the Kurds efforts for independence. In order to highlight core features of the Kurdish media from the beginning to the current state, this

chapter has outlined some historical and political turning points that have shaped the Kurdish nationalist movements throughout the history of Iraq and Kurdistan. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the question of Kurdish independence has been on the surface locally, and internationally has been discussed. The second part of this chapter specifically considers the history of media in Kurdistan. It will start firstly, from the publication of the first Kurdish newspaper in 1898, by focusing on the newspaper's goals. Then, the early history of the media from the beginning of the 20th century until 1970: during this period, the situation of Kurdistan and the Kurdish media remains the same; then the next stage of the Kurdish media began in 1970-1974, in which the Kurds have enjoyed a time of autonomy for a very short period; then the period of rechecking the media began under the rule of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime. The final stage of the media was the greatest historic event of the Kurds, which occurred in 1991 as a result of the Ba'ath party's defeat in the Gulf War; in this stage, Iraqi Kurdistan was semi-autonomous in Iraq between 1991 and 2003 and during this period, the media have seen many changes and developments.

2.2. Overview History of Kurdistan

Kurdistan (the land of the Kurds) is the geographical area situated in the mountains of the Middle East. Kurds settled around the Zagros Mountains (Northern Mesopotamia) about 4,000 years ago (Hevian, 2013: 95). Although there has not been a state called Kurdistan, the term Kurdistan has been in use since the twelfth century (McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011; Yıldız, 2004). The Great Kurdistan is about 200,000 square miles. Kurdish is an Indo-European language related to Persian. The Kurdish people are the fourth largest ethnic and linguistic group in the Middle East, following in size the Arabs, Turks, and Persians. Today an estimated 25 to 30 million

Kurds live in Kurdistan. Before World War I, and for many years, Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Persian Empire.

The Kurdish question mostly began after the collapse of the Great Ottoman Empire in World War I, when the Ottoman government was forced to sign the Treaty of Sevres in 1920. Article 64 of the Treaty granting the Kurds the right to have their independent state of Kurdistan in the future. This treaty was considered as a clear victory for Kurds because it was the first international agreement that supported the Kurdish rights to autonomy. However, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk rejected the process of the Sevres Treaty, and a new peace conference resulted in a new treaty, which known as the Treaty of Lausanne, in 1923. In this treaty, the Kurds' right to autonomy was completely neglected, which put an end to Kurdish ambitions for independence. Eventually, as a consequence of the Lausanne agreement and after the World War I, Kurdistan officially divided into four territories among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (see figure 2.1) (McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011; Hogan & Trumbour, 2013; Yıldız, 2004; Wanhe, 2002).



Figure 2.1: Map of Greater Kurdistan according to Google Map

However, the Kurds were never satisfied with this division, and this can be seen as the root cause of the Kurdish people's conflict until the present day. Throughout the 20th century, the Kurds have struggled against the authorities occupying their areas, and there were more than twenty Kurdish revolts involving armed struggle. The Kurds were in frequent clashes because they have found themselves attached to other countries by force. The most well-known Kurdish movements are, the rebellion of Sheikh Said of Piran²⁵ in Turkey, Sheikh Mahmud and Mullah Mustafa Barzani in Iraq, and Qazi Muhammad²⁶ in Iran (Hevian, 2013; Romano, 2002; Sheyholislami, 2011), but none of these were successful. However, in spite of the failure of these activities, the Kurdish demand for independence continued, and they have been subjected to violence, imprisonment, torture, disproportionate military campaigns, and acts of genocide (Fernandes, 2007; Hevian, 2013; Yıldız, 2004; Wanche, 2002). Finally, toward the end of the 20th century, and after 70 years of struggling, one of the Kurd's rebellion movements was successful and obtained autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991.

2.2.1. Iraqi Kurdistan after World War I until Autonomy in 1991

After WWI, in 1921, the British established Iraq and introduced King Faisal as the first king of Iraq. In 1923, in this newly formed government, Southern Kurdistan was attached to Iraq (Stansfield, 2005). However, the Kurds were not happy with this attachment and their revolution began as a response to the decisions which deprived them

²⁵ Sheikh Said Piran was a leader of the Kurdish rebellion, captured around 1925 and publicly hanged in the same year by Kemal Ataturk, the President of the new Turkish Republic

²⁶ Qazi Muhammad was a political and religious leader who became the Head of the Republic of Kurdistan in Mehabad in 22nd Jan 1946. He was the founder of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, the PDKI, which was a successor of a secret organisation "*Komelley Jhíyanewey Kurd*". In 1947, the Kurdish Republic was crushed by Iran's central government, and the Iranian military court executed Qazi and some of his associates.

of independence in their own territory. Since the 1920s, several Kurdish attacks were launched, where their resistance militia '*Peshmerga*' centred on the highest Kurdistan's mountains on the Iraq-Iran border. In the Kurdish political literature, the Kurdish movement is known as 'the struggle in the mountains', and this term is very common in the Kurdish political dictionary.²⁷

The most well-known movement in Iraqi Kurdistan after WWI, was the attempt of Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji to obtain rights for Kurds to gain independence. When the Ottoman empire was defeated in the war, many national movements were launched as a right of self-determination of nations and to obtain independence in that time²⁸ (Hama Emin, 2008). Kurds were among those nations that started their movement to gain an independent state. In late 1918, Sheikh Mahmud was planning to gain independence for Kurdistan, and for this purpose he worked in several ways. Firstly, he led a series of rebellions against Russian for the Ottoman empire at the Iranian border; second, he sent messages to Wilson in Baghdad.²⁹ At the beginning Wilson had agreed to make Sheikh Mahmud governor (*wali*) of Sulaymaniyah,³⁰ under British protection. In that period, the British wanted to help Sheikh Mahmud because they had to solve the political chaos in southern Kurdistan, so they selected Sheikh Mahmud as a capable person who could control the Kurdish anger towards the British (McDowall, 2003; Wanche, 2002). In this

²⁷ "The only friends of the Kurds are the mountains", which is believed to be a Kurdish saying, became the title of a book in 1992, *No Friends But the Mountains* (Bulloch & Morris, 1992).

²⁸ The idea of self-determination was a great hope of many nations to gain their independence, because in World War I, the Allies accepted self-determination as a peace aim. The term is attributed to the President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, who listed self-determination as an important objective for the post-war world.

²⁹ After WWI and the success of Britain in this war, when the south Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) were under British auspices, Arnold Wilson was a commissioner in Baghdad.

³⁰ Sulaymaniyah is a famous city in Iraqi Kurdistan, Sheikh Mahmud launched his movement in this city.

regard, the British believed that Sheikh Mahmud was able to stop the frequent Kurdish rebellions on one hand, and on the other hand they wanted a powerful person to deal with the growing Turkish threat in the region. However, very soon the British relations with Sheikh Mahmud became aggravated, and Sheikh Mahmud downed the British flag in Sulaymaniyah and announced a total independence of Kurdistan. This was not accepted by the British and a series of conflicts happened between the British and Sheikh Mahmud. After a strong resistance from Sheikh, he was wounded and captured by the British armies and sent to Baghdad in 1919. In a military trial, he was sentenced to death. Later the decision was changed to exile and he was sent to India. After that, the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially Sulaymaniyah, became worse which made the British change their mind and recall Sheikh in 1922. The British officially confirmed Sheikh Mahmud's State in Sulaymaniyah and helped him in the formation of the government cabinet.

After a while, the British offer of a Kurdish independent state and for Sheikh Mahmud's position had been repealed for several reasons: first, by 1924, the Iraqi government had already formed and the stability situation of Iraq had changed; second, many international issues had become resolved, especially after the issuance of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which denied providing any independent state for Kurds that had been offered before in the Treaty of Sevres; third, the Turkish threat was also gone; finally, the British found Sheikh Mahmud very ambitious, and would not obey British orders, for example he designating himself as a 'King of Kurdistan' and announced the kingdom of Kurdistan in Sulaymaniyah without permission from the British; furthermore during his rule he led several conflicts against the British. After the British had withdrawn their promise, another war broke out between the British and Sheikh Mahmud; this war was continued until 1925. Finally, the Sheikh's movement was defeated and his Region was destroyed. However, the desire for establishing a Kurdish independent government

didn't come to an end. Sheikh's third revolt started in 1930 and continued for a year but again was without success (McDowall, 2003: 151-176).

The second Kurdish revolution was led by Mullah Mustefa Barzani. He ran the Kurdish struggle for independence for many years. Mullah Mustefa Barzani was one of the most influential leaders in the Kurdish national movement, and he also started his rebellion in the first half of the 20th century and continued until his death. Mustafa Barzani became a leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) from the establishment of the party in 1946 until his death in 1979³¹ (McDowall, 2003). He demanded the establishment of a Kurdish province in northern Iraq during King Faisal's reign, but all the efforts were without success. Later, when the military coup by Abdul Karim Qasim occurred in 1958 and ended the monarchy, there was a hope that the situation of the Kurds would improve, especially when Qasim promised to respond to the demands of the Kurds. However, his promise was not fulfilled, and as a result a war broke out between Barzani and Qasim in 1961 (McDowall, 2003; Wanche, 2002).

When the Ba'ath Party came to power in Iraq following an army coup in July 1968, the Kurdish national movement was very strong, and the newly formed government, which was led by Ahmed Hasan Bakr and Saddam Hussein, planned to put an end to the Kurdish uprisings. They announced a peace plan between the Kurds and the Iraqi Government. On 11 March 1970, Mullah Mustafa Barzani accepted the negotiation and signed the agreement. This agreement was considered a victory for the Kurds because it responded to many of the Kurd's demands, such as providing autonomy for Kurds in the Kurdistan of Iraq and obtaining the Kurds' right of representation in government

³¹ KDP is the largest political party in Iraqi Kurdistan; Masud Barzani, who is the son of Mustafa Barzani, is the leader of the party now.

bodies. The March Agreement was the best deal ever offered to the Iraqi Kurds, as it allowed the Kurdish language to be used as an official language in Kurdistan, the establishment of Kurdish journals, and the appearance of many public organisations, and it attempted to resolve the long-running Kurdish–Iraqi conflict. However, the agreement only lasted four years because the Iraqi government did not adhere to the provision of the agreement. As a result, the outbreak of war between the Kurds and the Iraqi government was announced again in late spring of 1974 (McDowall, 2003; Stansfield, 2013; Wanche, 2002: 27-32).

After 1975, the fighting between the Kurds and the Ba’ath government continued, and the Kurds suffered a lot from the outcome of this war. Between 1975-1990, the Ba’athist regime started conducting several aggressive programmes upon the residents of the Kurdish cities and villages. For example, during 1980-1988, in the war time between Iraq and Iran, the Iraqi forces launched a systematic attempt to defeat the Kurdish resistance movements, accusing Kurds of supporting the Iranian government in the war. In the extermination campaign, Iraqi forces killed 188,000 Kurdish civilians, and forced hundreds of thousands into exile. This war also caused the death of 8,000 male Barzanis in the 1970s-80s. The most infamous incident was on March 16, 1988, with a ruthless chemical weapons attack on the Kurdish town of Halabja, near the Iranian border. Up to 5,000 civilians were killed, thousands more injured and many dying later from health complications (Black, 1993; Kelly, 2013: 364). The Kurdish genocide was centrally planned and administered by the Iraqi government against the entire Kurdish population to destroy the Kurdish movements and make them weak (McDowall, 2000; McDowall, 2003; O’Leary, 2002; Wanche, 2002; Yıldız, 2004; Randal, 1997). Throughout seven decades, after WW1 until 1991, the Kurdish revolutionary struggle has been continuous against all forms of Iraqi government. However, the period of Saddam Hussein’s rule

over Iraq, which lasted for almost 35 years, is considered to be the bloodiest era of Iraq's history.

2.2.2. Iraqi Kurdistan after Autonomy in 1991

After about seven decades of fighting, in 1991, the Kurdistan Region³² eventually became an autonomous region. The second Gulf War in 1991 had brought a new circumstance in the Middle East, especially for Kurdistan, because it resulted in the establishment of the Kurdistan Region. After the defeat and withdrawal of the Iraqi Army from Kuwait in the second Gulf War in 1991, the Kurdish uprising against Saddam Hussein's regime had commenced. In March 1991, the uprising was an inevitable response to the Ba'ath regime of crimes against the people of Iraqi Kurdistan. Since October 1991, Northern Iraq was no longer governed by Saddam Hussein (Wanche, 2002; McDowall, 2003).

During the second Gulf War, Saddam Hussein also took his army towards the south and invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The consequence of the second Gulf War was very harsh for the Iraqi people, it resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and put the entire Iraqi people under international economic and political sanctions (McDowall, 2003). Moreover, tens of thousands of Arab Shi'ite in Iraq were killed by the Iraqi official armies, because of their uprising against Saddam Hussein. However, this war was an open door for Kurds to obtain their autonomy in the northern Iraq Kurdistan territory. After the major defeat of the Iraqi army in February 1991, uprisings were occurring over the entire

³² Deferent terms for Iraqi Kurdistan have been used in this chapter and throughout the thesis, for example Kurdistan Region is a term that used after the autonomous of Kurdistan in 1991; Iraqi Kurdistan will be used because it refers to that part of Kurdistan in Iraq; Northern Iraq is used because it is in the north of Iraq; Southern Kurdistan is also used because this part of Kurdistan is geographically located in the south of Great Kurdistan. Moreover, it has sometimes been referred as the 'free Kurdistan'.

south and north of Iraq. While Saddam Hussein was successful in controlling southern Iraq and defeating the Shi'ite uprisings, he couldn't control the Kurdish uprisings. In April 1991, after only a month of the Kurdish uprising, the Iraqi government attempted to end the chaotic situation in northern Iraq by using the same aggressive actions. However, the attack was not successful because almost all the Kurds in the north had decided to leave Iraq, and fled to the mountains along the border of Iran and Turkey. As a result, a mass exodus of about two million Kurds occurred. The humanitarian disaster would have happened if the United Nation did not intervene and create a plan to safely restore Kurds in their territory in northern Iraq. The United Nations Security Council soon issued the decision number (688) on April 5, 1991; 'the 36th parallel a no-fly zone' had been declared to protect Kurds in the cities and all the areas in the north of Iraq. This historical event became a great victory for the people in Iraqi Kurdistan and resulted in the formation of a semi-independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq (Al-Rawi, 2012; McDowall, 2003; Romano, 2006; Sheyholislami, 2011; Wanhe, 2002; Yıldız, 2004;).

After this sequence of events, the Kurdistan Region had been established, creating such a region has been described as a 'state within a state' and a 'democratic enclave' (Bengio, 2012; Gilley, 2010; Relly et al., 2015). Gilley (2010) labelled Kurdistan as an interventional democratic enclave, which means a foreign intervention, formed during an immediate transition, in order to protect democratic freedoms in some region of an authoritarian state. Gilley indicated three examples of democratic enclaves in recent history, which are, West Berlin after 1948, Kurdistan after the First Gulf War of 1991, and Hong Kong after 1997. He stated "these democratic enclaves are built within the boundaries of existing states as a result of foreign intervention" (Gilley, 2010: 392).

It cannot be denied that the Kurdistan Region has become a source of hope for all Kurds in Iraq and all the other parts of greater Kurdistan in Iran, Turkey and Syria (Sheyholislami, 2011). Politically, the Kurdistan Region is mostly considered as a centre for the other parts of Kurdistan because it is the first victory for the Kurdish throughout their history (Wanche, 2002). The most significant achievement of the Kurdistan Region after 1991 could be summarised as follow:

2.2.2.1. Conducting the First General Elections

For the first time in history, a Kurdish election has been held in the Region. Although several political groups participated in this election, the majority of the Kurdish votes were for the two major political parties. First, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) won 50.8% of the total votes in the 1992 election. This party was established in 1946 and was the first official party that was found to stand against the Iraqi government for Kurdish rights. KDP set up the military units or militias '*Peshmerga*' in 1962 (Stansfield, 2003: 70). Mustafa Barzani was the first leader of the party, and he served as the party leader from the beginning until his death in 1979. After his death, his son Masoud Barzani was elected president of the party in 1979 until now. Masoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region, was directly elected with 69.6% of the total votes (McDowall, 2003; Stansfield 2016; Wanche, 2002; Yıldız, 2004).

Second, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) obtained 49.2% of the 1992 the Kurdish first election. This party was officially established on 1 June 1975. After the collapse of the Kurdish Revolution in 1975, Jalal Talabani coordinated some left-wing groupings and split from the KDP, and announced the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in Damascus. He has been the secretary general since its establishment. Since then, the PUK and the KDP have become the two major rival parties in the Kurdistan

region, each with an almost equal power circle. Talabani has been elected as President of Iraq for two terms in 2005 to 2014. However, in the middle of his second term as president, Jalal Talabani suffered a stroke on 18 December 2012,³³ which made him unable to continue in his position as president. Since then, he has received intense health care (McDowall, 2003; Yıldız, 2004).

2.2.2.2. Establishment of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)

After holding the election, the first Kurdistan Regional Government was formed; this was the Kurdish hope for many years. The representatives of the two major political parties (KDP and PUK) in the new Kurdish government were almost balanced. Throughout the 1990s up to 2003, these two political parties were running the government.

2.2.2.3. Growth of Democratic Organisations

Another achievement of the Kurdish during the 1990s was providing a space for many political parties to operate in Kurdistan freely and establishment of many civil society organisations, especially for women and youth people. This was considered a bright sign for the development of democracy in Kurdistan.

During the 1990s, a small sign of democracy appeared in the Kurdistan Region, however many obstacles were in the way of development. The Kurdistan Region suffered from many internal and external setbacks which have entirely impeded growth of democracy throughout the decade. For example, the political system of the region was

³³ Associated Press in Baghdad. Tuesday 18 December 2012.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/18/iraq-president-jalal-talabani-suffers-stroke>

characterised by instability for the entire decade, 1991-2003. The neighbouring countries, such as Iran and Turkey, apparently were interfering in the political affairs of the Kurdistan Region. Another major factor that has resulted in weaknesses in the KRG during the 1990s was the economic embargo that was imposed, which has blocked progress in Kurdistan deeply. As a consequence of the defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War in 1991, Iraq (including the Kurdistan Region) were isolated economically and were unable to establish formal economic relations, especially in relation to selling oil, which Iraq was and still is heavily dependent on the revenues from (OECD, 2016).

However, the major weakness of the Region was caused by frequent internal conflicts. In the late 1990s, KDP forces clashed with *Parti Kirekarani Kurdistan* (PKK) (Kurdistan Workers' Party). Then, in 2000, fighting between PUK and PKK also broke out. Most importantly, only two years after the first elections took place, in May 1994, Civil War broke out between the two major political parties in Kurdistan, the KDP and PUK. The clashes led to around 2,000 deaths on both sides between 1994-1997. This war had an intense negative effect on the semi-autonomy, which resulted in many weaknesses in the Kurdistan Region. For example, Barzani and Talabani's competition for power kept the Kurds politically divided. As a consequence of the internal/civil war, the Kurdistan territory geographically divided into two areas, where each political party had complete control over their area. This division has remained in place even up to now. Between 1994-1999, two political administrations were in place in Kurdistan. PUK has had control over Sulaymaniyah and all surrounded small cities, and these territories have been described as a green zone; the KPD controlled Erbil and Dhok, and its area is described as the yellow zone (McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011; Yıldız, 2004).



Figure 2.2: Map of the KDP Yellow Zone and the PUK Green Zone in Kurdistan Region

Providing this overview of the history of Kurdistan was to introduce the Kurdish history as a preface to the next section, which will clarify the nature of the relationship between media and politics. It is quite clear that the Region has had a tragic political history and it is considered one of the nations that had and is still suffering for its independence. Like many nations who have been deprived of their own independent state, the Kurdish have attempted to gain their rights. This aim affects many, if not all, aspects of the Kurdish life, and one of those areas is the media. The media are very connected to politics in the past and present. Providing the detail of Kurdish recent history was required in order to reveal a strong connection between the media and politics, which has been emphasised throughout the thesis. Therefore, in the next section, there will be an overview of the media history through in the last century. The presentation will be through the same division of the modern Kurdish history which was presented above. It will begin with the early history of the media in Kurdistan, and the main focus will be on the development of the media after 1991.

2.3. Early History of Kurdish Media until 1991

The history of the Kurdish media started in 1898, when the first Kurdish newspaper *Kurdistan* was published. *Kurdistan* newspaper had been established by the princely family of Badirkhan in exile in Cairo because Istanbul would not grant permission for the newspaper. Although Egypt was also ruled by the Ottoman Empire, the central government in Istanbul had less control over that area. However, due to the pressure from the Ottoman Empire authorities, the newspaper was forced to move to Geneva then London, and, finally, to Folkestone, UK until it was terminated in 1902 (Hassanpour, 1992; McDowall, 2003: 90; Sheyholislami, 2011). Establishing the *Kurdistan* newspaper is considered a great event in the history of the Kurdish press, not only for being the first Kurdish newspaper, but it changed the Kurdish language from only spoken language and poetry to a language that could be used for writing and, more specifically, for journalistic style writing.



Figure 2.3: Front page of *Kurdistan* newspaper

The *Kurdistan* and the other newspapers that were issued in the beginning of the 20th century have served the national Kurdish campaign in terms of language, culture, and politics, and therefore play an important role in the history of Kurdistan. Azad Hama Amin, the General Secretary of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate spoke of the political importance of *Kurdistan* newspaper by saying:

The *Kurdistan* newspapers' anniversary is seen among Kurds as a history of the political movement, the history of the *Kurdistan* newspaper is a history of Kurdish independence struggles. As we see, currently, all the government institutions consider the anniversary of the *Kurdistan* newspaper as a national day and celebrate every year on 22 April to commemorate this day.³⁴

³⁴ My research in-depth interview, 10 November 2015

Throughout the 20th century, most newspapers and magazines raised political concerns. The print media tried to consolidate nationalist feelings amongst Kurds and implicitly advocated for the Kurdish Liberation Movement (Hassanpour, 1996; McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011). To explain these attempts, this chapter will go into details of the Kurdish media orientations after World War I until the independence of Kurdistan in 1991. Generally, the media in this period has been divided into two different models:

2.3.1. The Kurdish Public Media

After World War I, the British mandate in Iraq attempted to establish a Kurdish newspaper in order to cover the political affairs and promote British policies. *Tegaiishtni Rasti* (Understanding the Truth) was the first newspaper, issued on January 1, 1918. Major Soane³⁵ was the editor and was assisted by Shukri Fazli. *Tegaiishtni Rasti* released 67 editions, the last edition was issued on January 27, 1919. Then, *Peshkewtin* (Progress) appeared as the first paper that was printed in the Kurdistan Region. It was also issued by the British on 29 April 1920, 144 were published and it continued until 29 June 1922 (Hassanpour, 1996). These two newspapers were in line with the British, since both were directed by Major Soane; however, they benefited the Kurdish people in the formulation of Kurdish journalism and promoting the Kurdish writing system (Syam, 2017). Another two newspapers, *Jiyanewe* (Rebirth) then *Jiyan* (Life), were issued during the British mandate in Iraq and Kurdistan. *Jiyanewe* (Rebirth) was first issued in Sulaymaniyah on 18 August 1924, then stopped on 14 Jan 1926, to be replaced by *Jiyan* (Life) which started on 21st January 1926, released 553 editions, and then terminated on the 10th March 1938.

³⁵ Major E. B. Soane, British Political Officer and general director in Sulaimaniyah in 1919.

It was a weekly newspaper, political, literal and social oriented, issued in Sulaimaniyah. Since both newspapers were sponsored by the government, they were affiliated with the British and criticised Sheikh Mahmud's movement for its destruction in the Kurdistan Region territory. Another well-known newspaper is *Jin* (Life), which was released in January 26, 1939. It reached 1015 editions when it stopped on February 19, 1963; the owner was Piramerd a famous Kurdish poet. This newspaper is considered to be one of the most important Kurdish newspapers since it had a long life of about 25 years. Throughout the 20th century, most of the newspapers including the state-owned print media, were politically oriented; in other words, they were either used to promote the policy of the government or for spreading the idea of Kurdish rights and Kurdish liberation (Hassanpour, 1996; Rasul, 2012; Sheyholislami, 2011; Syan, 2017).

In the monarchy period and the following republican governments, the establishment of private media in Iraq was allowed. Some of the Kurdish nationalist intellectuals, such as Piramerd and Hussein Huzni Mukiryani, contributed towards the development of the Kurdish publications and ran some newspaper and magazines. However, in regard to the broadcasting media, due to the high cost of establishing broadcasting media, the radio and later the television were all a state-owned. None of the Kurdish journalists and intellectuals could open any broadcasting media throughout the first six decades in the twentieth century. In fact, the number of private media remained small because of instability across the Kurdish region, the strict government censorship and the high costs associated with establishing printing presses, until it gradually disappeared altogether by 1985 during the Ba'ath regime period (Sheyholislami, 2011:81), and all the media became state-owned (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011).

The orientation of Kurdish radio and television was different they were less concerned with politics. In the early stages of broadcasting, it was mostly involved in music, culture and entertainment. The first Kurdish radio station in Iraqi Kurdistan started broadcasting just three years after the establishment of the first Iraqi radio station. It was the Baghdad's Kurdish Radio Station which started broadcasting in Baghdad in 1939. Regarding television, it was established in the early 1970s, and Baghdad's Kurdish Channel Station started as the first Kurdish television channel in Iraq. It was also state-owned (Sheyholislami, 2011). The second Kurdish channel was Kirkuk's Kurdish Channel Station, founded in 1974, and is considered the first regional Kurdish TV broadcasting in the Kurdish territories. Its programmes were in Kurdish, Turkmen, Syriac, and also Arabic. However, all the radio and television channels were strictly censored by the Iraqi regime. They were exploited by the Ba'ath government to broadcast propaganda.

During the Ba'ath regime, the Kurdish media were under severe pressure and tightly controlled by the government. All the media publications and broadcasting were focused more on education, entertainment, documentation and the spreading of the Ba'ath Party doctrines. The media type across Iraq (including Kurdistan) was a mixed model of the Authoritarian Media and Communist Media Model (see Chapter Four). The journalists, especially the Kurdish, were not allowed to express their opinions because the government directly controlled the media content, and every individual message had to go through a strong editorial policy. To make certain no critical views were communicated to the public, a strong censorship was in place. All media actors were members of the ruling Ba'ath Party and were treated as a member of the Ba'ath party (Ayish, 2002; Rugh, 2004; Sinjari, 2006). Just like in other Middle Eastern countries, the media were employed for Ba'athist propaganda and served government policies

(McDowall, 2003:11; Sheyholislami, 20). In the Iraqi media, no challenges to the Ba'ath government were tolerated. Sinjari (2006) pointed out that, as a result of these restrictions, about 800 Iraqi journalists were either arrested or disappeared during this period. In addition, in this period, there were no significant developments in both quality and quantity of the media, The media were totally used as an instrument of propaganda for Iraqi political interests (Amos, 2010; Hurrat & Leidig, 1994; Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008; McDowall, 2003; Sheyholislami, 2011; Sinjari, 2006; Yıldız, 2004).

2.3.2. Kurdish National Movements Media (Partisan Media)

The Kurdish national movements established a 'clandestine media' as a tool for communication and for spreading awareness of Kurdish rights among the Kurdish people because they were banned and not permitted to issue and distribute in the Kurdistan Region openly. The clandestine newspapers were operating and broadcasting from the Kurdistan mountains because the Kurdish resistance army were based here, on the highest of Kurdistan's mountains on the Iraq-Iran border.³⁶ During the British mandate of Iraq after WWI, this type of media had appeared due to disagreement between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad. As a result, several papers were issued by the Kurdish nationalists. Syan (2017: 271-287), has documented all the Kurdish periodicals in the early 20th century until 1991 in Iraqi Kurdistan. According to him, in that period, 433 newspapers and magazines were published in the Kurdish language, among them 218 were clandestine (see table 2.1).

³⁶ Due to the geographical location and tough conditions of these areas, they were out of the control of central Baghdad and the Iraqi army ,who never reached those series of mountains on the border of Iraq, Turkey and Iran.

Table 2.1: Iraqi Kurdish periodicals issued from 1910-1991, the Kurdish uprising

Years	1910- 1919	1920- 1929	1930- 1939	1940- 1949	1950- 1959	1960- 1969	1970- 1979	1980- 1989	1990- 1991	Total
Kurdish Periodicals	2	12	7	41	54	68	105	135	9	433

Source: Syan (2017: 271-287).

The clandestine newspaper started from Sheikh Mahmoud Barzani's revolution. This period is considered a prosperous phase in the Kurdish history because during his rule in Sulaymaniyah and even his rebellion he was interested in issuing newspapers. Between 1922-1926, four weekly newspapers were printed by Sheikh; they were, *Bangi Kurdistan* (The Call of Kurdistan), 1922-1926, Then *Roj Kurdistan* (The Day of Kurdistan), 1922-1923, *Umed Istiqlal* (The Hope of Independence), 1923-1924, and *Bangi Haq* (The Call of the Right), in 1923, only issued a few. After his defeat, Sheikh took his publisher with him to the *Jassana* cave to continue publishing his newspaper, *Bangi Haq* (The Call of the Right), and this was regarded as a great effort to be recorded in Kurdish media history (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011 Syan, 2017).

After Sheikh Mahmoud's failure, another rebellion appeared in the early 1940s by Barzani. In September 1946, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was officially announced. KDP had issued many clandestine newspapers, however, only a few issues were actually published. The first was *Rizgari*, then in 1955 *Xebat* (Struggle) was issued to replace *Rizgari*. In the beginning, the clandestine newspapers were weak and limited. Due to the pressure from the government, most of these newspapers only lasted for a few months with a very limited number (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011). However, in the second half of the century, especially in the 1960s, the clandestine newspapers had slightly changed towards a better situation, in particular after the military coup by Abdul

Karim Qasim in 1958, which terminated the monarchy in Iraq. For a short period, some rights were given to Kurds. The new republican government offered a solution to the Kurdish rebellions and allowed political parties and groups to have their own media openly. Therefore, between 1958-1961, in the first negotiation between the Kurds and Baghdad, the clandestine press was allowed to print and publish in the cities. For example, *Brayeti* (Brotherhood), *Xebat* (Struggle), which were issued by the KDP, began to criticise the administrative style of the Baghdad government, which caused tension between the two sides. As a result, the clandestine media returned to issue in the Kurdistan mountains because the government started to control the all Kurdish political activities in 1962.

As discussed, when the Ba'ath party came to power on 17 July 1968, the newly formed government also suggested a peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue and an agreement was signed between the Kurds and the Iraqi government on 11 March 1970, which included a provision for the use of the Kurdish language and allowed for the development of the Kurdish culture in all forms. During 1970-1974, there was a rapid development of the Kurdish press, and many newspapers and magazines were published (McDowall, 2003; Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011). This period represented a milestone in Kurdish media history because many newspapers started to publish in the Kurdish language.

Nonetheless, the agreement only lasted four years, as the Iraqi government started to control the freedom of expression which had been permitted during the agreement period. Due to the failed negotiation between Baghdad and the Kurdish political, the publications issued by the Kurdish parties and nationalists were banned, many of the newspapers disappeared, and the Kurdish movement resorted to clandestinely printing

and radio stations. On the other side, the Iraqi government managed to control some of them and so they continued to publish in the Kurdish language after they fell into line with the Ba'ath Party.

After 1975, the national political movements resumed to issue some of the clandestine newspapers; this time, it expanded to include another broadcasting media, which was *Dengi Yeketi Nishitmani Kurdistan* (the Voice of the PUK) – this later became *Dengi Geli Kurdistan* (the Voice of the People of Kurdistan). *Radio Dengi Geli Kurdistan* launched in 1979 (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011; Rasul, 2012; Syan, 2017). In fact, the access to these radio stations were very difficult because the Iraqi central government frequently disrupted the signals of these radio stations. Furthermore, the Iraqi Kurdish people were not allowed to listen to these radio channels openly, therefore they were used in secret.

However, the clandestine, also known as partisan, print media in that period was mostly uneven and had many weaknesses regarding design, writing and editing. Both Hassanpour (1992) and Sheyholislami (2011: 81) described the press movements in Kurdistan as low quality, referring to the 'absence of enduring dailies' because they resorted to working underground and the printing facilities were poor, which resulted in low circulation, poor distribution facilities, and some of them were short lived. Nevertheless, scholars (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011; Rasul, 2012; Syan, 2017) asserted that, although clandestine media (both print and broadcast) were operating and distributing in secret organisations, with a very basic outlet, they played a significant role during that period. This form of media could play a great role in the Kurdish nationalist movements by awakening the national consciousness of the Kurdish people and creating a link among the party organisations and the people.

2.3.3. The Kurdish Media After Autonomy 1991

The uprising of Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 affected all aspects of life in Kurdistan, including the media. This event brought a greater change in the media, which was entirely different from before. In this new stage of an emerging political system, dozens of Kurdish newspapers and magazines were started by political parties. For example, in just the first year in 1991, 71 periodicals were established (Rasul, 2012). These newspapers and magazines were operating under a new model where, unlike before, the media were not state-owned; everyone had the right to issue a newspaper or any other media type. However, due to the issues related to cost and lack of experience, individuals were not attempting to establish any private media; the majority of the media channels were directed by a particular political party across the region. Furthermore, as explained, throughout the history of the media in Kurdistan, the media already had connections with politics. Thus, all the political parties, including newly established ones, started to have their own media outlets, such as radio, television and newspaper (Al-Rawi, 2012; Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011; Rasul, 2012).

These are some of the media outlets that have been established by the two political parties: The KDP directly run a significant number of radio, television and newspaper outlets due to its position as the largest party in the government, which has resulted in the economic growth of the party in the region. Therefore, this party has had more opportunities to establish a greater number of media outlets from 1991 until now. In September 1992, they partly resumed issuing the *Xebat* (Struggle); this newspaper was first published during the Kurdish movement in the mountains of Kurdistan on 4th May 1959. The KDP also issued another daily newspaper, *al-Ta'akhi*, published in Arabic. Regarding radio and television, the KDP started broadcasting *Kurdistan* television in

1991 and a wide number of radio stations. It also launched the first Iraqi Kurdish satellite television channel in 1999, which was the first Satellite television to broadcast from the free land of Iraqi Kurdistan (Sheyholislami, 2011). This satellite television was important because it was broadcasting to the other Kurdish regions in Iran, Syria and Turkey. The Kurdish population of these regions were very interested in watching a Kurdish satellite television because they had never seen Kurdish broadcasting or been exposed to the political activities.

PUK Media, since 1991, also directly supervised a great number of media outlets. For example, it launched its daily *Kurdistani Nuwe* (New Kurdistan), which was launched on 12 January 1992, then a daily newspaper in Arabic, *Al-Ittihad* (The Union), and *Chawder* (Monitor) a daily bulletin in Kurdish and Arabic. In addition to a wide number of radio stations that broadcasted in Kurdish and Arabic, PUK ran television channels *Gali Kurdistan* (Kurdistan People television), then opened *Dngi Gali Kurdistan* (Voice of the People of Kurdistan), followed by, in 2000, its satellite television, *KurdSat*.

The Kurdish media in the 1990s saw progress as well as failure. Kurdish scholars pointed out, on the one hand, the development of the media has been huge, especially in terms of quantity. They stated, although the involvement of the political parties has had a clear impact on the media in which it affected the independence of the media, on the other hand, the political parties have played a leading role to improve the media. In this period, a considerable amount of money was spent on the media, and there were competition among the Kurdish political parties, especially the two ruling parties, to have more developed media outlets. For example, within the first few months, on 12 January 1992, the PUK issued its first newspaper *Kurdistani nuwe* (New Kurdistan). Following this, in September 1992, the KDP launched *Xebat* (Struggle). Each of the major parties

were expanding their media outlets in their specific area.³⁷ Also, when the KDP established the first Kurdish satellite channel *KTV* in 1999, in the following year, in 2000, the PUK also launched its first satellite channel *KurdSat*.

Nevertheless, the Kurdish critics (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011) also identified some limitations in the Kurdish media during the 1990s, which can be summarised as follows: first, the media outlets were under supervision of the political parties and they were working for the political interests, which will hinder the development of the media. In particular, during the civil war³⁸ in 1994 to 1997, the media has been affected negatively, because the war has intensified the use of the media as war propaganda and were used for generating division among political groups. As a result, there was a lack of commitment to the ethics of the profession of journalism in the media organisations. Second, during the 1990s, there were no independent media outlets in the Kurdistan Region. Thus, the neutrality and objectivity often put across was not very balanced and affected the credibility in the news stories because the Kurdish journalists and writers were strongly affiliated with the specific political parties.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented a review of the literature on the modern history in Kurdistan. It tackled the Kurdish struggle within the sequence of governments throughout the 20th century. Providing this quick overview of Kurdistan history was necessary

³⁷ After the civil war, Kurdistan cities implicitly divided between KDP and PUK, for example all the KDP media outlets are located in Erbil and Dhok, which is the dominating party in this area, while the PUK media outlets mainly exist in Sulaymaniyah.

³⁸ Please see above, page 81.

because of its direct relationship with the development of the media. As the Kurdish media have always been employed to support the Kurdish big question, in which the Kurds have been deprived of their independent state as have the other nations in the Middle East, such as Arabs, Turks and Persians. Kurds believe that they have this right as they represent the largest nation in the world without a state. However, throughout history they haven't been granted this right, thus the aim of obtaining an independent state is present in all the existing Kurdish cultural and political aspects, including the media.

For this purpose, the current chapter has presented a detailed review of the primary aims of the media throughout the 20th century. In other words, the Kurdish rebellion has contributed to the emergence of the media because they want to deliver their message through the media during the 20th century. Therefore, it could be said that the Kurdish revolutionary leaders and the Kurdish intellectuals have established the press because they need it for their own purpose, which is to serve the Kurdish question. As a result, both the Kurdish movements and the media have benefited each other; the Kurds could spread their message through the media and the Kurdish media has been developed and flourished by the Kurdish leaders and nationalists, and in this matter, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region has led among the other parts of Kurdistan.³⁹

After providing a detailed background about the nature of the media, it has become clear that the Kurdish media before 1991 was employed to support the role of the Kurdish nationalist movement, by spreading the idea of Kurdish national liberation and

³⁹ Kurds in Iraq have the largest contribution because the other Kurdistan regions in Iran, Turkey, and Syria cannot read or write in their own language because their government has banned the learning of the Kurdish language in the educational syllabus. Only Iraqi Kurds were allowed to learn Kurdish at school. The cultural movements mostly occurred in the Iraqi Kurdistan, though all the types of media could protect their identity (Hassanpour, 1996; Sheyholislami, 2011).

informing militants about resistance activities during the rebellion period. This type of Kurdish media has become a partisan media after the success of the revolution in 1991.

In the era between 1991 and 2003, when Iraqi Kurdistan officially became an autonomous part of Iraq, unlike Saddam Hussein's controlled area, Kurdish media outlets in the region have witnessed a development in terms of quantity and quality. Nevertheless, despite some development, the media has also been significantly affected by the political and economic crisis within the Region. As stated, the political powers have dominated in Kurdistan, and one of the controlled areas was the media. The media were divided sharply between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). One of the downsides of the civil war is it made the idea of independence very remote in Kurdistan. As a result, huge obstacles prevented the media to operate democratically, although the Kurdish leaders always claimed they created journalistic freedom. The democratic principles of the media were not developed much, as the relation between the media and politics remains strong, but in a different way. For example, although there was freedom in opening media outlets and censorship was abolished, there were no private or independent media outlets because the government, or rather, the two political parties that were running the government, never encouraged the establishment of the independent media in Kurdistan. It was rare to find criticism toward the political parties' performance. Due to their successful Kurdish uprising and gaining autonomy from Baghdad in 1991, every Kurd, especially journalists and writers, were strongly affiliated with the political parties, in particular the KDP and PUK. Therefore, all the media were working for political groups; journalists were willingly serving those political purposes because they wanted to serve the Kurdish issue. Serving the Kurdish issue was considered the greatest responsibility of the Kurdish journalist, to protect the Kurdish autonomy in Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, although the press law that

was issued on 25 April 1993, there is no pre-publication censorship on the media, political censorship was still applied. Criticising the government was not much tolerated, and the press law had many paragraphs to restrict the press.

However, towards the end of the 20th century and after almost a decade of the Kurdish government in the Kurdistan Region, the idea of sanctification of the political parties gradually reduced among journalists and Kurdish writers. This deviation has occurred when journalists found that the Kurdish parties have selfish aims to enrich themselves and their interests and put the Kurdish issue to the side. Due to a huge amount of perceived corruption in the Kurdish government, Kurdish journalists have attempted to establish a new type of media, which is the private media, where the primary aim of the media is to fight the government's corruption and criticise every misconduct in politics.

Chapter Four in this thesis presents all the changes of the media with regard to the landscape development, a gradual shift from partisan roles of the media to adopting the private and independent media, the media progress after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. In this period, journalists started to think about establishing a critical media, and the media have seen many significant changes and developed from several different perspectives.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on applied communication research to achieve a deeper understanding of the development of the media since the 2003 Iraqi war. The Kurdistan region of Iraq is used as a case study and concentrates on a critical review of the role of the news media in the process of democratisation. In this research, literature has been reviewed to enhance understanding of the theoretical background of the research problem. The first two chapters, mainly focused on two key concepts namely media and democracy. Kurdish history and media history have also been reviewed to clarify how political communication is deeply connected to the Kurdistan history. As an exploratory attempt, providing this review of literature was important to theorise the role of media in the democracy in Kurdistan. In any new transitional democratic, the media will be influenced by the new political system. At the same time the media's role can be very influential for democracy because of its potential impact on political decisions.

This chapter of the thesis represents the methodology of the research and justifies the adaptation of methodological research tools that were used for obtaining reliable data. The research aimed to examine the new situation for the media in the Kurdistan Region and to explore the democratic role that news media plays in the process of democratisation. For this purpose, this research has employed qualitative research methods to analyse the primary data gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions. Patton (2002) defined qualitative research as attempting to understand the uniqueness of personal experience and engagement. Through this method, the researcher

has direct contact and a close relationship with the people, situation, and phenomenon under study. The qualitative research is not without weaknesses, this type of research often depend on the interpretive approach, therefore it would be easily influence by the researcher's values and background. Furthermore, qualitative data is less structured; therefore, it is more difficult to analyse. However, this feature can be considered as a uniqueness of qualitative research because in an open and wide discussion, the researcher may produce findings that were not determined in advance (Patton, 2002). In this regard, qualitative data may help to explain the difficult questions or issues that have been addressed in this research. Therefore, qualitative research is the most effective methodology to achieve the research aims.

This chapter consists of two main sections, the first part looks at the rationale of using interview and focus group discussion methods, and the procedures of conducting these tools, while the second part provides a detailed review of the data analysis methods. It will go through thematic analysis plans, explaining how the data will be presented and analysed systematically throughout the rest of the thesis chapters.

3.2. Research Methods

3.2.1. In-depth Interviews

The purpose of conducting interviews for this study is to collect in-depth, qualitative data about the contribution the news media in Kurdistan in supporting democratic reform. The interview strategy has been chosen because it is one of the most established qualitative usages in communication research (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1997). It equips the researcher with a deeper understanding by collecting narratives from

participants. In the detailed individual interviews, there is more opportunity for the researcher to gather detailed information about the questions. Patton (2002: 341) states that the purpose of an interview is “to allow us to enter the other person’s perspective”. The in-depth interview gives the chance for a more personal communication with the respondents; because trust builds up in the face to face contact and encourages the participants to be open and honest. Kvale (1996) explains that interviews in a qualitative research study may be used to understand the respondents’ world because it is rooted in the perceptions of their own experiences, which entails covering factual and meaningful information. The weaknesses of this method are the amount of time required for interviewing and transcribing (Bryman, 2001), as well as the cost involved, for example for travelling to the origin country or to another city. Also, some of the data may contain irrelevant information, as was discovered during data analysis (Walliman, 2006).

For this research, field-work was conducted in Kurdistan during two different periods, in 2015. I travelled to the Kurdistan Region in February, then for another round of interviews and focus group discussions, I travelled again between October and November. Almost %90 of the interviews were conducted in the Kurdistan Region in both Sulaymaniyah and Erbil cities. One on one interviews were conducted on-site at a preferred place for the interviewee. Only two of the interviews were done via Skype here in the UK. Additionally, internet/telephone was used to draw in additional clarification and contributions. The interviews’ length was unrestricted to ensure that all the important issues were covered. The longest interview was 62 minutes and the shortest was 26 minutes. All the communications (email, telephone, messenger) were carried out in the Kurdish Sorani dialect. All interviews were recorded using an audio digital recorder, after gaining permission to record.

Safety and ethical issues of the research had to be considered for the field work. First, regarding the safety, due to the ISIS war which was prevalent in the Kurdistan Region in 2015, I had to fill in a safety issues form from the university to ensure that the safety of the places I intended to travel to could be checked. I hoped the two big cities which I planned to conduct my field work were safer compared to other areas in Kurdistan. Second, for the ethical issues, I had a phone call/email contact with the chosen individual interviewees almost a month before travelling, to make sure about the procedure. In the email correspondence and the telephone calls I introduced myself and gave them an introduction to my topic, the focus of study and the interview, then asked if they were willing to take part in the research and let me interview them. Then during the actual interviews, I reiterated and confirmed that the interview was only for academic purpose and the data would be stored securely. At the end of the interview, I expressed my thanks for their participation in the interview.

There are different types of interviews. Patton (1980: 206) outlines four types: informal conversational interviews, interview guide approaches, standardized open-ended interviews and closed quantitative interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) add structured interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) identify semi-structured interviews and group interview. The semi-structured interview method has been employed in this study because it is a more flexible interview tool and commonly associated with qualitative research. The one-to-one interview format was applied to discuss the research with open-ended questions to gain a deep insight into the participants' opinions and judgements about the development of the media in Kurdistan in the democratisation process. Also, open-ended questions were used for them to be easy to comprehend by all participants, as Neuman (2000) states, open-ended questions allow the respondent to answer in more detail and to clarify their responses whenever needed. In other words, open-ended

questions allow the participants to develop their own responses as there are no boundaries guiding their answers. Furthermore, the researcher can request clarification of the responses and, consequently, get a more methodical understanding of the ideas and thoughts expressed.

For the research interviews, a set of questions were carefully devised to obtain a comprehensive knowledge about the media position in the democratisation and the role of the media in supporting democracy in the Kurdistan Region. To build an appropriate set of questions for the interviews, I read and studied many sources of previous surveys and academic research such as Van Belle (2000), Becker and Vlad (2011), Freedom House, IREX and Reporters without Borders international surveys. With consideration for the nature of the Kurdistan situation, my interview questions were inspired by those academic and international criteria which evaluate developments of the media. Then, I classified the questions into three categories to analyse the working environment for the news media in Kurdistan.

- Legal environment: This includes the examination of both the laws and regulations which might influence media. For example, constitutional provisions to protect journalists and media freedom. The independence of the judiciary and of official media regulation.
- Political environment: This includes the evaluation of the degree of political control over the content of news media. For example, issues which examine the editorial independence, a lack of official censorship and self-censorship by journalists.

- Economic environment: This includes the structure of media ownership. For example, control of the media through subsidies from the state or other actors, the impact of corruption and bribery on content.

3.2.1.1. Categories of Interviewees in the In-Depth Interviews

This study included 20 participants from the Kurdistan Region. Participants were chosen from different areas to gain more objective data for example in the two big cities in the Kurdistan Region in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Furthermore, although this research did not focus on the different viewpoints, I have attempted to include every significant aspect of the participants' thoughts and beliefs in the interview process. This had to be considered to gain a complete picture of the Kurdish political background, and obtain substantial data with a wide variety of views. Thus, the researcher expected that there would be some variation in the answers due to the range of diverse backgrounds in opinion, political views and geographical area. Most people in Kurdistan strictly belong to either Secular views, Communist ideas or Islamic beliefs. Although, this made the process of analysis rather difficult, it did make it more robust.

All the participants had a deep understanding of the media in Kurdistan; their experience was between 15 to 30 years in the media, even the politicians all have experience in journalism because they started their work as writers or journalists. The categories and the number of in-depth interviewees' in the research were as follows: six senior journalists, three media academicians, three politicians/ government employees, three media staff, two media law experts and three members of a civil society/ media organization.

As shown in the categories, some of the interviewees were holding official positions of authority or represent the head of the local and international media organisations. For example, Abdulrahman Sdiq was minister for the Environment in Iraq, in addition to his skill he has an extensive knowledge about development of the media in the democratic transformation. He has hundreds of radio, television and newspaper interviews, he is considered as one of the Kurdish intellectuals in Kurdistan. Also, I met Soran Omer, a member of parliament in the Kurdistan Region Government, he is chair of the human rights committee and therefore has an extensive knowledge of Human Rights issues. Previously, Soran Omer worked as a journalist for more than 15 years. In the interview, I discussed the current situation of the media in Kurdistan in detail, and he generously gave me some valuable data about violence against journalists and the level of corruption in the Kurdistan Region. I also managed to fix an appointment with Rahman Ghareeb, a coordinator of the Metro Centre to Defend Journalists for the local press freedom. In an open interview, we discussed most of the issues related to violence and journalist's right in Kurdistan, and thankfully he gave me all their documents containing statistics about what journalists have endured in the last few years. Also, I had the opportunity to interview Azad Hama Ameen the General Secretary of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) who has a long experience in both law and journalism in the Kurdistan Region. From his interview, I obtained valuable information about the role of the media in Kurdistan. Finally, I also met Asos Hardy, who is considered a father of the private/independent media model in the Kurdistan Region. He was the founder and first editor-in-chief of the first independent newspaper *Hawlati*, in 2000. Hardy has been awarded *Gebran Tueni* by World Association of Newspaper and News Publisher (WAN-IFRA) in Beirut in 2009 for Freedom of Speech and Free Press. He is one of the well-known journalists in the Kurdistan Region, in his newspaper, he openly criticises the

government and the Kurdish administrators for their involvement in corruption. He has been attacked by unknown people because of his speech.

During the interviews, I noted that nowadays, in the last few years, after the establishment of many private and independent media outlets, the Kurdish people are more confident in expressing their opinions without fear from the authorities. The interviewees talked about a lot of sensitive issues such as government corruption and politicians, which was very helpful for my research. For example, almost all the interviewees indicated the existence of corruption in Kurdistan openly, furthermore they mentioned a practice of strong editorial policies in the news media, despite claims of being free from the government and political influence. For example, in the interview with Habib Karkuki he described editorial policies in the media as follows:

The media outlets are motivated by editorial policies. Journalists tend not to publish any stories that might upset the owner and result in them losing their job. I personally monitored the television news interview programmes, and found out that the presenters are censoring their questions about corruptions when they interview powerful people in the government such as the prime minister and other powerful political leaders in Kurdistan. However, for other interviews with politicians who have less power such as parliament members or the other ministers, the presenters are intensifying their questions about the misconduct of politicians and ask very sensitive ones about corruption (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

My close relationship with those working in the media and confidence allowed me to gain more in-depth reliable information when asking specific and sensitive questions, for example the level of independence of the news media in terms of editorial policies and political interference. My experience in building up trust for talking about a sensitive issue was very helpful. Another skill which helped during conducting the interview was changing the way the questions were expressed, and omitting some questions when required. For example, not all the interviewees were asked all the

questions, for those who were experts in law, I emphasised more on the legal environment of the media, and the same approach was taken for the interviewees from the media organisations and politicians. I focussed more on the media's functions and the media situation in Kurdistan. However, among the interviewees, still there were some who had extensive knowledge about all parts of the interview questions (political legal and economic) such as Rebeen Hardy, Azad Hama Ameen, Asos Hardy Shwan Muhamad and Kamal Rauf. I asked them all the interview questions in detail, therefore these interviews mostly lasted for around an hour. As a result, there is a different range of using the interview's answers in the finding chapters, some of them have been used in the quotes several times and some others only a few times. In other words, the value of the information differs from one interviewee to another, because despite the careful planning that was undertaken, a few of the interviewees' responses did not have much importance to the research aims.

3.2.2. Focus Group Discussions

The focus group approach also applied to illuminate this research and obtain more qualitative data for the first and fourth research questions which were focused on first, the development of the media in the process of democratisation and second, performing a watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan. Scholars have expected that the focus group allows the investigator to explore new themes and to understand phenomena from the respondents' experience. In addition, that it would be possible to obtain deeper levels of interpretation and to make important connections (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1997). Focus group discussions are also considered to be a friendly research method, as it allows participants to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings comfortably.

In this research, two focus group discussions were conducted; each group consisted of five people. The group size was kept intentionally small, to give everyone an opportunity to participate and help the participants to feel comfortable when sharing their opinions and beliefs. This sense of security may not occur in larger groups, a smaller focus group make the sessions more focused and controlled. One of the focus group discussions was specified for experts and academic in the media field, and the other was for journalists who were either managers or editors of the different media outlets and media organisations. In selecting these homogenous groups of participants, years of experience, qualifications etc. were considered. Stewart and Shamdasani (1997) explain that interaction will be easier among similar participants.

The first focus group session which was for the media experts was carried out on 12th November 2015. It took place at the University of Sulaymaniyah, in Dr Hemin office who was one of the group participants. The group discussion lasted for 93 minutes. The members of the focus group discussions were selected carefully, for example, three of the participants have a PhD in media and journalism and the other two have Master. All of them are a university lecturer and they all have many years of experience in media. This group was selected to give their knowledge about the watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan, which is the fourth research question. The participants were enthusiastic in the discussion and actively shared and gave their information generously.

The second focus group was for editors and staff members of the media organisations in the Kurdistan Region, it took place in the *GK* radio station, in the office of Anwer Hussein, who was also one of the group discussion participants, the session lasted for 95 minutes. All the participants in the group were senior journalists, their age ranged between 35-45, their working experience ranged between 15-25 years. I specified

this category of editors in media organisations who were experienced journalists in the region to receive a substantial answer for the first research question. The participants discussed in detail the most recent changes, developments and setbacks of the media in Kurdistan. Indeed, these editors and experts being knowledgeable and experienced journalists were able determine the situation of media and the development of the media post war after the collapse of Saddam Hussein regime.

I supervised both two group discussions; I introduced the topic and stated objectives for the focus group discussion. After a brief introduction of the topic, as well as guidelines for the session, I tried to position myself as a researcher seeking to gain information from all the different participant's viewpoint. Gibbs (1997) indicated that the role of the moderator or researcher's skill is very significant in leading the group discussion successfully. In this regard, I established a good understanding with all the participants. I tried to keep a balance and give opportunities to all participants, not imposing any of my own ideas that might lead the interviewee into saying what is required. Another task as a supervisor of the session is the control of time, to give everyone's time to speak. It was important to not let the group be dominated by any participant and encourage everyone to have their say. In this matter, the personal skills I have of leading the debate were very important. I have three years' experience as the editor and presenter of debate programmes in one of the local television stations.

Furthermore, to stimulate the discussions, the use of general and nonspecific questions was deliberate. I first started with the general question issues relating to the position of the news media, such as the strengths and weaknesses of media in Kurdistan, although this question was one of the initial questions in the question list it was easy to discuss therefore it was specifically designed to encourage interaction among the

participants, then gradually I moved to specific questions, for example the strict editorial policy for media in Kurdistan; independence of the media in Kurdistan; the watchdog function and the contribution of the news media in improving government accountability. Throughout this process, the sessions were recorded, in addition I wrote some of my own notes in the meetings.

Regarding the use of the in-depth interview and the focus group discussion, the portion of data that has been derived from each of these two main methods is given equal weighting through the coding framework. Additionally, to complement these data sources, this study employs other qualitative methods to interpret and examine the population under research. Accordingly, besides collecting primary data, I take advantage of secondary data. For example, in chapter five, I have reviewed the Kurdish Press Law articles in detail, with support from the participants' opinions and others in the academic research field. Using these documents is very important in any research, since they provide further details to confirm and support data from other sources. Furthermore, throughout the analysis, I have also used a range of statistical data collected from secondary sources, such as using data from official and academic reports and documents. My observations and personal experience as a Kurdish native researcher and a writer for a long time in the field of media have enabled me to observe closely the development of the media in Kurdistan.

3.3. Data Analysis

As stated above, this research has employed qualitative research as a type of research that is systematically conducted and involves the collection of evidence. This thesis uses a thematic analysis strategy to manage the data that was gathered from the in-

depth interview and focus group discussions; this has been done through the application of coding and the creation of themes. Thematic analysis is described as a tool to use across different methods rather than a specific method (Boyatzis, 1998). Scholars from different disciplines have applied thematic analysis, and it is widely used in political communication research. Thematic analysis involves searching throughout the data that has been gathered from the interviews, focus groups, or texts for identifying and analysing patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Themes are something important captured in the data which have relation to the overall research questions. In this thesis, several themes have been discovered which were embedded throughout the interviews and focus groups. For example, in this research, when the researcher interested to talk about violence against journalists, collected all the information about the concept from the raw data, and after determining the strengths and the power of emphasising by the interviewees, then the concept became a theme. After that, transcribed what was related to this theme turned into a brief outline, as a result a strong theme emerged with several categories which formed sub-themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006: 86-93) indicated a step-by-step process in doing thematic analysis. This research is inspired by their six phases in the process of analysing the interview and focus group data, the steps are:

1. Familiarisation with the data, this phase is considered very important for the researcher because they need to be familiar with their own data. For this purpose, I worked on the data by listening to and rewinding the recorded data several times and noting down initial ideas. This was followed by transcription of the necessary information from the data, hence not every specific word of the interview and focus group sessions has been transcribed. In this regards, Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated that thematic

analysis does not require transcription to be the same as discourse or narrative analysis. However, they emphasised the necessity of transcribing only the important information.

2. Generating initial codes, Boyatzis (1998: 63) defines categorisation codes as “the most basic element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon.” Code words can be used in qualitative research as a signpost that point to things in the data. It will help the researcher to collect the things that they have noticed so that the researcher can subject them to further analysis. In this study, the researcher looked at the data systematically for interesting concepts to form the basis of themes. Accordingly, sixteen codes were gathered from the texts of the interviews, then grouped into segments, and organised.

3. Searching for themes, after the process of coding which enabled better analytic control of the data, then the codes could be easily fragmented, examined, compared, conceptualised and categorised (Strauss & Corbin, 2007: 61). This process starts when the analyst completed coding the repeated and interested concept. Then this phase has begun, which is more focused on the broader level of the pattern that might make a potential theme. For example, thinking about the relationship between codes and between themes, what might be the main themes and what go to sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

4. Reviewing themes, in this phase the researcher will look at the chosen themes to decide if the theme is to be alone or needs to be combined, or sometimes discarded because there is not enough data to support them (Braun and Clarke, 2006) This will be done through reviewing the raw data extracts to see if they formed in a coherent pattern. Then the researcher needs to be sure about the validity of the themes in relation to the data set and that they fit together.

5. Defining and naming themes, for each individual theme, the researcher needs to conduct and write a detailed analysis. As well as identifying the ‘story’ that each theme tells, it is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall ‘story’ that you are telling about the data, in relation to the research question or questions. Sub-themes are essentially themes-within-a-theme. They can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme. In this research within each theme, in each chapter of the findings several themes have been identified then every theme consists of several sub-themes.

6. Producing the report, in the final phase of the analysis the researcher must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. For example, there should be enough extracts to make a comprehensive argument in the data analysis and at the same time should be in relation to the research question and literature.

Table 3.1: Finding Chapters Design

Chapter Findings	Research Questions	Methodological Tool	Themes & Codes
Chapter Four	RQ1. How have the media developed in the transition process of Iraqi Kurdistan?	In-depth interview & Focus group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current division of the media type • Media Codes and Ethics in Kurdistan
Chapter Five	RQ3. In which way has the legal and economic environment enabled or hindered the role of the news media in the democratisation process?	In-depth interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal environment of the media in Kurdistan • Protection of journalist’s rights by media organisations • Access of Information • Economic environment of the media in Kurdistan • Political Funds to news media outlets • Journalists’ bribed
Chapter Six	RQ2. Has the challenging political situation hindered the	In-depth interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violence against journalists

	development of the - democratic media?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalists' self-censorship • News media organisations self-censorship • Editorial policies • Religious and cultural censorship • Islamic state (IS) war and self-censorship
Chapter Seven	RQ4. To what extent have the news media been effective in playing a watchdog role and contributing to government accountability in the newly democratised Kurdistan Region?	Focus group discussions & In-depth interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative role of the media • The role of the media as public forum • Watchdog role of the media

In this research, after conducting the interview and focus group discussions, thematic analysis was used to organise the data into meaningful groups. This has been done through the process of searching for codes and identifying themes. In the thematic analysis, the process could be done either in inductive or deductive approaches (Braun and Clarke 2006). Deductive means the identified themes codes are strongly linked to the data themselves. While in inductive the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84). In fact, the nature of the research question will determine the ways the data should be managed, if the question essentially can be answered by a yes/no, then it requires a deductive approach to the data because in the deductive approach the researcher has restricted themselves to pre- selected codes and themes and codes based on previous literature or the specifics of the research question (Gale et al. 2013). However, in the inductive approach, 'themes are generated from the data though open (unrestricted) coding,' (Gale et al. 2013: 3).

In this thesis, all the research questions required to be answered in detail, therefore it is required to apply more an inductive approach, because overall it employed open ended questions. Therefore, it is required to use an unrestricted approach in organising the data. For example, I was interested to talk about self-censorship, but did not impose any interpretation based on pre-existing theories (as it is in inductive). During the process of coding from the collected the data, I found the raw information was very supportive of the concept of self-censorship. I then read and re-read the data for further categories related to self-censorship. As a result, a strong theme of self-censorship emerged with several sub-themes. However, in Chapter Seven, in the process of analysis, both inductive and deductive approaches have been applied in regarding the watchdog role of the media. As the key thematic ideas have been developed in advance according to my previous literature about the watchdog media function, I specifically looked for the answers to the fourth research question. However, the way the data was analysed was more likely to be 'inductive', because I used a wide range of answers for the watchdog role of the media by creating several themes and sub-themes to cover the analysis very deeply. As a result, the analysis has been done with considerations of both the approaches - inductive and deductive.

Chapter Four

Development of the Kurdish News Media after 2003

4.1. Introduction

This chapter responds to the first research question which aims to look at the democratic change of the media in the political transformation in Iraqi Kurdistan after 2003. It is clear, that the media are an important element in the process of democratisation, therefore this chapter presents the changes in the news media structure after 2003. It is aimed, in particular, at illustrating the quality of development of the media, mainly through observing the degree of political interference and the ownership designs of the Kurdish news media, and by analysis of the Kurdish media ethics and its development with regard to professionalism. For this purpose, there is a detailed analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion. The analysis is supported by local and global academic research.

The previous chapters indicated that, previously, in all of Iraq, there were only five state-owned daily newspapers, two government television channels and also four radio stations. The freedom of expression was completely restricted, and journalists didn't have any legal protection. Then after the uprising of 1991, the media model of Kurdistan changed but the change was in the number of media outlets. This chapter is going to analyse the structure of the Kurdish media and their development since democratisation of Iraq in 2003. Obviously since then, the media have seen a substantial increase in the number of newspapers, radio and television as well as online journalism in the Kurdistan Region. According to statements made by the Kurdistan Journalists

Syndicate in 2013, in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region with only 83,000 kilometres' square, and a population of nearly five million, 959 media outlets were registered in the Kurdistan Region in 2013. This included 36 satellite television stations, 73 local television stations, 138 radio stations and 712 newspapers and magazines (Kurdistan Syndicate of Journalists, 2013).

Compared to the Kurdistan population of nearly five million, this number is considered disproportionate. In addition, some Kurdish researchers indicate that a numerous number of print, online, and broadcast news outlets in Kurdistan does not necessarily mean a development in the range of media (Abdullah, 2014; Hogan & Trumpbour, 2013; Reporters Without Borders, 2010), because most of the radio and television stations are run by political parties, almost every individual party have their own radio and television channel and a handful of newspapers. Indeed, prolonged periods of authoritarian rule and political instability affected the media system in Kurdistan.

In order to have a comprehensive view about the overall development of the news media, this chapter reviews the news media after the process of democratisation of Iraq in 2003. First, starting with viewing the media landscape and the changes of the model in Kurdistan.

4.2. Development of the News Media Model in Kurdistan

This section provides sketches of the news media landscape in Kurdistan by revealing the model of media ownership. Indeed, the appearance of the first private/independent newspaper *Hawlati* on November 5th, 2000, took the Kurdish media into a new phase of media autonomy. The establishment of private newspapers are

considered as a forward step towards media developments because the main focus of this type of media were to put pressure on the government and expose the issues of corruption and shortcomings in the government. This mean the Kurdish news media in Kurdistan started their revolution before the Iraqi democratic transformation in 2003. Bearing in mind that the Kurdish media after the uprising of 1991 have developed steadily from a very small number of outlets to the multiple ownership and broad landscapes of coverage. Then the historical event of overthrowing the Baathist regime on April 9th, 2003, widened the media development at an even faster pace. In the new political system, the media have taken advantage of the wider range for criticising and freedom of expression, In addition to the huge increase of the number of print, radio, television and electronic media.

The media have improved from the absolute partisan media to private media in 2000, and finally along with political changes and after democratic transition in 2003, the media model has seen many more changes. The Kurdish media scholars have classified the media outlets' ownership in Kurdistan into three categories: partisan media; private/independent media; and finally, 'shadow media'.

4.2.1. Partisan Media

The previous chapter indicates that the history of the media in Kurdistan has always been connected to politics. The strong relationship between the media organisations and the political parties mainly dates back to the Kurdish movement fight against Iraqi governments up to the second half of the 20th century. According to Azad Hama Amin, the General Secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate:

Due to the long history of the Kurdish resistance for independence, the media in Kurdistan were accordingly politicised from the beginning. The Kurdish media always had an extra mission in Kurdistan which is to protect the Kurdish nationhood. The Kurdish resistance used the media for

informing of their activities and promoting the Kurdish national movements during the rebellion period throughout 20th century. Currently there are hundreds of media outlets broadcasting in Kurdistan, almost all of them agreed to promote the Kurdish national interest (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

The model of partisan media is still widespread in Kurdistan, the two ruling parties (PUK and KDP) are greedy to own extra media outlets. The partisan media has been divided into two groups, which are the ruling party media and the opposition party media.

4.2.1.1. Ruling Party Media

The initial type of the partisan media is the ruling party media this type of media is widespread in Kurdistan. These media are so named because they are directly affiliated with either the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) or the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Both major Kurdish political parties sponsor dozens of radio, newspapers and major satellite-broadcasting channels. The party media outlets are financially dependent on their parties rather than revenues from sales and advertisement. Therefore, they are not subject to any profitability requirement.

According to Kawa Hassan (2015) the two parties own more than 400 media outlets, and they are funding their media outlets from government's budget. Due to the very large number of partisan media outlets, only some of the most prominent of them will be presented. In terms of television, Kurdistan TV is the first satellite television launched in Kurdistan, directly run by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). It started broadcasting on January 17th, 1999 in Erbil. Recently it has become a more news oriented channel. *Kurdsat* Broadcasting Corporation, is a Kurdish satellite television station based in Sulaymaniyah in Kurdistan. It belongs to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). It broadcasts programmes in the Kurdish, Arabic and Persian languages. It has 24-hour

news, bringing the most up to date of regional and international news. *GK TV*, is the first Kurdish channel established by the PUK and started broadcasting by the end of 1991. On the 1st June 2008, it became a satellite television broadcaster, and is regarded as the first Kurdish satellite television news channel.

Regarding the newspapers, the best known partisan newspapers are, *Xebat* Newspaper, which is a daily political newspaper of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) established in September 1992, it was first published during the Kurdish movement in the mountains of Kurdistan on 4th May 1959. It focuses more on current Kurdish issues and the political movement history. Currently, the editor-in-chief is Saman Abdulla. The KDP also has another daily newspaper *al-Ta'akhi* published in Arabic. Similar to this, the PUK also own two daily newspapers, which are *Kurdistani Nuwe*, and *Itihad*. *Kurdistani Nuwe*, is a daily newspaper first established 12 January 1992, it was the first newspaper after the Kurdish uprising in 1991. This newspaper is officially run by the PUK. Currently, Stran Abdullah is the editor of the newspaper.

For the national media and the state-owned media, according to the interviewees, the state-owned media does not exist in Kurdistan because there is not much distinction between the state media and the political parties' media. For example, *Zagros TV* is supposed to be a state-owned station in Erbil, but the channel is mainly recognised as a KDP channel because of the strong connection of the channel with KDP political strategies. Similarly, in Sulaymaniyah, when *Xandan Media* organisation started its broadcasting, it was called a state-owned media, however the channel is completely directed by the PUK. The following sections interpret the division of the media in Kurdistan and the political/economic orientations of the media ownership.

The power of the partisan media has been reduced after the appearance of a great number of other types of news media such as ‘opposition party media’ and the ‘shadow media’.

4.2.1.2. Opposition Party Media

This type of media is a partisan media but is run by the opposition parties, it is also financed by the political parties. Several opposition media networks operate in Kurdistan, they have 24 hour news coverage, effectively exposing the ruling parties’ corruption and always encourages journalists to investigate political actors’ wrongdoings. The real opposition media started after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003, when the two Islamic political parties, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)⁴⁰ and the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK)⁴¹ both became opposition parties in the Iraqi Kurdistan legislative election in 2009. They started broadcasting their satellite television channels as an opposition media because they wanted to challenge the PUK and KDP’s representation. Chronologically, *Payam TV*, was the first Islamic Kurdish satellite channel established by the Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK) on December 1st ,2008. Most of the programmes are politically oriented and reflect Islamic views. Second, *Speda TV*, started broadcasting in 2009 as a Kurdish satellite channel. It was established and funded by the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU). Its programmes are mainly political, it has daily reports about government and political corruption.

⁴⁰ The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) was founded in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1994 by a group of religious Kurds led by Salahuddin Bahaadin. The members consider KIU as a reformist national party. The party promotes freedom of expression and combatting corruption and bureaucracy. The party is particularly popular among Kurdish youth and students. It is also involved in charity work in the region (Hevian, 2013).

⁴¹ The Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK), established by Ali Bapir in May 2001. He was previously one of the leader of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). According to Ali Bapir, his group “must be open-minded and seek fraternity with all those who call or act for Islam” (Brown and Littlefield, 2014: 153).

With the emergence of the Gorran Movement⁴² in 2009 the political opposition model in Kurdistan becomes more active. *KNN* (Kurdish News Network), is a news channel, founded in 2008,⁴³ and funded by the Gorran Movement. Its news broadcasting is updated hourly. *KNN* seeks to promote political reform by exposing corruption in the region through in-depth analyses and addressing the negative aspects of the system instead of only highlighting the positives. The opposition media has played a critical role in reporting on corruption and human rights violations in Kurdistan.

4.2.2. Shadow Media

This type of the media is indirectly affiliated with the ruling political parties. It is the latest model of the news media in Kurdistan and recently became very common in Kurdistan. These media outlets are financially dependent on parties or someone who is in power of the political parties. The Kurdish media scholars have recognised this type of the media as a ‘shadow media’, because they claim independence but they are linked to one of the ruling parties. In this matter, Rebeen Hardy the director of the *Sardam Media Organisation for Publishing* said: “the ‘shadow media’ consider themselves as

⁴² Gorran is a liberal and reformist Kurdish political party in Iraqi Kurdistan under the leadership of Nashirwan Mustafa. Founded in 2009, it is the main opposition to the ruling two-party coalition of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (the Kurdistan List), which governs the Kurdistan Regional Government. Shortly after its formation, Gorran participated in the regional elections in Kurdistan. It gained a surprising 22 percent of the total votes in Iraqi Kurdistan and came in second after the Kurdistan List (comprising the KDP and PUK), with 25 seats in the 111-seat Kurdish Parliament. In the 2010 Iraqi elections, it refused to join the Kurdistan List and ran under its own name. They won only 8 seats, whereas the Kurdistan List gained 43 seats. According to the BBC, “Gorran has already shaken the political landscape in Kurdish areas,” One of Gorran’s main objectives is to “uproot corruption.” The movement’s leader, Nawshirwan Mustafa, the previous vice-president of the PUK until 2006. Mustafa argued that the aim of the split was to promote reforms in the political system in Kurdistan.

⁴³ *KNN* was founded in 2008 as a subsidiary of the Wusha Corporation. This company was established by Nawsherwan Mustafa.

private/independent but in reality, they belong to some political parties” (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

‘Shadow media’ financially depend on someone who is in power in the ruling parties. For example, the *Rudaw* company is established by Nechervan Barzani⁴⁴ the prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan; *KurdSat News*, is supported by Hero Xan the former Iraqi president Jalal Talabani’s wife, and *K24* which is also recently opened by Masrour Barzani⁴⁵. These channels are totally sponsored by two powerful and wealthy people in the KDP and PUK in Kurdistan.

The main ‘shadow media’ outlets in Kurdistan in chronological order are:

Rudaw

Rudaw is a Kurdish news media network that also serves the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. It is funded and supported by the *Rudaw* Company. This media network was launched in May 2013, financially supported by Nechirvan Barzani, the Prime Minister of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This company consists of *Rudaw* TV, Radio and Newspaper, its official headquarters are based in Erbil, the capital city of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The company has 550 full time staff members. It has offices in all the main cities in Kurdistan such as Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk and Duhok. It has also opened offices in Baghdad, Qamishlo in Syria, Istanbul, Berlin, London, New York and Washington. The company has correspondents in various parts of the Middle East, Europe and the U.S.

⁴⁴ Nechervan Barzani is also a son in law of Massoud Barzani

⁴⁵ Masrour Barzani, the son of Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani born in 1969.

Rudaw Media Network broadcasts in Kurdish and English. This has brought the network a large audience from inside Kurdistan as well as throughout Europe and North America (Ismaeli, 2015). *Rudaw* has a television channel and two radio stations offering distinctive news and music which are broadcast on shortwave and online. It also has a weekly newspaper, with hard copies distributed in the Kurdistan Region and Europe.

Kurdistan24 (K24)

Established on October 31, 2015 in Erbil in the Kurdistan Region. *K24* includes television, radio and the website in Kurdish, English, Turkish and Arabic languages. It is sponsored by Masrur Barzani the son of the current president Masud Barzani. It offers 24-hour news from Kurdistan and around the world. Its offices expanded to include Turkey in Ankara, Istanbul Diyarbakir; Syria in Qamishli, Hasaka and Kobany; United States in Washington, DC; Russia in Moscow, in addition to Baghdad and the other cities in Iraq Kurdistan such as Sulaymaniyah, Dohuk, Kirkuk. It provides in-depth analyse culture, sports, and economy in Kurdistan and the world. “*K24* want to be part of the democratic transformation of Kurdish society” and as stated on their official website their aim is to promote democracy and human rights in Kurdistan. (Waisi, 2015).

The reason for establishing these media outlets is that, the ruling parties realised the importance of the independent media. Both parties started to establish a number of media outlets to resist independent media. Especially when they found that the audience of the propaganda media/ partisan media dramatically declined, the ruling parties inspired to create a ‘shadow media’ as a combination of the partisan media and independent media. The ‘shadow media’ created a new political media plan, as their editorial policies are completely different from the partisan media. Although they are funded by the ruling parties, they have much more freedom, such as becoming more open to include different

views, report on a wider range of issues of corruption, and discuss topics that were formerly the exclusive domain of independent publications. Asos Hardy the director of the Awene Publishing Company, described 'shadow media' as follows:

'Shadow media' is the media that is created by political parties or someone who is of power in the political parties. This type of media is created to overcome or resist the private media by claiming independence, because they are providing a wide range of criticism of their political parties and present different views from different political backgrounds. They broadcast and publish what cannot be said in their partisan media (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

However, as long as these media outlets are owned by a powerful people in the KPD and PUK, it is logical to say that their reporters and all the staff are not publishing things which might upset their sponsors. A good example of this can be found in a study done by a Kurdish researcher Afshin Ismaeli, he explained the political impact on the daily practise of the media, and the existence of practising self-censorship among journalists. In Ismaeli's research which was specified for *Rudaw's* performance in developing democracy in Kurdistan, he asserted that the channel's editorial policies are very clear from the actions of the journalists. Ismaeli asked some members in *Rudaw* if they have ever investigated or reported about the owner of *Rudaw* or Prime Mister Nechervan Barzani's corruption? The answers were definitely not. For example, one of the participants said: "In the Middle East nobody pays for the media that reveals his or her own corruption". Another participants answer was: "We have not made any investigation about Nechervan Barzani. However, we are more courageous than the other channels in criticizing him. However, another of the interviewees response in the study is: "I've never been told I can't write something, but, there are limits in every country." Despite presenting extensive day to day media coverage about the misrepresentation of the political parties in the government. Some of the Kurdish journalists are pessimistic about the role of *Rudaw* and claim that the *Rudaw* Company is one of the 'shadow media'

companies affiliated to the KDP or, more precisely, to Nechirvan Barzani, the KDP's Deputy President and the current Prime Minister.

4.2.3. Private/Independent Media

Hallin & Mancini (2004) considered the establishment of private media ownership as the main factor in maintaining the independence of the media from the government and political parties. In Kurdistan, the private media or so-called independent media is the media that are run by individuals or private sector companies. These media outlets have independent financial sources and do not receive any subsidies or grants from the government, any political parties or individuals in the political parties. The private/independent media financially depends on sales, advertising and international organisation's aid. As stated, the Kurdish media started experiencing this type of media since early 2000 which began with the newspaper *Hawlati*, then it rapidly accelerated after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. In this regard Rebeen Hardy states:

Initially the purpose of establishing private/independent media in Kurdistan was to follow up the government performance and transparency. Throughout the first decade of the Kurdish semi- autonomous existence (1991-2000) the media in Kurdistan region had not seen any active opposition or private media. The Kurdish people couldn't get a real and truthful news from the media (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

There were some efforts to establish independent media in the 1990s. For example, in 1994 some Kurdish intellectuals created the weekly newspaper *Amro* (Today), which was considered non-partisan. However, they were soon forced to cease their activities because the tone of their newspaper was judged too critical. In an interview by Reporters Without Borders, Asos Hardi, the Directors of Awene said, "it was simply impossible to publish something that was not in line" (Reporters Without Borders, 2010).

Regarding private/independent newspapers in Kurdistan, *Hawlati* was the first Kurdish private newspaper published in Sulaymaniyah by Tariq Fatih the owner. *Hawlati* was a biweekly newspaper issued by Ranj Publishing House, published on Sundays and Wednesdays. The last editor was Kamal Rauf. The BBC referred to *Hawlati* as the birth of independent media in Iraq. In 2008 it was chosen as the most popular newspaper in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, it closed on 23 February 2016 due to financial problems. Second, *Awena*, is an independent newspaper established in January 2006. It was founded by Asos Hardy, who was the former editor-in-chief of *Hawlati*. It is a weekly Kurdish newspaper, published every Tuesday in Sulaymaniyah and it has an online edition as well. In 2009, the circulation of newspapers reached 17,000, but now due to the financial crisis and the increase of online newspapers, the circulation of the newspaper has noticeably decreased. Like *Hawlati*, *Awena* also focuses on political issues and it is considered as one of the most effective independent newspapers in Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, it is a unique newspaper to have explained its financial budget to the public. Currently, *Awena* is encountering a financial problem because of the lack of funding from the government or any private sector in Kurdistan, and recently launched several campaigns for help.

As a private broadcasting media, *NRT TV (Nalia Radio and Television)*, is the first and unique private/independent television in Kurdistan, established in 2011. It is the only free satellite TV station, which was founded in Sulaimaniyah by Shaswar Abdulwahid. *NRT* started broadcasting on 17th February 2011, with strong coverage of the protests during the first days of the 17th February 2011 demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah. After only three days of its establishment it was torched down by unknown people. Furthermore, the head of the Kurdish *NRT* channel, Shaswar Abdul

Wahid, also received death threats and was attacked and wounded in October 2013, in Sulaymaniyah, (Chapter Six, page 172 presents more details about these events).

With regard to the private/independent radio, *Radio Nawa*, is the first and the only private/ independent radio station across the region, launched in 2005. It was established with financial help from the United States after the process of democratisation of Kurdistan.⁴⁶ It broadcasts 24 hours a day and has news updates every half-hour.

Arguments about the private media's full independence have always been subject to debate among the Kurdish media intellectuals. Some of them never believed in the independence of this type of media, because establishing media outlets in Kurdistan is not profitable which means the media owner is always subject to loss. There is a big doubt therefore about the owners' purpose of establishing these news media networks and also where they get their financial funds from. In this research, I interviewed a considerable number of Kurdish scholars and journalists about the issue of private/independent media, I found that there are two opposing views about the independence of the private media. In this regards, it is imperative to present both views to make the argument clear. First, the doubtful views about the private media were as follows:

Fazil Najib, the spoken person of *Rudaw* television, was among those who completely disagree about the independence of the private media, he expressed his scepticism by saying:

I think there is not any independent media in Kurdistan because the media in Kurdistan have not become a business, none of the media outlets can survive without political parties or political actor's help. Those who claim

⁴⁶ My interview with Karwan Anwer on 18/11/2015.

independence are not transparent in their funds. (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

Azad Hama Amin also raised a question about the private/independent media' funds when he said

The independent media means independent economic of the media organisation. Depending on my information, as a general secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, all the media outlets have a financial loss, so tell me where they get their funds from? (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

The second view about the private/independent media was from those who are working in these media or some members of the political parties especially PUK. These are their justifications:

Kamal Rauf the director of *SharPress* news media website explained:

We don't have a specific policy towards any political parties. We are just transferring the events without prejudgements whether one is good or bad. We might publish positive news about a specific party today, but tomorrow it might be negative about the same party. We are just transferring realities to the public. (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Rebeen Hardy added:

Yes, the private media have brought different views to their channels so far. Whenever there is a voice, the private media try to bring those voices to the public attention. For instance, although *Hawlati* newspaper is run by some secular people, they managed to give opportunities to the religious and banned person Mallah Krekar⁴⁷ to explain his situation and views to the public." (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

⁴⁷ Born in 1956 he is a Kurdish Sunni Jihadist Islamic scholar; he went to Norway as a refugee from northern Iraq. Krekar was the original leader of the Islamist armed group Ansar al-Islam, which was set up and commenced operations in Northern Iraq.

Shwan Muhammad the editor of SpeeMedia who clearly advocated private media independence said, “we don’t receive any funds from the government, we are not accepting any conditional funds from anyone” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Saman Fawzi also said:

As far as the private media outlets are not supported by any political parties, I can say they are independent. Although I have some notes about the private media, I can call them independent because they have not become an organ of any political groups so far (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

As a result, there is no consensus among Kurdish media experts and journalists on this issue. It seems that the financial transparency of the private/independent media is a most controversial issue among the research interviewees. The Kurdish scholars have expressed their doubts about these media’s fund on the one hand and on the other hand the private media owners claim total independence.

On this matter, David Rohde, (2005: 19) when examined American efforts to create a free press in Iraq and Afghanistan, he stated that the United States spent \$200 million in two years in Iraq to help create an independent media. He said that this expenditure on media development in Iraq is six times more than it has ever spent in any other nation.” In the in-depth interviews in this research, I raised this issue of funding the private/independent media with the editors of these media such as Shwan Muhammad, Asos Hardy, Rebeen Hardy and Kamal Rauf. They clearly indicated to the international subsidies for their media outlets. So, are these subsidies given without a hidden agenda? Asos Hardy explained that, “after the Iraqi war the Americans gathered the editors of the private/independent media outlets and gave a good offer to our media, but I didn’t accept the offer because everybody knows that there is some hidden intention behind this help” (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

At the same time, none of these editors denied that other international help was available such as International Media Support (IMS) and International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) for journalism in Kurdistan Region, but according to the interviewee editors, this financial help has reduced or stopped in the last few years. In the focus group discussions with the journalists which was held on November 2015, the senior journalists accused the private media of having loyalty towards those international organisations. For example, Stran Abdullah the editor in chief of the first newspaper issued in Kurdistan Region after 1991, clearly stated, “that nobody pays without purpose, accepting help from any international organisations means that you are no longer free” (Journalist focus group discussion, November 18, 2015).

Therefore, according to both of these interviewees perspective, the private media in Kurdistan have received generous financial aid from either the United States or other international organisations in the first ten years after the Iraqi war in 2003. However, the recent financial problems of the private media indicate that that these subsidies have stopped now, it also means that there is no financial aid coming from the ruling political parties either.

As previously mentioned, the private media especially the two oldest private newspapers *Hawlati* and *Awena* have recently held several campaigns and asked the public for financial help because the media in Kurdistan need external funds to maintain their journalistic work. These fundraising campaigns were successful but couldn't cover all the newspapers' demand; some of the powerful and wealthy politicians such as Barham Salih the former Prime Minister and Nichivan Barzani the current Prime Minister donated large amounts of money to help private/independent media outlets overcome their financial problems. Although independent/private media organisations announced

that all these donations were without restrictions and that they would not accept any conditional help, media analysts have raised doubts about these donations. In this regard, Stran Abdullah said:

It is true that those donations were offered without conditions, but they certainly will affect the coverage of the news in the future because there will be favouritism and bias toward those donors. Even if the media has a story about massive corruption, there will be consideration for those people (Journalist focus group discussion, November 18, 2015).

Therefore, it can be concluded that in the Kurdistan Region, none of the media outlets can exist without external funds. Although the editors of the private media have claimed independence from the Kurdish political parties' dominance, they have accepted some subsidy to maintain their work, and this will affect their media reporting.

In this regard, if we ask about the content of the private/independent media, does it maintain standard media professionalism? This issue is raised in the research interviews and the focus group discussion, mainly there were some notes about the private/independent reporting, especially in objectivity and balance. The interviewees indicated that these media are always seen as opponents to the ruling parties, they are biased in favour of the opposition parties and are not objective in their writings. In this matter, Saman Fwazi a law professor at the Human Development University in Sulaymaniyah, although he agreed with the independence of the private media, he pointed out some faults of these media outlets. For example, the lack of objectivity, especially in the private newspapers' reports, he stated "on the editorial pages of the private newspapers, often the editor's personal view is clearly observed. Sometimes they can't hide their bias toward specific political groups." (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

Azad Hama Amin also added: “*NRT* was not neutral in its reporting during the last political crisis in October’s demonstration.⁴⁸ *NRT* purposely broadcasted a very negative image of the government in October. For instance, using slang language by protesters about President Barzani without any censorship (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

This issue has been taken into account in this thesis, because there are many accusations criticising Kurdish journalists and the media for not being ethical. Due to the new experience of the Kurdish journalists to the democratic role, there is a lack of professional journalistic behaviour. Therefore this chapter made a comparison between the characteristics of professionalism of the media in Kurdistan in regard to the Kurdish journalist codes and ethics.

4.3. Professionalism Practising Media Codes And Ethics in Kurdistan

In general, most developed countries do have media Codes of Ethics, and in addition many organisations have their own specific codes. However, there are some countries around the world, especially the developing countries, which still have not adopted any ethical codes in their media. Kurdistan is among those that have no written Code of Ethics, but Kurdish Press Law No. 35, enacted in 2007, has adopted the IFJ

⁴⁸ Anti-government demonstrations started on 8th October 2015 and it continued for two weeks in south eastern cities throughout the governorates of Sulaimaniyah and Halabja, it was mainly in areas dominated by the opposition. Thousands of people demonstrated in October against Kurdistan government corruption. The reason for the public demonstrations were because of government corruption which specifically demanded for the salaries which were overdue by several months and a lack of public services. Also, they demanded that the KDP president Massoud Barzani should step down and leave. The demonstrations turned into violent clashes between protesters and police. Five people died and 25 people at least were injured.

Codes and Ethics.⁴⁹ The Kurdish Press Law in Article 2 guarantees of freedom of expression and publication, liberties and privacy, public morals and public order are in accordance with international declarations. These are the principles of ethics in the Bordeaux Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, that have been adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists.

I conducted an analytical procedure to examine the extent of the current performance of the Kurdish media in the International Federation of Journalists codes and ethics. The following Paragraphs present an analytical method to find out the current situation of the ethics of the journalistic practices in Kurdistan. It begins with some points about the application of the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists in Kurdistan:

First, is the idea of truth.⁵⁰ The IFJ Declaration puts truth as a first duty of journalists; most media organisations such as the BBC and SPJ have begun their codes and ethics publications with ‘truth’. It is the media’s responsibility to report news truthfully through reporting the facts, and giving the citizen the news in many different angles. Providing truth in the Kurdistan Region is under question. Some of the problems come from the journalists themselves as they don’t prepare well enough to be able to conduct in-depth news stories. Some of the interviewees have described media reports in Kurdistan as half-cooked stories or inaccuracies because often journalists are in a rush to finish their work. With regards to publishing unverified stories, Sirwan Rashid said: “yes, Kurdish journalists have published inaccurate stories, because they often do not

⁴⁹ The IFJ Codes and Ethics were adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists - IFJ. They have been amended by the 1986 World Congress.

⁵⁰ “Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

verify their news sources” (In-depth interview, 11 November 2015). Also, the recent ISIS war has its influence on the media in Kurdistan, it is a reasonable factor to hide the truth. Facing war with ISIS has justified some of the media concealing some facts (see more detail is in Chapter Six).

However, other reasons are related to the authorities’ unwillingness to provide the media with necessary information. In this regard, Asos Hardy said:

Our media outlets have to be critical and this is very difficult in a country like Iraq and Kurdistan because accessing information is not easy, and the way to get information is very difficult. Sometimes the political actors give wrong information to the media in order to reduce the media’s reputation. Therefore, we have to be very careful when we get information from an unknown person. Our mission is to provide truthful information to the public, not fake information” (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

The second code of the IFJ is the journalist’s fair judgement and the unbiased principle of the public’s right to have true and objective information.⁵¹ The principle of objectivity can be found in virtually every code in media ethics. Objective journalists are required to maintain neutrality in reporting; a professional journalist has to avoid partisanship and bias, and they should maintain a strict attachment to accuracy and other truth criteria. Hallin and Mancini argue that professionalisation comes with “objectivity” and political neutrality. In addition, journalists are more objective and independent if they serve the public rather than a particular interest. Accordingly, to support objectivity media owners and political parties must not limit journalists’ independence. Kurdish media is poor in producing this kind of report and sometimes they disregard standard objectivity. Most of the media outlets have an aggressive tone in their reporting, this can

⁵¹ “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 of fair comment and criticism” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

be seen a lot during a crisis, and during elections. The Kurdish media has a lack of professionalism, because it does not follow standards of objectivity and neutrality.

Third is that the journalist reports in accordance with facts and avoids suppressing essential information.⁵² As the Kurdish government currently is at war with Islamic State (IS), some of the interviewees indicated that during this war the Kurdish media disregarded the facts and they asserted that, it is necessary sometimes to skip over some basic information about the war because of how it affects every individual in Kurdistan. Almost all the interviewees were in agreement that the Kurdish journalists should not publish all the facts about enemy victories because this will scare the Kurdish audience (Chapter Six provided more details about the impact of the war of the Islamic States IS on the Kurdish media).

Fourth is the journalist's use of only fair methods to obtain news and documents.⁵³ In the Kurdish Press Law, the second Paragraph of Article 2 clearly states the right of the journalist to have access to information; furthermore, the right to access information was granted in a particular law in 2013. However, journalists' access to information is poor through official channels because government bodies are not providing information to the media easily and there is very poor co-operation from the government in this matter. The journalists therefore developed their own ways to obtain information, this approach has carried a lot of weaknesses because they rely heavily on unofficial sources. This kind of information is mainly obtained through personal relationships between journalists and

⁵²“The journalist shall report only in accordance with the facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

⁵³“The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

politicians, or through leaked information from government institutions. In this regard, Kamal Rauf said: “We, as independent media, are very keen to get all specific information about government wrongdoings. We have our own ways to get information from the government institutions” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015). Kamal Rauf said the Kurdish journalists find advantages from disagreements of the political parties, because the party’s members are reporting against each other’s involvement with corruption. Some of the interviewees who represented the editors or spokesman of the news media stated that they have tried to avoid unverified sources for example Fazil Najib as *Rudaw* network spokesman said, we, as a *Rudaw* channel never accept any news from a source that is not clear or the news providers are concealing their names. As indicated above, because of a poor response from official government bodies to the journalist, the media are using unofficial methods more often to obtain information. This kind of information is generally characterised by deficiency and a lack of credibility. Furthermore, a journalist might fall into reporting fake news stories.

Fifth, the Charter indicates that the journalist must make their highest attempt to correct any published information which is found to be inaccurate.⁵⁴ In this regard, Article Seven of the Press Law outlines the way that newspapers should correct incorrect information.⁵⁵ It stated that the editor must publish the correction in the same place and the same size of letters in which the original story was published in the newspaper. However, in this matter, all the interviewees were in agreement that the corrections in the media or in newspapers are rarely seen, despite the publishing of many incorrect news

⁵⁴ “The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

⁵⁵ See appendix 1

stories. Journalists admitted to having published unverified stories but there is only a very limited attempt in the Kurdish media to correct incorrectly published information.

Sixth is the journalist's protection of the sources from which they obtained information.⁵⁶ In Kurdistan, despite the law giving journalists' the right to protect their sources, there are many pressures from political actors upon journalists to reveal their sources. For example, Kamal Rauf, who was one of the research interviewees and he works as an Editor of an online private newspaper said that he has faced 55 lawsuits, most of which are about revealing the source of published information (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015). However, the interviewees indicated that despite the many pressures, journalists have shown their responsibility in not revealing any of their news sources, because as mentioned, a considerable number of the news stories are from secret sources therefore it would not be considered well-behaved to reveal any of these sources.

Seventh is the issue of the danger of discrimination on grounds such as race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.⁵⁷ In fact, the Kurdish media is less involved with these matters, and one can say that the media has worked very well to reduce this danger despite the existence of a long background of tension between Kurdish people, Arabs, and the numerous ethnicities in Iraq.

⁵⁶ "The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence" (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

⁵⁷ "The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins" (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

Eighth is journalistic professional offences, such as malicious writing, slander, libel, and acceptance of a bribe in any form.⁵⁸ There are a lot of examples in the Kurdish press on these professional offences. The Kurdish media, and especially the private and opposition media have recognised, as critical media they have many stories about government corruption and the wrongdoings of political actors. Many journalists have therefore been accused and taken to court under the defamation law. Almost all the journalists that were interviewed admitted that they have been charged by the court multiple times and paid several fines for their defamatory reports.

As a result, many academics have criticized the Kurdish journalists for the absence of professionalism and unwillingness to follow a journalistic code of ethics. (Sheyholislami, 2011; Hogan & Trumpbour, 2013; Reporters Without Borders, 2010), similarly, most of the research interviewees were very doubtful about journalistic professionalism in Kurdistan. For example, Hemn Majeed, a journalism university lecturer in the University of Sulaymaniyah, asserted that “the performance of media in Kurdistan is very weak and unprofessional” He further explained other reasons for the shrinking media professionalism by saying: “we can’t expect professional media in a nation like the Kurds, because we come from a tribal background which will not change easily” (Academic focus group discussion, 12 November 2015). Kamil Omer, a journalism university lecturer at the University of Sulaymaniyah, also supported this view He said: “The Kurdish media are far from being professional because the political parties

⁵⁸ The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: plagiarism; malicious misrepresentation; calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression” (The IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists).

still exercise their power upon the media, either directly or indirectly” (Academic focus group discussion, 12 November 2015).

Asos Hardy also acknowledged the lack of professionalism of the media by saying:

When we started working as journalists there was not any journalistic training, we started as writers not journalists. Like all other fields of the media in Kurdistan, professionalism also needs more time to embrace the new situations; and specifically for a nation like the Kurds it might need further efforts, because the political system has deliberately not interacted honestly towards the media. The political system wants the media to be used as a tool for their own interests (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Mam Qanie, who was previously working in the private media said: “We cannot find professional media here in Kurdistan, if a journalist wants to practise professionalism he/she will be in trouble with editors and managers. We might have some professional journalists but we don’t have a professional media” (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

Furthermore, some of the interviewees complained about the journalists’ disrespectful behaviour towards politicians and the long history of political parties’ struggle. They also said that the media are irresponsible about national unity, and want to fuel conflicts among political parties. In this respect, some of the interviewees were concerned about a new phenomenon which has emerged among journalists in Kurdistan, the selfishness and self-interest by journalists; recently some Kurdish journalists have been accused of working for their own advantage. This phenomenon has become common among all types of the news media including the ‘shadow media’ and independent. Halkawt Abdullah stated, “the journalists in Kurdistan are not responsible, especially the most well-known ones, they have a lot of lawsuits about defamation and they do not care about the increase in their lawsuits. For example, sometimes journalists

publish a very aggressive report about a particular person in the government or political parties and present themselves as a hero.”

However, in contrast to this, some of interviewees expressed a positive opinion about professionalism of the media in Kurdistan by comparing how the journalistic profession has been in the last decade to times before. Stran Abdullah the editor of daily newspaper *Kurdistani Nuwe*, pointed out that after 2003 Kurdistan moved into a transition towards a democratic system, and the Kurdish media entered a new phase, he said:

After 2003 the economic sieges of Iraq were terminated, Kurdistan and Iraq have developed in economic, political and technological terms. Since then , the Kurdish media have developed because many international organisations entered Kurdistan and have helped the media organisations by offering a lot of journalistic training (Journalist focus group discussion, November 18, 2015).

Anwer Hussein, a member of the Kurdistan Syndicate Journalists (KSJ) and the director of *GK* Radio, also indicated that the media have developed significantly in terms of quality and quantity, he said, the media in Kurdistan is most developed compared to the other institutions in the Kurdistan Region (Journalist focus group discussion, 18/11/2015).

Indeed, in the last few years after 2003, journalists’ skills have become a big matter for both media organisations and the journalists themselves. To overcome this lack of professionalism, many training programmes emerged to improve the quality of journalism and to develop the field of media studies. For example, the University of Sulaymaniyah became the first institution to open a department of Media Studies in 2000 and other Journalism Departments have also been set up in the universities and institutions in Erbil. This has directly helped students and journalists to learn and

understand the principles of media and related disciplines. Furthermore, many other training sessions are offered by the Independent Kurdish Media Centres, the Metro Centre to Defend Journalists, and by the Ministry of Culture and Youth. However, all these efforts were only launched in the last two decades; it will take time to change the journalistic profession.

As the interviewees pointed out since 2003 or even before and during the Iraqi Kurdish autonomy in 1990s,⁵⁹ Kurdish media professionalism was very poor for two reasons: Firstly, because almost all journalists were working for particular political groups, and so the media was solely used for propaganda. Secondly, there has been a lack of experience and lack of journalistic training regarding the modern democratic journalism.

The codes and ethics of the Kurdish press has been clearly defined in Article 2. However, as scholars (Breunig, 1994) stated that in many developing countries, while in their constitutions the freedom of the media is very well defined, these freedoms are never guaranteed in practice. Likewise, in Kurdistan, it is not easy to conduct media roles professionally. The interpretations might sometimes be affected by personal interest. After a critical review of the performance of the media in monitoring the government, I found that the media have fallen into unprofessional behaviours such as involvement in defamation cases, non-adherence to truth, accuracy, objectivity or fairness. All of these ideal ethics in the media are still questionable in Kurdistan.

⁵⁹ Before 1991, all Kurdish media in Kurdistan was state owned and tightly controlled by the government and Baath Party. However, after 1991, a new era of autonomy has started which has provided more space for the media. Since that time the number of media outlets has been greatly expanded.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the main developments and changes that have occurred in the media system in Kurdistan. It has examined the growth of the media landscape after 2003, in terms of number and ownership diversity. In this period, the media have seen a real increase which is considered a positive sign towards democratic change. However, as one of the new democratised region, the ownership of the media in Kurdistan has been characterised by strong competition from politicians to own the media. Because of the importance of media in the modern era, the major political parties and their powerful members have tried as much as possible to own the media. Through their powerful news media networks ‘shadow media’, they were successful in having a link with the media. Although these media outlets have been characterised by giving a wide space for criticism, and presenting negative news stories about the government and the ruling political parties, most importantly, they are owned by politicians, in other words, there will be undue interference with the content; this issue is problematical because it affects the independence and the democratic role of the media.

The establishment of private media is the main factor in achieving the independence of the media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The private media in Kurdistan, since its birth, are publishing critical views and critical news about government corruption and the publics’ rights in the political systems. They have a positive role in this aspect, as they have managed to transfer real news to the public. For the first time, the Kurdish people have received real images of the Kurdistan situation and the truths which were hidden from them for a long time. However, these media outlets are suffering from financial weaknesses because the media have not become profitable in Kurdistan on the one hand, and on the other hand the government do not have any plan to develop

independent media in Kurdistan and there isn't any support from the government. The private media has not got a good enough supply to meet demand for the Kurdish media in the new democratic time. For example, due to unsolved financial problems, on 23 February 2016, *Hawlati* the first independent newspaper closed. The closure of a number of private newspapers, and the holding of campaigns asking for support would be a reasonable clue that the private media in Kurdistan do not have a regular financial support from the political parties. Apart from these open campaigns they have not accepted help from the political parties as the owner of these media outlets claimed.

Finally, professionalism of the media was also one of the areas that have been under investigation in this chapter. Indeed, the performance of the professional roles in developing, democratic countries such as Kurdistan is not easy, especially when the journalists translate reality into words and images. From analysing a journalist performance in the transition to democracy, it is noted that the Kurdish journalists are jumbled and confused between two different aspects, one is the requirement of acting as professional democratic societies and the other is their complex background of institutional and cultural conditions which is far from the ideal to achieve professionalism. Thus, transforming the media into fully democratic institutions need a lot of effort because the journalist's cultural background requires a long time to adopt the new democratic change; the Kurdish journalists still hold values that are rooted in their professional life under the old regime on the one hand, and on the other hand the Kurdish journalists are in a rush to present themselves as an investigator or as a defender of human rights, therefore they easily fall into unprofessional behaviour; sometimes they act as judge and jury and have a very aggressive reporting stance toward every individual action of the political actors. Consequently, they put themselves into trouble with the courts and the political actors. There are hundreds of lawsuits against journalist, the everyday

performance of the media in Kurdistan bears many weaknesses. Most of the interviewees asserted that the Kurdish journalist are careless towards the law and display unethical behaviour. The common perspective of the journalist's performance in Kurdistan now is confrontation between the media editors and politics. Although the media could introduce watchdog reporting, it lacks professionalism, as there are many accusations criticising Kurdish journalists for not being ethical.

Finally, in the transformative phase, in Kurdistan the democratic role of the media is still open to question, in spite of development of the media landscapes, the media in Kurdistan are still far from the ideal of being powerful for the following reasons: First, the media market is very weak in Kurdistan, none of the media organisation can survive without external funds and this has resulted in the weakness of the private/independent media. Second, despite the positive points of the media in Kurdistan and the pluralistic ownership, most powerful news organisations such as *Rudaw*, and *K24* are maintained either by political actors or a limited number of families. Third, there is a widespread recognition of the lack of professionalism of the media in Kurdistan.

Thus, there is a question as to what might be the watchdog role of the media and news reporting in a country like Iraq and Kurdistan, where historically the Kurdish media have always been used as a political instrument, often tied institutionally to the political parties. This relationship between the media and politics is a long-standing matter; because of the provision of financial subsidies, this close relationship has largely remained even after the democratisation process. All these matters are very important questions that will be discussed in the following finding chapters in order to add to the literature about media in a free environment and the performance of the media in a newly democratised region in the developing world. More analysis about other elements of

democratic systems are also applied in the thesis in the following chapters, including independence of the media, the political environment of the media such as journalist intimidation, the watchdog role of the media, implementation of the law, and the cooperation between the law and the power of democratic government – the legislative, executive and judiciary branches of the government.

Chapter Five

Legal and Economic Environment of the Media in Kurdistan: Strengths and Weaknesses

5.1. Introduction

This chapter responds to the second research question, which is: In which way has the legal and economic environment enabled or hindered the role of the news media in the democratisation process? For this purpose, the chapter utilizes qualitative methods to investigate perspectives of media freedom; the analysis includes an interpretation of the primary data gathered from research interviews and group discussions. The findings will be presented with an examination of the current economic, and legal context in Kurdistan. This will be addressed by observing the working environment for journalists and explaining the main challenges the news media face. Also, I will use secondary data such as documents and figures from official and academic reports.

The previous chapters indicated that the Kurdish media has recently seen developments in both quantity and quality. A significant number of the news media networks such as *Rudaw*, *NRT*, *KNN*, *KurdSat* and *K24* have been established in the period since 2003. However, basically in newly emerging democracies, the media are frequently criticized for being unable to act effectively due to close ties to political elites. Likewise, in the case of Kurdistan, there are few private/independent media organisations, which are suffering from financial weakness. While the most powerful and dominant news media organisations in Kurdistan are ‘shadow media’,⁶⁰ which are

⁶⁰ Please see Chapter Four

financially strong, but not independent. The funds for the ‘shadow media’ outlets, derived from powerful individuals in the political parties. To some degree, these, wealthy politics have served the movement of the news media in Kurdistan, by providing many news programmes to create awareness and enlighten citizens about their rights. Furthermore, the owners of these media networks give a huge budget to these organisations, they are equipped these media networks with expensive and advanced technology. However these media outlets are not independent, they are owned by powerful members in the ruling political parties, which means that politicians are able to intervene in the content that the media produces, and this poses a threat to the democratic role of the media.

This chapter seeks examine the economic and legal situation of the media in a place like Kurdistan which has recently stepped toward democratic transition. This will be through clarifying the extent to which the media and journalists have independence in Kurdistan, and also revealing whether the media environment has encouraged or hindered the news media in their role of enhancing democracy in Kurdistan. The analysis is arranged into two themes, which are: (i) Legal environment of the media in Kurdistan (ii) Economic environment of the media in Kurdistan. Each of these themes is organized into several codes.

5.2. Legal Environment of the Media in Kurdistan

The legal environment will be now examined through analysis of both the Kurdish Press Law and its implementation. One of the greatest step toward democracy in the transition time in Kurdistan was the issuance of the Kurdish Press Law by the Kurdistan parliament in 2008. Development of the Press Law is also requirement in the political transformation because the previous law will be no longer fit the idea of the new environment of the media. Therefore, this section will go through an analytical method

to determine whether the new law that was issued in 2008 in Kurdistan is benefited from democratic principles.

Recently many changes have been occurred in the field of the media, thus it was imperative to release a new law which would parallel to this development. The Kurdish Press Law has been released in 2007, in the first draft, it was allowed imprisonment of journalists upon a court order; it also stated that judges can take the decision to close down a newspaper or suspend a media organisation for up to six months if they publish Articles critical of the Kurdish authorities. After many criticism and the protest by journalists and the Kurdish intellectuals, the Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG, President Massoud Barzani sent it back to the Kurdistan National Assembly for redrafting, then it has been amended and released again on 22 September 2008. The Press Law now operates under the Iraqi Kurdistan Constitution, it is issued with fourteen Articles, each of them is contained several Paragraphs and they are spread over five chapters. Overall, the Kurdish journalists are welcomed the law because many improvement have been made in the law, such as prior censorship to publication have raised in addition to providing freedom of expression and prohibiting imprisonment of journalists.

In this section these questions should be answered: Do the law and constitutional provisions protect the media? Does the law have provisions to protect journalists' rights? Are the judiciary independent when dealing with journalistic cases? How is the law enforcement in Kurdistan? Are government bodies helpful towards the media, for example regarding access to information? In the following sections, each of these questions has been coded against, and each coding theme analysed in detail. Below is an analytical procedure for the main aspects of the law and its strengths and weaknesses:

5.2.1 Strengths of the Press Law

The Press Law is provided a wider space for freedom of expression and freedom of press in compare to the law of central Iraq and the other countries in the Middle East. Many of the Kurdish and international observers have expressed their happiness toward this progresses of the law in a region like Kurdistan. Anwer Hussein, a member of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, called a new law as unique law in the Middle East:

We have a very good Press Law; I think in the Middle East only Israel and maybe Turkey provide such rights to journalists and the media. Under our Press Law the media outlets should not be closed down and journalists can't be imprisoned (Journalist focus group discussion, November 18, 2015).

To analyse this, the following sub-sections are describing the most development points in the new Press Law:

5.2.1.1. Conditions for Opening Media Organisations

One of the positive area of the amended Press Law is the facilitation in obtaining a print media license. Article 3-1⁶¹ indicated to the conditions that should be fulfilled in publish a newspaper. The procedure for getting a license has become quick and easy, this has resulted opening dozens of newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations in Kurdistan. These facilitation is a good sign from the regional government in encouraging the freedom of the media. Saman Fawzi pointed out that the Regional Government is encouraging the freedom of the media by facilitating the process of establishing a media organisation. He stated:

⁶¹ "The Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper shall place an advertisement in two daily newspapers published in the Region, in which the name, title, nationality and place of residence of the Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper is stated as well as the name of the newspaper and its language of publication and the name of its editor and the periods of its issuance. This advertisement shall be equivalent to an announcement for the publication of the newspaper." Article 3-1

There are some pillars of media freedom, one of them is the ease of publishing newspapers. In the Kurdistan region, we are working on the declaration law, which means for opening a newspaper you just need to issue a declaration, and publish this in two daily newspapers, and these are the only requirements. Establishing a newspaper doesn't required any sort of permission from the authorities, and only the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate needs to be informed. This is the same approach as is applied in most developed countries such as Britain and France. Another positive development has been the removal of all the tax on opening media outlets (radio, television and newspapers). I think we are unique in the Middle East with this law because most countries have imposed taxes on media outlets (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

This open approach in the system in Kurdistan could be considered a great step press freedoms. All of these rights is rarely seen in the press law in the neighbouring countries, according to their media law, all journalists and media outlets must apply for license before they begin.

5.2.1.2. Abolishing Censorship and Guaranteeing Freedom of Expression

Another prospect of the law is represented in Article 2, which has clearly raised censorship on the media in addition to guarantee many rights to the media, including the right of freedom of expression. In particular, Article 2 (1) clearly stated: "The Press is free and no censorship shall be imposed on it. Freedom of expression and publication shall be guaranteed to every citizen." Article 2, also from the second Paragraphs up to fifth has further guarantees freedom of the press. For example, in the second it gave the journalist right to obtain from diverse sources. In the third Paragraph allowed journalist to keep secret the sources of information unless the court decides. Finally, perhaps the most importantly to media is what came in the Paragraph 5 of the same Article, which banned the authority or any agent to close down any newspaper or confiscated it.

5.2.1.3. Access to Information Law

The right to access information is the other favourable point regarding the law in Kurdistan Region. This right is imperative for journalists; therefore, it is specifically mentioned in the prevailing Press Law in Kurdistan. In June 2013, the Parliament passed a new law guaranteeing the right of access to information in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. This law is similar to the Freedom of Information Act in the United States. (IFJ, 2014). The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) expressed their satisfaction with this new law. Toby Mendel, Executive Director at the Centre for Law and Democracy said: "It is very welcome that the Kurdistan Region has adopted this law, joining other democracies by putting in place a system for ensuring transparency in government." The right to information was recognised as a fundamental human right in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 2010, more than 70 countries, mostly Western developed countries, had adopted access to information legislation, including Eastern Europe and South America. These laws are generally aimed at "giving citizens, other residents, and interested parties the right to access documents held by the government.

In relation to passing the access information law, all of the members of Kurdistan's Parliament, with a variety of views, have agreed without any objections. The law emphasises the right of access to information for all locals in Iraqi Kurdistan as well as to foreigners. It states that "the government institutions should give the requested information within ten days, unless the information falls into one of the exempted categories: if it relates to military issues, negotiations, personal medical histories or other factors". Overall, there is a hope that the journalists will find better opportunities under

this new law in the future, as access to information remains an obstacle course, particularly for independent journalists.

In theory, the access to information law is considered as a great achievement in the Kurdish journalistic work it aims to: First: to enable citizens of the region to exercise their right to access information, public institutions and private accordance with the provisions of this law. Second, uphold the principles of transparency and effective participation of the consolidation of the democratic process. Third: securing a better climate for freedom of expression and publication. However, in reality there are a lot of obstacles to access information in Kurdistan, and this law has not has not been put into practice.

5.2.1.4. Protection of Journalist's Rights

Overall, Article 7,⁶² from the first Paragraph until the tenth, is a good package that has been provided by the legislature in order to protect journalist's rights. For example, the first Paragraph presents a clear declaration that the journalist is free and there is no power over him in the performance of his work except the law; the second Paragraph asserts on given opinion or publishing information will not cause injury to journalist's person or violate his rights; and the third, gives the journalist right to protect privacy of sources of information unless a judicial decision is issued. In addition to some other journalist rights such as the right to attend certain activity, journalist's choices to terminate his contract, and journalist salaries wages. Overall, this Article is expanding journalist rights, and the Paragraphs consider direct call of legislator in Kurdistan for the media to do their duties as the watchful eye of the people to follow the negative

⁶² See appendix 1

phenomena and corruptions. It insurance the journalist that there will not be any punishment for disseminating information and opinions and also asserted that no power is above him except the law.

Article 8,⁶³ is also continued to insurance the journalist rights from any arbitrary action against him in case he has been accused in professional performance duties. In this case, this article has provided some further protections for the journalist, such as first, the Syndicate should be informed of any legal actions against journalist; second, journalist shall not be investigated or his house be searched; third, documents from journalist collections should not be taken proof against him if they are not directly related to the issue under investigation.

From this analysis one can say that compared to the other media law in the Middle Eastern countries, the overall Kurdish Press Law has written well, However, the law is imperfect it bears some core weaknesses, yet there are some criticisms and fears about a number of aspects, especially in the section which related to freedom of expression (Article 9.1).

5.2.2. Press Law Weaknesses

Journalists have raised concerns about a list of areas which are prohibited and believe the legislation imposes undue.

5.2.2.1. Imposing Big Fines on Journalist

Regarding the fines which has mentioned in the first and second Paragraphs in Article 9. In the first Paragraph of the Article 9 the law has imposed big fines on the

⁶³ See appendix 1

journalist. It states that journalists who publish a critical article can be punished with fines ranging from 1 to 5 million Iraqi Dinars (US \$820 to \$4,200). Additionally, Article 9, second Paragraph stipulates that the organisation publishing such an article may have to pay a fine of between 5 and 20 million Dinars (US \$4,200 to \$21,000). Also, in the third Paragraph indicates to the raise the fine if the violation were repeated, by stating “the Court may provide that it does not exceed double the sum of the fine described in Paragraphs (first and second) above.” Many journalist have expressed their dissatisfaction with these fines and they said it is a large amount of money compared to the journalist’s wage in Kurdistan. Also, most of our interviewees suggested that imposing such high fines against journalists and editors could restrict media freedom. Azad Hama Amin, the General Secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, stated:

We have changed all the physical punishments in the Press Law into fines. Now there are a lot of fines imposed upon media organizations and journalists. In some cases the fine might increase to fifty million Iraqi Dinars (US \$42,000) or even more if the case is transferred to another law, these considered a large amount of money, therefore journalists struggle if they receive these fines (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

However, others said that the law cannot be without penalties, as stated by some journalists Firhad Awni⁶⁴ Areez Abdallah,⁶⁵ these penalties create a balance between freedom of expression and individual freedom and public freedom.

Overall, journalists specified that the most important point of this law is abolishing every physical punishment on journalist especially imprisonment. This feature is not exist even in the Iraqi Press Law, the imprisonment of the journalist start from a year to sometimes sentences to death in Iraq. In the previous Kurdish Press Law, the

⁶⁴ A former General Secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate

⁶⁵ A member of the cultural committee of Kurdistan’s regional parliament

imprisonment of journalists upon a court order was allowed. It was stipulated that “in case a journalist violates the laws in force in the region, the judge may issue an arrest warrant for the journalist after informing the union.” This text has now been replaced by a new article stipulating that “in case of violation of laws in force, the journalist shall only be subject to a financial fine and shall not be imprisoned.” The changing imprisonment of the journalist to only fine because it reduced fear of journalist in conducting journalistic work (Niqash).

The second criticism towards the Press Law was for the using some undefined terms, in fact there is a list of terms came in the Article 9 which according to many media and law experts, are not even with the overall the rights of the journalist in the other Articles. What comes in this Article is overstated in the action of the journalist's behaviour by mentioning some terms that are not defined. As a whole, chapter 9, is just oppose to overall Articles. For example, in case of violation of journalist, as far as the Kurdish Press Law referred to the principles of ethics stated by the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists,⁶⁶ it was no need to limit freedom of expression by those Paragraphs and imposes strict guidelines as it in the Articles 6 and 9.

These terms and phrases have been mentioned in the law that have several meanings, which has concerned many journalist and international organisations journalists to ask for clarity. A number of terms are listed in Article 9, addressing these terms can be problematic for journalism and free expression because without careful and specific definition for these terms the media are open for abuse. The first Paragraph in Article 9 that prohibits distributing information because of “instability situation security”

⁶⁶ Article 9, 1(7)

“making fear to people” “encourage in executing crime” “encourage terror” or “fostering hatred, discord and disagreement among the components of Kurdish society.” All of these are confusion of ideas and have a wide margin which will be open for interpretation and abuse. Such terms could easily lead to self-censorship by journalists, because a reporter covering corruption at a government agency could be accused of any of these ambiguous terms.

5.2.2.2. Protection of Journalist's Job

As key element in fostering an empowering environment for independent media is the protection of journalists in their professional activities. There are at least two components to this. The first concerns, which has been discussed above, was the matter of physical security, and the extent to which the legal system protects journalists from violence and the second is journalists' job security, which relates to the relationship between journalists and media owners.

In Kurdistan, every media organisation has a specific aim, and journalists are obliged to adhere to their editorial policies. Journalists are also required to practise censorship for media organisations because there is no legal contract between journalists and media channel. Therefore, dismissing journalists is very simple; if a journalist issues a report that a media organisation's owners dislike, that could lead to their dismissal. Journalists therefore tend to follow all the media's editorial policies in order to avoid upsetting the media owners and losing their jobs. As long as the majority of the media outlets are owned by political parties; editors and journalists are therefore forced to be a part of the parties' organs.

Regarding the journalist's job security, this contract is not defined in Kurdish Press Law properly, there is no legal agreement between journalists and media channel. In this matter, Azad Hama Amin, the General Secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate, mentioned that "we as KJS asked the media organisation and the journalist to sign their contracts KJS offices, we wanted to help journalists but nobody listened to us" (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015). Thus it is clear that the Kurdish Press Law is not defined the journalists' job security; this would result in doubts about the claim to democracy.

5.2.3. Implementation of the Law

As stated above, some areas of the Press Law are concerning to journalists in Kurdistan, such as the imposition of fines. However, journalists are in general satisfied with the Press Law, they do not ask for any other amendment, because they are worried about the government's plan to weaken the guarantees that have been obtained, rather than improvement. The interviewees are most worried about the implementation of the law. They indicated that sometimes courts judge journalists under different laws; I asked for further information about this problem and the other laws were being used. Mam Qanie, a freelance journalist and previously the Director of the newsroom at *NRT*, explained:

In some issues, the courts are not dealing with journalist's cases according to the Press Law No. 35. but often they refer the lawsuit of the journalist to the 1969 Iraqi Penal Code instead. Accordingly, journalists might be charged with, for example, the defamation article or with the anti-terror law. In fact, this action against the journalists means stepping back to the beginning of the journalistic achievements (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

Also, Asos Hardy the Director of the Awene Publishing Company and the editor of the Awene private newspaper stated:

According to Press Law 2007, No. 35, Article 8, the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) shall be informed of any legal actions against journalists. The Syndicate informed the Police Office of this, but in spite of this agreement between the Judicial Council and the Journalism Syndicate the courts do not deal with journalists according to the Press Law (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

The interviewees were in agreement that the Press Law implementation is very weak in Kurdistan, especially by the courts. They have pointed out that, if the current law was applied well it would likely have a positive impact, even despite the poorly defined terms and sentences. For example, as Mam Qanie Bakir Hama Sdiq and Asos Aardy pointed out, courts judge journalists under different laws, such as the defamation article or with the anti-terror law or refer the lawsuit of the journalist to the 1969 Iraqi Penal Code instead. Also, by law, journalists are protected; the Kurdish Press Law, No. 35 of 2007, clearly prohibits all types of violence against journalists including imprisonment, harassment, physical abuse of reporters and the closing down of media outlets. Despite this law, hundreds of violations have been recorded, including threats, imprisonment, and beatings, especially those who are working for independent and opposition media outlets.

5.2.4. Implementation of the Access to Information Law

Accessing information is a requirement of journalists, and it is considered a fundamental right for journalists to do their work properly. In many countries, especially the fragile democratic countries, accessing information is considered a major problem inhibiting the media's role. Although journalists access information has been issued in particular law in 2013, the journalist access to information is not helpful through the official ways in Kurdistan. In fact, Kurdistan is among those countries that has seen problem with getting information from the authorities. This is considered by the interviewees as one of the biggest obstacles hindering the media's development. Kamal Rauf, the Director of the *SharPress* news media website, argued: "despite the existence

of a particular law about getting information, government institutions are not giving information to the journalist” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Habib Karkuki also explained the reality of the current situation in Kurdistan regarding access to information:

In some developing countries, where democracy and human rights are less established, such as Middle Eastern countries, the right to access information is not supported by the government bodies for a number of reasons. First, freedom of information will lead the public to have more information about the government’s day-to-day performance, and this directly promotes greater transparency, which itself encourages the reduction of corruption in the political system (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

Karkuki further argued that the information law will deliberately not be enforced.

He stated:

In my opinion, corruption is everywhere in the government institutions in Kurdistan, even in the court. If all the information appeared to the public, many political actors and managers would be involved in corruption cases. Therefore, the authorities decide to hide information from the public. If the media expose all these lies by the political parties’ leaders, they will surely lose their reputation and they will not be elected in the next election (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

Unfortunately, the access information law is not yet enforced. Almost all of the interviewees emphasised that the law has not been put into practice because it fails to create an environment that facilitates its intentions. According to Azad Hama Amin, the main obstacle that hinders the application of the law is a lack of guidelines for how it should be implemented. He noted:

When the law was issued, the Kurdish Parliament authorised the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan to monitor the law’s implementation. However, the Human Rights Commission declared that they are unable to do this because the law comes without any instructions for implementation. Therefore, it seems that this law, since its birth, has not been given any attention by the government (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

There are two reasons for the obstructions to the practise of this law. Firstly, the weaknesses in the rule of law. Rahman Gharib, the General Coordinator for non-profit advocacy group Metro Centre to Defend Journalists, expressed his view by saying, “the law supporting access to information is not enforced, there is a lack of law enforcement here.” (In-depth interview, November 18 2015). The second reason is that, the corrupt government and politicians do not want this law because transparency in institutions will display their wrongdoings.

Overall, in day-to-day journalistic practise, accessing information is difficult and this is considered as one of the greatest obstacle for the media in Kurdistan. It is not easy to get information in Kurdistan because different government institutions have different rules, and make their own decisions over whether to release information. “The government institutions only give information to the ruling parties’ media easily, however for the other media organisations there are many obstacles,” said by Haider Jamil,⁶⁷ the Director of Kurdiu.⁶⁸ While accessing information is an essential right for journalists in the democratic society, Kurdistan in this matter has a major problem, and this has affected journalistic work. Almost all the interviewees argued that there are difficulties in accessing information and asserted that in countries such as Iraq and Kurdistan where corruption is practised everywhere, the real application of this law is unlikely.

⁶⁷ The research in-depth interview

⁶⁸ Kirdiu is the official electronic news website of KIU.

5.3. Economic Environment of the Media in Kurdistan

To maintain effectiveness, the media should be free from monopolisation from the government, politicians, and particularly commercial interests. In general, world widely, there are two major problems that might face media independence across the countries, which are political challenges and economic difficulties. “In Kurdistan, the connection between journalists and politics is like blood in the body; it is very hard to separate one from the other. Since their birth, the media have always been affiliated with politics in Kurdistan”, said Stran Abdullah (academic group discussion, November 12, 2015). As mentioned in Chapter Two, the first Kurdish newspaper was completely politically oriented; since then, due to Kurdish calls for independence most Kurdish newspapers have been strongly linked to politics throughout their history. For example, in 1991, a significant number of partisan media outlets were established; these were completely funded by political parties especially by the two major parties, the PUK and KDP. Almost all media outlets, across radio, television, and newspapers, were controlled by the political parties; there were no private or independent media in Kurdistan. Later, over the last decade, a new model has begun to emerge in the media landscape.

However, the commercial pressure on the media is not common in Kurdistan. Since the purpose of the early Kurdish media was not commercial but was instead connected to political purposes. For a long time, during previous regimes, the media served as a means of ideological expression and political utilization. The Communist Press and Authoritarian Media Model were in use in Iraq and Kurdistan Region, all the media outlets being run by the government and Baath party. Even after the important

political events in 1991 and 2003,⁶⁹ only the private media outlets, which are very few in Kurdistan, have independence in their financial system. The majority of the news media outlets which include the partisan and opposition media and the ‘shadow media’ even after the process of democratisation are completely funded by the political parties or powerful politics. Thus, what should be discussed in this section is the poor economic environment of the media and journalist in Kurdistan.

5.3.1. Economic Impact on the Democratic Role of the Media

It is clear that political parties always want to have their dominance over the media, therefore after the emergence of private/independent media outlets, the audience of the partisan media declined dramatically. Then a new strategy came to the surface which is building strong news media with a wide margin of freedom. By adopting this plan the political parties could overcome their weaknesses; these media outlets are completely owned by individuals who are in power in the ruling parties (see Chapter Four for more details).

Currently, the most effective model of news media in Kurdistan are the private media and the ‘shadow media’. First, the private media, this news media is the only type of the active news media which is financially independent. The primarily purpose of establishing private media in Kurdistan was to follow up the government performance and transparency. This type of the media showed their activeness in contributing building the democratic principles in Kurdistan through being an eyes for the public through presenting critical reports about the government corruptions.

⁶⁹ In 1991 the Kurdish gained semi-autonomous from the Iraqi regime and in 2003 the process of democratisation has started after the Iraqi war.

Second the 'shadow media', although this model of the media has served the Kurdish news media in terms of presenting extensive news coverage and follow up the government and political parties' corruptions, it has a negative impact on the media autonomy, because the 'shadow media' is owned by individuals in the ruling political parties and primarily, is not required to be profitable. The ruling parties give 'shadow media' organisations a huge budget; The cost of running these channels is very high, and they are equipped with expensive advanced technology to attract professional journalists; For example, they publish daily newspapers that are larger than private newspapers and sold for a lower price, or even for free. This ability of the 'shadow media' to act in this way has weakened the private media market, as Asos Hardy explained his resentment about the failing media market in Kurdistan.

The last thing that the ruling parties have done against the private media was the economic battle. The ruling parties have created the 'shadow media', with a huge budget, to challenge our private newspapers. They are able to pay high salaries and buy very good quality equipment to attract our professional journalists. The 'shadow media' has badly affected the private media, especially print newspapers. For example, while I barely manage to publish 20 pages twice a week, they can easily publish their daily newspaper with more pages for a lower price or even for free. Also, their newspapers are better quality in terms of publication and distribution. With all these pressures, it is very difficult for the private media to sustain itself, because the circulations of some private newspapers have dropped by two-thirds (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Thus, there has been a failure in the private media market in Kurdistan. First, because of the strong competition of the 'shadow media' to be the first news media in Kurdistan Region. Second, there is not enough advertising to support the media; none of the media outlets can depend on advertising to generate enough revenue, and establishing the media were always subjected to lose money in Kurdistan. These reasons made independent media with poor finance is very challenging. For example, *Hawlati*, the first private Kurdish newspaper that was considered by the Kurdish media scholars as

symbolic for an independent/private media in Kurdistan, decided to close its print version because of a financial crisis on 23 February 2016. *SharPress* newspaper, also shut down because of financial problems in 2015. The closure of a number of private newspaper is a good example of weaknesses of the media market in Kurdistan.

5.3.2. Journalist's Poor Economic Conditions Impact on Journalistic Work

Journalists' economic conditions have a direct impact on their work: when a journalist is paid well, they are more likely to be able to do their job professionally. Sander (2003, cited in Changarawe, 2015) suggests poor salaries are a major reason behind weak media, because journalists might accept bribes in order to cover a specific news story in a positive way. Bribes are likely to be offered by politicians wishing to influence how journalists report the news. This cooperation by politicians and editors is common, and it leads to the independence of the media being undermined.

The financial situation of journalists in Kurdistan, as in many other transitional regions, is poor. Most journalists are not paid well; the salaries of those who are working for the private media and the opposition media are usually between 400-800 US dollars per month. However, journalists who are working in the 'shadow media' have a better economic situation. In this regards, *Rudaw* has made considerable progress toward increasing journalists' salaries and allowing journalists, the minimum salary for *Rudaw* journalists is monthly 1000, while the maximum is 4000 US dollars. Thus, it could attract many journalist and gain control of journalists' voices indirectly. Yahya Reshawi, a journalism lecturer in the Polytechnic University in Sulaymaniyah, said:

Because of offering good salaries on one hand and on the other, are advertising for media freedom and claiming independence from the political parties'

dominance, the shadow media has attracted many of the famous and professional journalists in Kurdistan. However, the editorial policies of these channels are very clear. Everyone who works in these media networks knows very well what kind of reporting should be broadcast” (Academic group discussion, 12 November 2015).

Thus, the ‘shadow media’ are able to attract journalists from different backgrounds and different media organisations, because unlike in the partisan media, journalists in these media do have a space to report freely, and they have provided a forum to conduct political debate and wider opportunities to criticise misleading claims made by politicians and the government. Then another question will come out, which is whether the political parties have indirect control over journalists working outside of the ‘shadow media’? The interviewees were not in agreement, some of them recalled that there have been major attempts by politicians to buy journalists voices, especially those journalists who are working in the private media. Kurdish politicians ever want to be close to the private media through, for example, trying to attract journalists by offering them good opportunities; they have either attempted to encourage to the media to cover their news positively or at least stay silent. In this matter, Mam Qanie said:

I can say that the politicians have tried, with almost all of the independent journalists, (the famous and the junior), to buy their voice. This has been done in secret, we have no information about the agreements but we can see the result. This is very clear in the tone of the news stories or the articles presenting coverage of corruption. We can see that there is less focus on some politicians than others, even though they are all involved with corruption (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

This discussion has shown that political parties and politicians have tried to control journalists’ voices in several ways. First, they have encouraged journalists to leave the private media and work in the ‘shadow media’ such as *Rudaw*, which has employed many qualified and experienced journalists. Second, politicians have tried to control journalists who work outside the ‘shadow media’ by offering money, either as a donation to private media organisations or as a personal offer in order to earn friendship

from journalists in the private media. Thirdly, they have also tried to bribe journalists and bargain with both the senior and junior journalists. In this regards, the interviewees argued that many of these aims have already been adopted; in other words, through this method, politicians have been able to dominate the news media in a modern way, because as stated there is a wide space for criticism and investigative reporting about the political and government misconduct. Indeed, some of the journalists have already accepted the offers and some have not.

In this matter, most of the interviewees, the senior journalist in particular, completely denied having any commitment towards the politicians or any agreements about the coverage of political corruption. They identified that the politicians and the authorities have ever tried to buy the independent journalists' voice, or silent the media by offering them a great amount of money or high positions in government. However, these bargains are never accepted by the famous journalists, they said that bribers are not work with the real journalists. If someone fell into this kind of bargain, it will be revealed very soon though their writings and their speech. This will have a direct influence on the reputations of the journalists and certainly the reputation of journalists are the most important things in our job and we not destroyed by any amount of money.

5.4. Conclusion

The general aim in this chapter was to examine the legal and economic development of the media in Kurdistan in the time of democratisation. In terms of legal environment, the Press Law has seen a significant improvement in Kurdistan. Under this law, journalists have protection, and the law prohibits all types of violence against journalists including imprisonment, harassment, physical abuse of reporters and the

closing down of media outlets. Furthermore, by law there is a wide space for Kurdish to express their opinions on governmental issues, politics and economic development freely. However, their main concern is about some undefined terms which is oppose to the overall context of the law. The legislator imposed a large fine to the journalist and the media organisations if they published for example anything might “fostering hatred, discord and disagreement among the components of Kurdish society.” However, overall the law is good as most of the Kurdish journalist have expressed their satisfactions towards the law if it is applied properly. The law would likely have a positive impact in Kurdistan, even despite the poorly defined terms and sentences.

Therefore, regarding creating a suitable environment for the media to operate their democratic functions, the law indeed provides a considerable space for the media in Kurdistan, but reforms in the laws and structures alone do not guarantee the media will operate successfully. What is important, in all matters is that there is a close interaction between the law and how it is interpreted and implemented. Next chapter provides details on the rule of law, it acknowledges that there is a big gap between the written law and the real practise of law regarding the media in Kurdistan and the courts have also not paid attention to either the Press Law nor Kurdistan Journalist Syndicate’s instructions. In Kurdistan there are records of a large number of instances of violence and attacks against the journalists including arrests, murders, beatings and threats. Consequently, the lack implementation of the law has created an important factor impeded the creation of a desirable environment for the media to operate in.

Regarding the economic environment, it is clear that growth of the media market is a strong step towards the development of a liberal and independent media. The media should be financially independent in order to perform a democratic function. The financial situation of the Kurdish journalists is poor, thus, there is a risk of journalists

accepting bribes. As stated, creating a suitable environment for the media is one of the core principles of the democratic society. Unfortunately, the private media in Kurdistan is currently at a very weak level, because they do not have enough revenue to survive without supports, and the government has no plan to support them without conditions in order to overcome their poor financial problems. What is obvious is the politicians, who also run the government, are constantly trying to control the media through funding. They have used their wealth to dominate the media in Kurdistan by establishing a 'shadow media' as a new model of the media, which has a wide space to criticise the government. These wealthy politicians claim that the purpose of establishing these media is only for promoting democracy in Kurdistan Region, it is difficult indeed to monitor the intentions of media owners. Although the establishment of the 'shadow media' made the news media in Kurdistan stronger than ever and has helped journalists overcome financial problems, it affects the independence of the media. For example, these media networks are run by a limited number of families who are active in the political parties; this means the parties have implicitly controlled the media again by establishing these media networks on one hand, and on the other hand it has weakened the private/independent media market because the 'shadow media' are challenging the private/independent media in several ways: first, because of the high quality of these media networks, most of the advertisement revenue are going to them. Second, the owners of the 'shadow media' are very wealthy, they profusely spend money on these media outlets and they do not seek any profit from these news organisations. This has undoubtedly resulted in a market failure in general, and in the private/independent media market in particular in Kurdistan. It is clear that the media ownership has a direct influence on media independence and the professionalism of watchdog reporting. In the case within Kurdistan, if the media are dominated and monopolised by political parties, does the media in Kurdistan have the

capacity to perform its function as a watchdog? Is there any correlation between the role of the media as the state watchdog and improving democratic governance? This will be analysed in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Chapter Six

Threats and Challenges to Journalism in Kurdistan Region

6.1. Introduction

This chapter has been introduced to answer the third research question, which is: To what extent has the challenging political situation hindered the development of the democratic media? The examination area will include the political situation and the extent of the media freedom in Kurdistan. What is clear that in the newly democratised Kurdistan, various pressures on the media might be in practise even in the period of democratisation. In the theory, it is essential in the democratic system to enable the media to perform their functions and the country should have democratic institutions to support the media. This research considers the debate that the entry of the United States military to Iraq and Kurdistan Region has brought democratic change, especially in the media in Iraq and Kurdistan (Kim and Hama-Saeed, 2008; Sheyholislami, 2011; Ismaeli, 2015). In some areas, the changes are matched democracy and in others not. For example, the positive aspects of the changes can be concluded as, improvements in the right to freedom of expression, by law, people have the right to criticise the government and talk about their rights via the media clearly and prior censorship on the media has been abolished. Furthermore, in the democratisation period, the Kurdistan region has taken steps towards building a civil society. Many local⁷⁰ and international⁷¹ organisations have opened to

⁷⁰Local organisations such as Metro Centre and Defence Committee of Press Freedom.

⁷¹International organisations such as Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House. Institute for War and Peace.

defend the media and ensure the rights of journalists and observe the media's situation. In annual and monthly reports, these organisations assess the degree of media freedom and record all violations against journalists who are practicing journalistic work. These changes that have occurred since 2003 could be considered a key factor in the development of the democratic process and as signs of media freedom in Kurdistan.

However, this chapter will point to some other areas that still need improvement in Kurdistan, for example, in the last ten years several incidences of violence have been committed against journalists.⁷² A big concern here is about the Kurdish journalists' task and their safety because the threats and targeting of journalists might prevent them from expressing their views and writing on critical issues in Kurdistan. Committing violence against a journalist, such as threats, kidnapping and murder, may lead journalists to practice self-censorship.

This chapter, therefore, is going to examine whether the challenging political environment encourages democracy and enhances the democratic role of the media, or whether it is just the opposite. This chapter presents analysis of the data that have gathered from research interviews and group discussions. Beside participants' opinions, I took advantage of secondary data, such as document reviews, using data, documents and figures from official and academic reports. Also, observation, my personal experience as a researcher in the field of media in Kurdistan, was very helpful. To simplify the analysis and examine the political environment of the media in Kurdistan two main themes have

⁷² Within five years (2008-2013), three journalists were murdered in Kurdistan because of their reporting activities. Also, the number of attacks on journalists and the media are increasing. According to Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS), cases of violence against journalists have increased from 58 in 2014 to 72 in 2015 (Report (15) and (16) of the Committee for the Defense of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate).

been identified: (1) Violence against journalists, and (2) Journalist's self-censorship and organisational censorship. Each of these themes has been divided into several sections.

6.2. Violence Against Journalists

In this section, the political environment will be evaluated by investigating whether the news media and journalists can uncover news safely without harassment, including arbitrary detention or imprisonment, violent assaults and threats. As mentioned in Chapter One, in democratic societies, the ideal environment for the media should be characterised by the right to report on, to comment on, and to criticise its own government without threat from figures in authority (Hachten, 2005). Thus, in democratic society, the media are able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint. An enabling environment for the media is essential to protect journalists in their professional activities. To obtain this, the adaptation of effective laws and a legal framework will be helpful. However, in Kurdistan, the implementation of the law, especially toward journalists, is poor. For example, by law, journalists are protected; the Kurdish Press Law, No. 35 of 2007, clearly prohibits all types of violence against journalists including imprisonment, harassment, physical abuse of reporters and the closing down of media outlets. Despite this law, hundreds of violations have been recorded, including threats, imprisonment, and beatings, especially against those who are working for independent and opposition media outlets.

In the new environment in Kurdistan after 2003, there are still critical issues about the practise of media and thus it is crucial to investigate the negative areas of the media in this research. This section specifically will examine all the forms of violence have been committed against journalists and reveal the reality of the political environment of the

media in Kurdistan. To simplify the analysis, the coding of themes about violence has been divided into two sections: (1) Assassination and murder (2) Examples of the lack of law enforcement and violence against journalism

6.2.1. Assassination and Murder

Although the security and the working environment for the media in Kurdistan is safer compared to the rest of Iraq⁷³ (Kim and Hama-Saeed, 2008), Kurdistan is not free from violation. The legacy of violence against journalists is ongoing in Kurdistan (Abdulla, 2014). In the five-year period of 2008-2013, three journalists were murdered because of their reporting activities. These were: Soran Mama Hama, Sardasht Osman, and Kawa Garmyane. The murder of the journalists was discussed widely in the research interviews, its important in this research is for two main reasons: First, it reveals the reality of the media situation in Kurdistan; as stated, the protection of journalists and their work is vital in the democratic societies, therefore any increase in the number of violent acts towards the media impedes the process of democratisation. Second, the consequences of violence for journalism overall may lead to the practise of self-censorship by journalists and this will affect the democratic role of the media as a whole. The details of these three cases are as follows.

1. Kawa Garmyane:

Was 32 years old, he was the Editor-In-Chief of Rayel magazine. He had also released several reports asserting corruption among Kurdish politicians, especially those connected to two ruling political parties, the PUK and KDP. His magazine, Rayel, aimed

⁷³ Iraq is considered a dangerous and difficult place for journalists, according to the survey by the Committee to Protect Journalists (see reports of Committee to Protect Journalists, 2006-2016). For example, between March 2003 and January 2008 in Iraq, 125 Journalists were killed on duty as a journalist.

to expose the wrongdoings of political actors, particularly those in power. On December 5, 2013, Garmyane was shot outside his home in Kalar.⁷⁴

2. *Sardasht Osman:*

Was a freelance journalist who wrote for Kurdistan Post, Awena, Hawlati, and Lvinpress. He was 23 years old, and had studied English at the Salahaddin University in Erbil. He was kidnapped at the gates of the University on 4th May 2010, when he was in his fourth year. Two days later, his body was found on Musil Road. Sardasht usually wrote sarcastic articles about corruption involving high-ranking government officials and the region's two major political parties.

3. *Soran Mama Hama:*

Was 23 years old when he was murdered by unknown attackers. He was a reporter for the Kurdish-language bimonthly magazine *Leven*. Almost a year before his murder he had received threatening messages. On July 22, 2008, he was shot by unidentified gunmen riding in a BMW car in front of his home in Kirkuk.

The people I interviewed pointed out the reasons behind journalist's assassination clearly. They stated that, the killing occurred because of his article about a political leader's involvement in prostitution. Rebeen Hardy, the editor of *Sardam* Media Organisation for Publishing, asserted that Soran was killed because of an interview he conducted, saying: "both the interviewer and the interviewee were killed in this case".

⁷⁴ Kalar is a small city in Kurdistan located to the south of Sulaymaniyah.

Regarding Kawa Garmyane, Hardy also said:

Garmyane was very brave in his writing, he enjoyed challenging the authority. He was a victim of corruption. Kawa Garmyane was investigating some corruption files regarding some sensitive issues. He was talking about a specific type of corruption which involved some political leaders. Therefore, all the people know that Kawa Garmyane was killed because of these reports (In-depth interview, February 10, 2015).

Sardasht Osman also killed because of his writing, One of Osman's most critical articles was about the family of President Barzani, called "I Am in Love With Barzani's Daughter".⁷⁵ In this story, which was published in December 2009 in Kurdistan Post, Osman attacked the wealthy Kurdish President and wondered whether he could escape his poor origins by marrying one of Barzani's three daughters. After receiving many threatening calls⁷⁶ about this story, in the final article before his death Sardasht wrote about his anticipation of being murdered. "I am not afraid of death from torture", he stated. "I'm here waiting for my appointment with my murderers. I am praying for the most tragic death possible, to match my tragic life" (Human Rights Watch's Report, October 29, 2010).

⁷⁵ An excerpt from Osman's article: "If I become Massoud Barzani's son-in-law, we would spend our honeymoon in Paris and would also visit our uncle's mansion in America. I would move my house from one of the poorest areas in Erbil to Sari Rash [Barzani's palace complex] where it would be protected by American guard dogs and Israeli bodyguards. I would make my father become the Minister of 'Peshmerga' [the Kurdish militia]. He had been a 'Peshmerga' in the September revolution, but he now has no pension because he is no longer a member of Kurdistan Democratic Party. I would make my unlucky brother, who recently finished university but is now unemployed and looking to leave Kurdistan, chief of my special forces. My sister who has been too embarrassed to go to the bazaar to shop, could drive all the expensive cars just as Barzani's daughters do. For my mother, who is diabetic and has high blood pressure and heart problems but who is not able to afford treatment outside Kurdistan, I would hire a couple of Italian doctors to treat her in the comfort of her own house. For my uncles, I would open few offices and departments and they, along with all my nieces and nephews would become high generals, officers, and commanders. The family of Mulla Mustafa Barzani [Massoud Barzani's father] can kill anyone they want, and they surely will." <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc050910KA.html>

⁷⁶ According to his brother Bashdar, Sardasht Osman had received a number of threatening phone calls telling him to stop writing about the Kurdistan Regional Government and its officials.

Overall, journalists have been subjected to physical attacks because they have represented the democratic role of the media. Different forms of violations have been committed against journalists in order to keep them silent. What made the situation more critical is, most of the attacks against journalists were not investigated properly and the attackers have gone unpunished. For example, Sardasht Osman was killed by unknown kidnappers. A week after his murder, hundreds of university students gathered and demonstrated against those involved with his death. They accused the authorities of the murder and of the violence against journalists. Seventy-five Kurdish journalists and editors also issued a statement which held the regional government responsible for Osman's death. Reporters Without Borders also expressed its fears about the situation of pressure on the media in Kurdistan, and asked the government to provide appropriate measures to protect the lives of journalists. The organisation argued that the killing of Sardasht highlights the extreme danger that journalists face in the region (Human Rights Watch Report, October 29, 2010).

However, after the murder, a committee was selected by the government to investigate the crime but the names of the committee's members were not released. Kurdish critics have expressed doubts about the existence of the committee, because nobody has been able to identify any of the members. In September, the Kurdistan Regional Government issued a 430-word report that declared that Osman had been killed by a member of Ansar al-Islam,⁷⁷ but provided no evidence for the assassination. However, Ansar al-Islam denied its involvement with his murder. Another example is the lack of investigation in the case of Kawa Garmyane, although Sangwani⁷⁸ was the prime

⁷⁷ Ansar al-Islam was an extremist Islamic group in Kurdistan. The report claims that Osman was killed because he was not carrying out work he had promised to do.

⁷⁸ Before Garmyane was killed, Mahmoud Sangawi a military commander in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), had threatened Garmyane in a phone conversation. This conversation had been recorded

suspect of his murder, another person took the responsibility of Garmyane's murder and nothing has been done in this case. The murder has gone without any punishment, because the case is demonstrably linked to some powerful members in the ruling parties. Since the investigation, many critics and writers have criticised the judiciary in Kurdistan for their lack of commitment to the media. In this matter, most of the interviewees asserted that the judiciary is controlled by the two ruling parties PUK and KDP.

Burning Nalia Radio and Television (*NRT*)⁷⁹ is another clear example of the lack of law implementation in Kurdistan. *NRT* was established on February 17, 2011, the same day the 17th February demonstrations began. From its first day, it broadcast coverage of the protests, showing a live feed of demonstrators protesting against corruption. The station was burned because it continued its live broadcasts on the demonstrations.⁸⁰ These protestors were calling for an end to poor governance by Barzani, the Kurdistan Regional President. After a few days of its broadcasting, dozens of armed men broke into *NRT*'s headquarters on February 22nd 2011 and torched the entire building. This event is recorded as a worse situation of the media in Kurdistan. Many international organisations like CPJ and Reporters Without Borders such as CPJ issued reports about the state of media freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan, they have criticised the high number of violations

and was later published on YouTube in July 2012. According to news reports, Sangawi was the prime suspect of his murder. He was therefore arrested in January 2014, but quickly released because of a lack of evidence. Sangawi has not denied the phone call or the use of vulgar language, but said he was only threatening Garmyane as he had published a critical article about Sangwani in his magazine. In a court case, another person took the responsibility of Garmyane's murder; however, neither Garmyane's family nor the journalists accepted this trial. After Sangwani was released, journalists and human rights defenders expressed doubts about Sangawi's case. Consequently, many people gathered in front of Kalar courthouse and that demanded authorities and the court make the right decision about Garmyane's killer.

⁷⁹ Nalia Radio and Television (*NRT*) is the first and only private sector television station in Kurdistan, founded by Abdwl Wahid Shaswar in Sulaimaniyah.

⁸⁰ The 17th February 2011 demonstrations happened mainly in the city of Al-Sulaimaniya in Kurdistan. 17th February were a series of demonstrations. Nearly 7,000 protesters gathered for 62 days to demonstrate against government corruption. During this period five people were killed in Sulaymaniyah, and according to figures released by the Directorate of Health in Sulaymaniyah 958 people were injured.

recorded against the media. and expressed their concerns about the government's weak commitment to media freedom. A report of CPJ mentioned that on several occasions, particularly in the cases of murdered journalists and the torching of the *NRT* television station, had asked for a clear response from the authorities about these violations, but the commitment of the authorities to these organisations was very low. The representatives of these international organisations therefore expressed their disappointment about this situation, and the lack of transparency in Kurdistan.

These analyses indicate that much of violence has occurred against journalists but the courts have been silent toward the most of the crimes. Although there have been investigations into these cases, no arrests have been made. This has left journalists disappointed about the ineffectiveness of the judiciary and law enforcement agencies in Kurdistan. For example, Twana Osman, the manager of the news television *NRT*, expressed his doubt about Kurdistan's system of governance. He said: "there was sufficient evidence for the court to establish the truth about this event, but the court did not make a serious attempt to find the suspects and bring them to justice".⁸¹ Instead of conducting an investigation to identify the criminals who were involved in the case of *NRT* burning, Kurdistan's parliament and courts made negotiations, then the government was obligated to pay 15 million US dollars to *NRT*. According to Ferhad Hatem, the General of the Court of Sulaymaniyah, the government is obligated to pay 15 million US dollars to *NRT* in damages. Hatem told CPJ that there is no legal basis for such compensation: "I don't want to hide it from you. There is a political aspect to this, if the

⁸¹ (Abdulla, 2014: 7).

government has not committed [it], why does it have to pay compensation for this crime?”⁸².

About the judiciary independence and how are dealing with journalistic cases? most of the interviewees also emphasised that the judicial system is not working independently, Bakir Hama Sdiq, a former member of the Iraqi Parliament and a senior lawyer in Sulaymaniyah, argued:

The political parties have influence over the court, most of the positions in the judiciary and the judge are selected by the two ruling parties, and this selection depends on the person's loyalty to the parties. In fact, this is considered as a main obstacle to the media's democratic role, because the selected judges cannot deal with journalistic cases impartially. However, this does not necessarily mean that Kurdistan does not have effective judges, in fact, we do have very good judges, all these matters are dependent on individual's principles (In-depth interview, February 10, 2015).

Asos Hardy also confirmed that, and expressed his concern about the courts performance, by saying:

There are many cases that have gone unpunished. Anybody can hurt journalists or even kill them, then escape easily. Regarding the judicial system, I think nobody can say that the court in Kurdistan is completely independent. As we can see, nobody has been punished in the cases of the murders of the journalists, because the suspects were powerful figures in the two major political parties (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Also one of the research interviewees as a victim of an unfair decision about his journalistic story, expressed his concern about the judicial system's independence in

⁸² (Ibid.).

Kurdistan. He said: “according to my experience⁸³ with the judiciary, I can definitely say that the court’s decisions are not independent” (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

As a result, it has become clear that Kurdistan suffers from a lack of transparency, independence and ineffective judiciary and law enforcement agencies. As mentioned, in a democratic system, there should be strong support from each of the government’s separate powers (legislature, executive, and judiciary). However, in Kurdistan, there is very limited support from the governmental powers. The civil society groups and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have also not protected the journalist sufficiently. Weaknesses in investigating the murders of three journalists, and the unresolved cases of *NRT* indicate towards the fragile democracy in Kurdistan and the inactiveness of the judiciary system. Kurdistan is still unable to provide the right to freedom of expression for the journalist and the public, although this is considered one of the core principles of the democratic society. The police couldn’t even arrest suspects, but instead it created some scenario, such as in the case of Kawa Garmyane. This suggests that the judiciary system is controlled by the twopowerful ruling political parties, PUK and KDP, and therefore court is not independent as is necessary in a democratic system. Hence, it seems that the challenging political environment and the journalist’s situation therefore fluctuates between what is written in law and what is practised. While a democratic transformation in the political environment has given the media a legal right to be free and active, at the same time it has not created a suitable environment for the media to succeed.

⁸³ This interviewee is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years’ experience. As he had been arrested for about a month, because of publishing a news story about corruption.

6.2.2. Examples of the lack of law enforcement and violence against journalism

This section will present more details about the other type of violations against the media organisations. Murder is not the only violation against the media in Kurdistan; various approaches such as arrests, harassment and threats are also used against practicing journalists in order to keep them silent. See these examples:

First, Arrests

By Press Law, arresting journalists is abolished, but sometimes journalists might be arrested by other law or they will face imprisonment by a Kurdish security organisation Asayish. To explore the arrest of journalists, I asked interviewees about this types of imprisonments. Often the interviewees expressed distrust in the executive power of the police and the judicial power of the court.

One of the interviewees, who is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years' experience. He has had a harmful experience with the Kurdish courts, and expressed dissatisfaction with the application of the law in Kurdistan. During my interview with him, I asked him about his imprisonment. He told me following story:

I published a very short news story which was only 40 words, about corruption in Kurdistan. I wrote that one of the political parties' leaders has tried to send 250 million dollars through Turkey to Europe, but the money has been blocked in Turkey because it was an illegal transaction. In fact, in the news story I didn't mention any names, I didn't even say that this money had been stolen from the public budget. This means that the news story didn't fall under any kind of defamation press law, but the newspaper edition was removed from the markets and book shops. Later I was arrested for about a month for publishing this particular news. When I went to the court I asked if I could pay my bail, because generally journalists can pay their bail without being detained. The court has knowledge about this article, which is the right to paying bail instead of imprisonment under the Press Law of 1993. However, they refused to accept this, I was forced to go to the

private jail.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the most harmful thing in my trial was the interference of Asayish men who were not independent at all. In my case the court was unfair.

Another interviewee was also arrested in 2014. I have personally interviewed him to inquire about his case, and his story was as follows:

I have been imprisoned without evidence, the justification for my arrest was very weak. It was because my Facebook account has been hacked by ISIS.⁸⁵ I personally informed the security organization (Asayish) and the police about my account problem, I published notes about my Facebook hacking. I tried several times to close my Facebook account but I couldn't. Despite all these attempts I have been imprisoned. However, after a week I was released. I was wondering, 'If I was guilty, how come they let me free after a week?' The detention was without evidence, as I haven't been given a trial, I was just released without any explanation. In my case the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate was not informed,⁸⁶ the court didn't even allow KJS representatives and Human Rights defenders to see me. It was obvious that I was innocent but I haven't received any sort of apology letter or any compensation from the court, as a victim this was very harmful (Personal communication, December 10, 2015).

Almost all the interviewees expressed doubts about the implementation of the Press Law in Kurdistan. I met Saman Fawzi, a law lecturer at the Human Development University in Sulaymaniyah who holds a PhD in Media Law, to discuss why journalists are imprisoned despite there being laws to prevent this. He admitted that in some cases

⁸⁴ Private jail is for very serious criminals. It was used to hold political prisoners during Saddam Hussein's regime

⁸⁵ Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (IS or ISIS) is a radical Sunni militant Islamic group. In Arabic, the group is known as Daesh. It is led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and has control of some territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria. The earliest clashes between Kurdish and IS forces began on December 2013. In 2014, IS captured several cities in northern Iraq; however, Kurdish military forces '*Peshmerga*' resisted IS and successfully defended the Kurdish cities in northern Iraq.

⁸⁶ "The Journalists Syndicate shall be informed of any legal actions against a journalist if it is related to his journalistic practice." Press Law 2007, No. 35, Article 8.

the courts judge is charging journalists under different laws, for example, the defamation article or anti-terror law (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

Second, Beatings

The journalist in Kurdistan have also faced beatings. One of the research interviewees was himself beaten in the head, in August, 2011 by unknown men. He said: “I have never had any personal problems with anyone in my whole life. It is very clear that I have been beaten because of my job, as an independent journalist and as a supporter of media freedom” (In-depth interview, February 1, 2015). In this matter, the interviewees were in agreement that the beating of journalists in Kurdistan is common, especially during a political crisis. It is usually targeted at independent and opposition journalists.

Third, Pressure and Threats

The interviewees indicated that many journalists have been threatened or insulted, either in person or through the phone. When I asked: what are the types of threats made towards journalists in Kurdistan? I asked this to most of the interviewees; they largely agreed that in addition to the common threats such as phone calls and threat messages, recently political actors have learnt to accuse journalists and put the media under pressure. For example, politicians know that journalists are not jailed for their work but may have to pay bail. Politicians can therefore threaten journalists with a defamation case, knowing that the journalist may have to pay a bail of millions. According to Rebeen Hardy:

In some cases, courts asked journalists to pay three million dollars for their bail. Everybody knows that this amount is unaffordable, the journalist could

never pay that sum, but it is a tactic applied to stop journalists from writing about political wrongdoing (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

Thus, journalists are now afraid of this particular law, as the judiciary are able to charge journalists or media outlets with several million dollars of bail. Consequently, by threatening, the authorities can force journalists to stop talking about politicians and government corruption. Furthermore, most of the interviewees mentioned that the media and journalists come under pressure particularly during political tensions. Political actors make many accusations against the media, such as defamation, incitement of audiences, and destroying the peace.

Fourth, Media Organisations' Closure

On 10th October 2015, the offices of the *KNN* and *NRT* were closed in all the cities of north-western Iraqi Kurdistan (Erbil, Soran and Dhok). During the closing down of these media stations, all the TV staff in Erbil and Dhok were arrested and transferred out of the cities. The explanation by the security forces for their actions was, these channels have been encouraged the chaos in Kurdistan. In these cities, which are under the control of PDK, the authorities closed the stations for 43 days.

Fifth, Preventing Reporting

According to the last report issued by the Metro Centre, the Asayish said that they were commanded by the authorities that they should not let the media to cover the demonstration. Throughout the events of October 2015, the Metro Centre recorded 22 cases of authorities preventing the media from covering events.

_A series of events happened in early October 2015, started from demonstration of thousands of people throughout the Governorates of Sulaymaniyah and Halabja.

Protestors demanded that KDP leader Massoud Barzani to step down, because his presidency had ended on 20th August. The political parties have tried to reach an agreement, but after three weeks of negotiations, they did not reach an agreement because Barzani consistently refused to compromise. The KDP argued that his leadership is required to save the region from the ISIS, as their '*Peshmerga*' forces play a significant role in this war. As a result, the judicial body of the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG) has called to extend the current President Massoud Barzani by a further two years. The council's announcement was met by a strong response from opposition politicians. The KRG Parliament Leader Yusuf Muhammad promptly rejected the council's decision, as he said it would not be legal without his approval. This rejection by Kurdistan Parliament's President Leader Yusuf Muhammad led to the issuance of an arbitrary decision by the KDP against the KRG Parliament and its president. The KDP since then has suspended the regional parliament. Then shortly, the KDP ordered that all the parliamentarians, and the four ministers who belong to the Gorran Movement have to leave Erbil. In a news conference at the office of the parliament in Sulaimaniyah, Mohammed Yusuf said: "What happened today is a clear coup against legitimacy represented by the parliament that represents the people." After that, when Yusuf Mohammed and his crew prevented from enter Erbil City on October 12, 2015 to attend the parliamentary sessions. They were stopped by Kurdish security authorities controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil city_. All these events have resulted in doubts about the claim to democracy in Kurdistan. According to Committee for the Defense, Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) Report, cases of violence against journalists have increased. KJS has recorded 72 cases of violations against the media and journalists in the Kurdistan Region.

Table 6.1: Comparison of 2014 with 2015⁸⁷

Years	Number of violations against media organisations
2014	58
2015	72

A summary of the violations against journalists in Kurdistan can be seen in reports by KJS which are released every six months. Here are the figures for 2015, issued by the Committee for the Defense of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate:

Table 6.2: Number of violations against media organisations from 01/01/2015- 30/06/2015⁸⁸

Type	Number of cases	Numbers of people affected
Shutting Media Offices	2	16
Attempted Arson	1	1
Beating	5	8
Arrest	3	3
Obstacles	17	38
Harassment	2	2
Detention	1	3
Insults	1	1
Total	32	72 Journalists

⁸⁷ Provided by the Committee for the Defense, Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate Report (16).

⁸⁸ Report (15) of the Committee for the Defense of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate.

Table 6.3: Number of violations against media organisations from 01/07/2015 – 31/12/2015⁸⁹

Type	Number of cases	Numbers of people affected
Murder	1	1
Attempted Murder	1	2
Shutting Media Offices	1	2
Beaten	2	1
Arrest	2	2
Detention	3	11
Obstacles	5	9
Insults	1	1
Harassment	7	9
Total	23	38 Journalists

As shown above, the number of attacks on journalists and media outlets peaked in 2015 when compared to 2013 and 2014, both in terms of statistics and the range of cases. CPJ, in a special report which was presented in Washington, D.C, expressed its concerns about media in Iraqi Kurdistan. In addition, most of the attacks against journalists were not investigated properly and the attackers have gone unpunished as the courts have taken a long time to investigate the cases. Also, the democratic institutions were not strong enough to take any action towards the media reports. In particular, since the events of October 2015, all the democratic powers have been paralysed by the KDP.

After presenting these examples of the challenging political situation in Kurdistan, one can say that various pressures on the media still exist, and the region

⁸⁹ Report (16) of the Committee for the Defense of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate.

suffers from the absence of the rule of law. In examining the journalist's situation, it has become clear that what is written in law and the constitution and is different to actions taken against the media in practice. As scholars indicate, in developing countries, often the freedom of the media is well defined in their constitutions. However, they never guarantee freedoms in practice (Breunig,1994). Good media laws alone cannot be successful if they are not applied correctly. The interviewees pointed out that the courts have not followed up on corruption cases and charged criminals. The reason given is that most of the court's employees are loyal either to the PUK or KDP and almost all the corruption came from these two ruling parties.

As a result, the analysis in this section confirms that journalists have often been subjected to physical abuse because they have supported the democratic role of the media. Furthermore, the murders of journalists, the burning of *NRT*, and other forms of violence that have been committed against journalists are the evidence that the overall situation is not supportive towards the news media.

In the next section, the analysis continues in relation to another challenge of the media in the political environment, which is the censorship and self-censorship of the media. As the violence, such as threats, kidnapping and murder, might result in the practice of self-censorship by journalists.

6.3. Self-censorship

To assess the challenging political environment in Kurdistan, it is important to know the degree of censorship and journalistic self-censorship in Kurdistan. McQuail (2013) claims that journalistic self-censorship is the result of extreme insecurity and a

violent environment. It is clear that in Kurdistan Region violence has occurred against journalists, so what might be the outcome of those violence because, although the Kurdish media operate without official censorship, the political pressures may lead journalists to censor their own stories. According to the interviewees' responses, several types of self-censorship can be found in everyday journalistic work, including political, cultural and legal self-censorship. Therefore in the following sections the extent of self-censorship practised by the Kurdish journalists and the effect of this censorship on media practice will be examined.

6.3.1. Journalists' Self-Censorship Due to Fear of Their Lives

The violence committed against journalists in the Kurdistan region may restrict journalists' work, and prevent them from writing about sensitive topics. For example, where three journalists were killed because of their reporting and findings, this has likely resulted in journalists and media outlets practising self-censorship. The question is whether fear of murder or threats has made Kurdish journalists stop covering serious cases to avoid harmful consequences. This issue was discussed in detail in the research interviews with media experts and journalists. In fact, most of the interviewees agreed that killing journalists has some influence on journalistic work but it is not stopped journalists to uncover the sensitive news stories: When I asked interviewees, "Do assassinations make journalists scared to write about this issue?" Rebeen Hardy said: "luckily not, I think this made the Kurdish journalists angry and write more about corruption" (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

Saman Fawzi pointed out that "generally, the journalists might practise self-censorship out of fear for their lives, but in Kurdistan not much affected, I think practice

of self-censorship is diverse and personal, and its degree is different from one journalist to another” (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

However, Habib Karkuky a journalism lecturer at the Salahadin University in Erbil, said:

The killing of those journalists has left a very bad image in journalists’ minds. This image indicates that anyone publishing serious reports about political leaders will have the same fate as Soran Mama Hama or Kawa Garmyane, but I think that hasn’t stopped the media from following corruption (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

What can be drawn from the interviewees’ common view is, violence and murder against journalists has pressured some, but not all, journalists to practice self-censorship. As Saman Fawzi pointed out, this issue is personal since some journalists are afraid to cover these issues and some are not, for example, there are an increasing number of journalists who are continually reporting about corruption. In fact, several reasons might make a Kurdish journalist continue watchdog reporting: firstly, Kurdish journalists really like to challenge the authorities and believe in a revolution from the media in order to face the massive corruption in the government. Some of the interviewees expressed this by saying that, for now, the only method to fight the government’s wrongdoings is through the media, since the government and the ruling political parties control the legislature, executive, and judiciary institutions, but in the news media, there is intensive coverage of the negative aspects of the government. Secondly, from the murder of the three journalists, it has become obvious that journalists in Kurdistan sometimes take great risks in their job. As mentioned above, the murdered journalists were informed several times about the danger of their reports, all of them received several threatening messages, and were actually anticipating being murdered. Despite all of this, they didn’t stop writing on the subject of corruption. Sardasht’s final article is a good example of this, when he wrote “I am not afraid of death from torture, I am here waiting for my appointment with

my murderers”. As known from the interviewees, there are many other journalists in Kurdistan seeking to bring great cases of political corruption to light. Some of them have already encountered violent attitudes such as threats and being set a bail amount of millions of U.S. dollars by the court. This indicates that, although there are a lot of threats to the journalistic work, they are taking their duties to do investigative reports. What I have also drawn from this discussion is that the reasons for these challenges by the media and the journalists are, some of the Kurdish journalists have a great desire to build a strong media in Kurdistan, similar to other democratic societies. Also, the Kurdish journalists’ interest in the job and sometimes seeking self-advantage and reputation from these reports.

6.3.2. News Media Organisations Editorial Policies and Self-Censorship

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the news media in (opposition, private and the ‘shadow’) have a good practice; they have obtained a wide audience because of broadcasting a number of diverse programmes. However, they still are limited by the boundaries of political power, such as political intervention in news media content which is probably affects the media’s independence. Take an example of ‘shadow media’, *Rudaw*, although this media outlet has a wide space for different viewpoints and criticism, their journalists practise self-censorship. Ismaeli (2015) stated that the journalists in *Rudaw* network: “are imposed through informal kinds of constraints.”⁹⁰ Obviously, self-censorship is indirectly practised in ‘shadow media’ networks by the employees; in other words, unspoken rules about media content are in place.

⁹⁰ Said Romano (an interviewee of Ismaeli, 2015: 85).

Habib Karkuki, the lecturer at the University of Erbil, confirmed that journalists have a fear of dismissal:

Sometimes a journalist might have a particular news story which might be very important, but this will not be published because of the editor and the owner's restrictions on this kind of news. However, I know that many journalists are publishing their important news on social networks. When I look at some reporter's Facebook page, I see reports about corruption and government criticism. They are clearly criticising the current situation in Kurdistan, but they never say this in their media channel. I asked one of them, 'Why are you not publishing these reports through your media organization?' The response was: if I say this in my channel it will be censored or not published at all. Therefore, it is better to publish them on Facebook because at least my friends will see it properly. This is not just one case, we have dozens of these cases in Kurdistan (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

Habib Karkuki further argued:

It is so clear that media outlets are motivated by editorial policies. Journalists tend not to publish any stories that might upset the owner and result in them losing their job. I have seen *Haqpaivin* programmes on *Rudaw* TV. Usually in this television interview programme, the presenter explicitly asks very sensitive questions about the political actor's activities and their involvement with corruption. However, in Nechervan Barzani's programme, the questions were all about the opposition party's participation in the new Kurdistan government cabinet and the differences between the political parties in the new government cabinet. Only some clarifications about oil contracts that have been arranged by Nechervan Barzani were discussed. The questions were not about his involvement with corruption at all (In-depth interview, 20 April 2015).

This means that, although *Rudaw* has a large number of critical news broadcasts, and programmes which expose political and government corruption, journalists are for instance not free to talk about the Prime Minister's involvement in the corrupted government, as he is the founder and the only sponsor of the *Rudaw* media company. In this matter, Asos Hardy said that self-censorship is now practised less by ordinary people, "The journalists and the people, either with their real names or nicknames, are publishing

everything about the government's actions without any fear on the internet" (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

In the above quotes there are two different perspectives, one for journalists and one for ordinary people. The people are free nowadays to express their view about political leaders and the government; they can write and publish whatever they want on social media, as long as they are not working for a media organisation. However, journalists who are working with media outlets in Kurdistan are forced to follow the organisation's direction on media content.

From this discussion, I found that, while censorship is abolished by the law, political interference is still common especially in those shadow news media networks which are financed by the major political parties. Although these powerful news channels claim independence, the editorial media policies strongly are in use, in other words, self-censorship is widely applied in those media organisations. As it has been shown in the case of *Rudaw*'s journalist and editors, they are practising self-censorship in order to keep their job. It is true that the 'shadow media' such as *Rudaw*, have provided a wide space for different viewpoints and criticism, but their journalists suffer from informal kinds of restraints.

The Kurdish media has recently seen developments in both quantity and quality. However, there are a few private/independent media organisations, and the most powerful and dominant are the 'shadow media',⁹¹ which are financially strong but not independent. Journalists in these organisations tend to conduct self-censorship in order to avoid upsetting the media owners and losing their jobs. As mentioned, the majority of the media

⁹¹ Please see Chapter Four

outlets are owned by political parties; editors and journalists are therefore forced to practice unofficial censorship on the parties' behalf. The funds for the 'shadow media' outlets, derived from powerful individuals in the political parties, mean that politicians are able to intervene in the content that the media produces, and this poses a threat to the democratic role of the media.

6.3.3. Religious and Cultural Censorship

The interviewees pointed to some justifications for performing self-censorship by journalists in Kurdistan which can be categorised as religious and cultural. The interviewees were not in agreement about the existence of 'red lines'. Some of them indicated to numerous 'red lines' that impose upon media freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan. Regardless of the political and historical justification, there are many subjects that remain taboo. Shwan Muhamad stated that cultural and religious self-censorship is widely followed by journalists: "Journalists are not free to talk about sex issues or break any religious thoughts, if someone wants to talk about these issues they have to give dozens of justifications" (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015). Mam Qani also argued that journalists cannot write anything about religion or a specific religious group, because, as he said: "the judgment from society will be very tough" (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

Saman Fawzi more emphasised on this by saying:

Kurdish society is a conservative society, traditions and religions have a lot of impact on Kurdish society. Previously there were three areas that nobody was allowed to touch which were religion, politics and sex. Sex and religion still taboo, however the issue of criticising politics and government is widely broken. Now many criticisms about the government and politics are expressed, but nobody dares to talk about sex and religion because of society's reaction (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

There is an indication that the culture and religion still have a great impact on Kurdish society. Interviewees mentioned the necessity of talking about religion and social inequality, but journalists practise self-censorship because of harsh judgement from society. The great concerns of the media editors and the experts are relevant to the debates of freedom of expression, which has been emphasised by the press law. Saman Fawzi discussed legal self-censorship; he explained that criticising religion in general is permitted by law, but the media are not allowed to offend any specific group or religion, especially Islam. Therefore, journalists try to avoid all of those sensitive issues because they don't want to face people's judgement. As a result, the analysis indicated that freedom of expression is not practised in Kurdistan in relation to culture and religion but widely practised in the political issues. In the recent era, after 2003, criticising the government and political actors has become very common and unrestricted.

6.3.4. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) War and Self-Censorship

The ISIS war, can be the reasonable factor for the journalist to practise self-censorship. I asked the interviewees whether the media is using this war as an excuse to not talk about corruption. Asos Hardy said:

In fact, the corrupted system always want to give some excuse to continue with exploitation. I am as an editor of the private newspaper *Awena*, one of those journalists who are exposing government wrongdoings, I want to expose all the corruption (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

However, in regard to uncover Kurdish '*Peshmerga*'⁹² war with ISIS, Asos Hardy argued that there are some unspoken boundaries that the Kurdish journalists adhere to:

⁹² '*Peshmerga*' are the Kurdish official military forces of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. '*Peshmerga*' means someone who confronts death.

There is no need to tell every journalist what should be respected. Every journalist knows what should be published and what should not. For example, I'm one of the journalists that know, it is my duty not to publish any kind of stories which might harm '*Peshmerga*' and serve ISIS (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015)

This means that the ISIS war has influence on the media in Kurdistan in terms of the profession, such as hiding the truth or being less objective. Facing war with ISIS has justified some of the media concealing some facts, in other words, it results in the Kurdish journalists practising self-censorship, since defending the Kurdish question has become a priority among all the Kurdish, including journalists. Furthermore, in the discussion regarding the ISIS war, the interviewees identified acceptable and unacceptable self-censorship practices. They indicated that two important issues are strongly linked to this war. The first self-censorship, which is acceptable by the Kurdish journalist is widely practiced among all the Kurdish media. The Kurdish media are all agreed not to publish any information regarding numbers or facts related to '*Peshmerga*' in the recent ISIS war. If journalists have a bad news story about the Kurdish in the fighting with the ISIS war, it will not be published in order not to frighten their Kurdish audiences. Thus, it is clear that the idea of the Kurdish defence of the Kurdish question is unchangeable, the Kurdish issue will always have its effect on the Kurdish media reports, as stated by Azad Hama Ameen (in-depth interview, 10 November 2015). While the second self-censorship is not acceptable by the media editors, which is using the war as justification to control the media when reporting about the government's misconduct and mismanagement. The interviewees indicated that this idea is not acceptable and the media will not take this into account. This has been proven in practise, because during the war there has been an increase in the media reports about the political and the government misconduct. As a result, one could say that the war has not generally affected reporting on corruption.

Overall, as stated in the previous chapter, the Kurdish press law is one of the positive outcomes in the process of democratisation in Kurdistan. Article 2 of the press law has clearly raised censorship on the media in addition to guarantee many rights to the media, including the right of freedom of expression. It said: “The Press is free and no censorship shall be imposed on it. Freedom of expression and publication shall be guaranteed to every citizen.” However, the results of this discussion indicates that there is a self-censorship in media organisations and it exists among the journalists in order to keep their jobs. Cultural and religious self-censorship is also found in the media in Kurdistan due to the nature of Kurdish society, which will not change easily. Nevertheless, what is coded as political self-censorship and self-censorship in the war environment, such as the ISIS war, although it made the Kurdish journalism less objective, it has not created a big obstacle to journalistic work and have not stopped journalists writing on corruption.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined political situation and working environment for journalists in Kurdistan. It indicates that the overall situation in Kurdistan is not helpful for creating a proper environment for the media to do their essential tasks. Since in the democratisation process, several cases of violence such as murder, threats, imprisonment, and beatings against journalists and the media have been found. In particular, in October 2015 the political party, KDP, which represents the government,⁹³ closed down the media outlets and prevented the media from uncovering news stories during the political tensions and demonstrations, despite the law has given the media all the right to criticise

⁹³ During the political crisis, the party and the government behaved as one and impose their decision without asking any other member of the government

the government, prohibits all types of violence against journalists. However, as the interviewees pointed out, all of the laws, democracy, and human rights principles will disappear during a political crisis.

What made the situation worse is most of the attacks against journalists were not investigated properly. In the definition of democracy, Diamond et al. (1990) stated, in addition to the essential conditions of democracy,⁹⁴ the rule of law and the power of the three government's separate powers (legislature, executive, and judiciary) are considered the core elements of a democratic system. Any defect in the power of these elements will result in the weakening of democratic government. This chapter therefore has indicated to the rule of law and its implementation in Kurdistan. The analysis of this chapter explores several deficiencies in the presentation of these institutions in Kurdistan. As discussed, all the matters of the rule of law that should guarantee that no one is above the law are not practised in Kurdistan and the independence of the judiciary system is questionable. For example, the analyses in this chapter clearly showed that the courts in some cases are not dealing with journalists' murders according to the law and the attackers have gone unpunished. Most importantly, the interviewees pointed out that throughout the last thirteen years since the democratisation occurred in Iraq and Kurdistan Region in 2003, the democratic institutions were not supportive. the court did not take the journalistic cases seriously.

Practising self-censorship among Kurdish journalists is also the result of the unstable political environment in Kurdistan. The findings of this chapter showed that the media organisations have strong editorial policies due to the wide range of political problems

⁹⁴ The essential conditions consist of fair elections, extensive competition among individuals, effective opposition, and operations of civil society organisations.

and existing strong connections between the media and politics. Furthermore, other cultural reasons, such as lack of experience in a democratic political framework and the tribal background of the Kurdish people, have resulted in cultural weaknesses of the media and made journalists practice self-censorship widely. As a result of these, the process of democratisation has surely been deeply affected. Therefore, the next chapter will questions, do the media affect by such weak condition of the political environment? How the media produce intense watchdog reports on the critical condition of government and political misconduct?

Chapter Seven

The Watchdog Role of Media in Kurdistan.

7.1.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to analyse the fourth research question, which refers to the watchdog role of the news media in enhancing democracy in Kurdistan during the transition era from 2003 onwards. For analysing the potential watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan, the perceptions of interviewees and group discussions involving individuals who have experience of working in the media were relied upon.

The literature review of this thesis has described the democratic role the media, in which it should represent the interests of the public, and act as an inspector of the government. This role of the media as a defender of democracy has been addressed by many Western scholars (McQuail, 2005; Overholser and Hall Jamieson, 2005; Nordenstreng, 2006; Malakwen, 2014). This aim here is to add to the existing body of knowledge, with an emphasis on the media during a political transformation period. The empirical chapters, so far, have presented the developments and deficiencies in the overall legal and economic environment of the media, in addition to the overall political situation that has surrounded the work of journalism in the Kurdistan Region.

In reality, practising the role of the media in Kurdistan through the lens of the western democratic system is not easy. Firstly, there is a big gap between the media as an ideal or in law and the day to day media performance; the law indeed provides a considerable space for the media in Kurdistan, since the Kurdish journalists have gained

many democratic rights, but reforms in the laws and structures alone do not guarantee that the media will operate successfully because the implementation is equally important. In Kurdistan, law enforcement is one of the main problems that impedes the development of the media in Kurdistan (see Chapter Six for more details). Secondly, the result of the analysis showed that the media are facing a lot of pressure in regard to their finances. In the case of private media in particular, the institutions and journalists suffer from poor budgets, which weakens their condition and has led to the closure of some newspapers. Nevertheless, the analysis showed that, in spite of this, journalists continue to challenge the situation, advocating for the public's rights and attacking government corruption. For example, several news media outlets in Kurdistan, such as *Rudaw*, *NRT*, *KurdSat News*, and *KNN*, provide 24-hour news programmes, including many programmes for talking about day to day government performance and the political involvement in the corruption.

Investigation of the democratic role of the media in Kurdistan needs to consider the affairs of governments and other political actors (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956). Therefore, this chapter will examine the development of the news media in Kurdistan in light of the democratic changes, including the role of the media as a forum for public debates, as a provider of information, and as a watchdog. For this purpose, the partisan news media will be excluded because they are mostly used as an instrument for political advantage.⁹⁵ The presentation of different viewpoints is often missing from partisan media, as the initial purpose of this media is to promote the ideologies and advertise the thoughts of the political parties. Therefore, they do not attempt to perform as a watchdog. In this analysis, the focus will be on the performance of the private media

⁹⁵ Chapter Four has described the ownership of the news media in Kurdistan, which has been divided into three main types since 2003. It consists of partisan, shadow and private media.

and the ‘shadow media’⁹⁶ in relation to democracy. The private news media outlets have been selected because, since their establishment, they have been critical towards the government and produce daily intensive reports on political corruption within Kurdistan. Regarding the ‘shadow media’, they have been chosen for investigation because, although the owners of the ‘shadow media’ are powerful members of the political parties, they do not promote their parties’ interests in these channels explicitly. The ‘shadow media’ has served the development of the media by providing a space to report on the corruption and include opportunities to criticise the politicians and the government.

Thus, what might the role of the media look like in Kurdistan? Does the media in Kurdistan practice the watchdog function or is it something else? Does the watchdog’s characteristics exist in the news media, and can the media adequately practice this role? What is the relationship between the media and politics? To organise the analysis, three main themes have been developed: (i) the media as a forum for public debate; (ii) the media’s role as an informative tool; and (iii) the media as a watchdog and as a “fourth estate” to hold government accountable. Within each theme, the strengths and weaknesses of the Kurdish news media are discussed. Finally, the chapter closes by identifying the major obstacles preventing the media from acting as a watchdog in Kurdistan, before a short conclusion.

⁹⁶The shadow media outlets are very active in Kurdistan, recently established by companies and individuals who are the powerful members in the two ruling political parties (see Chapter Four for more details).

7.2 The Media's Role as a Forum for Public Debate

Regarding the media as a forum for public debate, as mentioned in the literature review, since the 17th century, liberal philosophers have recognised the crucial role of open public debate and free speech or the 'marketplace of ideas'.⁹⁷ They assert that ideas and truth should be allowed to be expressed without the restriction of the state, and it is the people's decision to choose 'right' from 'wrong' (Fraleigh and Tuman, 2010; Asard and Bennett, 1997). In this research, the concept of the media as a marketplace of ideas and a forum for the public to express their ideas was mentioned by interviewees. They asserted that the media should be a platform for presenting different views from individuals with different political and ideological backgrounds. In this matter, during the interviews and group discussions, the participants explained the strengths and weaknesses of the internal and external environments of the media in Kurdistan.

As an internal strength of the media environment, the open dialogue and open disagreement that have recently appeared in the Kurdish media can be considered as a democratic feature. Rebeen Hardy, the Editor of *Sardam* Media Organisation for Publishing, pointed out that the news media in Kurdistan has become a forum for public discussion:

We as private media give an equal opportunity to all the different views; we provide a forum for dialogue among all political parties. In our media network, all individuals have the right to express their ideas without any restrictions. We are trying to build bridges for all the different backgrounds through the media. For instance, although *Hawlati* newspaper is run by some secular people, they managed to give opportunities to the banned

⁹⁷ The metaphor of the 'marketplace of ideas' was identified implicitly by liberal philosophers. It was first anticipated by John Milton's *Areopagitica* in 1644, and later by John Stuart Mill in his book *On Liberty* in 1859. Thomas Jefferson developed the notion, arguing that truth would prevail and free speech should be tolerated in a free and open encounter; however, none of them used the term 'marketplace'. Later, the marketplace of ideas was formally established as a theory by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1919.

religious person Mallah Krekar⁹⁸ to explain his situation and his views to the public (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

Also, Mam Qanie, the former Director of the *NRT* newsroom, said: “political debates and forums overload the media, especially in television programmes. Dozens of political debates are broadcasted every single day from several media outlets” (In-depth interview, 15 February 2015).

As an external strength of the media environment in Kurdistan, most of the interviewees acknowledged that by law, people have the right to criticise the government and talk about their rights. Without prior censorship from the government, the people and journalists report about all corruption by politicians and those in power and the media talk about injustice in the government. This kind of freedom could be a positive aspect of the media in Kurdistan. Azad Hama Amin, the General Secretary of the Kurdistan Journalists’ Syndicate, commented on this by saying:

All types of news media in Kurdistan have their free microphone. They broadcast the public’s voice everywhere. The news media broadcast the anger of the people without censoring it. Moreover, hundreds of posts are released every day on social media; they talk about everything, including the government, the President, and all political actors, and sometimes they use insulting (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

However, some of the interviewees have doubts about the effectiveness of the notion of ‘marketplace of ideas’ in a place like Kurdistan where democracy and human security rights are limited.⁹⁹ Both Azad Hama Amin and Halkawt Abdullah commented on the national cohesion and the nature or quantity of information that should be given to the public by suggesting that it is important to know what kind of information is necessary

⁹⁸ Please see page 130 in Chapter Four.

⁹⁹ In fact, some Western scholars have also questioned whether a confrontation of competing views is really the best way of revealing the truth (Gutmann and Thompson 1996).

for citizens and arguing that giving a lot of information might harm the public mind psychologically. As long as the authorities do not take account of media reports and will not listen to the public's voice, it is not a logical to exhaust people. We should not exhaust people because neither the authorities nor the public have any power to decide about reform” said Azad Hama Amin (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

Halkawt Abdullah also stated:

I have concerns about the contents of some media organisations, which are possibly affecting cohesion in the Kurdish society. To be honest we have an exhausting media in Kurdistan, sometimes the media promotes fighting between all the different political backgrounds (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Also, some of participants in the academic focus group discussion such as Hemin Majeed Kamil Omer And Arkan Rashid have the same view towards the media's excessive political debate. They expressed their concern that these programmes are fuelling conflicts between political parties and would result in the destruction of national reconciliation in Kurdistan. Despite this, most of the interviewees were opposed to this line of argument and agreed that they should support the media to be a marketplace that informs the public of all ideas. In this regard, Asos Hardy, the Editor-in-Chief of the private newspaper Awene, said: “If the government or any specific group decide what kind of what information is important to citizens, we cannot change anything” (In-depth interview, 01 February 2015).

Shwan Muhamad, the Editor of the private website *SpyMedia*, also argued:

The public still have the right to know everything about their rulers. We should work to empower citizens to demand accountability from government. The media should continue to exercise a watchdog role. The rest is not our job (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

Indeed, as the interviewees pointed out, the news media in Kurdistan, in particular, the private media such as *NRT*, *Livin*, *Hawlati* and *Awena* are active, and they compete to include different views in their programmes and news. As stated initially, the private media has established a new model of news media in Kurdistan which supports the presentation of alternative views. Prior to the establishment of these media there was no representation from different views as all the media were advocating for political parties. Similarly, although the ‘shadow media’ are indirectly funded by the political parties (see Chapter Four), within the ‘shadow media’ model, there is a wide range of freedom compared to the previous partisan media. They are more open to including different views, report on a wider range of issues, and discuss topics that were formerly the exclusive domain of private/independent publications:

From this discussion, it has been clear that the private and ‘shadow media’ have provided a wide range of different viewpoints and are able to present a wide range of criticisms of the government. Through these media networks, Kurdish citizens express their opinions regarding governmental issues. Providing a space for public debate has overload the news media programming, especially the television news contents.¹⁰⁰ In fact, none of the interviewees denied the progress made by the Kurdish news media as a forum for public debate; all of them emphasised that the public forum role is widely practised in the Kurdish media. However, the concern raised was about the excess of those programmes and the oversupply, and this would exhaust Kurdish people. For example, as some of the interviews pointed out, the political debate programmes have overloaded the other programmes. I have looked at the quantity of the main seven news televisions, *Rudaw*, *NRT*, *KurdSat*, *KNN*, *GK*, *Speda* and *Payam*, and found that they have devoted a

¹⁰⁰ As television is more effective to provide the debate programmes.

total of 76 hours of their transmission time to weekly debate programmes (see appendix 2). The news media have advocated for presenting these news programmes and debate programmes about day to day government performance and the politicians' involvement with corruption. These channels have provided a wide range of political debate shows to criticise and even judge the government institutions and politics. As a result, it could be said that good practice can be seen, since the media's function as a forum for the public to debate has contributed to building democracy and public awareness about peoples' rights in Kurdistan.

7.3 The Media's Role as an Informative Tool

The informative role of the media has been identified by many western scholars (Siebert et al., 1956; Norris, 2008). In their view, the first role of the media is to provide reliable information because it is the public's right to have relevant information about the actions of the government officials. Regarding the informative role of the media in Kurdistan, considerable progress has been seen in the rights of expression and the media reports regarding the government and political misconduct. Almost all the interviewees were in agreement that the Kurdish news media have intensive day to day reports about political issues and fuel democracy by informing the citizens.

Abdurlahman Sdiq, the former Minister in the Iraqi government, stated, "we have an active media in Kurdistan; sometimes, political decisions are reported by the media before the decision reaches the appropriate government office" (In-depth interview, 11 November 2015).

Asos Hardy also commented on the informational role of the media by acting as a guardian of the public interest:

In order to make people informed about their political decisions, it is the media's task to reveal everything. In fact, in Kurdistan nothing remains secret. The Kurdish news media reveal everything about the political actors, President, government issues such as budgets; the media are involved in every political aspect (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Azad Hama Amin, also emphasised the effective role of the news media by saying: "The media are not absent in Kurdistan, they present intensive coverage and live broadcasts without censorship¹⁰¹ during all political events especially political crises such as demonstrations" (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

On the other hand, the interviewees also identified the weaknesses of the media reporting. These weaknesses might come from either the internal environment, such as lack of professionalism from the media and journalists themselves, or the external environment, such as political and legal constraints.

The interviewees pointed out that what affected the quality of representation of the Kurdish media is a lack of professionalism and there are several reasons for this. For example, there is a strong competition among the media organisations to increase their viewers and readers. Sometimes the sole aim of editors and journalists, is to get as many news stories out as quickly as possible in order to be the first among the other media organisations. To achieve this aim, most Kurdish media outlets fall into publishing or broadcasting unverified news reports. In this matter, Kamil Omer and Yahya Reshawi in their conclusion about the Kurdish media asserted that: "the Kurdish media reporting in

¹⁰¹ In another context, he criticised the news media for broadcasting slang language from the public without censor, such as using inappropriate words towards the Kurdish president, Masud Barzani.

general is superficial and not focused, the media are more interested in the quantity of the watchdog reporting.”

Arkan Rashid raised a similar issue regarding the Kurdish media:

In the Kurdish media are also not giving any apologies for publishing inaccurate and incorrect news stories. For example, a few days ago, I saw a Kurdish news website published news about a death of a famous Kurdish man. This particular interesting news, has been seen and read by thousands of viewers. Then, the person posted on his Facebook that he is alive and the news was not correct. So, I have checked the news website to see apologies for this news but the page didn't give any apologies for the mistake. This is a simple example of many incorrect published news stories without corrections in the media in Kurdistan (Academic group discussion, 12 November 2015).

Another problem in the Kurdish media is inaccuracy in the news stories. Because access to information¹⁰² is not easy, the media are instead chose to get information from unofficial sources. In this regard, Kamal Rauf said: “We, as independent media, we are keen to get all specific information about government wrongdoings. We have our own ways to get information from the government institutions” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015). Sometimes the information is not true as this kind of information is characterised by a deficiency and a lack of credibility. This has been emphasised by each of Rebeen Hardy, Stran Abdullah and Karwan Anwer.

The interviewees have also pointed out that the historical Kurdish issue and long period of war have affected the Kurdish media reporting. For example, Azad Hama Ameen said:

It is not common for any Kurdish media to uncover any news which might harm the Kurdish issue or Kurdish rights to independence. The idea of the

¹⁰² In the Kurdish Press Law, the second paragraph of Article II clearly states the right of the journalist to access information; furthermore, the right to access information was granted in a particular law in 2013. However, journalists' access to information is poor through official channels because government bodies do not provide information to the media easily.

Kurdish defence of the Kurdish question is unchangeable, the Kurdish issue will always have its effect on the Kurdish media reports (In-depth interview, 10 November 2015).

Asos Hardy also pointed to the unspoken boundaries that journalists adhere to:

There is no need to tell a journalist what should be respected. Every journalist knows what should be published and what should not. For example, I'm one of the journalists that knows it is my duty not to publish any kind of story which might harm '*Peshmerga*'¹⁰³ and serve ISIS. You could say this is related to national security (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Arkan also said:

The long-time of war and the Kurdish issue has affected the media, for example in the ISIS war, I was in the front of Karkwk war and there were a lot of '*Peshmerga*' victims in the war but I didn't broadcast any news about our defeat in order not to lose the audience's confidence (Academic group discussion, 12 November 2015).

As a result, the interviewees emphasised, the Kurdish media have two problems that are related to Kurdish historical positions about independence and the recent dramatic changes to the political system in Kurdistan.¹⁰⁴ Firstly, the Kurdish media always defend the Kurdish issues. Secondly, most Kurdish citizens, including journalists, are involved with a particular political party. These two significant issues affect the objectivity of the media news reporting. Thus, despite considerable progress in Kurdish media practice¹⁰⁵ to provide a massive amount of news reporting about the government and the political misconducts, it is too early to expect the Kurdish media to be accurate,

¹⁰³ '*Peshmerga*' are the official Kurdish military forces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. '*Peshmerga*' means 'someone who confronts death'.

¹⁰⁴ The recent change in the political system after the process of democratisation in Iraq and Kurdistan in 2003.

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned above, the news media networks have provided a wide range of political debate programmes to criticise government institutions and politics. This is seen as a good practice, since the media's function as a forum for the public to debate has contributed to building democracy and public awareness of their rights in Kurdistan. As a result, in the last few years after the establishment of several news media networks, the performance of the news media has significantly improved.

reliable and professional. To conclude this section, I have selected the strengths and weaknesses of the news media' role as an information provider in Kurdistan:

Strengths

1. The news media have played a role in educating citizens and enlightening them about their rights in a democratic system.
2. The news media have advocacy debate programmes to highlight the problems to Kurdish citizens and how the government should alleviate their situation.
3. The news media are beginning to serve as a means of furthering participation in society and provide opportunities for Kurdish citizens to express their opinions regarding governmental issues.
4. The media have created the idea of tolerance and acceptance of each other among citizens in Kurdistan.
5. The government has given the public a considerable space to talk about their rights through the media.

Weaknesses

1. Regardless of the news media's role as information provider for citizens, there are some concerns - especially from academics and senior journalists - about the professionalism of Kurdish news reporting. They have criticised the media reports for lack of neutrality, objectivity and poor quality.
2. Some of the Kurdish media academics described the news stories reports in Kurdistan as half-cooked and unverified. They have criticised watchdog reporting in Kurdistan as lacking experience, because editors and journalists are not concerned

much about the quality of their work rather than increasing their audience by being first to publish or broadcast news stories.

3. In monitoring the government's performance, journalists often forget their role as a journalist but instead act as a political judge or prosecutor. Consequently, a lot of aggressive debate has occurred between journalists and politicians, and in the frequent trouble journalists have with the authorities, they are often charged with large fines.

4. Since the Access Information Law¹⁰⁶ is neglected by the Kurdish authorities (legislature, executive, and judiciary),¹⁰⁷ the Kurdish journalists are unwilling to follow a journalistic code of ethics, for example, in the way they obtain news and information, often from unofficial sources.

5. Despite having published unverified and incorrect news stories, the Kurdish media rarely apologise to their audiences or publish corrections for their mistake (details about media ethics are presented in Chapter Four).

7.4 The Media as a Watchdog to Hold Government Accountable

The watchdog role is defined differently across countries and cultures. The definition of the watchdog role follows existing social, political, and economic

¹⁰⁶ In June 2013, the Kurdish parliament in Erbil passed a new law guaranteeing the right of access to information. It clearly declared that the government institutions should give the requested information within ten days.

¹⁰⁷ As mentioned in chapter five, this law has not been adhered to by the government. When the law was issued, the Kurdish Parliament authorised the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan to monitor the law's implementation. However, the Human Rights Commission declared that they are unable to do this because the law comes without any instructions for implementation.

conditions. According to Coronel (2003: 9), the watchdog role of the media is “sustained investigative reporting on corruption, human rights violations and other forms of wrongdoing [which] has helped build a culture of accountability in government and strengthened the fledgling democracies.” In light of this definition, the evaluation of the media’s performance as a ‘watchdog’, by which it keeps political authorities accountable by monitoring their activities and investigating possible abuses of political power in Kurdistan, will be discussed.

Regarding developments and weaknesses of the internal condition of the watchdog media, the interviewees were not in agreement. Some of them were optimistic. For example they asserted that the private news media in Kurdistan plays its role by informing, educating and being a watchdog. However, the views of others regarding the watchdog role of the media were pessimistic; they saw that the media had been unable to fulfil their role as watchdog because no developments or changes in the governmental system have been seen, and the corruption is increasing day by day.

The optimistic view expressed by some participants, almost two third of the interviewees agreed that all types of news media outlets (including newspapers, radio, television and online) are working hard to release huge numbers of reports about weaknesses in government and political actors’ wrongdoings. In this matter, Kamal Rauf, the Director of *SharPress* news media website, said: “Every day there are regular reports, programmes and articles criticising government performance and the scandals of political leaders. These reports are generally provided by private news media and the opposition media” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Asos Hardy also asserted: “Although we have some weaknesses in presenting media reports, we have performed the watchdog function a lot, we have engaged in

critical surveillance over political activists and government institutions” (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015). He gave an example from his own newspaper, *Hawlati*, about the efficiency of the watchdog reporting in the Kurdish media. He asserted that it is possible for the media to play a watchdog role over government wrongdoing in Kurdistan by saying:

There was a powerful investigative report by the *Hawlati* newspaper, when we exposed the government’s decision to buy 111 expensive cars for the members of Kurdistan Parliament. The report explained that this would be an extravagant expense by the government. Consequently, the report received a strong reaction from the public, and the government regretted the decision (In-depth interview, 1 February 2015).

Haider Jamil, the director of Kurdiu (the official news website of KIU), also indicated to the emergence of the watchdog media by saying:

I am working in one of the government ministries, and I have personally seen that political actors are now paying more attention to the media reports and they are trying to hide their daily issues from the media. The performance of the media is much improved in the last few years” (In-depth interview, 11 November 2015).

Also Shwan Muhamad said:

It is true that the media couldn’t remove any ministers but we have done a lot. About the media reports’ impact, we should not blame the media; but instead the authorities such as the Public Prosecutor and the Commission on Integrity should be blamed in Kurdistan. These two authorities should follow up the corruption files that the media reported on (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

Shwan Muhamad further explained the reasons why the media reports are neglected, saying:

Mostly, the governmental organisations such as the courts and ministries are not fully independent. In some cases, the Public Prosecutor does not have power to arrest powerful political actors on one hand, and on the other the Interim Ministry is not fulfilling the court’s decision. In brief, the political parties have power over these governmental organisations (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

Most of the research interviewees agreed that there is a watchdog reporting in Kurdistan, some of them went even further, and said there is an oversupply of those reports in Kurdistan and the media are very active in exposing political wrongdoing. In fact, the media have had a watchdog role since the private news media emerged in 2000.¹⁰⁸ The media have begun to publish political critiques of the government and have focused more and more on the negative performance of the government. However, the question is, what is the impact of the media reports on political decisions? In other words, does the news media support democracy in Kurdistan? The majority of the interviewees agreed that the impact of the reports is disappointing, and they indicated that the media have a limited impact on political decisions. Their explanations for this include the difficulties of adapting to democratisation in Kurdistan, which might take some time. Besides, the media organisations themselves have flaws which are presented in the following paragraphs.

The second view of the participants was pessimistic about the media's role as watchdog in Kurdistan. This perspective was more critical about the watchdog reports by the private news media in Kurdistan. The weaknesses can be summarised as follows: (i) weaknesses of the news media themselves; (ii) weaknesses in the public's power; (iii) weaknesses in government responsiveness.

¹⁰⁸ The private news media started in 2000 when the *Hawlati* newspaper was established. This newspaper took the Kurdish media into a new phase of media autonomy as, before 2000, almost all the media were politically aligned. Currently the most famous private/independent media organisations are *Hawlati*, *Livin*, *Awena* and NRT.

7.4.1 Internal and external weaknesses of the news media themselves

Some of the interviewees and participants in both focus group discussions, which consisted of the media specialists and senior journalists, highlighted the shortage of investigative news reporting. Firstly, Arkan Rashid said:

The quality of watchdog media in Kurdistan is not considerably developed because media organisations do not give priority to the watchdog role of the media and there is not a specific budget for investigative journalism. For example, I have spent four months on an investigative story about Garmian Area¹⁰⁹ budgets; after looking at hundreds of files, I found that more than \$600 million US Dollars had been stolen from the Garmian budgets. When I finished the report, my manager didn't pay attention to the effort which I spent on this story, and it has been published like any other simple report" (academic group discussion, 12 November 2015).

This indicates that professional investigative reporting does not receive enough recognition from media owners, because most of the other interviewees such as Kamil Omer, Hemin Majeed, and Karwan Anwer, had the same thought regarding media manager' carelessness with respect to investigative reports. All of them believe that media organisations do not prioritise investigative journalism in their agenda work, and they do not provide large enough budgets for this reporting. From Arkan's argument, one can also notice that, because most of the reporters depend on piece work (or payment for each article written), the journalists are not dedicating themselves to produce long and detailed reports as is required for investigative reports. Media managers do not pay extra money for the extra work involved for investigative watchdog reporting.

This carelessness towards professional investigative reporting has resulted in a lack of watchdog media in Kurdistan. In other words, it seems that the directors and the reporters have agreed to develop only quantitative watchdog reporting. The media reports

¹⁰⁹ Garmiyān Area is located to the south of Sulaymāniyah in Kurdistan.

are simple and do not go into a deep investigation. As most of the interviewees indicated, there is improvement in the number of media reports about corruption in the government. However, there are many criticisms about the quality of professionalism of the media reports. Saman Fawzi, a law professor at the Human Development University in Sulaymaniyah, was asked about the reason for the shrinking quality of investigative reports in Kurdistan: “because the journalist is in a rush in producing their reports.”¹¹⁰ The participants have described the media reports as half-cooked news stories and the journalists are not following the code and ethics of professional reporting.

Another reason for poor professionalism within watchdog media has been argued by Hemin Majeed: He explained:

We can't expect professional media in a nation like the Kurds, because the Kurdish tribal backgrounds will not change easily. Therefore, the Kurdish media cannot produce a professional report because our culture is far from the democratic system perspective, and our journalists have come from this culture (Academic focus group discussion, November 12, 2015).

He further explained that,

The Kurdish cultural background is distanced from the western democratic system, as I said before, the Kurds have a tribal background and all the Kurds, including our journalists, have no experience with a democratic society and the free media. In our society, the media have no respect and no power. The media serves as an instrument for propaganda. In contrast, the West and Europe have a hundred years of experience with democracy and the notion of free media. The media therefore, in our regressive culture, cannot do anything toward the authorities or political decisions. Thus, it is not realistic to expect any power of the media, any response or even any respect from the government towards the media reports (Academic group discussion, 12 November 2015).

As a result, Hemin Majeed pointed out that due to the tribal cultural background of Kurds, the professional performance of the media is remote and one cannot expect that the

¹¹⁰ My research in-depth interview, 15 February 2015.

elements of democracy will emerge in Kurdistan overnight. In fact, democratic structures will need time to develop, especially in a society like Kurds with the Middle Eastern cultural background.

Kamil Omer also was one of the academics that had a pessimistic view about the watchdog reporting in Kurdistan. He explained the undeveloped political background in Kurdistan has resulted in cultural weaknesses of the media, he said:

In general, the investigative media has not become a model for Kurdish media, either in terms of theory or practice. None of the news media outlets in Kurdistan (including the private media) can produce an objective and professional investigative report (Academic focus group discussion, 12 November 2015).

Kamil Omer went on to indicate the obstacles that hinder the development of the media in Kurdistan. One of the reasons behind the weaknesses of the watchdog media, as he said, is the political environment which is not helpful in supporting watchdog reporting; journalists in Kurdistan might face terror at any time and can be attacked. He also gave an example of the big gap between Kurdistan and the Western countries in terms of the safety of journalists when producing a watchdog report. He said:

In the seventies, when the journalists in the United States investigated a report on the Watergate Scandal¹¹¹ they were confident that there would be the law to protect them, but here, after almost 50 years, still there is not a strong law to protect journalists when they publish their reports. The issue of journalists' safety has created a big problem, because although by law, the journalists have been granted freedom to publish their reports, there is a lot of pressure on Kurdish journalists (Academic focus group discussion, 12 November 2015).

As discussed in the previous chapters that journalists' safety is questionable in Kurdistan, even though there is legal freedom for journalists to do investigative reports.

¹¹¹ Watergate is a general term used to describe a complex web of political scandals between 1972 and 1974. The word 'Watergate' specifically refers to the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C. (<http://watergate.info/>)

For example, three journalists were murdered because of their media reports¹¹². This is due to the weaknesses of the implementation of the law.¹¹³ By law journalists have protection and all types of violence such as imprisonment or physical abuse against journalists is clearly prohibited. However in reality, every year hundreds of violations are reported by local and international human rights organisations. The courts have been silent about most of the crimes and are failing to take the necessary steps to investigate journalistic cases. As a whole, the environment for investigative reporting is not helpful.

The next two sub-sections will develop discussion of the political and cultural background of the Kurdish public sphere and government.

7.4.2 Weaknesses in Public Power

The western scholar Gans (2003) argues that the watchdog media might not influence society if no influential audience is paying attention. Similarly, regarding the public's passiveness in Kurdistan, most participants believed that their investigative reports and critical stories do not receive attention from the general public. Although the Kurdish media have regular stories about corruption and follow every individual move of political actors, the impact of the stories is limited. In this regard, Kamal Rauf mentioned his investigative report about corruption in the budget by the two ruling political parties (PUK and PDK) and how the scandal had been reported abroad but not received much attention locally. He stated:

I published an investigative report about the annual budget of the two main political parties. I found out that they have diverted \$35 million US dollars from the public budget without telling the citizens. When I published this

¹¹²The three journalists were Soran Mama Hama, Sardasht Othman and Kawa Garmyane (see chapter five).

¹¹³See Kurdish Press Law, No. 35 of 2007 appendix 1.

report, the reaction to the report was very limited; only the international organisations were interested to know more about the story” (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Kamal Rauf further expressed his anger about this situation by saying:

The authorities are not listening and they are careless about their people. Our public are also very passive. For example, currently there are lack in public services, social care, electricity, but nobody has raised a legal complaint against the government despite all their shortcomings (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

Muhammad Rauf conducted the same investigative work and published it in an article in *Living* press. He claimed that between 2004 and 2010, the KDP and PUK each took \$35 million US dollars per month from public funds to finance their media. This came to a total of \$5 billion US dollars over six years. They used public funds to finance more than 400 party-backed and ‘shadow media’ outlets. This money represents almost 20 percent of the public budget each year (Kawa Hassan, 2015: 8). However, this story also generated no reaction from the public. The reason behind the lack of public reaction to media reports on corruption could be interpreted as being due to fatigue, as Rebeen Hardy explained:

Corruption is very common in our political system, the public used to hear hundreds of news stories about corruption every day. In other words, the expectation among the public about corruption is very high in Kurdistan. For example, if I publish that \$10 million US dollars has been stolen, there will not be any reaction because they used to hear a lot about the corruption of the government. In fact, we have a very corrupted government and a very passive public” (In-depth interview, 10 February 2015).

7.4.3 Weaknesses in Government Responsiveness

The majority of the interviewees were in agreement that the media have presented and published a lot of serious reports about corruption. For example, Fazil Najib said: “in terms of reporting scandals, we have done what the media do in the developed world such as France, Britain and the US, but in Kurdistan the government is not paying attention to

these media reports” (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015). As stated, Fazil Najib has claimed that the Kurdish media’s reporting is strong. However, he was disappointed about the reaction to media reports. He said:

We have done a lot in the media in exposing corruption, but the courts didn’t follow up corruption cases and chase criminals. Because obviously, most of the court’s employees are loyal either to the PUK or KDP. In fact, this passive response from the court toward the media reports has left media report worthless in the eyes of the public. The media report is like just some grievance about the situation (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

During the interview, Fazil Najib gave an example about an investigative report that was undertaken by *Rudaw* television. A lot of effort was spent on investigating huge corruption in a construction project in Kurdistan, when reporters found out that the political actors in PUK and KDP had stolen several million dollars from those contracts. However, as usual the reaction to the report was non-existent. As he said, “the report was neglected by the authority and the public prosecutor that was supposed to follow the case didn’t pay any attention to the report.” (In-depth interview, 11 February 2015).

Abdurrahman Sdiq also asserted:

While the other branches of government (legislature, executive, and judiciary) have no voice, the media are working instead of the other branches and talking about the reasons behind the crisis. However, there is no response from the government. I think the reason is that the collaboration between the authorities and the media is very poor (In-depth interview, 11 November 2015).

The participants admitted that the responsiveness of the government toward media reports is limited or absent. In this matter, Halkawt Abdullah explained the strategy of the government:

The public can criticise, publish or say whatever they want, but there will not be any response. Therefore, we can say, the media have provided the public sufficient information about exercise of the government but they are not empowered (In-depth interview, 19 November 2015).

As a result, the interviewees in general were pessimistic about the practice of the media to support democracy in Kurdistan. They indicated that, in 2015, the process of democratisation has been damaged intentionally by the KDP, one of the major parties in Kurdistan¹¹⁴. Abdurrahman Sdiq, the former Minister in the Iraqi government, said: “all the democratic powers (legislature, executive, and judiciary) in Kurdistan have been paralysed, none of the governmental authorities can take any action against political corruption (In-depth interview, 11 November 2015).

In fact, the government’s disregard for media reports has affected the public’s trust in the impact of the media in Kurdistan, because the courts are always ignoring media reports. Some participants indicated that people have got tired because of intensive reporting about corruption, and there is no governmental reaction to media reports. For example, since 2013 the media have consistently released and broadcast dozens of documents about corruption in the Ministry of Natural Resources in Kurdistan. In addition, the people are also expressing their anger about the responsible minister, as they think that he is a corrupt person. While hundreds of posts are published about this matter in social media every day, the government is not ready to take any action or pay attention to all these voices and the minister has remained in his position. Therefore, it is clear that the impact of the watchdog news on government decisions tends to be very limited, although some of the interviewees did not agree with this, and they gave

¹¹⁴ Since October 2015, the Kurdistan parliament has been paralysed and has not held any parliamentary sessions. Kurdistan Parliament’s President Yusuf Mohammed (the candidate from the Gorran movement) and his entourage were prevented from entering Erbil city on 12/10/2015 to attend the Parliament’s sessions. They were stopped by the Kurdish security authorities from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Erbil city. This happened because of rising tension between the KDP and Gorran, the second largest bloc in Parliament.

examples of ways in which media reports had been successful in changing political decisions.

After providing this discussion, it is time to summarise the developments and weaknesses regarding the watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan.

Strengths of the watchdog media

1. The news media have frequently exposed the weaknesses in the government. Some interviewees pointed out there is even an oversupply of news reports in the media in Kurdistan.
2. Prior censorship to publication have been raised and the Kurdish Press Law has provided the media outlets freedom to follow every political action.
3. The government allows the media and the public to talk openly about corruption and politicians' misbehaviours. People can even use offensive language to criticise individual politicians, including the prime minister or the president.

Weaknesses of the watchdog media

1. Media organisations do not provide large enough budgets for investigative reporting, and producing professional investigative reports is not prioritised enough in Kurdistan.
2. Kurdish journalists are not qualified or prepared enough for investigative and watchdog reporting, there is a lack of professionalism; for example, being biased on certain issues.
3. While the media environment in Kurdistan has provided freedom for journalists to publish their reports, there is a lot of pressure on the journalist. Journalists might be worried about the consequences of publishing their stories, including threats,

being arrested or even being murdered; therefore, they may not be able to carry out their work properly.

4. The responsiveness of the court toward media stories is weak. On the whole, judges do not take necessary steps to look at issues raised by the media, and many criminals have gone unpunished because there is a lot of political influence upon the courts.

5. Laws regarding journalism appear ineffective and are weakly enforced. For example, in some cases, the courts are not judging journalists according to the Kurdish Press Law No. 35.

6. Conducting investigative reporting in Kurdistan is difficult because on one hand there is not enough information collected, and on the other hand, it is difficult for journalists to access information from governmental organisations, ministries or private companies.

7. As external factors, the Kurdish tribal cultural background and the lack of experience of modern democracy has had an impact on the Kurdish government, the public and the journalists. The weak power of the media is directly related to the lack of reliability in the media.

7.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the watchdog role of the news media in Kurdistan as a newly democratised country. The main question that was considered was the fourth research question, regarding the role of the media in enhancing democracy since 2003. First of all, it should be acknowledged that the process of democratisation in a country like Iraq or Kurdistan is not easy because of the political and cultural background; as one

of the research participants said, “we are not prepared for such a democratic system.”¹¹⁵ The interviewees were critical of the levels of democracy in Kurdistan and they asserted that it is reversing in Kurdistan. Although the interviewees admitted that the media in the last few years, during the transition period, have started to criticise the government and address issues such as corruption in government and how the ministries operate, the impact of the watchdog media is still very low.

Indeed, talking about watchdog media is challenging because it would raise many complex issues. In the investigation of the watchdog role in Kurdistan, it was necessary to examine political affairs and legal implementation alongside with media performance. Examining the internal and external environments of the media have helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the media in Kurdistan.

In order for the media to play a substantial role as a watchdog and ‘fourth estate’, three important elements must be present: first, accessibility, which is the availability of information to the media; second, responsiveness, which is the government’s capacity to respond to citizens’ concerns; and third, accountability, which refers to the power of the public to hold authorities to account (Färdigh, 2013). If any of these elements are missing, the media are less likely to play the “fourth power” in the government. Thus, in considering the accessibility of the media in Kurdistan, this has been demonstrated by the interviewees, who emphasised this role of the media in Kurdistan. Almost all the interviewees were in agreement that the private media have provided information to create awareness, and enlighten citizens about their rights in Kurdistan. Through these media networks, Kurdish citizens express their opinions regarding governmental issues.

¹¹⁵ Hakawt Abdullah (semi-structured interview, 19 November 2015).

However, regarding the other two features of the democratic system that need to be present, the responsiveness and the accountability, they are not present in Kurdistan. The external environment, including the cultural, political and conflict environment, have a great impact on the media reports. Färdigh (2013) explained how, in the ideal democratic system, the government should listen to the public, and the public should have rights to participate in government decisions; additionally, each of the government's branches (legislature, executive, and judiciary) should have their own real power. Nonetheless, in Kurdistan these authorities do not have enough power to take action against the government's misbehaviours. The practice of the law and the governmental institutions are weak in Kurdistan,¹¹⁶ In other words, the courts and prosecutors are not willing to follow up on the media reports and open corruption file cases. For example, as explained in Chapter Six, in Kurdistan the courts have not dealt with journalists' murders according to the law and the attackers have gone unpunished. Furthermore, the government completely disregards media reports. The consequence of a passive response from the government has resulted in a deficiency in the media's role in supporting the new democratic system. It also creates distrust among the public, because they believe that the media reports are useless and cannot do anything about the politicians' and the ruling parties' corruption.

In Kurdistan, the public's ability to hold the government to account is missing because, despite good practice from the media and journalists in addressing the serious problems of the government's performance, the ideal, representative role as watchdog or "fourth estate" in Kurdistan has only a limited impact. In general, most of the

¹¹⁶The three-government institution does not perform its duties as required in a democratic system, especially since 2015 when the parliament was stopped due to the political crisis in Kurdistan.

interviewees explained that the media's role is not perfect, but this can be attributed to the government and the democratic process which have only progressed a few steps towards building a democratic society in Kurdistan.

Finally, the outcome of this chapter also indicates that the journalists themselves are not free from faults since some weaknesses have also been found in the media environment. These problems have led the investigative media to fall into unprofessional behaviours in Kurdistan and to demonstrate a lack of independence. The continuing existence of a complex connection between the media and politics in Kurdistan has affected the watchdog role of the media. For example, the media outlets are often unable to survive without political parties' subsidies; there is, therefore, a risk that the influence of politicians will dominate media content. On the other hand, despite this connection between the news media and politics, there is always confrontation between the media authorities and politicians. The media often report on the politicians aggressively, and there are hundreds of lawsuits against journalists because of the everyday performance of the media in Kurdistan. The findings showed that most of the features of professionalism are missing, and the Kurdish media are influenced by inaccuracy, publishing unreliable news reporting and promoting subjective interests. Therefore, according to these analyses, taking into consideration the active role of the media in which they performed their duties as an information provider, a forum for the public, giving the public relevant information, and in reporting on government wrongdoings, but due to the existence of the many internal and external challenges, the media's role as watchdog is unable to stand against the abuses of power or successfully attempt to hold power to account.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This thesis attempted to analyse the role of the media in a new transformation phase in Kurdistan. Its aim was to examine how the media in Kurdistan has changed in relation to the new transitional democracy. The analysis of this thesis has found that the western liberal democratic concept has had an impact on the media system in Kurdistan. Overall, the transition process brought a turning point in the history of the Iraqi Kurdistan media. This thesis has suggested that politics and the media have interacted in the democratic era, but it also makes assumptions about issues that have substantially influenced the media's development, such as the economic, cultural and legal environment. It has sought to analyse the Kurdish media to explore how effective the media is during this transitional period, and assess whether the general environment in Kurdistan enables or prevents the news media in Kurdistan to perform its essential functions, especially since the newly emerging democracy falls short of basic standards for democracies; the media environment, however, often seems to lack the qualities it needs to play a key role in promoting democracy.

The empirical chapters were mainly focused on: first, the development of the media in the recent era; second, strengths and weaknesses of the legal and economic environment of the media; third, the main threats and challenges to journalism in Kurdistan; and fourth, exploring the role of the media in enhancing democracy in Kurdistan, in particular, it attempted to determine the watchdog role of the media as one of the features of the liberal media model. This chapter represents a conclusion of the thesis, which consists of two sections. In the first part, it will review the key findings that

present the development of the democratic perspective within the media in Kurdistan. In the second part, it will make suggestions and recommendations for further research.

8.1 Kurdish Media and the Democratic Perspective

Regarding the democratic principles, moving the media from an authoritarian system to a typical liberal media is one of the greatest actions that should occur in any newly democratised country. Since the main focus of this thesis is to examine the state of the media in the new democracy in Kurdistan, it was important to establish the links between the development of the media and the liberal media model in terms of its European origins. It is clear that the political transition since 2003 has brought changes in the media in the Kurdistan Region. It transferred the media from the partisan-controlled to different forms of more or less liberal media systems. The media landscape/models in Kurdistan have seen great progress, which is an integral part of the fundamental political changes in the era of transition. In the literature review it was discussed that, in the liberal media model, the media are expected to serve as the eyes and ears for citizens, and monitor the performance of government and politicians. In light of this system, this thesis examined the successes and failures of the Kurdish media since the start of the process of democratisation in Iraq and Kurdistan in 2003.

In a positive sense, good practice in the day to day performance of the media was found, such that, this research has added exploratory findings to the literature in the media field. In examining the performance of the media in the Kurdistan Region, this thesis presented considerable progress in the diversity of media ownership, in particular, the increase of the private and independent media. The media has been more active during this period when compared to any other democratic institution in the Kurdistan Region.

As described in the literature review in Chapter Two, in healthy democratic countries, the media's task is established as the right to report, to comment, and to criticise their own government without threat from figures in authority (Hachten, 2005). Also, according to the liberal approach, the media has to act as the 'Fourth Estate', which disseminates information to enable citizens to make informed decisions; provides a space for public discussion and investigates any government wrongdoing; and serves as a watchdog, highlighting the activities of the government and checks for abuses of political power on behalf of the wider public interest. In this matter, the overall result of this thesis has shown that the media have played a significant role as a channel of information, providing a space for discussion and dissemination programmes to highlight the problems to Kurdish citizens and propose ways that the government should alleviate their situation. Hence, the media are beginning to serve as a means of furthering participation in society.

Nevertheless, the results of this thesis have also shown the negative side of the media and overall process of democratisation in Kurdistan Region. These aspects were mostly related to the surrounding media environments, the lack of professionalism and the connection between media and politics. Ideally, in a democratic system, there should be strong support from each of the government's separation of powers (legislature, executive, and judiciary) and from civil society groups that can guide and support the media to act as a watchdog. Also, there should be strong backing for establishing the media as the Fourth Estate. However, in Kurdistan, there is limited support from the government's separation of powers, and it lacks the strong institutional support for the democratic process. Furthermore, the rule of law and its implementation in Kurdistan is very weak.

Analysing the democratic role of the media in Kurdistan in terms of theory and practice is a complex issue and is related to the whole process of democratisation, which this thesis aimed to examine. The following clusters represent key findings of the thesis, starting from the most positive aspects then negative aspects of the media.

8.1.1 Developments in the Media

This thesis has addressed in detail the main developments and changes that have occurred in the media system in Kurdistan, which can be summarised in three areas: the media changes, improvements in press law and the development of the watchdog role of the media.

8.1.1.1. Media Changes

Chapter Five of this thesis discussed the development of the media landscape throughout the history of Kurdistan, especially since 2003. It showed the massive increase that occurred in the number of media outlets and the diversity of media ownership. Furthermore, the media have given a wide space to lawfully advocate for public rights and to talk openly about government and political corruption.

These changes to the media in Kurdistan are regarded as a positive sign of the start of a new phase in the region, where the media are being transformed from an authoritarian model to a liberal one. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Hallin and Mancini (2004) consider the establishment of the private media as the main factor in achieving the independence of the media. Kurdistan has seen the establishment of private media since early 2000, which means that the efforts within the Kurdistan Region in building an

independent powerful media started even before the fall of Saddam Hussein.¹¹⁷ *Hawlati* newspaper, which was the first newspaper, was very active in publishing a critical view and news about government corruption. At that time, it was the only private/independent newspaper that was issued in Kurdistan. Since 2003, private media has increased to issue several newspapers and magazines, and a few years later, it expanded to include radio and television. Since its birth, the private media has acted as a watchdog and followed the political corruption in the government. Therefore, this type of media in the Kurdistan Region is valued among the Kurdish intellectuals and journalists. Prior to this period, the Kurdish people were not able to get real and truthful news from the media because all the media outlets were owned by political parties. The private media have had a significantly positive influence in this aspect, as they managed to communicate real images of the Kurdistan situation. They create awareness among Kurdish people by presenting the reality of what was hidden corruption for a long time. In other words, they demonstrate their role in supporting democracy in Kurdistan.

8.1.1.2.Improvement of the Press Law

The Press Law in Kurdistan now operates under the Iraqi Kurdistan Constitution; it seems to have made considerable progress in terms of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, especially after the amendments to the draft of the media law. In September 2008, the Iraqi Kurdistan's Regional Parliament approved a media law which would stop the imprisonment of journalists. The previous media law had been criticised by many Kurdish journalists because it allowed for the imprisonment of journalists upon

¹¹⁷ The Kurdistan Region has enjoyed autonomy from Baghdad since 1991 (see details in Chapters Four and Five).

a court order, but now there is no possibility of such incidents and journalists are no longer imprisoned.

Chapter Five in this thesis also presented developments that have occurred in the Press Law; the improvement of the law in comparison to other Middle Eastern countries is significant. For example, under this law journalists have protection; the law prohibits all types of violence against journalists including imprisonment, harassment, physical abuse of reporters and the closing down of media outlets. Furthermore, the procedure for getting a license has become quick and easy, and a licence is no longer required for issuing a newspaper. On the other hand, the chapter also pointed out that, compared to ideal democratic societies, the law is imperfect. For example, not all charges which are brought against journalists are specified in the Press Law, it imposes large fines, and finally, it consists of a number of terms and phrases that have several meanings, such as ‘national security’ and ‘public morals’, which has concerned many journalists and international organisations. These ambiguous terms have a wide margin which will be open for interpretation and abuse.

Nevertheless, overall, journalists are satisfied with the law if it is applied correctly; this means that the Kurdish journalists are much more concerned about the implementation of the law. The interviewees openly asserted that if the current law was applied well, it would likely have a positive impact, even despite the poorly defined terms and sentences. They stated, however, there is currently a disparity between what is written in law and constitution and what actions are taken against the media in practice. Also, many of the interviewees highlighted the ineffectiveness of the judicial system and lack of law enforcement in the Kurdistan Region.

8.1.1.3. Development of the Role of the Media in a Democracy

In modern democratic societies, the media have long been an integral part of the political process. The media institutions provide information on the political, social and economic issues and subsequently influence the decisions and reactions of ordinary citizens towards public affairs. In fact, since 1991, the era of autonomy from Baghdad and later in 2003, the political system in Kurdistan region has moved from an authoritarian-bureaucratic single-party regime to a multi-party democratic parliament. The process of establishing the democratic system has started since that time, and many aspects of democratic principles have been in practice, such as holding democratic elections every four years, providing freedom of the media by law and allowing the public the freedom of expression.

In this thesis therefore, the aim was to investigate the state of the media in the new era since 2003. The interviewees agreed that the media increasingly criticise the government, addressing issues such as corruption in the government, and exposing how each ministry operates. Members of the public are free to criticise the government and the political system. In fact, good practice has been demonstrated, and the way the media functions as an informative tool can be considered an achievement in the process of democratisation in Kurdistan. There are many improvements in the media's performance in exposing detailed information about the government's actions and political wrongdoings through news reporting programmes. The media have also provided a space for the public to criticise and even judge the government and the political parties.

In analysing the activeness of the media, the interviewees indicated that the media are consistently arguing about governmental and political issues through informative debate programmes. This has positively resulted in further awareness and desire among

the public to know every aspect of political issues. For example, within a single week, there are 76 television debate programmes across 7 television news stations¹¹⁸. Indeed, this is considered as a huge number of political programmes in a region like Kurdistan with a population of five million.

It has become clear that the media are freer now than ever to criticise the government and follow every step of the political actors. All the findings showed that the media in Kurdistan are performing many of their tasks. They have become a forum for the public, informing the public of all the necessary information, and exposing the government's wrongdoing. However, many obstacles still exist in Kurdistan which hinders the role of the media in contributing to democracy. In this matter, one cannot ignore the political environment in Kurdistan, which is not helpful at all. In fact, none of the other government powers (executive, legislative, judicial) can work properly. In this situation, the media cannot work individually, therefore the democratic role of the media in holding the government accountable would be very limited.

8.1.2. Challenges for the Media

Studying the critical challenges facing the media in the region was among the primary aims of this research. Despite the fact that Kurdistan has seen many changes in the field of media after the process of democratisation, internationally the area is still considered very poor. Kurdistan and Iraq have been placed in very poor positions in associated international rankings. For example, the World Press Freedom ranked Iraq and Kurdistan 158 out of 179 countries in its 2016 and 2017 worldwide index of press

¹¹⁸ See appendix 2: the total debate programmes on the television news channels *NRT*, *Rudaw*, *KNN*, *KurdSat News*, *GK*, *Speda*, and *Payam*.

freedom.¹¹⁹ Also, the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2016) has placed Iraq (including Kurdistan) in 166th position out a total of 177 countries.¹²⁰ This poor rating has inspired the review of the overall media position in Kurdistan Region. The main challenges are presented in the following sections:

8.1.2.1. Threats and challenges to journalism

The media are considered one of the most important elements for consolidating democracy in transforming societies; however, journalism in societies with an authoritarian past often faces challenges from various sources, such as political pressure. In the Kurdistan Region, journalists have been subjected to physical attacks because they have supported the democratic role of the media. They have encountered different forms of violence in order to keep them silent. Noticeably, in the international and local reports, the number of attacks against journalists increased in 2015 when compared to 2013 and 2014, both in terms of statistics and the range of cases (see Chapter Six for details). The non-profit advocacy group, Metro Centre, releases its reports each year in three languages about attacks on the media. In the last four years, its reports have recorded in detail nearly 700 attacks on journalists, including threats, harassment, beatings, detentions, intimidation and arson.

The findings of this thesis indicate that pressure on journalists still exists. The political powers who represent the government have taken violent action against the news media and journalists to stop them covering the wrongdoings in politics and addressing

¹¹⁹ Ranking 2017 World Press Freedom Index. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2017>

¹²⁰ Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016

issues of corruption, For example, the murders of Mama Hama, Garmyane, and Osman, the burning of *NRT*, and other forms of violence committed against journalists provide evidence that the overall environment is not supportive towards the news media.

In one research interview, the coordinator of the Metro Centre said that, what made the situation worse is, most of the attacks against journalists were not investigated properly and the attackers have gone unpunished. These have resulted in doubts about the claim to democracy in Kurdistan. Often the interviewees¹²¹ expressed their concerns about the increase in the number of attacks against media activists, as well as distrust in the executive power of the police and the judicial power of the court, which they said makes it difficult for the Kurdish media to fulfil their role as watchdog and the fourth estate.

8.1.2.2. Self-censorship

Chapter Six in this thesis has classified several types of self-censorship that are currently employed by the media in Kurdistan. It indicates that, although censorship has been eradicated in Kurdistan, self-censorship is practised widely. Due to a long history of existing links between the media and politics, facing threats, kidnapping and murdering, unstable political issues and other cultural reasons, Kurdish journalists and media organisations have strong editorial policies in place.

Regarding the media organisations and journalist self-censorship, the outcome of the interviews clearly pointed out that unspoken rules are in place in Kurdistan. While censorship is not permitted by law, self-censorship is indirectly practised in the media

¹²¹ Interestingly, some of the interviewed journalists and editors have been exposed to harassment.

organisations, especially by employees of the ‘shadow media’ networks. As was shown in the case of *Rudaw*’s journalists and editors, they practise self-censorship in order to keep their job. For example, although *Rudaw* has a large number of critical news broadcasts and programmes which expose political and government corruption, journalists are not free to talk about the Prime Minister’s involvement in the corrupt government, as he is the founder and sponsor of the *Rudaw* media company. In the powerful news channels, the editorial media are strongly in place.

Cultural and religious self-censorship is also found in the media in Kurdistan. The interviewees stated that Kurdish journalists are not free to talk about sex issues or break any religious thoughts, even if they give dozens of justifications, because the judgment from society is very tough. This type of self-censorship is related to the nature of Kurdish society which will not change easily. The ISIS war has also influenced the media in Kurdistan in terms of the profession, and in particular, in providing truth and objectivity. The interviewees emphasised that the media have a responsibility towards the Kurdish society. It seems that all the Kurdish media are all in agreement not to publish any information regarding any defeat of Kurdish ‘*Peshmerga*’ in the recent ISIS war in order not to frighten their Kurdish audiences. Thus, facing war with ISIS has justified concealing some facts in the media reporting. In other words, it results in the Kurdish journalists practising self-censorship, since defending the Kurdish question has become a priority among all the Kurdish, including the journalists.

8.1.2.3. Rule of Law and Judiciary Independence

The adaptation of the laws and structures relating to the independence of the media are essential for the development of free media. In legal terms, as mentioned, there has been a great reform in the law, however this alone does not guarantee how the media

will operate. What is important, in all matters, is the interaction between the law and how it is interpreted and implemented. A legal framework may be helpful, however good media laws alone cannot be successful, and therefore, an important factor to enable a desirable environment is the implementation of the laws. The laws designed to foster media independence should be very clear; any confusing or contradictory elements will hinder the process. In Kurdistan, in some cases, the courts are not dealing with journalists according to the Press Law. Furthermore, sometimes government institutions are completely neglecting the law. Perhaps the best example of this, since 2013 the law guarantees the right of access to information in Kurdistan, however it does not happen in practice. Access to information is considered the main problem for journalists and one of the biggest obstacles hindering the media development.

In addition, while the media are active in attacking government misconduct and covering political corruption, other government institutions fail to support the media and do not follow up the media's investigative reports. The journalist's situation balances between what is written in law and what is current practice. While a democratic transformation in the political environment has given the media a legal right to be free and active, at the same time it has not created a suitable environment for the media to succeed. Various pressures on the media still exist, and the country lacks effective democratic institutions supporting the media, which are essential to build a strong democratic system. The region suffers from the absence of the rule of law and the courts, in particular, fail to address the media actively, and therefore media reports have only a limited impact. In the research interviews, the interviewees pointed out that negative actions towards the media by the authorities and the ruling political parties do occur and often increase during sensitive political situations. They indicated that all the laws, democracy, and human rights principles disappear during a political crisis.

Therefore, this thesis was concerned with examining the difference between what is written as a law and constitution and what are the actions against the media in practice. Scholars indicate that, in developing countries, often freedom of the media is very well defined in their constitutions. However, they never guarantee freedoms in practice (Breunig 1994). Good media laws alone cannot be successful if they are not applied correctly. In Kurdistan, neglecting media reports is considered a core problem hindering the development of the media in Kurdistan. It was clear from the interviewees' views about the media's role in Kurdistan that journalists have done a lot in relation to reporting on corruption, and have covered every action by the government. However, the media reports are not being followed up by other governmental institutions, particularly the courts. The interviewees pointed out that the courts have not followed up on corruption cases and charged criminals, such as in the cases of Kawa Garmiyani, Sardasht Osman and Soran Mama Hama. The reason is that, as the interviewees stated, most of the court's employees have loyalty either to the PUK or KDP and almost all the corruptions came from these two ruling parties. All the interviewees, including the law experts, were in agreement that the court and judges are not independent in the Kurdistan Region. As a result, a passive response from the court towards media reports has left these reports worthless for the public, and the media reports have only a limited impact. Therefore, the media in the Kurdistan Region has not become a source of power as it is in many democratic countries.

8.1.2.4. The Media financial Failures in Kurdistan

Growth of the media market is a significant step towards the development of a liberal and independent media in democratic societies. To date, Kurdish media is not profitable, since the circulation of many newspapers are relatively low so the sales alone

could not support the media's revenues. Currently, the most difficult challenge for Iraqi Kurdistan's media is how to build funding sources for good journalism. The interviewees indicated that, due to the low circulation and revenue from sales, and the media itself is subject to lose out. They also pointed out that there are low levels of advertisement revenue.

Overall, the financial situation of journalists in Kurdistan, as in many other transitional regions, is poor. This leads to the question, whether the political parties have indirect control over journalists' working? The interviewees were not in agreement, and some of them recalled that there have been major attempts by politicians to buy journalists voices, especially those journalists who work in the independent/private media. Kurdish politicians certainly want to be close to the private/independent media, for example, trying to attract journalists by offering them good opportunities; they have either attempted to encourage to the media to cover their news positively or at least stay silent.

The finding of this thesis showed that political parties and politicians have tried to control journalists' voices in several ways. Firstly, they have encouraged journalists to leave the private/independent media and work in the 'shadow media', such as *Rudaw* which has employed many qualified and experienced journalists, by offering them better salaries and working conditions. Secondly, politicians have tried to control journalists who work outside the 'shadow media' by offering money, either as a donation to private/independent media organisations or as a personal offer in order to earn friendship from journalists in the private/independent media. For example, when the private media organisations asked for financial help, the powerful people in the political parties offered them large donations. The media analysts have raised doubts about politician's donations to the private/independent media and said these will certainly affect the potential

coverage of the news in the future, because there will be favouritism and bias toward those donors. Thirdly, they have also tried to bribe journalists and bargain with both the senior and junior journalists. The interviewees argued that many of these aims have already been adopted; in other words, through these methods, politicians have been able to dominate the modern news media because, as stated, there is a wide space for criticism and investigative reporting regarding political and government misconduct. Indeed, some of the journalists have already accepted the offers and some have not.

In this matter, most of the interviewees, the senior journalist in particular, completely denied having any commitment towards the politicians or any agreements about the coverage of political corruption. They identified that politicians and those in authority have tried to buy the independent journalists' voice or silence the media by offering them money or high positions in government. However, these bargains are never accepted by the famous journalists; they said that bribers do not work with the real journalists. If someone fell into this kind of bargain, it would be revealed very soon through their writing and their speech. This will have a direct influence on the reputations of the journalists, and certainly a journalists' reputation is the most important thing in their job.

8.1.2.5. Media Political Independence

In the transformation of the media in Kurdistan towards a liberal model, the increase in the number of media outlets and the diversity of the media can be seen as positive sign. However, scholars have also pointed out that because of the long-standing authoritarian system, the legacy of controlled media power has carried over into the democratising period. Even after 2003, the ruling political parties want to have control over the media, including the news media. In Kurdistan, as Kim and Hama-Saeed (2008)

stated, the Kurdish media have gained a pluralistic ownership, but not much independence. Currently, a considerable number of news media outlets operate in Kurdistan, and they compete to expose huge amounts of watchdog reporting on current affairs and political misconduct. However, only a few of them are financially independent. This has created another problem for the democratic role of the media in Kurdistan.

The ruling parties want to continue to have power over media channels, therefore they have taken on a new strategy in the news media. Within this strategy, many media networks have been established which are known among the Kurdish journalists as the 'shadow media'. This type of media offers space for different views and gives a wide range of criticism of the government. For example, giving opportunities to journalists from different political parties and independent journalists, and discussing sensitive and political topics were formerly the exclusive domain of the private and independent media. Despite these positive aspects, all of the interviewees acknowledged that these media networks are not free from political control. The main reason for this claim is that these media outlets are owned by the powerful members of the ruling political parties, and are directly fed by them; these certainly affects their independence and their ability to undertake a watchdog function in the media. This model of the media is not in-line with democratic principles, because the first condition for free media is financial independence, which means an important condition for free media is not met. The owners of the shadow media are very wealthy and they are not seeking profits from the media, in other words, they have weakened the private/independent media market by distributing newspapers at a lower price. Also, as the research interviewees argued, because the political parties resource their media outlet generously, many journalists have left the

private media and gone to work in the shadow media, which has weakened the private/independent media.

8.1.2.6. Complex Connection between the Media and Politics

This thesis has hypothesised that politics and the media have interacted in the democratic era. It also argues that the Kurdish media are as highly concerned with politics as ever. The journalists and politicians in Kurdistan have enjoyed links for a very long time. This relationship has carried over into the transitional democratic period and caused disadvantages for the developments in the media. The interviewees in this research strongly emphasised that defence of the Kurdish question is unchangeable, and the Kurdish issue¹²² will always have an effect on the Kurdish media reports, as stated in particular by the research interviewee, Azad Hama Ameen. Because of the uniqueness of the Kurdish political situation, the media have been used to serve the political purpose of the Kurdish throughout history. Many scholars (McDowall, 2004: 3; Sheyholislami, 2011; Yıldız, 2004; Hevian, 2013) have stated that the Kurdish media mainly tended to focus on the gaining of national rights and highlighting injustices against the Kurdish people.

More recently, another relationship between the media and the politicians has developed, where journalists need the politicians for information and access to the political system, and politicians depend on the journalists for wider exposure of themselves and their policies. The interviews suggested that this relationship reflects the problems associated with political communications in new democracies, and that journalists and politicians are still negotiating their roles, responsibilities, and

¹²² The Kurdish question for independence: see Chapter Two.

interactions. This relationship between journalists and politicians or politics has constrained the media watchdog reporting. In contrast, from a Western democratic point of view, it is impossible to accept limitations on freedom of the media.

In order to clarify the intertwined and multi-faceted relationship between the media and politics, this thesis looked at the root of this connection. To date, research into the media and democracy in Kurdistan has only talked about the strong connection between the media and politics. However, this thesis explored how in addition to the strong connection between the media and politics, there is an increase in mistrust and miscommunication between the political parties and the media. Indeed, this connection is a blessing and a curse for the media at the same time. In some ways, politicians have served the news media's status in Kurdistan by spending a massive amount of money and effort to develop the media and establish multiple media networks which offer intensive daily 24-hour news media reporting coverage. On the other hand, Hallin and Mancini (2004) consider private media ownership as the main factor in establishing the independence of media from the government and political parties, and the political ownership of the media will certainly hinder the development of the media as autonomous institutions. These media outlets often depend on the political parties or wealthy private companies, which means that the media will lose their independence.

Therefore, despite there being a strong connection between the media and politics, there is also mistrust between the two. The role of the news media in the new democratic Kurdistan presents a paradox. While the media are often directed by the political parties, the media are presenting daily watchdog reports and holding power accountable, exposing abuses of power, and being supportive of the unfolding democracy. A justification of this statement is the growing mistrust and miscommunication between the

government/political parties and the media, and the huge amount of watchdog reporting about the day-to-day political misrepresentation.

8.1.2.7. Ethics and Professionalism

The points discussed above were mostly related to the external challenges of the media; however, not all the faults come from outside the media, since the journalists' performance also has an impact on hindering the development of the media in Kurdistan. In the newly developing democratic environment, conducting professional roles is not easy, especially when the journalists have to translate reality into words and images, and sometimes these interpretations are affected by personal interests. The critical news media in Kurdistan have displayed some unprofessional behaviours when monitoring the government's performance. Some of the interviewees complained about the journalist's disrespectful behaviour towards politics and the political party's history. They said that the media are irresponsible towards national unity, and have started to fuel conflicts among the political parties. Many academics and media experts have criticised the Kurdish journalists for the absence of professionalism.

From analysing a journalist's performance in the transition to democracy, it was noted that the Kurdish journalists are torn between two different aspects: one is the requirement to act professionally and the other is their complex background of institutional and cultural conditioning, which is far from the ideal of professionalism. Thus, transforming the media institutions into professional and democratic institutions requires a lot of effort because the journalist's cultural background requires time to adopt the new democratic change. The Kurdish journalists still hold values that are rooted in their professional life under the old regime on one hand, and on the other hand the Kurdish journalists are in a rush to present themselves as investigator or as defender of

human rights, therefore they easily fall into unprofessional behaviour. For example, when monitoring the government's performance, the journalist very often forgets their role as a journalist and acts as a political judge or prosecutor. Consequently, a lot of aggressive debate has occurred between journalists and the politicians. There are hundreds of lawsuits against journalists, and the everyday performance of the media in Kurdistan bears many weaknesses. Most of the interviewees asserted that the Kurdish journalist is careless towards the law. The common perception of the journalist's performance in Kurdistan now is of confrontation between the media editors and the politicians. Although the media introduces many watchdog reports, a lot of it lacks professionalism, and there are many accusations criticising Kurdish journalists for not being ethical.

In addition, in Kurdistan, although there are codes of ethics which have been adopted in the media, the qualities of truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness are still questionable. For example, in publishing and broadcasting news and information, they have fallen into frequent trouble with the authorities and slapped with large fines; furthermore, being biased towards a certain group is very common in Kurdistan. As clearly indicated throughout the thesis chapters, the Kurdistan Region has produced appropriate laws which have defined the rights and responsibilities of journalists, however journalists are mostly unwilling to follow a journalistic code of ethics in practice.

8.2. Recommendation for Future Research

Overall, the finding of this thesis has established that the media have presented reports on the day-to-day management of the government's executive performance. The Kurdish media have issued hundreds of reports daily, providing critical views on

corruption and political leaders' wrongdoings. Most of the research interviewees agreed that there is watchdog reporting in Kurdistan, even some of them indicated that there is an oversupply of those reports in the media. However, in relation to the impact of those reports, and the power of the media as a fourth estate, the interviewees admitted that there is very limited impact of the reports on political decisions. As they indicate, the problem is not the media but is related to the democratisation process which still needs more time to be fully implemented in Kurdistan.

With a remarkable increase in the number of active media outlets and developments in the content of reporting, the response for the fourth research question on the watchdog role of the media in holding the government accountable in Kurdistan would not be positive. In this regard, it is important to consider the current political situation and the actual representations of the government institutions in Kurdistan.

Impeding the impact of media reporting is not a unique phenomenon in a transformation period, since many newly emerging democracies fall short of the basic standards for democracies and the media are seen as a hybrid model which carries over some features from the previous system. Many scholars have attempted to explain the role of the media in the transition period because of the direct relationship between the media and the consolidation of democracy, and what the media could provide as foundations for the future stability of democratic institutions. Most of the findings agreed that the media, in many new democracies, are frequently criticised for being very close to the political elites. Similarly, in the Kurdistan region, the media are still far from the ideal for the following reasons: Firstly, the media economics is very weak in Kurdistan, none of the media organisations can survive without external funds and this has resulted in the weakness of the private/independent media. Secondly, despite the positive points

of the media in Kurdistan and the pluralistic ownership, most powerful news organisations such as *Rudaw*, *K24* and *KurdSat News* are maintained either by political actors or a limited number of families. Thirdly, the misrepresentation of the democratic institution and weaknesses the rule of law in Kurdistan. Fourthly, widespread recognition of the lack of professionalism within the media in Kurdistan. In addition, the government has always played a large role in the media in Kurdistan. For a long time, the media were controlled by a series of authoritarian Iraqi governments and therefore, some of this legacy remains and has carried over into the democratising period. Even after 2003, the ruling political parties owned a significant portion of the media, including most of the news media.

As a result, the role of the media in new democracies, for example Kurdistan, should be viewed in its specific context (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), since there are many factors, such as culture, politics, economic pressure, lack of experience and professionalism, which could hinder the development of the media. Accordingly, the democratic role of the media is not very well developed in the Kurdistan Region. As Christians et al (2009) argue that, although many changes can be observed in the new media environment, the essence of the democratic role is severely lacking. However, the media should bear in mind that their counterparts in western democracies have gone through long evolutionary historic processes, and seen developments happen over the centuries. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect during a transition process, the surrounding environments will adopt a free and independent media supporting genuine democratisation processes completely.

Certainly, this thesis is not without limitation, this research project has concerned to explore the role played by the media in the period of democratisation, which is a rare

occurrence in a region like Kurdistan for several reasons, mainly due to a wide range of political problems, typical administrative and political backwardness that are known about in the Middle East, and poor characteristics of the media in the past. All the findings showed that the media in Kurdistan have moved towards playing the democratic role. For example, they became a forum for the public, informed the public of all the necessary information, and exposed the government's wrongdoing, but the poor democratic performance of the overall government institution has curbed the media roles. The political, economic and legal situation in Kurdistan is not as helpful in supporting the media's attempts to develop democracy, as it is in the western world. Future research could focus on the darker side of the media's role serving politicians, which hinders the development of democracy. As mentioned throughout the thesis, the media in the Kurdistan Region have strong links with politics and most of the organisations are controlled by the political parties. The party media or partisan media term is quite popular in Kurdistan; mostly the media are described as the mouthpiece of the political parties. Therefore, further study on this side of the media would be beneficial in relation to developing democracy.

This thesis has focused on the role of the official media, which included all the news media such as radio, television, newspaper and the official online news websites, to determine the state of the media in promoting democracy. Future research could focus on social media to evaluate its contribution in the process of building democracy in the Kurdistan Region. During the last four years, while this thesis has been undertaken, Internet usage has seen a significant rise in Kurdistan. Currently, the number of readers of online newspapers has considerably increased, as well as the popularity of using social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogger. Although the Internet has some limits, its use is more common among the younger generation and educated people. This type of

media provides more freedom for people to talk about their rights, and expose corruption and the wrongdoings in politics, and as a result it is worth taking into account in future research.

Another important area which has not been part of this research is conducting comparisons of the performance of satellite television news and the other types of media in the Kurdistan Region, since there is an assumption that television is the more effective medium in Middle Eastern countries because it does not require any literacy skills. In Kurdistan, especially, after the establishment of the private news television, the content of television has dramatically developed, and therefore Kurdish people rely more on television for receiving news programmes than any other medium.

Another area for possible further research would be to expand its scope to examine the impact of the ISIS war on the development of the media environment in the Kurdistan Region. As stated in Chapter Five, the ISIS war resulted in a decline in democracy in October 2015; because of this war, the KRG has conducted a series of undemocratic actions. It would be interesting to analyse the impact of October's political crisis and the ISIS war on the development of democracy and the media in the Kurdistan Region. Finally, the chosen in-depth interviews and focus group discussion methods of this study can be broadened to include content analysis of the news programmes; quantitative methods could also be used, for example the audience-based studies to explore the audience's perception of the role of the media in supporting democracy.

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Appendix 1:

The Kurdistan Region Press Law

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

In the Name of the People

President's Office - Kurdistan Region – Iraq

Decree No. 24 of 2008

Press Law in the Kurdistan Region

Pursuant to the authorities granted to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region in accordance with the provisions of Article 10 (1) of Law No. (1) – 2005) and pursuant to the legislation enacted by the Kurdistan National Assembly - Iraq in its fourth session held during its second season on the 22nd of September 2008, we hereby issue:

Law No. 35 of 2007

Press Law in the Kurdistan Region

Chapter One

Definitions and Principles

Article (1): The following terms shall have the meanings hereunder for the purpose of this Law:

1. Region: The Kurdistan Region – Iraq.
2. Syndicate: The Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate.
3. The General Secretary: The General Secretary of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate.
4. Journalism: The practice of journalistic work through various media.
5. Journalist: Someone practicing the journalism profession.
6. Newspaper: A publication issued and distributed periodically and regularly under a specific name in subsequent issues.

Article (2):

First: The Press is free and no censorship shall be imposed on it. Freedom of expression and publication shall be guaranteed to every citizen within the framework of respect for personal rights, liberties and the privacy of individuals in accordance with the law, as well as being committed to the principles of ethics in the Bordeaux Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists.

Second: A journalist may obtain from diverse sources, in accordance with the law, information of importance to citizens and with relevance to the public interest.

Third: In case of a legal suit, a journalist may keep secret the sources of information and news relevant to the suits brought before the courts unless the court decides otherwise.

Fourth: Every natural or legal person shall have the right to possess and issue newspapers in accordance with the provisions of this Law.

Fifth: No newspaper shall be closed down or confiscated.

Chapter Two

Conditions for Obtaining and Conceding the Right to Publish Newspaper

Article (3): The following conditions shall be fulfilled to publish a newspaper:

First: the Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper shall place an advertisement in two daily newspapers published in the region, in which the name, title, nationality and place of residence of the Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper is stated as well as the name of the newspaper and its language of publication and the name of its editor and the periods of its issuance. This advertisement shall be equivalent to an announcement for the publication of the newspaper.

Second: Any party concerned may oppose publication of the newspaper, within a 30-day period from the date of the published declaration, to the Court of Appeal if the region, as its cassation otherwise the newspaper shall be considered to be established.

Third: The Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper shall forward and register the announcement of foundation at the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate. The announcement must include the source of funding and the syndicate to shall also inform the Ministry of Culture.

Fourth: A person who intends to publish a newspaper must be fully qualified in accordance with the law.

Fifth: It is not permitted to publish two newspapers under the same name in the region.

Sixth: A Concessionaire or Founder of the newspaper shall clearly print in the newspaper, in a prominent place, his name and the name of the editor of the newspaper and the location and date of its issuance as well as the name of the printing house at which the newspaper is printed. For any change or amendment to the content of the foundation statement, he shall also publish declaration about the change or amendment within 30 days from the date of the change or amendment.

Article (4): Every newspaper shall have an Editor-in-Chief supervising information published. He must fulfill the following conditions:

First: He must be a journalist and a master of the spoken and written language of the newspaper.

Second: The Editor-in-Chief and writer shall bear the civil and penal responsibility for what is published, while the Concessionaire bears the civil responsibility; and he bears the same responsibility as the Editor-in-Chief if he participates in editing the publication.

Article (5): Observing the procedures stipulated in this Law, the Concessionaire shall have the right to make a partial or whole concession to others, provided that he publishes in a daily newspaper the notification of his intention to grant a concession before 30 days have passed after the specified date of the concession.

Chapter Three

Response and Correction

Article (6):

First: In the case of the publication of false information, the concerned person or one of his heirs, or one acting on his behalf shall have a legal right to demand a correction or response to the news story or article. The Editor-in-Chief shall publish free of charge the correction or response in one of the two issues following the date of the arrival of the correction or response. It shall be published in the same location with the same font and size in which the article was published.

Second: Failure of the newspaper to publish the factual response shall result in a fine of no less than one million Iraqi Dinars and no more than two million Iraqi Dinars.

Third: The Editor-in-Chief may refuse to publish the response or correction in the following circumstances:

1. If the newspaper had corrected the story or article before the arrival of the response or correction.
2. If the response or correction was signed under a pseudonym or written in a language other than the one in which the story or article was written.
3. If the content of the response or article is in contradiction with the law
4. If the response or correction arrived ninety (90) days after the publication of the original story or article.

Chapter Four

Rights and Privileges of the Journalist

Article (7):

First: A journalist is free and there is no power over him in the performance of his work except the law.

Second: The opinion given or information disseminated by a journalist may not be used as a reason to cause injury to his person or violate his rights.

Third: A journalist has the right not to divulge the sources of his information unless a judicial decision is issued.

Fourth: A journalist has the right to attend conferences and other general activities.

Fifth: Anyone who insults or injures a journalist as a result of the performance of his work shall be punished with the punishments decided for those who injure government employees during regular working hours or as a result of the performance of his work.

Sixth: A journalist shall have the right to terminate, of his own will, his contract with the newspaper if there is any radical change to the policy of the newspaper for which the journalist is working, or if there is a change in the circumstances under which the journalist had contracted, provided that he gives the newspaper 30 days notice before stopping work, without any infringement of the journalist's right to compensation.

Seventh: Press institutions and their administration shall undertake to provide a journalist with all the rights stipulated in the applicable laws and the contract ratified by the Syndicate.

Eighth: A journalist shall be paid additional compensation, not to exceed one-month payment of salary or wages, at the end of the fiscal year, if he had not received the whole or part of his regular vacation.

Ninth: The newspaper shall bear the cost of treatment expenses if a journalist were injured or became sick during the performance of his work or as a result of his work.

Tenth: The newspaper for which the journalist works shall compensate the journalist for working legal holidays by paying him the equivalent of two days of wage for each legal holiday worked.

Chapter Five

Immunity

Article (8):

First: The Syndicate shall be informed of any legal actions against a journalist if it were related to the practice of his profession.

Second: A journalist shall not be investigated or his office and house be searched for the reason stipulated in paragraph (first) of this article, except in accordance with a judicial decision. The General Secretary of the Syndicate, or someone acting on his behalf, shall have the right to attend the investigation.

Third: No documents, information, data, or papers in the possession of the journalist may be taken as a means of proof against him, in any penal investigation, if they were not related to the penal complaint filed against the journalist.

Fourth: No crime has been committed if the journalist has published or written about the work of an official or a person entrusted with a public service or a public representative if what he has published does not go beyond the affairs of the profession or of the public or representative service on the condition that he has provided proof supporting what he has ascribed to them.

Fifth: No legal procedures shall be taken against the journalist after ninety (90) days from the date of publication.

Article (9):

First:

A journalist and the editor in chief shall be fined an amount not less than 1,000,000 million dinars and no more than 5,000,000 million dinars when they published in the media one of the following:

1. Sowing malice and fostering hatred, discord and disagreement among the components of society.
2. Insulting religious beliefs or denigrating their rituals.
3. Insulting religious sanctities and symbols of any religion or sect or abuse them.
4. Anything related to the secrets of the private lives of individuals, even if true, if it offends them.
5. Libel, slander or defamation.
6. Anything that prejudices an investigation or trial procedures unless publication is permitted by the court.

7. Violation of the principles of ethics stated in the Bordeaux Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists, adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists.

Second: A newspaper shall be charged a fine of no less than five million Iraqi Dinars and no more than twenty million Iraqi Dinars for publishing one of the items mentioned in paragraph (first) above.

Third: If the violation were repeated, the Court may raise the fine, provided that it does not exceed double the sum of the fine described in paragraphs (first and second) above.

Fourth: The General Prosecutor and the affected person shall have the right to file suit, in accordance with law.

Article (10): The provisions of article (9) shall have no effect upon newspaper and publications imported by governmental institutions, universities and scientific research centers for purely scientific purposes.

Article (11): Materials copied or translated from sources outside the Kurdistan Region shall not be exempt from this Law.

Article (12): Any text contradicting the provisions of this Law shall not be valid.

Final Provisions

Article (13): The Council of Ministers and the Competent Authorities shall implement the provisions of this Law.

Article (14): This Law shall take effect as of the date of its publication in the official gazette *Kurdistan Gazette*.

Masoud Barzanî

President of the Kurdistan Region - Iraq

This Law has been issued in Erbil on the 17th of Razbari 2708 (Kurdish Calendar), corresponding to the 9th of October 2008 (AD) and 10th of Shuwal 1429 (Hegira Calendar).

Necessitating Reasons

The Press is of great value to both Kurdish and international society. It enjoys a broad scope of freedom, which requires specific legislation that organizes the Press profession in a manner that keeps in tune with the spirit of this age and its developments and enables citizens to be informed of the truth. And in order to fulfill the requirements needed for practicing freedom of the Press in a transparent and professional manner and to express the opinions and thoughts which contribute to the building of a civil society and bolstering the principles of democracy and human rights, this Law was enacted.

Appendix 2:

Main Satellite News Channels Political Debate Programmes

Table 1: Satellite News Channels in Kurdistan:

News Televisions	Year of Establishment	Televisions' Location
NRT	2011	Sulaymaniyah
Rwdaw	2011	Erbil
K24	2015	Erbil
KNN	2008	Sulaymaniyah
KurdSat New	2014	Sulaymaniyah
KG	2008	Sulaymaniyah

Table 2: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by NRT

No.	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Pekawa zhyan	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
2	Chawpekawtn	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
3	Arastakan	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
4	Dw jar bir bkarawa	60 mins	2	2.00 mins
5	Tawtwe	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
6	Dialogue	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
Total	6	4.30 mins	2	9.00 mins

Table 3: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *Rudaw TV*

No	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Ba hemni	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
3	Qawayak lagal hizbakan	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
4	Panjamor	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
5	Chwar qoli	30 mins	2	1.00 mins
6	From washnton	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
7	Lagal ranj	90 mins	2	3.00 mins
8	Rudawi amro	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
9	Dw ali	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
Total	9	6.50	2	13.40

Table 4: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *KNN TV*

No.	Debate programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Bzhar	25 mins	2	50 mins
2	Lekdanawai rozh	30 mins	2	1.00 mins
3	Rozhava garm	35 mins	2	1.10 mins
4	La amerikawa	30 mins	2	1.00 mins
6	Tarik w rwn	15 mins	2	30 mins
7	Prsi shaqam	60 mins	2	2.00 mins
8	Didari amro	35 mins	2	1.10 mins
9	Gftwgo	50 mins	2	1.30 mins
Total	9	4.40	2	9.20 mins

Table 5: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *KurdSat News TV*

No.	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Didari taibat	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
2	Panorama	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
3	Politic	55 mins	2	1.50 mins
4	Dasalati chwar	60 mins	2	2.00 mins
5	Prdi wlat	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
6	Parsif	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
7	Rozhi hawtam	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
8	Kasi hafta	55 mins	2	1.50 mins
Total	8	7	2	14.00 mins

Table 6: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *GK TV*

No.	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Bunyad	55 mins	2	1.50 mins
2	Panel	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
3	Didari taibat	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
4	Garmawgarm	35 mins	2	1.10 mins
5	Ra	40 mins	2	1.20 mins
Total	5	3.40 mins	2	7.20 mins

Table 7: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *Speda TV*

No.	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Rumal	25 mins	2	50 mins
2	Mzhar	30 mins	2	60 mins
3	Didari taibat	35 mins	2	1.10 mins
4	Gftwgo	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
5	Tawara	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
Total	5	3.00 mins	2	6.00 mins

Table 8: Weekly debate programmes broadcasted by *Payam TV*

No.	Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total weekly hours
1	Fshar	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
2	Xzmat	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
3	Didari taibat	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
4	Diwi dwam	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
5	Rwanga	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
6	Prd	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
7	Gftwgo	50 mins	2	1.40 mins
8	Amro	45 mins	6	4.30 mins
9	Dwangai xalk	45 mins	2	1.30 mins
Total	9	7.00 mins	2	17.00 mins

Table 9: Broadcasting Debate Programmes By News Television Channels In Kurdistan By Hours

News Televisions	No of Political Debate Programmes	Average Duration of Length Hours/Mins	Frequency	Total Weekly Hours
NRT	6	4.30 mins	2	9.00 mins
Rwdaw	9	6.50 mins	2	13.40 mins
KNN	9	4.40 mins	2	9.20 mins
KurdSat New	8	7.00 mins	2	14.00 mins
GK	5	3.40 mins	2	7.20 mins
Speda	5	3.00 mins	2	6.00 mins
Payam	9	7.00 mins	2	17.00 mins
Total	51	36.40 mins	2	76.20 mins

Appendix 3:

Interview Questions

Political Environment

1. In which way is media subject to editorial direction? Could you give an example?
2. Do media outlets express independent, does balanced views exist?
3. Do media outlets have a sufficient level of access to information? Is this right equally enforced for all journalists, regardless of their media outlet's editorial line?
4. Is there any unofficial censorship? Could you give a story or an example?
5. Do journalists practice self-censorship? Are there unspoken 'rules' that prevent a journalist from pursuing certain stories?
6. What are argumentative issues officially off-limits to the media?
7. During investigative news stories on issues such as corruption do journalists face pressure from the government or other powerful political actors?
8. Are journalists harassed while covering the news? Are certain geographical areas of the country off-limits to journalists?
9. What is the extra-legal intimidation or physical violence might face journalists, or media outlets? Could you give examples?

Economic Environment

- 10- Which way media owned or controlled by the government or political parties?
Could give examples?
- 11- What is the pattern of news media outlets?
- 12- Are privately owned media seem to promote principles of public interest, diversity and plurality?
- 13- Is media ownership transparent?
- 14- Are the channels of news and information distribution able to operate freely?
Could you give an example?
- 15- Do the state or other actors try to control the media through subsidies?

16- Are journalists paid well?

17- Do government officials or other actors pay journalists in order to cover or to avoid certain stories? Are journalists often bribed? Could you give an example?

18- Does the overall economic situation negatively impact media outlets' financial sustainability?

Legal Environment

19- What do you think about judiciary independent?

20- Are the rights to freedom of information recognized as important among members of the judiciary?

21- Are journalists prosecuted or jailed as a result of what they write? Could you give examples?

Appendix 4:

Journalists And Editors' Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. What is the extent of the development of the media in the transition process of Iraqi Kurdistan?
2. What is the most developed aspect of the media after 2003, in the Iraq and Kurdistan democratic transition.
3. What are the current most topical problems of the media in Kurdistan?
4. In which way are the media subject to editorial direction? Could you give an example?
5. Do media outlets express independent views, do balanced views exist?
6. Do government officials or other actors pay journalists to cover or to avoid certain stories? Are journalists often bribed? Could you give an example?

Appendix 5:

Media Experts And Academics' Focus Group Discussion Questions:

1. What is the major role of the news media in a newly democratised country like Iraq and Kurdistan?
2. Are the media playing their roles or are they simply being used by political groups, to further their own interests?
3. How much is the media able to contribute to sustain democratisation in Kurdistan?
4. Scholars expect the media to play a responsible role in society. Do you see the media in Kurdistan playing any role in holding the government to account? If YES, what are these roles? If NO, please explain.
5. How do you describe the watchdog role of the media in Kurdistan? Do you think the media are playing any watchdog role in Kurdistan? If YES, state how? If NO, state why and what are the main obstacles?
6. What should be done to enhance the role of the media in playing the watchdog role in Kurdistan?

Appendix 6:

Name of Research Interviewees

1. Hakim Ahmaed/ the Dean of Media Department at the Polytechnic University, PhD in Media.
2. Habib Karkuki / University professor at the Salahaddin University-Erbil, PhD in Media.
3. Saman Fauzi / Former Member of Iraqi Parliament, Associate Professor in Media Department, PhD in Law Press
4. Rebeen Hardy/ Senior Journalist, Editor-In-Chief of *Sardam* Media Organisation for Publishing.
5. Asos Hardy/ Senior Journalist, Editor-In-Chief of *Awena* Newspaper.
6. Mam Qanie/ Senior Journalist, Editor-In-Chief of *Millat* Media Organisation.
7. Shwan Muhamad/ Senior Journalist, Editor-In-Chief of *SpyMedia* Organisation.
8. Sirwan Rashid/ *KNN* television channel spoken man.
9. Fazil Najib/ *Rudaw* television channel spoken man.
10. Haider Jameel / the Director of *Kurdiu*, the official electronic news website of KIU.
11. Kamal Rauf/ Senior Journalist, the Director of the *SharPress* news media website.
12. Halkawt Abdullah/ Senior Journalist, a Member of the Board of *Sardam* Media Organisation for Publishing.
13. Azad Hama Ameen/ the General Secretary of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate.
14. Rahman Ghareeb/ the General Coordinator for non-profit advocacy group Metro Centre to Defend Journalists.
15. Abdulrahman Sdiq/
16. Abubakr Ali/ Politician, Former Minister in Kurdistan. Bachelor Degree in Law
17. Soran Omer Kurdistan/ Politician, Member of Kurdistan Parliament.
18. Baker Sdiq/ Former Iraqi Member of Iraqi Parliament and a lawyer/ Bachelor degree in Law.

Appendix 7:

Participants of the Media Experts And Academics' Focus Group Discussion

Participants	Designation
Hemn Majeed	Lecturer at the Media Department at the University of Sulaymaniyah, PhD in Media and Journalism.
Kamil Omer	Lecturer at the Media Department at the University of Sulaymaniyah, MA in Media
Arkan Rasheed	MA in Media, a Director of News Department of KNN TV
Yahya Reshawi	Lecturer at the Media Department at the Polytechnic University in Sulaymaniyah, PhD in Media.

Appendix 8:

Participants of the Journalists And Editors' Focus Group Discussion

Participants	Designation
Stran Abdullah	Senior Journalist, Editor-In-Chief of <i>Kurdistani Nuwe</i> Newspaper
Fahmi Hama Tofiq	Director of <i>Radioy Yakgrtw</i> (KIU Sulaymaniyah Radio).
Chiman Muhammad	Senior Journalist, Women activist.
Karwan Anwer	Director of Sulaymaniyah Branch of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS).
Anwer Hussein	Journalist, Director of <i>Radioy Gali Kurdistan (GK Radio)</i> , a Member of Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS).