The Role of The Media in Developing Democracy In Kurdistan:

A study of Rudaw Journalists' Perspectives, Notions and Attitudes

Afshin Ismaeli

MA in Journalism Studies

University of Oslo

Department of Media and Communication

May 2015

Abstract:

This thesis examines the professional notion and attitudes of journalists in Kurdistan region, highlighting improvements in media performances in addition to indicating to the role of journalists in developing democracies and specific conflicts of journalists with societal norms, political and economic interests. Iraqi Kurdistan is an example of democratic transition in the middle of conflict hot zone. The study is based on qualitative interviews with journalists and managers of Rudaw media network.

The thesis argues that Rudaw journalists seem more than the other media are able to challenge the dominant norms and standards and did make contributions to the advancement of democracy in Kurdistan. Journalistic professionalism is used by Rudaw journalists to show their autonomy and objectivity, and their will to empower public participation by enabling more dialogue among groups, and Rudaw voices the concerns of civil society

The research displayed the existence of political, economic and cultural factors, as well as to an extent religious, journalists' attitudes and organizational structure that together create a difficult setting for Rudaw journalists. These factors have influenced the professional standards of journalism in Kurdistan and further the efforts of journalists in developing democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Findings from this study reveal that Rudaw do have a role to play in developing democracy and human rights. This role is important because it gives the media responsibility of serving the interests of the citizens and being the mediators of the democratic process.

Content

Chapter Sex. Conclusion……………………………………...……..94

List of abbreviations:

BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation

DHRD   Democracy and Human Rights Development Centre

CNN   Cable News Network

CPJ   Committee to Protect Journalists

IFJ   International Federation of Journalists

GCHR   Gulf Centre for Human Rights

HRW   Human Rights Watch

IWPR   International War and Peace Reporting

IMS   International Media Support

ISIS   Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

KJS   Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate

KNN   Kurdish News Network

KRG   Kurdish Regional Government

MP   Member of Parliament

NPA   Norwegian People's Aid

NGO   Non-Governmental Organizations

NRT   Nalia Radio and Television

NDI   National Democratic Institute

NSA   National Security Agency

NUJ   National Union of Journalists

NRK   Norsk Rikskringkasting

PUK   Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

PDK   Kurdistan Democratic Party

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UN   United Nations

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past few years, media in Iraqi Kurdistan[1] have been an integrated part of political parties. Until the 1991 uprising, media outlets were a tool of political resistance and a way of informing militants about resistance activities, used by Kurdish guerrilla and revolutionary movements. This type of journalism emerged during the armed revolution during the 1970s. Revolutionary journalists didn't have any experience working with media before 1970s, and the contents were full of heroic and resistance subjects.

In 1991, a historical event took place, as most of the Kurdish political parties established their own media organization, including local TV stations. In 1992, after the election of the Kurdish parliament, a press law was introduced. At that time, the Kurdish media has updated itself in a new form and structure. In addition, many newspapers have appeared. Media scholars in Kurdistan began supporting the media as new institutions.

---

[1] Kurdistan is not a state, but the term 'Kurdistan' has been used for centuries to refer to the region predominantly inhabited by Kurds. It includes huge parts of the southeast of Turkey, the northeast of Syria, the north of Iraq, and the northwest of Iran. The thesis concentrates on

It did not take long before the Kurdish governments,[2] by exerting censorship and by taking over newspapers, started to violate the press law. Very little has been done to avoid the monopolization of newspaper, TV, and radio licenses. On the other hand, opposition parties and critical voices were not given voice in public debate and tried to keep them silent. For instance, Asos Hardi, chairman of Board Directors and founder of the newspaper Awene, told Reporters Without Borders, "It was simply impossible to publish something that was not in line."[3] Naturally, all these processes limited freedom of speech and perpetuated the PDK[4] and the PUK[5] (two main parties in Kurdistan) political hegemony all over the country.

This partition surely represented a division of territories to the south and north, as the north was covered by media affiliated to PDK, and the south was covered by PUK media. The language of media, cultural matters, and news coverage were following the party's geographical scope.

In this way, the history of Iraqi Kurdistan's media became a product of the region's political history. PDK and PUK have taken control over the media and now use it as an instrument of political propaganda for their advantage and interest. Partisan journalists worked with the politicians they supported in order to help promote their causes.

As a result, it is not surprising that during the 1990s, the media in Kurdistan and the journalistic profession in particular were not trusted. Apparently, the print press started to change in the beginning of the 2000s. It was in this context that Tariq Fatih launched the newspaper *Hawlati* early in 2000. The BBC refered to it as "the emergence of an independent media"[6] in Kurdistan. After *Hawlati* came *Levin*, a periodical magazine that started in 2002; Later the *Awene* newspaper started in 2006,

---

[2] As the result of civil war in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1994, two Kurdish governments emerged, a PUK-controlled government based in Suleimania and a KDP-controlled state based in Erbil, both proclaiming themselves as legitimate rulers of Kurdistan.

[3] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 05.02.15)
[4] Kurdistan Democratic party
[5] Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
[6] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7094973.stm (Read, 05.02.15)

and the Kurdish News Network (KNN) launched in 2008 by the opposition party the Gorran (Change) movement.

The advent of the Gorran movement in 2009 has had some positive effects on the status of the region's media. This impact was, mainly, political. While the Gorran movement made its entry into the region's political scene by turning into the second-largest party represented in the Kurdish Parliament, but it may be difficult in the nowadays circumstance to accept that the Gorran movement would radically change the political order in Iraqi Kurdistan. In the elections of July 2009 the Gorran movement and the Islamic parties (Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Jama'a Islamiya) challenged the KDPs and PUKs power monopoly for the first time.[7]

This fostered the emergence of a parliamentary political debate, which allowed the media to play a new role. "For the first time," stated a Gorran official interviewed by Reporters Without Borders, "the media played a major role by shaping public opinion."[8]

Reporters without borders[9] claims that the status of press freedom in Iraqi Kurdistan has much improved over the past several years, and now Iraqi Kurdish journalists are safer and benefit from better working conditions than reporters in bordering countries. The number of media outlets has literally exploded to over 850 media outlets (including 415 newspapers and magazines).

Article 2 of the Kurdistan Press Law[10] (Law number 35 of 2007) protects journalists' right to "obtain information of importance to citizens and relevant to the public interest from diverse sources." The law also says that journalists are protected against arrest for publishing such information and requires the regional government to investigate and punish "anyone who insults or injures a journalist as a result of his work." Furthermore, the law says that a journalist may not be charged with

---

[7] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 05.12.15)

[8] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 06.02.15)

[9] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 06.02.15)

[10] http://krp.org/docs/PressLaw-KRI.pdf (Read 06.02.15)

defamation if "he has published or written about the work of an official or a person entrusted with a public service…[or] if what he has published does not go beyond the affairs of the profession," although the law does not define these terms.

However, in spite of the law, there have been threats posed to journalists. The independent commission for Human Rights has documented over 210 complaints in 2014[11] regarding breaches of journalists' rights that authorities have not investigated. The reasons behind violations relate back to a lack of law enforcement, professionalism, and training and preparing security forces. Niyaz Abdullah [12] of the Metro Centre for Defending Journalists, a local media freedom group, believes that "The government is ignoring the laws in place that require it to investigate abuses and the harassment of journalists, and to hold the wrongdoers accountable."

"Sadly, the Kurdistan Regional Government today looks less and less like the open and thriving democracy it paints itself to be," Sarah Leah Whitson, the director of Human Rights Watch in the Middle East, said. "By undermining legal guarantees for free speech, the KRG is undermining one of the basic pillars of a free society".[13]

Awat Ali, director of the Metro Center, told CPJ that hundreds of lawsuits are filed against journalists every year that accuse them of defamation, espionage, disrespecting religion, and "deviation from social norms." While under the press law, no journalist may be jailed for his or her work; many have been detained for days or more until trial. They are often freed only after paying hundreds of dollars in bail.

The 2014 Gulf Center for Human Rights[14] noted that: "the KRG authorities have arbitrarily tried, convicted and imprisoned journalists with impunity. This despite a

---

[11] http://ihrckr.org/?p=1256 (Read 04.04.15)

[12] http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/09/iraqi-kurdistan-free-speech-under-attack (Read 05.02.15)

[13] http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/09/iraqi-kurdistan-free-speech-under-attack (Read 05.02.15)

[14] The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) is an independent, non-profit and non-governmental organization that works to provide support and protection to human rights defenders (including independent journalists, bloggers, lawyers, etc.) in the Gulf region by promoting freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Press Law of 2007 which purports to give protection to the right of journalists to obtain information of "importance to citizens" and "relevant to the public interest." [15]

Across the country, attacks against journalists and media outlets have continued, resulting in a high number of casualties among journalists. Within the last five years, three journalists have been murdered: Soran Mama Hama in July 2008, Sardasht Osman in May 2010, and Kawa Garmiyani in December 2013.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, economic and society empowerment and informational transparency has changed the role of media and journalism in Kurdistan. Journalism seems to have developed as a fourth estate and watchdog to foster democracy, be necessarily critical of politicians (adversarial), champion citizen rights against the abuse of state power, and provide a platform for debate (Schultz 1998: 29).

Hence, numerous news media (both print and electronic) have sprung up in Kurdistan and have tried to reshape the political agenda and everyday lives. Certain civil organizations have been included in the mainstream arena and a relative degree of press independence and freedom has been achieved due to political democratization and economic expansion.

The development of free market, a relative democratization of the political sphere, freedom of press, new patterns of professionalization, and journalism training promoted a sort of "internal democratization" within the media in Kurdistan. The media institutions have had a vigorous role in reforming the structure and redistribution of power and authority of Kurdistan society working as a platform for debates in political, social, and cultural issues.

The press has relatively tried to redefine its relationship with the state, from a submissive role to the authority to a platform for scrutinizing and criticizing political power, informing the public, forming public opinion, and setting the agenda.

A number of key executives, media owners, and editors of newspapers launched new products. In 2011, the region's first independent TV and radio news station,

---

[15] http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/28 (Read 06.02.15)

NRT TV,[16] was launched by Nalia Company. Rudaw Media Network in Erbil is another noteworthy example of emerging independent and free media in Kurdistan. They expanded new editorial strategies and news plans, revealing corruption scandals in the government, investigating their statements, and promoting a more investigative journalism. In Rudaw, for instance, DMA's[17] super-producers have delivered broadcast production, news features, and management training to the Rudaw news channel in Kurdistan.

Rudaw considers itself an integral part of Kurdistan, Iraq, and indeed the larger world community. Through its impartial reporting, Rudaw works to promote democracy, freedom, and human rights in Kurdistan's post-conflict society. Rudaw is founded on the journalistic principles of honesty and integrity and aims to provide objective and unbiased information about events in all the four parts of Kurdistan, which spreads over Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

The launch of Rudaw in 2013 was a significant event that led to subsequent changes both in the media and in politics. Thus Oliver Moss,[18] editorial director at The Reporter Company, claims that Rudaw is looking to create a bond between Kurds across Greater Kurdistan and push Kurdistan and Kurdish issues onto the world stage, in the same way that Al Jazeera pre-empted Qatar's emergence as a global player and gave the Arab world a voice.

Many decades of partisan press raised some concerns on whether there would be progress in the value, objectivity, and professionalism of the journalism. Media in countries with a modern media policy, which receives funding from government and people, has a primary mission of public service. This type of media with a suitable political discourse toward party approaches, supports diversity, freedom of speech, objectivity, and the public discourses. Due to the transfer of their historical subjective

---

[16] Nalia TV and Radio is a Kurdish News and current affairs TV channel owned by the Nalia company and is based in Suleimania.

[17] DMA Media is a world leader in launching and managing news channels and producing and positioning content in the online and mobile environments. DMA has been responsible for launching and managing dozens of media projects all over the world.

http://www.dma-media.com/?s=rudaw (Read 06.02.15)

[18] http://www.the-report.net/iraq/kurdistan-region-sep2013/654-media-rudaw-putting-kurdistan-in-the-spotlight (Read 06.02.15)

framework of media to the new era, the Kurdish media still lacks the potential to maintain a public service role. 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[19], the KDP's deputy president and the current Prime mister. This company is getting 30 million dollars from oil revenues for a new TV station."[20]

However, media everywhere has an owner, and nobody would deny that media cannot avoid being privately owned. But the extent of monopolization of the market by Nechrivan Barzani and his involvement in some scandalous cases, such as offering a large sum of money to his son's (Edris Barzani) Rwanga Aiding Foundation, have influenced the agenda of public opinion about the public service and democratic role that Rudaw seems to have. However, Rudaw found it economically suitable to ensure editorial diversity within their media, as with this strategy to widen their audiences. Nevertheless, the permanent conflicts between the owner's interest and the journalist's editorial freedom have become the fundamental dilemma of the Rudaw in general. There have been little success in the attempts to solve this dilemma in Kurdistan, and especially in Rudaw; and in the end it is the owner who always prevails in confining the editorial policy of the media outlet such as Rudaw.

1.2 The structure of Rudaw

Rudaw TV channel was lunched on May 2013, with financial support fom Nechirvan Barzani, Prime minster of Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). 12 directors from across Rudaw as part of the Executive Boarding Team contribute to the leadership of the organization. The Executive Board of Rudaw is responsible for the operational management that comprises all production and general operational processes. The

---

[19] He is a Kurdish politician who has been Prime mister of the Kurdistan Regional Government since 2012. He is the owner of Rudaw media network.
[20]   http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/nechirvan-barzanis-association-media-corruption-rudaw-company-as-example/ (Read 05.02.15)

Director-General of Rudaw, Ako Mohammad is chairman of the Executive Board. He is appointed by the Executive Board.

The official headquarter of Rudaw is in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan. It is home for Rudaw TV, Rudaw Radio and Rudw Newspaper. Rudaw has 550 full time staff members. In addition to offices in most of Iraqi Kurdistan cities, Suleimania, Kirkuk and Duhok the organization has also opened offices in Baghdad, Qamishlo in Syria, Istanbul, Berlin, London, New York and Washington. Rudaw also employs many reporters and correspondents in abroad who contribute to Rudaw online. Rudaw has been preparing to launch an English-language satellite service.

Rudaw has online services in English, Arabic and Turkish that provides timely coverage of Kurdish issues. There are more than 20 journalists work on Rudaw website. Rudaw online is a place where everyone can access to the TV and radio archives of Rudaw. It also brings together an extensive collection of websites including Rudaw news, Sport, Health, weather and blogs as well as access to TV and Radio programs. Rudaw website accepts users comments, photos and videos about events theroughYour Rudaw page.

Rudaw has two radio stations offering distinctive news and music which are available via radio, television and online.

It has also a weekly newspaper, with hard copies sold in the Kurdistan Region and Europe. In the Kurdistan edition, stories of interest to the local population are covered. The European edition features issues of interest to the Kurdish diaspora.

1.3 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to look into the role of the media in promoting democracy by analysing the social and political structure of Rudaw media network and grasping the professional attitude of journalists from their perspectives. The project aims to explore the voices of Rudaw's TV and newspaper journalists in light of their professional journalistic standards as related to internal (media organization) and external (social and political structure) factors.

Rudaw was chosen due to its leading role in civil society development and also because of its influence in shaping contemporary Kurdish journalism. Rudaw is responsible for having triggered changes in the perceptions of the journalism profession, promoting debates on the competing cultures of journalism and their relevance to democracy. Rudaw website is one of the main resources used by international media. According to www.Alexa.com[21] Internet traffic data and global ranking, the audience distribution for Rudaw is as follows: Iraq 29.8 percent (rank 8 in Iraq), Turkey 13.1 percent, India 7.9 percent, United states 7.1 percent, and Sweeden 5.5 percent.

The data of this research has been collected through qualitative interviews. I have therefore conducted semi-structured interviews with Kurdish editors, journalists, and reporters for Rudaw, since I was interested in how they view their roles and responsibilities in the democratization process.

Much research has found on media in transitional democracies in Africa, South America, and East Asia, but very little has been done on the role of media in Kurdistan. This study might illuminate the functions and structure of an established media organization, understanding of news content framework, and their messages in Kurdistan. This might be one of the few studies carried out by Kurdish researchers with insights on both local and international journalism while using international comparative literature to explore a national and local issue. Likewise, it is one of the few studies carried out among Kurdish journalists that go beyond the surface of the news organization to understand the complex background of the organization's practices and dynamics.

In addition, this study has a critical viewpoint on the role of news organizations in society and journalists in Kurdistan.[22] Thus, this investigation has the ability to encourage journalists to improve their profession by avoiding affiliation to political

---

[21] http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/rudaw.net (Read 05.04.15)
[22] During the entire process of gathering data and writing, the researcher should remain distanced from his beliefs, personality, and values on the society being studied.

parties, being objective, acting as watchdog journalists, and to produce more contextual information for those who consume it.

1.4 Why Kurdistan matters

While Kurds do not have an independent state, with the exception of the regional government in Iraq, Kurdish media have been central in the formation of a national identity. Unlike many other Middle Eastern governments, Kurdistan, according to Romano and Gurses (2014), plays a vital role in bringing about stability and democracy to the region. Iraqi Kurdistan has a regional government to which great political, economic, and cultural attention has been devoted. Kurdistan is significant for several reasons.

The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 was a turning point for the Kurds' political history and for their media. At the same time, partisan journalism faded out but did not disappear. "A fundamental change in the nature of political life under the KRG[23] in the decade between 2003 and 2013 was the expansion and diversification of political discourse" (Watts 2014:157). Watts believes that the emergence of a new opposition in 2010 and independent media that helped produce "a more pluralistic national narrative, offered alternative sources of information, challenged Kurdish political elites, and provided civic and political opposition groups with new platforms to publicize their ideas and grievances to a much larger audience." (ibid, 157)

In the war against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS),[24] the Kurds have played a unique and important role. Moreover, Kurds made their intention to democracy, and simultaneously opted to fight radical Islamism and dictatorship in the region. Many scholars believe that the phrase "peace in the Middle East" should not only refer to the Arab–Israeli conflict, and the Kurds rights should not be disregarded.

---

[23] Kurdish Regional Government

[24] ISIS is a jihadist rebel group that controls territory in Iraq and Syria and also operates in eastern Libya, the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, and other areas of the Middle East.

1.5 Research Questions:

The main research question is:

What is the role of the Rudaw media network after its launch in 2013 in Kurdistan's democratic development?

The main question will be guided by the following sub-questions:

- What does the concept of professionalism mean to Rudaw journalists?
- How and in what ways did Rudaw journalists see themselves as contributing to the development of democracy?
- How do Rudaw journalists view and identify their roles in the Kurdistan's democratization processes?
- What are the main obstacles for journalists in the process of democratization?

1.6 Structure of the study

Chapter one provides the historical background to the structure of politics and the media in the Kurdistan Region. I outline the diversification in the structure of power within the press over the last 20 years, and I outline how changes have made the quality press become more influential.

Chapter two of this research outlines some of the analytical frameworks of the study. It introduces the notion of professionalism and objectivity. Professional journalists must possess journalistic skills, maintain their autonomy from parties, and have a certain degree of education and training. In addition, I outline the role of journalists in developing democracy. Journalists can best serve the public, democracy, and the transition to a more democratic political regime in many fledgling democracies.

Chapter 3 will explain the methodology I have used, namely qualitative research interviews. I will explain how I carried out interviews with journalists in Kurdistan and the limitations of the study while I collected the data and undertook the interviews.

Chapter 4 and 5 will contain the presentation and analysis of findings. In chapter 4, I will discuss various factors that influence Kurdish journalistic culture, organizational practices, routines and structure, and the concept of professionalism. The chapter examines the journalists as employees of a news organization that has intentions to professionalize the occupation and improvement of the qualifications of the journalistic profession. It examines the concept of autonomy and how journalists have moved from a platform that was controlled by the political parties' in the past decades to become more independent, to the extent of becoming a political institution.

Chapter 5 will give an overview of the role of Rudaw journalists in the advancement of democracy in the last few years. And how do they view and identify their role in promoting democracy? It seeks to explore how Rudaw as the commercial and private press tries to play the role as a privileged forum for stimulating public debate, a forum for political discussion between governmental and non-governmental sectors, including citizens, civil society, NGOs, and the state, in contrast to the previous partisan media that gave attention to the party actors. I will examine the attitudes of the journalists toward censorship, society norms, and ownership, which are the main obstacles to the transition of Kurdistan into a more democratic region.

Chapter 6 will provide conclusions and recommendations. It will give a critical overview of this study's main findings, establishing a link with the research question. It concludes that Rudaw in general advanced democracy but within limits imposed by the political and socio-economic environment in which they operated.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Objectivity and professionalism

Objectivity is important to the democratic process, because it permits the media to report political events accurately, fairly and independently (McNair 2011:65). The media's democratic role would be fulfilled, on the one hand, by journalists' adherence to the professional ethics of objectivity in reporting the facts of public affairs. Being objective means being rational, logical, and not manipulated by ideologies or political parties, and giving fair treatment of sources and information on reporting. Objectivity is a professional characteristic that has the importance and relevance for journalism. Walter Lippmann is identified as "the most wise and forceful spokesman for the ideal of objectivity" (Schudson, 1978:151). He believes that journalists should "develop a sense of evidence and forthrightly acknowledge the limits of available information; ... dissect slogans and abstractions, and refuse to withhold the news or put moral uplift or any cause ahead of veracity." Lippmann has arguably linked the rise of objectivity in journalism to professionalism. In addition, Hallin and Mancini are the strongest proponents of the link between objectivity and professional standing in the world of journalism. For them, the philosophy of professionalism is a means of safeguarding journalism practice from economic and political pressures.

2.1.1 The importance of objectivity to journalism

Why is objectivity important to journalism and why should we defend it? The controversial discussions about the future of journalism and its role in democracy have been less related to the favouring of objectivity in journalism. Almost all scholars have agreed to the crucial role of objectivity in journalism (Schudson 1978, McQuail 2013, MC Nair 2008). According to them, journalists are supposed to avoid biased information or partisanship to serve the public good.

Schudson and Anderson (2011:9) describe the ideal of objectivity as a source of journalistic power. They suggest objectivity serves a key role in journalistic cultures, acting "as both a solidarity enhancing and distinction-creating norm and as a group claim to possess a unique kind of professional knowledge, articulated via work." Schudson focuses on the social functions of the objectivity norm in American journalism and acknowledges, "a variety of moral norms could achieve the ends of providing public support and insulation from criticism" (165).

Furthermore, McQuail (2013:102) refers to the principle of objectivity as assisting to increase credibility and trust in the information and opinions presented that the media offer. Journalists, thus, become more reliable and authoritative when constructing a political story. A sense of reliability and credibility between the media and citizens is vital, since the media is considered a channel for promoting trust between citizens and authorities. McQuail also argues, "Objectivity gives the news product a higher and wider market value, enabling the news "product" to be marketed outside the immediate context for which it was originally produced." News media that claims to be objective have been vital for the journalists who have wanted their work to be taken seriously and professionally, and in this way objectivity serves as a defence system for journalists and news organizations to repudiate charges of bias (Tuchman, 1997). Journalists are thus perceived as more trustworthy and legitimate in society and contribute to advance democracy and promote social and political change.

University school of journalism and education is very important; educated journalist will be better equipped to construct news, and this will result in more balanced reporting than what the norm of objectivity produces.

In societies where freedom is limited, the practice of objective journalism may not be possible. Hallin and Mancini argue that "the gap between ideal and reality is far greater… Journalists will express allegiance to neutrality and objectivity, while the actual practice of journalism is deeply rooted in partisan advocacy traditions" (2004:14). Nevertheless, the new generation of journalists in different developing countries where their rights are still not guaranteed engage in the professionalization of their roles. Journalists in the last two decades have thus switched between different journalism identities and abandoned traditional forms of partisan journalism, while activities in the newsroom in their turn influence the professional identities of journalists (Hanitzsch, 2009).

The journalists most influenced by such ideal norms and values of journalism were more cynical about political parties and less influenced by ideologies and religion. Broadcasting the policies of many Western countries usually imposes a requirement of objectivity, on their public broadcasting service system, to ensure impartiality as well as independence from government. For example, the NRK's Statement of Commitments entails that,

> *The NRK should be editorially independent. The NRK should safeguard its integrity and credibility in order to act freely and independently in relation to persons or groups who for political, ideological, economic or other reasons wish to influence its editorial content. The NRK should be characterised by a high ethical standard and show balance over time. Objectivity, an analytical approach and neutrality should be striven for; see inter alia the Guiding Principles for Editors, the Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press and the Code of Ethics for Printed Advertising and Sponsoring.*[25]

---

[25] https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kkd/nrk-plakaten-engelsk.pdf
(Read 05.04.15)

2.1.2 Partisanship versus professionalism debate

The news media have long played a crucial role in the public sphere as arenas for debate and persuasion, and as tools for information and propaganda. After the formation of modern political parties from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onward, most newspapers were connected with one political party. Parties used media as a channel of communication to inform and communicate with their members. Media scholars (Schudson 1978, Curran 1997, Hallin 2000) have described the changes in the Western press from the nineteenth century onward, addressing the impacts that these modifications had on the transformation of news into commodities in the twentieth century and saw independent journalism as a product of the market that vanquished any partisan ties.

Hallin and Mancini (2004:67) in "Comparing Media Systems," consider the countries with more commercial news arenas, especially the United States, to be dominated by the liberal model of the press. This model assumes media need to enjoy absolute non-state intervention, something only attained by the dominance of market and the private ownership of the media. According to Hallin and Mancini (264), in contrast to the liberal model, some European countries such as Norway have adopted a democratic corporatist model of broadcasting based on the assumption that it best serves the public debate by maintaining pluralism, press freedom, press subsidies, and public service broadcasting. "Western European democracies have long believed that a strong public broadcasting system is necessary to prevent censorship" (Baker 2007:161).

Most Western countries, in different contexts, institutionalized journalism under the professional model in the twentieth century. The project of founding journalism schools, creating codes of ethics, setting licensing standards, and forming unions contributed to what has been called the high modernism of journalism (Hallin, 1994). Hallin and Mancini (2004) divide professionalism into three dimensions—public service, autonomy, and codes of ethics. They (2004:36) believe that one of the important elements of the concept of "professionalism" is the notion that professions are oriented toward an ethic of public service. Thus, professional journalism should provide a platform for debate, foster citizenship and democracy, and serve as

monitor to the state. One of the clearest manifestations of the development of an ethic of public service is the existence of mechanisms of journalistic self-regulation, which in some systems are formally organized, for instance, in the form of "press councils" (or sometimes for the electronic media "audiovisual councils") and sometimes operate informally, and that vary considerably in strength, regardless of whether they are formally organized (Hallin & Mancini 37).

Furthermore, the fall of party press, the flourishing economy, and technological developments led to an essential change in political roles of news organization and journalists. At the same time, journalists work hard toward professionalization of their journalistic roles and maximize their autonomy. Bourdieu links journalists' autonomy to the journalistic field and believes that to understand what is happening in the journalistic field, one has to understand the autonomy of the field. Therefore, the autonomy of journalists depends upon their position in that field and in their capacity to resist the impositions of the state or economy (Bourdieu 2005). He argues that autonomy structured on the basis of two opposite poles, between those who are independent from state power, political power, and economic power, and those who are dependent on it. And because of these constraints, it seems to him that the journalistic field is losing more and more of its autonomy (ibid).

Most of western scholarship has arrived at the conclusion that only an autonomous press can properly meet democratic goals. Waisbord claims that the press requires autonomy from the government to "offer a critical scrutiny of society, politics and the economy" (2013:44). He also asserts that autonomy is central to the ideal of professions to set requirements, control working conditions, and to exert full control over a certain jurisdiction (ibid). Thus, autonomous institutions might have the capability to serve the public interest and gain the rationality required to release itself from political, social, and economic constraints.

Professional journalism is also closely tied to ethical standards, such as the Ethical Code of Practice for the Norwegian Press, a code regulating journalism ethics and standards in Norway. Each editor and editorial staff member is required to be familiar with these ethical standards of the press and to base their practice on this

code. The code, which applies to TV, radio, printed press, and net publications, addresses the role of the press in society, integrity and responsibility, journalistic conduct and relations with the sources and publication rules.[26] Singer (2003) argues that journalists generally in order to fulfil their public service responsibility abide themselves to ethical guidelines. For Sanders (2003) journalism exists as a means to tell the truth, therefore journalists have an essential ethical tasks and violating this task would be detrimental for them and society.

Most scholars believe that "professional" training and education result in better professionals. In this view, the rises of educational levels of journalists are seen as necessary means to the development of the profession and improve the quality and standards of journalists. UNESCO, in model curricula for journalism education for Developing Countries & Emerging Democracies, articulated how journalism can serve developing democracy, "journalism, and the educational programs that enable individuals to practice and upgrade their journalistic skills, are essential tools for the underpinning of key democratic principles that are fundamental to the development of every country" (UNESCO 2007:5). Thus, the work of journalists ideally serves a democratic function. Hallin (1997:258) claims that the professionalization of journalism, that is formal, college-based education, has a positive aspect, and it is expected to act as a shield for journalists against commercial pressures and political instrumentalization, thereby increasing their autonomy (Josephi 2009:48). Splichal and Sparks (1994) in their research that examines journalism education and professionalization tendencies in 22 countries, stress that, with some qualifications, journalism is moving from craft to profession thanks to the diffusion of common educational practices (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Weaver (1998), in his work based on surveys of journalists, also encourages journalism education and emphasizes the importance of education in creating a global journalistic culture.

Hanitzsch describes the culture of journalism as that "particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists, consciously and unconsciously, legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful for themselves and others" (2009:369). Similarly, McQuail claims that professionalism should be considered in terms of its

---

[26] http://presse.no/pfu/etiske-regler/vaer-varsom-plakaten/vvpl-engelsk/ (Read, 09.02.15).

publicity, "meeting public needs for information," and for its power to apply responsibility, accountability, and freedom (2003:273).

Thus, conflicts between objectivity and professionalism versus partisanship were debated in the last two decades in most countries. Journalists successfully, in some countries, gained strong standing within the journalistic community, and they have largely abandoned submissiveness to the politicians. John Thompson (2005) has vividly described this change in the nature of political publicness. He argued that media make it harder than ever before for politicians to hide their secrets and actions:

Whether they like it or not, political leaders today are more visible to more people and more closely scrutinized than they ever were in the past; and at the same time, they are more exposed to the risk that their actions and utterances, and the actions and utterances of others, may be disclosed in ways that conflict with the images they wish to project. Hence the visibility created by the media can become the source of a new and distinctive kind of fragility. However much political leaders may seek to manage their visibility, they cannot completely control it. Mediated visibility can slip out of their grasp and can, on occasion, work against them.

(Thompson 2005:42)

There is a consensus in most literature (Strömbäck, 2008) that the power balance is increasingly shifting toward a situation where the media have the ultimate control over the public agenda, and as a consequence, the depiction of "reality" (Strömbäck, 2008).

In this regard, this model of autonomous journalism was exported to third world countries, along with the notion of freedom of the press. In Latin America, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet bloc, and the Middle East, the notion of an independent journalism, defending objectivity combined with social responsibility, become an important part of practicing journalism and might challenge the monopoly of state in the media. These journalists were influenced by the US tradition of professionalism, were more suspicious about political parties and less influenced by ideological thinking's (Kucinski, 1998). Carolina Matos (2008:207) examines the decline of

partisan press in Brazil and indicates that journalists might not have embraced fully impartiality or objectivity but they showed wider commitment to facticity, professionalism, balance and social responsibility. In addition, Arab scholars and journalists now speak routinely of an "Arab public sphere," in which liberal principles of pluralism and political independence are pursued, even by a channel such as Al Jazeera, which has a very different approach to the conflicts being played out in the Middle East than, say, CNN or the BBC.

2.2 Freedom as a principle

Freedom of speech is of particular importance in a democratic society (Warburton, 2009). It is fundamental because it is how we protect and practice our rights and liberties. Autonomy of journalism is usually attributed to freedom of speech. This freedom comprises not only the free flow of ideas, in information and in opinion, but also defense against the control of economic and political powers (McQuail, 2003).

The preservation of government's democratic legitimacy will be in danger, if individuals (including minors) could not have opportunity to have access to the information and disseminate information about the actions of government. The free circulation and dissemination of ideas are firmly rooted in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the United States, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right of freedom of speech, even those whose opinions are unacceptable.

Congress shall make no law ….. abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

Thus, freedom of expression is considered as a constitutional right in democracies. The principle is "considered as a precondition for truth-seeking, for personal autonomy, and for democracy" by the Norwegian Governmental Commission on Freedom of Expression (Rønning & Kierulf, p. 38). John Stuart Mill believes that freedom of expression is a precondition for truth seeking, due to the emerging truth

from collision of error and half-truth (Warburton, 2009). Accordingly, it also offers the means to scrutinize and criticize those with political and economic power.

Pateja (2009) argues that freedom of expression is not only precondition for truth seeking but also for individual development, by enlightening individuals to become rational autonomous creatures that participate in the democratic process and let citizens decide what they prefer. McQuail (2013) also claims that media by providing necessary information to the public urges active political, social and cultural participation.

Similarly, Ronald Dworkin believes that no democratic government can claim legitimacy unless it allows its citizens to debate freely: A legitimate government has to guarantee free speech. "Laws and policies are not legitimate unless they have been adopted through a democratic process, and a process is not democratic if government has prevented anyone from expressing his convictions about what those laws and policies should be" (in Warburton, 2009).

In Democracy in America, De Tocqueville viewed the press as an essential antidote to a culture that valued liberty, he stated:

"The press places a powerful weapon within every man's reach, which the weakest and loneliest of them all may use. Equality deprives a man of the support of his connections, but the press enables him to summon all his fellow countrymen and all his fellow men to his assistance. Printing has accelerated the progress of equality….. The press is the chief democratic instrument of freedom." (2009: 817)

In this regard, Pateja (2009) argues that the idea of sovereignty and right to self-government are concepts of democracy. In order to democratic system to work, citizens have to have access to all ideas, both true and false, and there must be no constraints on the free dissemination of information. Pateja (2009) also argues that the idea of sovereignty and right to self-government are concepts of democracy.

Thus, according to Meiklejohn, the value of freedom of speech gives the individual an important protection to criticize the power and enables citizens in a democracy to govern more effectively and wisely (In Petaja 2009:27).

2.3 Media and democracy

The transition to a more democratic political regime is the crucial aim. Theories of democracy predict that democratic governments (maybe of a certain type) will lead to better results for society than available alternatives (Baker 2007:6). Surely, the news media play an indispensable role in granting the central political role of citizens and exercising democracy. Gans believes that the news media have a power to reinforce the idea of democracy, particularly through coverage of election campaign events (and non-events), almost as if the never-ending coverage could prove that the citizenry still holds the ultimate power (2003:2).

There has been a consensus among western media scholars that professional journalism should provide a platform for debate, promote freedom and democracy, and serve as watchdog rather than representative of the government. James Curran argues that media has four influential functions in democracies (2002). The media plays a significant role in keeping people informed about public affairs in order that individuals are adequately briefed when they take part in the process of self-government. Therefore, the media can be fearless watchdogs, vigilantly examining the exercise of power. Curran also argues that the media provide a platform of open debate regarding the facilities involved in the formation of public opinion (ibid). Finally, the media can be the voice of people, representing to authority the citizenry's views.

David Randall asserts that reporters are to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, providing a voice for those who cannot normally be heard in public" (2000:3). Berman and Witzner (1997) argue that the free access and exchange of information is essential to the notion of democracy. McQuail also contends that the behaviour of democratic (or undemocratic) politics, nationally and internationally rely more on mass media (2005).

Similarly, McNair outlines the normative role of the journalist in democracies as a source of information, a critical scrutiny (watchdog) by monitoring the exercise of power, a mediator between citizens and politicians to ensure that the voice of the

public is heard, and as participant/advocate of particular political positions (2009: 238-240).

The norms and values presented above are common to many media systems. Thus, in many transitional democracies the press gradually began to become an arena for public debate that leads to rationalization of public opinion, and reflect the political divisions that existed in the society, which resulted in a wider consolidation of democratic liberal values. As Peter J. Anderson puts it in a recent study, "high-quality, independent news journalism which provides accurate and thoughtful information and analysis about current events is crucial to the creation of an enlightened citizenry that is able to participate meaningfully in society and politics" (2007:65).

Nevertheless, democratic participation has been steadily declining, and many scholars (McChesney 2008, Baker 2007) feel that this is at least partially due to the concentration of private media ownership. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that the private ownership of the media and its growing monopolies on a global scale are serving the interest of the market and the elites, rather than the media's "social duties." As a result, news content is undermined by economic and advertisement pressures, which leads to infotainment and the tabloidization of news (Hallin 2000a). In *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (1999), McChesney explains the increasing size and public acceptance of media conglomerates such as Disney, General Electric, and Bertelsmann, which were accompanied by the decline of political participation. He argues, "The wealthier and more powerful the corporate media giants have become, the poorer the prospects for participatory democracy" (2). He further argues that new policies are needed to create media supportive of democracy, while government policies have encouraged exploitative media to flourish (2004).

Gillian Doyle (2002) also warns of the post-governmental monopoly of media and claims that the more powerful individual suppliers become the greater the potential threat to pluralism. She considers concentration of media ownership a threat to pluralism. In the post-governmental monopoly of media, the huge and powerful private media corporations have bought both big and small media stations. McQuail

(2008) indicates that self-regulation and limiting press concentration are practical examples of measures adopted to improve the real chances of the public to receive informative benefits from the media. Therefore, the diversification of communication channels is politically important, because it expands the variety of voices that can be heard in a national debate.

2.3.1 Media watchdog/Fourth Estate

Traditional liberal theory sees the watchdog role of the media to scrutinize the government as a democratic principle. Media academics (Curran, 2002, McQuail, 2013, McNair 2009) have recognized the importance of the media's watchdog role and scrutiny of state activities. In order to prevent the abuses, which characterized the feudal era, journalists in democracy are charged with monitoring the exercise of power (McNair, 2009). This is the watchdog role of the journalist, who in this context becomes part of what Edmund Burke called the Fourth Estate. McQuail (2013:40) summarizes the essential elements of Fourth Estate theory as

   i.   The press is the main voice speaking up for the interests of the people as a whole.

  ii.   Essential to this role is independence from government and courage to speak out.

 iii.   A key task is the holding to account of government and other holders of power to the people, by way of publicity and advocacy.

 iv.   The press provides a reciprocal channel of communication between government and citizens.

  v.   This implies a forum function for the expression of public opinion.

Journalists may have their greatest influence on the process of democratization when they act as watchdogs, by scrutinizing the government and reporting scandals and other behaviour violating society norms. Accepted moral and social norms, which are endangered by politicians, are being watched and preserved by journalists.

As Baker states, media scrutiny of governmental actions is one of the main contributions that they are working to promote democracy (2002). Allern and Pollack (2012) believe that through reporting scandals to the media, scandals may serve vital and important functions in modern democratic societies, by making wrongdoing of any kind transparent to the public. Thus, media have an interest in playing the watchdog role in regard to politicians and developing the art of confrontation, giving citizens the opportunity to choose between the rights and wrongs of politicians and ensure that their voices are heard. Immense numbers of national and international news stories fall into this category, because journalists, bravely, report abuses against moral and ethical values, law, or actions that may be legal but ought to be penalized, in not abolished. The performance of the US media during the Watergate scandal or Monica Lewinsky scandal, and more recently, the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal and Edward Snowden, might be good examples of the watchdog role of journalism.

Some scholars such as Curran (2000) have studied the importance of the media's watchdog role and scrutiny of corrupt state activities. Watchdog journalism has proven that it is a force that has an effect on society and politicians. Michael Schudson (1978) has argued that the news media has more influence on politicians, who must be continually aware that journalists are watching them. National and international institutions and organizations or political actors find themselves and their positions threatened by the media, and they try to protect their reputations by prevent making wrongdoing, especially if it has negative consequences on their position and elections.

The watchdog function and the scrutinizing tasks of media are important, especially in the case of Kurdistan where the media shifted from being passive mouthpieces of political parties during the past few decades to being more critical about the activities of political actors, powerful institutions, organizations, and individuals.

2.3.2 Public opinion and public sphere

The distinctive character of public opinion can be traced back to the eighteenth century. German sociologist Jürgen Habermas believes that public opinion is formed in what he called the idea of "public sphere." This public sphere functioned primarily through face-to-face interaction in coffee-houses and salons, and through an independent press, which both staged reasoned debate and represented public opinion to government. For Habermas, "The press is the public sphere's prominent institution" (Copeland, 2006, p.181). The public sphere is accordingly a space in which anyone, in principle, has an equal right to speak, where arguments rather than social position and material resources are decisive, where untenable arguments and positions are given up through rational debate (Gripsrud 2010:233).

> *By the public sphere we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. . . . Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion – that is, within the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions.*
>
> *(Habermas, 1964 quoted in McNair, 2011: 17)*

There is consensus among scholars that "professional" journalism should provide public debate, foster citizen participation and democracy, and serve the role of "watchdog," rather than a "mouthpiece" of the government. Journalists need to inform citizens about the subjects related to their life, the actions of governments, and the political actors. The knowledge and information on which citizens will make their political choices must circulate freely and be available to all (McNair, 2011). In democratic societies, meanwhile, scholars argue that media is a main platform for individuals to disseminate and receive information to be able to participate in the democratic process and make rational and responsible choices. McNair (2011:19) believes that the media must provide a platform for public political discourse, facilitating the formation of 'public opinion,' and feeding that opinion back to the public from whence it came.

The role of the press in a society is a necessary condition for the operation of the public sphere, in creating a sufficiently educated, informed, and interested body of citizens and create the potential for and informed and freely expressed public opinion (McQuial 2013:41). Journalists can contribute to the public sphere by maintaining and managing a space for public debate, circulating ideas and opinions, extending freedom and diversity for the public, connecting citizens with the government, and prompting mobilization toward civic engagement (ibid). Thus, the media works as a means for providing citizens with the most important information, from the point of view of their political activities, and guiding public discussion—functions that are taken for granted in contemporary journalism.

2.3.3 Representative/Advocative

The media in democratic societies may serve as a channel for the *advocacy* of political viewpoints. Political parties require an outlet for the articulation of their policies and programs to a mass audience, and thus the media must be open to them. Historically, until the rise of ideals of objectivity and professionalism, journalism mainly functioned as "advocacy journalism," a platform for the articulation of parties' policies and programs.

According to Morris Janowitz (1975), advocacy journalism may assign journalists the role of active interpreters and participants who "speak on behalf" of certain groups, typically those groups who are denied "powerful spokesmen" (619) in the media. Journalists are representatives for specific interests and are motivated by the desire to redress power imbalances in society (Waisbord, 2011:371).

Waisbord (2011:371) presented the civic model of advocacy journalism, which is not limited to Janowitz's concept. He believes that use of the news media by organized groups to influence reporting, and ultimately affect public policies, belongs to forms of political mobilization that "seek to increase the power of people and groups and to make institutions more responsive to human needs. He sees advocacy journalism as a form of "political mobilization that seeks to increase the power of people and groups and to make institutions more responsive to human needs." Thus advocacy

journalism is a means for media institutions to increase awareness, generate public debate, give voice to the voiceless, and influence public opinion and key decision makers.

The footprints of advocacy journalism have been broadly seen in the European arena more than in the US. In addition, in transitional democracies, the notion that the press should advocate a specific political or ideological view still has been dominant. Waisbord related the persistence of advocacy model to the political economy of the press, which "governments and politicians continue to wield substantial power on press economies, news organizations are likely to act as vehicles for promoting their political interests" (2011:374).

The growth of the civic model of advocacy journalism has been significant in promoting societal changes. Through contributing to raising awareness and providing information, and affecting public opinion, the press aims a mobilization strategy to affect the definition of "public problems" (Gusfield 1981, Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Thus, civic advocacy is the product of a growing consciousness among civic groups about the importance of the media in the construction of public problems, and the need to approach the press as a tactical ally (Waisbord 2011:375). Hence, through public consciousness and influencing opinions, it takes step toward shaping the reality of society, not just influencing it.

2.4.4 Voice of the people

In addition to being a channel for the political viewpoints, the media has to ensure that the voice of the public is heard. One of the democratic key functions of media is representing people to those in authority. In this respect, the journalist plays a mediator role between the citizens and politician, and represents. Ideally, the media should provide a voice to those marginalized people and represent their views and interests in the public domain.

McNair (2011:239) argues that media's representative role can be performed by giving "citizens direct access to the public sphere, in the shape of readers' letters to

newspapers, phone-in contributions to broadcast talk shows, and participation in studio debates about public affairs." After having informed the people and the people participating in a debate, the media dispatch to the government the eventual public consensus that results from this debate. In this way, the government is supervised by the people.

Krumsvik (2011:21) emphasizes the diversity of channels where different opinions are expressed and collide with each other in a public space. Diversity of voices in the society is vital for a healthy democracy within a country, a society that promotes different perspectives and where views in different channels can be discussed. Three types of diversity, source diversity, content diversity, and exposure diversity, are considered crucially central to protect the rights of citizens, freedom of expression, and the functioning of democratic systems of governance (McQuail, 2005).

Social networks and Internet played a key role in providing platform for diverse perspectives for the formation of new community identities, since the Internet has become a platform for circulating information from one communicator to various others without the assistance of an institutional new organization. The "new" journalism of bloggers and citizen reporters challenges the "old" journalism and its reporters and law (Gant, 2007).

Proponents of this view argue that people outside traditional media by the availability of fast, interactive technologies such as Internet, can provide a new platform for citizens and for 'diverse and unheard voices' to communicate with the government and participate in the public debate. These technologies have promoted participatory democracy, in which more citizens now have steady access to the means of public communication and political representation.

Jaffer Sheyholislami believes that the Internet provides alternative communicative spaces to smaller organizations, social groups, cultural societies, and individuals in Kurdistan. He argues that websites and social media networks such as Facebook, in contrast to the traditional mainstream media, "[have] amplified marginalized voices that are excluded from the discursive domains of the dominant Kurdish political organizations" (2012:172).

The Internet, in this way, has challenged the traditional media, in which the journalist selects a limited number of stories for publishing and rejects the rest—understand it as "the community shall hear as a fact only those events which the newsman, as the representative of his culture, believes to be true" (White, 1950, in shoemaker 2009:76). Thus, journalists would become free from the constraints of publications as the gatekeeper of news and information. "The Internet enables everyone who owns a computer to have his or her own printing press" (Harper 2003:272).

By speaking up for the people and giving these people a place in the media, they become a part of the public sphere and participatory democracy (McQuail, 2013) in which they may contribute to a social consensus that the injustices against them ought to be redressed.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The most important consideration in designing a research project is to fit the research questions to the paradigm from which the researcher aims to conduct the study. In order to obtain the proper data needed to examine why and how certain mass media chose to play a role in promoting democracy, I have undertaken a qualitative study. This study is based upon a research carried out among journalists from Rudaw media network in Erbil and Suleimania.

In this chapter I will explain and clarify the main characteristics of the qualitative research interview as one of the most proper methods to support the study's arguments, as it allows a better understanding into the journalists' perceptions. Likewise, I will outline the profiles of the journalists I talked to, their positions and roles, and some limitations I faced and dealt with while working in the field. Providing this information is crucial, as it helps the reader to better understand the conditions and origins whereby the main arguments were made.

I believe that qualitative research is the best method to analyse journalism in Kurdistan. It is the most preferable study for understanding the role of media in subjects' perspective and "to acquire detailed, in-depth insights into individuals' attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and lifestyles" (Davis 1997:195). Eisner stated that qualitative research study could help us "understand the situation that is otherwise enigmatic or confusing" (Eisner 1991:58).

The qualitative research has the advantage of giving room for flexibility (Priest, 2010) rather than quantitative study, since my research questions aim to imply a deeper understanding of complex issues regarding democracy, values, and professionalism.

As Tuchman (1991:79) contends, "the method one should choose when approaching any topic, including news, depends upon the question one wants to answer. But not surprising that the most significant work on news is qualitative." She claims further that the most significant work on news is qualitative and the most interesting questions about news and news organizations concern either process, that is, "the general relationship between news and ideology or the specific processes by which news reproduces or alters ideology" (ibid).

One of the most widely used data collection methods, within qualitative research, in the field of media and communication research is the qualitative interview. The primary strength of qualitative interviewing, according to Jensen and Jankowski, is "its capacity to range over multiple perspectives on a given topic." (Jensen and Jankowski 1991:101).

3.1 The importance of Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative interview is one method of qualitative research that seeks to obtain an insight into the minds of participants via questioning. Kvale and Brinkmann refer to the goal of the qualitative research interview as "to understand the world from subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation" (2013:1). The only way to truly understand and find out about the role of Rudaw media network in promoting democracy was to ask their journalists directly.

Mostly, the interviews used in this type of research do not produce objective and quantifiable data. Kvale (1996:11) claims that in the qualitative interview research "the basic subject matter is no longer objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted (ibid). The approach allows the subjects to answer from their own perspectives, and the researcher works at getting "the subjects to freely express their thoughts around particular topics" (ibid). "The subjects not only answer

questions prepared by an expert, but themselves formulate in a dialogue their own conceptions of their lived world" (Kvale 1996). An interview, he goes on to say, is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose, and provides the researcher with descriptions, narratives, and texts in order to interpret and report according to his or her research texts (2013:33).

The research has used semi-structured interviews, which aim to explore in-depth experiences of interviewees and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. Such interviews are a particularly useful research tool in a situation where the topic of interest may be particularly sensitive. Bryman (2012) suggested that semi-structured interviewing works with a set of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, and the researcher would often use the semi-structured interview. Kvale (2013:27) defines it as "an interview, which seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' life world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena."

All my interviews were semi-structured. I spent a good deal of time with participants, and used open-ended and flexible questions which, according to Byrne (2012:209) "are likely to get a more considered response…and therefore provide better access to interviewees views, interpretations of events, understandings, experiences and opinions." The interviews lasted between one and two hours per person, all recorded on tape. All interviews were conducted in Kurdish. The quotations that I use in the research have been translated, by me, into English. I have tried to translate them as exactly as possible. The questions were related not only to both their practical work as correspondents in this region but also to the not visible aspects or conditions they have to relate to daily. In order for me to truly understand what circumstances and conditions they work under, I also had to ask them questions regarding the area itself and also ask about the conflict, its roots, and their view of it. Follow up questions asked them to describe their routines and possible obstacles they faced in carrying out their jobs. These questions tried to look for attitudes and conceptions on certain practices that I categorised afterwards in accordance to the common and differences in responses. I also asked them the research question: "What makes a journalist professional?" but tried not to ask this at the beginning of the talk. Usually, this was

very helpful, as their responses were not biased by what they could have thought I wanted to hear.

Moreover, I also asked them whether they felt there had been a change in their job after the political change in the country, as I sought to find out to what extent the government still exerts control over news content. Likewise, one of the questions I asked everyone was if they adhered to any ethical code; and finally, I asked if they were aware of how journalism is conducted in other parts of the world. Apart from these questions, the interviews consisted of several follow-up questions to the interviewees' responses.

3.2 Selection of samples

The sample must be representative and selected with care, to ensure that it accurately reflects the characteristics of the media organization. Warren (2002) believes that participants are meaning makers in interview research. "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton 1990:184).

In contrast to quantitative research that demands randomly selected or assigned participants, qualitative research allows for a freer form and carefully selected participants. This is important "because the object of qualitative interviewing is to discern meaningful patterns within thick description . . . . The researcher may try to minimize or maximize differences among respondents" (Warren 2001:87). For example, in this study, the goal is to understand a variety of interesting points to look at, the different perceptions about professionalism, how the Kurdish media perceive the norms and values of democracy, and how they promote democracy in the region.

Hence, I believe that a random selection of respondents was not helpful; a smaller group of journalists, based on their ability, selected to act as research participants, and "the researcher should decide whom the target audience is and invite people from those characteristics" (Krueger, 1994:18).

Participants selected for this study were: editorial managers, producers, editors, reporters, and news writers. The inclusion was based on a combination of self-selection and the snowball sampling.[27] They were then contacted and informed via email and telephone regarding the need for their participation in this study.

Creswell (1998) indicated that 5 to 25 participants is the typical range for such a study. I had potential good candidates to interview for my study, such as heads of sections and divisions and co-presenters. A total of ten participants were interviewed. Out of them, 7 were TV news journalists and one was a talk-show host. I conducted an interview via Skype with David Romano academics and columnist of Rudaw from Missouri, one more interview with the director general of Rudaw media network, and the remaining interview was with the editor in chief of Rudaw newspaper.

Different journalists with different political, cultural, and religious backgrounds were interviewed with the intention of providing a different vision of the journalists' performances. All participants were men, and their identities were revealed in this study. These interviewees consist of Ako Mohammed (The Director-General of Rudaw); popular talk-show host Ranj Sangawi; former MP and journalist Adnan Osman; the editor-in-chief of Hawlati newpaper, Kamal Rauf; David Romano, associated professor at Missouri State university and Rudaw columnist; I interviewed him to examine a western academic perspective and understanding his views about media and democracy in Kurdistan. Salam Saad, editor-in-chief of Rudaw weekly newspaper; Hiwa Jamal, presenter of the Rudawi Emro show; Hemen Abdulla, deputy managing director of Rudaw; shad Mohammad member of the Executive Borad; and Majid Salih, media advisor of Kurdistan Regional Government's parliament. Majid Salih does not have any position in Rudaw, I interviewed him to discuss perspectives of officials from opposition parties about the role of media in developing democracy in Kurdistan.

---

[27] Snowball sampling may be defined as a technique for gathering research subjects through the identification of an initial subject who is used to provide the names of other actors. The strategy has been utilized primarily as a response to overcome the problems associated with understanding and sampling concealed populations such as the deviant and the socially isolated (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

3.3 Data collection

As I had five years´ experience as a journalist and know the region well, I had a clear understanding of the tasks of gathering, processing, and transmitting news. It is important that the interviewer has significant knowledge of the theme of the interview, in order to be able to ask well-formulated and effective follow-up questions (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:99). My experience and knowledge about the region, political processes, and language give me the ability to identify and frame key problems, think critically and analytically, as well generate and communicate interesting and original insights.

For the purposes of the research's data collection, I travelled to Iraqi Kurdistan for a period of five weeks between November and December 2014, in order to undertake interviews with Kurdish journalists. I have conducted interviews in three main cities of Kurdistan (Erbil, Suleimania, and Duhok).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, excluding interview with David Romano that was conducted via Skype. Around half of the interviews were conducted in the Rudaw building in Erbil, whereas the remaining interviews were conducted in the Kurdistan parliament media office, restaurants, and cafes. I found most of the participants interested in discussing the aims of the media organization and the challenges they face.

All interviews were tape-recorded with consent from the participants, in order to ensure the accuracy of the ideas. The average duration per interview fluctuated between 50 and 90 minutes, and the results were transcribed in detail. After transcribing the interviews, the transcriptions were then translated from Kurdish to English.

3.4 Limitations of the study

The qualitative methodology employed in data collection and analysis also poses some limitations. There are concerns about lower reliability and validity of qualitative research. "Because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting it is

extremely difficult to replicate studies" (Wiersma, 2000:211). Berger (2000:124) also argues that the participants can tell what the researcher wants to hear, perhaps do not always tell the truth, do not remember things accurately, speak a different language, or simply do not have useful information.

Likewise, qualitative research often depends on the individual judgment of the researcher; the information presented is more easily influenced by the researcher's personal interpretation, because interviews permit flexibility in accordance with the situation. In such cases, the research becomes more reflective of the researcher's views than of the actual facts, presenting issues with validity. This in turn influences the participants' answers to the interview questions (Newman and Benz, 1998).

But can I as a researcher analyze a social and political system in which I grew up? I consider that with my five years' experience as an editor from Xebat newspaper, one of the Kurdish news organizations, and my understanding of the notion of journalistic professionalism in terms of managerial policy, this would help me not let personal attitudes and feelings bias my research. I have tried to identify what elements can affect or undermine the reliability and validity of the data. This would enable me to take precautions and address the accidental circumstances that the researcher may encounter; for instance, that informants may bring their emotions, feelings, fears, and personal attitudes into the session.

It is important to choose the suitable participants so as to get reliable data through interviewing. Henceforth, interviews were conducted with a number of participants who had all given their full names, phone number, positions, journalistic backgrounds, and perspectives on the topic of this dissertation.

Likewise, the methodology utilized in this study might not have the ability to generalize results to wider populations. Because qualitative research is often exploratory, the number of samples involved is often small (Green, 2005) and tailored to the needs of one population; therefore it is difficult to generalize findings to the wider population or to draw general conclusions from the findings of a qualitative study.

Of course, there are other limitations in the structure of the interviews, one of which is the lack of female participants. Unfortunately, obtaining willing female interview participants was extremely difficult. There was one female journalist on the Executive Board of Rudaw organization, which consists of 12 journalists. Additionally, none of the female journalists who were contacted actually replied or were willing to take part in the research. It is possible that female participants would have responded differently to the research questions and this would have changed the direction of the study and conclusion.

Furthermore, in order to amend the problem of so few female journalists, NGO organizations such as Independent Kurdish Media Centre and the Metro Centre to Defend Journalists have conducted many training programme initiatives in the last ten years to improve the quality of journalism as well as their professionalism. Among them is the training sessions offered by these NGOs for female journalists.

Likewise, there is a lack of literature available on media and in particular on new media such as Rudaw, and no academic work has been completed on this topic. In general, there is a short amount of literature and studies regarding the role of media in Kurdistan. What has been found was too broad, for instance studies by Zrebar Journal on "media in Kurdistan", a study by Saghi Barzani (2010) on Journalism that comprise more an international context, and a study by Nicole F. Watts on "Democracy and Self-Determination in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq".

CHAPTER FOUR

Professionalism and the Myth of Objectivity in Kurdistan

What does the concept of professionalism mean to Rudaw journalists? To what extent do social and political forces influence ethical and moral values of journalism in Kurdistan, and therefore what Rudaw news workers produce? In this chapter, I discuss various factors that influence the Kurdish journalistic culture, organizational practices, routines and structure, and the concept of professionalism. Journalists in Kurdistan operate under complex legal, political, economic, and cultural conditions. They do not have complete legal protection, have only partial access to those in power, and are not backed by independent institutions and news organizations. Despite this, there have been plans to professionalize the occupation and improve the qualifications of the journalistic profession in Kurdistan.

4.1 Journalists as news professionals

The state of the journalism profession in the developing countries within Latin America, Africa, and Asia vary. Some scholars claim that the socio-political situation in many developing countries has not provided the conditions required for professional journalism and objectivity, because professional journalism needs independency, impartiality, objectivity, respect, harmony, and balance in the selection and presentation of information, political openness, and free competition.

It seems that in the current era the media could not escape from professional journalism, and they can and must strengthen the positive aspects of it. Professional journalism seeks a space in order to carry out professional activities, safeguard the

rights of journalists, and create a competitive environment in the field of informing the public.

In Kurdistan, during the last few decades journalists have shifted between different journalist identities, assuming either a partisan form of journalism or objectivity combined with social responsibility. Journalists interviewed for this research (who work for Rudaw network and mainstream media) experienced the shifts between these two forms of journalism. These journalists basically agreed on the moral, ethical, and legal responsibility of media to develop a more democratic media environment and society as a whole.

Kamal Rauf, the editor in chief of Hawlati and one of the participants of the "Chwar Qoli" program on Rudaw TV, which consists of weekly in-depth analysis and study of topical events by four of the most famous journalists in Kurdistan, sees current journalism as highly complex and too party affiliated and journalists as passive professionals working in a traditional atmosphere. He divides media in Iraqi Kurdistan into three types:

> *The party media: These outlets are directly functioning as an organ of the political parties.*
>
> *The shadow media: These media consider themselves as independent but are in reality an individual official from political parties behind them. That individual set the media agenda.*
>
> *The independent media: refers to the media that is free of influence by political parties and actors.*

> (Kamal Rauf, 13.12.14)

As mentioned in chapter 2, during the 1990s, the media was heavily censored and connected to one of the two main political parties. Adnan Osman, former MP of KRG and journalist, emphasized how journalism became affiliated to the parties after the 1991 revolution. According to Osman, "The performance of the media in Kurdistan was one of total relationship with the parties. There were no private companies who could publish a newspaper. It was the parties who had the power and money to

establish the media. The control of media was high after that, journalists being told to leave the newspaper, and media thus served party goals" (Adnan Osman 08.12.14).

However, Kurdish journalists would have a significant role in accelerating the informational role of the press, serving the public and civil society, with the case of the Rudaw coverage of various dimensions of the society and the scrutinizing of government being a sign of such efforts. Watts (2014:217) claims that "the emergence of an independent media that helped produce a more pluralistic national narrative, offered alternative sources of information, challenged Kurdish political elites for control over historic memory." As McQuail notes, the "party newspaper has lost ground to commercial press forms, both as an idea and as a viable business enterprise" (McQuail 1994:15).

Thus, conflicts between professionalism versus partisanship practices in media outlets were key debates that appeared in the last decade. The new generation of journalists, who were more familiar with democratic values, journalistic ethical norms, and who had extensive perspectives about their social responsibility role, engaged more in professional journalism. Like other professionals (e.g., physicians or engineers), Kurdish journalists seem to have the perception that in many cases they know better than their users what is good journalism. Most of them embraced a process of separation of the press from political parties or the government. Hemen Abdulla, deputy general manager of Rudaw, describes how journalists changed their journalism identity from revolutionary to a more professional one. He explains how Rudaw founders tried to transfer Western democratic journalistic values to Kurdistan:

> *When I was in the Netherlands, I found out that journalists there have moral and ethical obligations to defend democratic values. On this base, we have had, as Rudaw founders, many deep discussions in order to transfer these journalistic cultures to Kurdistan. We have tried to impose new values and standards on Kurdish journalists, such as "objectivity", "accuracy" and "the role of media as a fourth estate" as emblem of professionalism. (Hemen Abdulla, 01.12.14)*

Additionally, raising the educational level of journalists, opening journalism colleges, encouraging the regulation of the journalism profession, and the creation of possibilities for journalists to pursue their career-developed professionalism in Kurdistan were all considered parts of an important reform. In Kurdistan journalism departments have also been set up in the Universities of Suleimania and Erbil. The Kurdistan Journalist Syndicate also plans to open a Media Institute, in addition to private universities such as Cihan University, which has its own journalism department. Thus, the last years have seen improvements in the academic and intellectual training of journalists, compared to two decades ago. Radwan Badini, Head of the University of Salahadin's Media Department, clarified that in 2000, only four journalists with academic background worked in this field. Journalists from the younger generation have become more interested in studying and discussing journalism norms and ethics. As Osman argues:

> *Journalistic professionalism increased with a focus on education and independence from political actors. Many journalistic training initiatives have emerged in the last years to improve the quality of journalism, as well as their professionalism. Many academics that have master and PhD in journalism return back from diaspora. Furthermore, universities and colleges of Kurdistan have set up journalism departments.*

Likewise, David Romano, columnist of Rudaw with experience from the U.S. and Kurdistan, claims that media outlets inevitably in order to keep their audiences attention, have to make professional reforms. He argues that

> *Media outlets such as Rudaw developed a large audience, and to keep that audience's trust, they have to, and they have been especially in the English website, publishing and writing objective stories and scrutinizing political parties.*

> (David Romano 13.04.15)

A new tradition in reporting imposed new standards for the selection of news. Some journalists cautiously stopped being passionate advocates and attempted to become more educated, independent, and professional. Simultaneously, professional autonomy and impartiality challenged the partisan characteristic of the national press.

Professional journalism considered itself as supporting and consolidating the roles of democratic citizenship. Many journalists undoubtedly understand their role in the same way, reflecting the norms of the profession. However, journalists interviewed for this research have positioned themselves differently in relation to the professionalization of journalism in Kurdistan. Abdulla believes that the Kurdish press today is more free and objective than it was 10 years ago. Rudaw had an important role in professionalization of content and economic independency of journalists. He claims that through a professional contract:

> *We ensure protecting journalists' rights and advocate a legal and regulated environment. The primary objective is to strengthen media institutions, accuracy and adherence to ethical and moral values of journalism by providing financial independence of journalists, supporting training of journalists, including teaching professional skills and reporting on specialized areas and finally developing media freedom. Journalists before Rudaw worked within a partisan media and admired politicians and party politics. We have prohibited such type of journalism in our institution. Our journalists report objectively and try to avoid any bias in their story. This is something new for Kurdistan; even if it is old for some parts of the world.*

The implementation of professional standards and values of journalism by Rudaw editorial managers has been positive. Professionalism challenged the partisan media. The change in perception of some journalists about professionalism is largely a result of internal and organizational reforms. Salary improvement alone however, is not the main factor in attitudinal change, enabling journalists to be more independent and objective. The financial situation of journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan, as in many other

transitional regions, is difficult; Rudaw has made considerable progress toward increasing journalists' salaries and exposing journalists to more economic independence. The managers of Rudaw guarantee the minimum salary of approximately $1,000 U.S. dollars per month.

Hallin and Mancini (2004:34) argue, "The professionalization of journalism begins precisely when the first hired reporters enter the picture, and the occupation of the journalist thus begins to become differentiated from that of printer or politician." Thus, professionalism implies the existence of an occupational autonomy. For them, professionalism is defined less in terms of educational barriers to entry, a lack of state regulation, or the ideal of "objectivity"; rather, it is viewed primarily in terms of "greater control over [one's] own work process," the presence of distinct professional norms, and a public service orientation (Ibid).

Furthermore, some participants were very critical of the condition of journalists and professionalism in Kurdistan. Journalist and poet Ranj Sangawi who worked more than 25 year as a journalist, has evaluated professionalism in Kurdistan and contends:

> *Due to the unusual condition of Kurdistan in the past and now, everything is abnormal here. Different types of practicing journalism and media standards have intermingled. Some media in Kurdistan identify themselves as independent; nevertheless they get financial support from parties. Some other private media works more fearlessly and freely. Because there is no legal media system in Kurdistan, which guaranteed transparency, therefore characters (journalists) have a crucial role in conceding meaning to the profession and channels.*

<div align="right">(Ranj Sangawi 30.11.14)</div>

Asked about Rudaw's objective model, Ranj Sangawi defended Rudaw and considers Rudaw as a reasonable alternative, stating that "all media in Kurdistan are the same, but there is more freedom of the press in Rudaw than is in other media" (as editors and journalists agreed upon).

This participant, thus, does not see Rudaw as completely free media. He believes that the existing media and newspapers had affiliation with political parties, and most of them have geographically concentrated audiences.

However, he considers Rudaw as the means to apply pressure for change. Although Rudaw is not completely free, through it the role of journalists and media professionals becomes more central, as they reveal and uncover challenging issues or competing personalities. Since a media outlet such as Rudaw has not been defined as an organ of political parties, it becomes a unique opportunity for independent journalists. But partisan media is still present in the region and political parties use both partisan and private media for their intention. Some of the participants admitted that although the partisan stance was not shown in Rudaw, the owner of Rudaw is a member of the PDK party (as discussed later).

Nevertheless, the director general of Rudaw, Ako Mohammad, emphasizes that Rudaw is a media institution, but not an ideological or partisan one. He believed that there is a reciprocal relationship between professionalism and Rudaw in Kurdistan. Most political parties cannot understand Rudaw's professional role. Ako Mohammad refers to his discussion with the former foreign minster of Iraq, Hoshyar Zebari, who studied media in the United Kindgom:

> *Hoshyar Zebari asked me, what is the message of your media channel? I answered we don't have any message.... What he meant by message is a political one. We don't have any political messages, but we play a crucial role in the performance of democracy and in forming criteria for practices and content in a media environment and strengthening institutions of media professionals.*

> (Ako Mohammad 18.12.14)

Most of the Rudaw journalists and especially the directors have a positive evaluation about their media organization; they are more inclined to see themselves what they do and the organization as professionals.

Moreover, participants consider their ability to manage adverse situations as evidence of a professional attitude. Regardless of relationship with the media organization,

when journalist succeeds in publishing objective information or surviving the newsroom environment he feels he is in total control of journalistic skills that would prove his professional attitudes.

However, journalists' /participants' attitudes and their definition for professional standards are vague. The study highlights the relatively inconsistent perceptions of Rudaw journalists regarding the professional role of journalists. Some participants, especially those who were near to opposition parties and the Gorran movement, criticize the media system in Kurdistan, believing that media outlets such as Rudaw are not totally objective and free. They also significantly claim that the Kurdish media are party affiliated, in a way that compromises their professionalism.

Furthermore, others (for example, managers of Rudaw) admire partisanship diminishing, raising journalism quality standards, and the autonomy of journalists. These journalists seem contribute to increasing the notion of professionalism, although it is still relatively low in the whole media industry, by mainly adhering to ethical standards, such as objectivity and accuracy, serving the public, applying reporting skills, supporting education and training professional skills. These journalistic values developed into important tools and criteria for journalism in its relation to democracy.

4.2 Objectivity and the struggle for autonomy in Rudaw

Can journalists avoid partisanship and strengthen press autonomy in Kurdistan? How can journalists be autonomous, and how autonomous should they be? As stated in the first chapter, the press in Kurdistan performed different roles in the different phases. The press functioned as a tool of resistance during the rebellion period and then became a partisan press after the success of the revolution in 1991, whilst the private press, in the era after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the consolidation of the economy, functioned both by serving the public and endorsing commodification of the media. However, this is not the period of the decline of partisan press, but political pressures were diminished, and the emergence of private media challenged the existing partisan media. It also led to a fundamental change in

policy of news organization and journalistic roles. At the same time, journalists have started to professionalize their role and maximize their autonomy.

And yet, on the one hand, political instrumentalization, marketization of media, and loyalties with parties on the one hand and weak consensus on journalistic standards and limited development of professional self-regulation on the other frequently restrain the autonomy of journalists (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Most of the journalists interviewed in this research agree to the assumption that the press should be fully independent, chasing truth without constraints from political parties and media outlets.

Hallin and Mancini (ibid.) argue that professionalization is essentially synonymous with "objectivity" and political neutrality. According to this view, professionalization is weakly developed in a system in which media have ties to political parties and do not have autonomy. On the other side, journalists are more objective and independent if they are to serve the public rather than particular interests, if they are to act according to specific journalistic standards of practices rather than following agendas imposed from outside (p.38). Accordingly, to gain objectivity media owners and political parties must not limit journalists' autonomy.

Ideally, autonomy is one of the core ideals of professional journalism. Waisbord has linked autonomy with professionalism and contends, "Autonomy has been central to the ideal of professional journalism" (2013:43). Autonomy, in this sense, means that journalists and news organizations, by the free flow of ideas and information, can contribute to democratic citizenship and serve democracy. Without autonomy, it would not be possible for journalists to fulfil their democratic mission according to journalistic ethical standards.

Autonomy in journalism can still be limited. Most media scholars believe that both political institutions and media organizations can threaten the autonomy of journalists. Waisbord claims that autonomy and self-governance is required for professional journalists to exercise their own logic without external influences (ibid.). In order to achieve this, media organizations have to transform into fully democratic institutions. This democratic transformation of media in Kurdistan is a challenging

task, mainly because the relationship between political parties and the media is highly ambivalent, the logic and restrictions of their predecessors can be found in the media structures, and journalists in the transformed media organizations will still hold values and criteria that belong to the old regime.

How can the press be independent from the state, which is considered a threat to the freedom of the press? Waisbord (ibid.) explains that press independence and freedom justify the mission of journalism in modern democracy. According to Kurdistan Regional Government legislation, political parties must respect the freedom of press, which is further guaranteed in Law no. 35 of 2007, which states:

> *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.*

Nevertheless political parties and politicians usually invest in media because of their political interests. Saghi Barzani (2010) claims that political parties colonialized media in Kurdistan, and this did not provide autonomy to journalists. Some of the interviewed journalists believed that journalists are more active in the political field than other fields in society, but the problem is that most of them have direct affiliations to a specific party. According to Salam Saadi, editor in chief of Rudaw's weekly newspaper:

> *Media is not independent in Kurdistan. Political parties established and controlled media. Most of the journalists who work today in Kurdistan have affiliations to political parties. Therefore, we can clearly see partisan coverage and biased information in their reports.*

Researcher: What about Rudaw, do you have affiliations to a specific party?

Rudaw and some other media outlets in Kurdistan have tried to distance themselves from the influences of political parties, ideologies and politicians. We are in the beginning of the process of emancipation from party affiliation and have not been fully freed… I would like to be clear about journalistic autonomy in Kurdistan. One of the criteria's for editorial independency is the financial independence of the media organization, something that is not achieved in Kurdistan.

(Salam Saad 09.12.14)

According to this participant, journalists' financial dependency on news organizations has prevented them from professional autonomy. One of the most important guarantees for the autonomy of journalists and other people from political parties is social and economic security. Rudaw seems to be emancipated from party affiliations, but complete financial independence is one of the biggest problems for the maintenance of the status of independent journalists.

It can be argued that political parties still exercise constraints on media either directly or indirectly. Journalists in a media organization that has chosen to be partisan would have to adopt a partisan position in their agenda. Thus, political parties, through the colonization of journalists' autonomy, have always tried to control the political agenda. In such a situation powerful political actors with their political and economic interests may challenge the media with their distinct public orientations.

The struggle of Rudlaw journalists for their autonomy is an on-going process. Through relatively safeguarding editorial independency, Rudaw has struggled to emancipate from political party affiliations. The news media attempted this effectively by finding sponsors to its programs and thus challenged the economic dominance of political parties. Private commercial journalism, thus, minimized the power of political parties. So, the market open the way for new platforms and opportunities of participatory and journalistic autonomy in the mainstream media,

extending the participation and representation in this field to the interests of "citizens".

On the other hand, other scholars argue that it is mistaken to conclude that journalism completely lacks autonomy, because it is essentially subjected to external factors (Waisbord 2003). Bourdieu also contends that the journalistic field is characterized by a high degree of heteronomy. It is a weak autonomous field, and one cannot understand what happens in journalism by only knowing who finances it. He also states that a field is an expanded form of political microcosm set within the social macrocosm. The political microcosm is a small universe caught up in the laws that function for the larger universe—"nonetheless endowed with a relative autonomy within that universe and obeying its own laws" (2005:32).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) used the term political parallelism to analyse relations between media organizations and political affinities. It refers to "*media content*—the extent to which the different media reflect distinct political orientations in their news and current affairs reporting"(p.28). Yet journalists "have never achieved a comparable autonomy within media organizations" (p. 35).

For Hemen Abdulla, Rudaw journalists have tried to conquer editorial and journalistic independence step by step. To protect journalists from internal and external factors Rudaw imposed internal rules including a board of managers to clearly divide between editorial responsibilities, as well as full protection of the journalists' independence against political and social pressures. He contends:

> *You know that Rudaw has an influential and authoritative sponsor (Nechirvan Barzani). He agreed with one condition within launching Rudaw media network "don't let any person or political party influence you and your media outlet, even me. I am very influential in PDK, first of all, don't let PDK influence your stories and news." What we did to avoid bias in Rudaw, is creating a board of managers which consists of 12 journalists from different parts of Kurdistan with different political and non-political backgrounds.*

David Romano, for instance, contends that Rudaw's manager never told him that he could not write about something; he believed he had the freedom to write about whatever he liked and they did not even edit his column.

Hiwa Jamal, host of Rudaw's nightly interview program, also claims that Rudaw's managers have never limited his autonomy and freedom; on the contrary they encouraged him to ask more critical questions on his program. (Hiwa Jamal 07.12.14)

It seems that the journalists and editors I interviewed have attempted to gain autonomy by professionalization, but according to some of the journalists as a part of institutionalized practices their autonomy was not granted. Indeed, the last years have seen improvements in the skills of journalists, but the Kurdish journalists need to be more professional and sophisticated in order to become effectively independent. This is due to two reasons: first, objectivity as philosophical realism is also deemed impossible insofar as editorial interests limit journalistic autonomy (Waisbord, 2000), and second, there cannot be a truly democratic society without autonomous news organizations. I also endorse this view of the need to extend journalistic autonomy and professional standards of media organizations, irrespective of whether they oppose or coincide with media owners, politicians, and political parties. As Hallin and Mancini (ibid.) argue, the growth of professional norms and self-regulation lead toward development of journalistic autonomy.

Thus journalists have more interests in journalism codes and ethics and try to maintain relative professional standards. In addition to university training and Rudaw in-house training of journalists, some centres of journalists' rights and advocacy such as Metro Centre have helped to raise debates among journalists on press independency, freedom, and activities. Metro Centre has implemented numerous projects and activities in connection with International War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Media Support (IMS), Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), and Democracy and Human Rights Development Centre (DHRD), aiming to broaden the scope of freedom of expression in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

4.3 Media ownership as a problem

Ownership concentration is one of the characteristics of the Kurdish media system. The vast majority of the Kurdish population obtains their information about different issues through partisan or commercial broadcasting. Powerful political actors and families have control over newspapers and their circulation. Although, the last few years have seen the expansion of diverse ownership papers (i.e., Hawlati, Awene, and Shar Press), and these have worked to undermine the negative impact of media concentration.

The liberal model of media (Hallin & Mancini 2004) considers the privatization of media ownership as the main factor in attaining the independence of media from the government and political parties. In contrast to the liberal model, Scandinavian and most European countries have adopted a public broadcasting model based on the assumption that it best serves the citizens and public debate.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the public broadcasting model has not come into operation. Furthermore, commercial broadcasting is the dominant form of broadcasting in the region, and a limited number of families, political actors, and figures control increasing shares of the Kurdish mainstream media. Most participants accused the government for not having transparent ownership laws and feel the need to foster a change in governmental ownership policy. Ranj Sangawi recommends diverse ownership that preserves the media from monopolization.

Regulations limiting concentration of media ownership have been very weak. The main reasons for this are surely the close relationship and political alliance of media owners with politicians. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that private owners also regularly will have political connections, which are vital to obtaining government contracts and concessions and in many other ways necessary for the successful operation of a business. In addition, these owners will often use their media possessions as a vehicle for negotiation with other elites, and they use their connections to avoid inconvenient regulations.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, most media owners are either political actors or are supported by them. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minster of

Iraqi Kurdistan, owns Rudaw (TV, radio, digital media and newspaper); Nalia Radio and TV (NRT) (two satellite channels, radio, digital media) is owned by Shaswar Abdulwahid, a Kurdish businessman; Hero Ibrahim Ahmad, wife of Jalal Talabani, the former president of Iraq, owns khak media company (TV, radio, and magazine); and Chawder news (newspaper, magazine) is owned by Mala Bakhtyar, a member of PUK politburo.

Thus concentration of media ownership by certain political actors has substantially influenced not only of the professional role of journalists, but of regulations that might imposed by the government. The owners are believed to rarely keep distance between the exercise of political power and media activity.

McQuail (2008) suggests limiting press concentration and self-regulation as one of the practical examples of measures adopted to improve the real chance of the public to receive informative benefits from the media. Romano confirmed the negative aspects of ownership concentration, but the most important thing for him is editorial freedom and independence.

> *When I wrote some columns for Gulan (a Kurdish Magazine) and Rudaw, one of my Kurdish students here in Missouri (U.S) said to me that people think you are KDP person because you write for those papers. That's not accurate, but that's how things viewed. Even though there is some questions about ownership of Rudaw…. In every country the media is owned by somebody. Everyone has some agenda, some redlines… the real test is does the media, the newspaper; the TV stations allow its journalists to truly cover the news in a professional way rather than a partisan manner.*

However, David Romano told this researcher that ownership interests never interfered with his writings. He rejects the idea that Rudaw managers engaged in attempts to undermine in the reediting his columns and argues, "*I think the media like Rudaw is getting much better.*"

In spite of the fact that most of the journalists confirmed non-interference of owners in media outputs, this research has found journalists' do have conflicts with ownership. Hemen Abdulla claims that Rudaw is a commercial media but "*no media*

can only depend on advertising." My understanding of his statement is that Rudaw is heavily dependent on the owner's revenue. Preventing owners from interference may not be politically possible because of high governmental position of the owners. In such a framework a more neutral and investigative coverage would have been a bit difficult, economic reasons explains why Rudaw may not work as effectively as wished.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) indicated how media organizations in highly commercialized media systems obey profit-oriented imperatives of maximum audience reach and thus higher advertising revenues. Adnan Osman also expressed similar worries and claims that journalism can hardly be autonomous when the press is firmly based on market economics. He explains that:

> *We are in the beginning of the process of independent journalism and professionalization. Most of the powerful and popular channels are belonging to the politicians or political parties. Rudaw is a professional channel, but is owned by a PDK politician. Rudaw has tried to be independent, many independent journalists who don't have affiliations to political parties work for Rudaw, whilst it is difficult for them to challenge the profit of the media owner.*

According to him, media owners can secure editorial freedom and independence and contribute for the development of public debate, but they can also create constraints to journalists or use media to maximize their own profit and revenue. At the same time due to the profit-oriented of commercial media, most participants consider the impression of the owner of Rudaw of vital support for a free and independent national media, as not enough to safeguard their essential freedom on editorial decision and content.

Hiwa Jamal also argues, "*Dominating media market and public agenda is an idea that all political actors have, but on the other hand journalists are working hard toward professionalization.*" Evidently, the relationship between owner and editor is a problematic and controversial one. Nonetheless, law, requirements and national regulations are scarce, very little has been done to leave owners less free to pursue

political or economic goals.

As some countries, to counter concentration of power over editorial content, have adopted specific codes of practice for editors and regulatory rules for broadcasters. For example, The Association of Norwegian Editors[28] (Norsk Redaktørforening [NR]) was established in 1950 to safeguard: the professional interests and the editorial independence of its members, freedom of expression, the public's access to governmental documents, protection of sources, evolving journalistic skills, and defense of press ethics and self-regulation. According to The Association of Norwegian Editors declaration, an editor shall always keep in mind the ideal purpose of the media. The editor shall promote the freedom of opinion and in accordance with the best of his/her abilities strive for what he/she feels serves society. Through his/her medium the editor shall promote an impartial and free exchange of information and opinion (ibid).

---

[28] http://www.nored.no/Association-of-Norwegian-Editors (Read 30.04.15)

CHAPTER FIVE

The Role of Media in Developing Democracy

In this chapter, I will give an overview of how Rudaw journalists view and identify their role in promoting democracy over the last years. Media during the 2000s continued its dissolution from partisan loyalties by embracing relatively non-partisan, democratic, public role models and standards of journalism, different than the former Kurdish journalist understanding of the role of journalism. As I discussed in the previous chapter, media institutions such as Rudaw began to be more professional and autonomous in the last few years as a consequence of, to some extent, political democratization along with strong market competition. I will argue that Rudaw as an example of the commercial and private press gradually managed to play a role as a limited, but substantial and privileged, forum for stimulating public debate, a forum for political discussion between governmental and non-governmental sectors, including citizens, civil society, NGOs, and the state, in contrast to the previous partisan media, which gave more attention to the party politicians. I will also show how there are constant tensions between politicians and Rudaw in Kurdistan. As we have seen, political parties heavily influenced the Kurdish media. Thus the contributions of Rudaw journalists to the democratization process through scrutinizing officials, creating public knowledge, and being a platform for diverse voices is the core debate discussed in this chapter.

5.1 Civil society and participation

Historically, Journalism has been a primary medium that attempted to serve political and social participation of citizens in Kurdish society. As I mentioned above, a flourishing economy, the social awareness of citizens, and development of technology forced the media system in Kurdistan to make reforms both in content and structure of media in order to respond to the new demands of society.

Political actors and institutions thus started to adapt the media norms and standards, because they realized that in order to influence the public they had to use and influence the media. The importance of media on political actors, institutions, and organizations has increased. Jos de Beus (2011) argues that as a result of increasing media influence, politicians who control or make public policy are increasingly dependent on the news cycle and the information revealed by journalists. Thus, politicians, in order to construct and reach the public, appear before television cameras. He believes that they improve their appearance in the newsroom continuously by means of extensive knowledge and achieved skills, through media training, media monitoring, the use of focus groups, and other electoral research. In addition, in order to create and maintain power and authority, and perform in ways leaders are supposed to, they try to figure their own public relations (ibid).

On the other hand, the increasing media influence as an important source of information on society and politics has encouraged journalists to provide a platform for public debate and participation in society. Thus the new media environment encompasses increasing numbers of people, social groups, and active players. In addition, these social groups and players have started to institutionalize themselves with the assistance of media as both a source of information and platform of participation at the social and political stage. The Gulf Centre for Human rights contends, "The fact that there are thousands of officially registered organizations in existence conducting important work, for example in the areas of women's rights, minority rights advocacy and press freedom, is impressive and gives cause for

optimism."[29] However social groups and minorities have complained about being allowed very little room to participate in the debates (Metro Centre). The National Democratic Institute (NDI) reported that 57 percent of NGOs in Kurdistan conceded maintaining partnerships with political parties (Romano 2014). Civil society organizations are comprehended non-representative, because they have political affiliations—for example, Azad Shekh Younis, the general secretary of Kurdistan journalists' syndicate, which is supposed to be independent, has firm affiliations to the PDK. It is widely asserted that the majority of civil society organizations are linked to the major political parties (ibid). Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) in Suleimania stated, "NGOs to operate effectively often need the support of the main political parties, strong community support and the backing of an international NGO. There is little support from the KRG for civil society."[30]

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights[31] in their research mentions the Yazidi[32] minorities as an example of a group that is not being fully included in the mainstream media. However, the Kurdish region has traditionally been a tolerant home[33] for a rich diversity of peoples including Arabs, Chaldeans,[34] Assyrians,[35]

---

[29] http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/28 (12.03.15)

[30] http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ab399c10.pdf (12.03.15)

[31] http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/28 (12.03.15)

[32] Yazidis are a Kurdish religious minority found primarily in northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey, northern Syria, the Caucasus region, and parts of Iran. The Yazīdī religion includes elements of ancient Iranian religions as well as elements of Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam. Although scattered and probably numbering only between 200,000 and 1,000,000, the Yazīdīs have a well-organized society, with a chief sheikh as the supreme religious head and an emir, or prince, as the secular head. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

[33] Some Kurdish tribes participated in the genocide of Armenians during World War 1, along with Turks and Muslim groups from various Caucasian tribes, attacked and killed Armenian and Assyrian civilians and refugees. Among modern Kurds, including major Kurdish parties like HDP, KDP and PKK, most of them acknowledge the killings and apologize in the name of their ancestors who committed atrocities toward Armenians in the name of the Ottoman Empire. (Wikepedia)

[34] Chaldeans are members of an autonomous Catholic Church that retains a unique liturgy and tradition while recognizing the Pope's authority. They live in northern Iraq, northeast Syria, northwest Iran and southeast Turkey. (Wikepedia)

[35] They are a Semitic-Akkadin ethnic group whose origins lie in ancient Mesopotamia. They belong to one of the four churches: the Chaldean Uniate, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Syrian Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Due to the ethnic-political conflict in the Middle East, they are better known by these ecclesiastical designations. The Assyrians use classical Syriac in their liturgies while the majority of them speak and write a

Turkmen, as well as the Kurds themselves. But the authorities had abandoned the Yazidi minorities (ibid). The Yazidis say there are outstanding questions that need to be answered in relation to the genocide in Shangal in July and August of 2014. It is difficult to explore these questions when the media is restricted and some social groups like the Yazidis are not included totally, something that is refuted by Rudaw journalists. Salam Abdulla stressed that many efforts were made by Rudaw to mobilize national identity and public opinion to support Shangal and Kobani. According to the participants Rudaw has played an important role in globalizing the voice of minorities and especially the Yazidis and giving them a platform to speak out about what happened to them and their demands. Rudaw managers confirmed that most of the international media agencies such as *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *BBC* and so forth used Rudaw as one of the main sources regarding the events that related to the Kurdistan region including the Yazidis.

Herbert Gans believes that citizen participation is essential to democracy, and therefore journalists supply news they think will help citizens participate in politics (2003). The consolidation of the relationship between the media and the civil society in Kurdistan may date back to the beginning of 2000. Kamal Rauf claims that in 2000, they started to build a bridge of connection between society and political power in the *Hawlati* newspaper. He contends:

> *We started to publish the citizen complaints about the actions and performances of government. It was a mechanism to let people participate meaningfully in the making and criticizing decisions that affect their lives. We told them that you are free to criticize and write whatever you want except defaming, libelling or insulting others. Thus we become a bridge of connection to them. On the other side it helps us to be trusted by the society and talk about defects and weaknesses of society such as circumcision of women, something that was avoided to be discussed in the public sphere.*

modern dialect of this language. They constitute the third largest ethnic group in Iraq with their communities in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Russia and Armenia. (The Political Dictionary of the Modern Middle East)

Thus media actually started to fortify the civil society and include citizens in the process of democratization of society. Modifications in the media system and representations supported wider changes in society. The social and cultural issues such as gender, children, and health became part of the media discourse, through which media was capable to have a great influence on these area.

Similarly, social movements, NGOs, and organizations have begun to increase, however their influence on power structures are not particularly solid, but they played an influential role in the process of enlightenment, restructuring, and reorganization of the Kurdish society. NGOs began to enjoy more right to free expression.

Over the last few years, journalists have sought to assert their journalistic professionalism and exert expectations of society from them. McQuail (2013:22) identified expectations of society from journalism such as circulating information on public matters, connecting citizens to government and vice versa, supporting the main institutions of society, respecting culture, and society values and serving the national interest. Journalists interviewed for this research have different perceptions of the role that the press has in regard to the process of participation of citizens and contribution in the social change.

Ranj Sangawi argues that his program is just a channel and platform for interaction between different views in order to produce a new and proper one. Through this interaction, and via civil society organizations, he mentioned that he was able to solve some social and political problems in the structure of the society. He claims:

> *I have tried to influence the structure of society. And this is achievable by new critical questions that can inform and encourage the citizens. It may contrast the beliefs of the society, but not in a radical form that can insult their belief. This is an art, to let the people hear something that is not acceptable and adorable.*
>
> *School corporal punishment was something legal in Kurdistan and fully encouraged by the government in order to maintain discipline in the schools.*

It was me who encouraged banning corporal punishment by letting the students and citizens participate in 42 TV programs. I have been awarded for my work in defence of school students' rights. I think if the students don't accept corporal punishment from their teachers in the primary schools, they cannot be controlled or exploited by the state in the future. One of the teachers has attacked me and kicked me, for my opinions and encouragement of the students.

As it is argued, Rudaw seems to have promoted both socially participative debate and also an intellectual, evidence-based, enlightenment style of public discourse. According to my observation, some media—and in particular Rudaw—attempt to enhance the performance of democracy by encouraging useful and mutual communication between different groups in society. As McQuail (2013) claims, journalism applies pressure for responsibility and society applies pressure in kind in return. By providing information about different social and cultural issues to citizens, Rudaw has tried to impact and shape the social and political life. In addition, according to the participants, Rudaw has let marginalized voices come through in the media. Habermas believes that the public sphere is a space where "public opinion can be formed" and citizens would discuss issues of common concern through rational debate. Eriksen and Fossum (2002:401) also claim that a strong public is a "sphere of institutionalized bodies of deliberation and decision making" located in the centre of political system. Habermas also defines the public sphere as a "society engaged in critical public debate" (1989). According to Ako Mohammad, Rudaw believes that one important form of citizen participation is involvement in citizen debates and discussions. He has highlighted how Rudaw journalists chose to deal and debate professionally with sensitive social and cultural issues:

We have tried to debate every single issue on society. It advances a series of debates to the surface, which includes the discussion on minorities, gender, bribing, school corporal punishment, water conservation; narcotics etc.…Rudaw's coverage has thus stimulated intellectual debate, discussion

and desire for participation of citizens. We have been many times threatened

due to our work on these issues.

This indicates that journalists in media sectors do experience limitations and frustrations. In spite of the limitations imposed by the political parties and social and cultural norms, it seems that Rudaw journalists participated in citizen enlightenment and thus helped serving the public. Member of *Rudaw*'s the Executive Board Shad Muhammad confirmed that *Rudaw* facilitated the debate in order to enlighten individuals and defended the social role and responsibility of journalism, but sees also the limitations of his media:

> *Journalism must have a social role; highlighting the wrongdoings that exist in society, emphasizing and participate more the works of people who intend to contribute to the development. I don't believe the media has total freedom . . . I think we have become a media power in Kurdistan, but not a power that direct social and political perspectives to conduct a change in society.*

(Shad Muhammad 02.12.14)

Since democracy depends on active citizenship and socially and politically included citizens, free access and participation of citizens in media are necessary in promoting equality and social issues. Scholars such as McChesney (1999) contend that media will be an essential forum for social and political debate if a democracy is committed to social equality and self-governance. He claims, "If the governing process is predicated upon having an informed citizenry ... [then] media perform a crucial function" (1999, p. 288). Some academics and journalists such as Majid Salih criticized this type of citizen participation in Kurdistan. He believed that journalists perform unprofessionally and unethically in Kurdistan by giving a platform to harmful ideas. Through giving voice to some harmful ideas such as extremism and incitement to discrimination, journalists do not draw public attention to reinterpret social problems and offer solutions. This argument is more pessimistic about the competence of media and other society players to influence the civil society and their willingness to engage in meaningful debate. Majid Salih, senior media advisor to the

KRG [36] parliament, states that the media in Kurdistan in some cases were incompetent at fulfilling its normative functions. He argues:

> *Media in Kurdistan have unprofessionally operated in the case of rising Islamic State in the region. Some mullahs[37] are secretly supporting IS. They are using social media such Facebook to spread their ideas, because it is prohibited to use mosques as a platform for such beliefs. Social media is something restricted to a defined amount of people, but while the national media debates about their speeches and articles, it is a free propaganda for them and makes them more popular. Media thus become a platform for extremists.*

<div align="right">(Majid Salih 03.12.14)</div>

Should extremists be prevented from using media to deliver their message to a wider audience? Freedom of expression is considered a precondition for democracy, personal autonomy, and truth seeking. Most of the democratic countries, however, have specific limitations on extremist speech that incites violence and discrimination. For example, in the US, a security agency such as NSA has authority to conduct warrantless surveillance in order to investigate potential terrorist activity.

But what about regions such as Kurdistan, where extremists ignore laws and individual rights and pose a real threat to free speech? The relationship of freedom of speech with authorities has always been controversial. As I argued in chapter 2, a democratic government has to let citizens express their views freely to create public debate. Ranj Sangawi defended his invitation to extremist Salafists[38] to his show and argued that

> *It is an art to learn to hear diverse voices. My job is to let different ideas and views interact in order to find new ones. In the case of giving platforms to extremists, I*

---

[36] Kurdish Regional Government parliament

[37] Mullah is the name given to a man with an education in Islamic theology and law. The title Mullah is commonly used for local Islamic clerics or mosque leaders.

[38] A member of a strict orthodox Sunni Muslims sect advocating a return to the early Islam of the Koran and sunna.

invite a Salafist such as Mala Ali and three other doctors. I am not telling Mala Ali that you are wrong, but I will let them interact. It is audiences who choose who is right and who is wrong.

Thus, free expression of ideas is important to some reporters in order to let individuals and the audiences comprehend different ideas and perhaps become rational autonomous creatures within society. Furthermore, they can participate in the democratic process and make rational choices (Petaja, 28). However, there should be a limit to the point of views that incite violence. As Zencovich (2011) argues, freedom must be limited in order to enable others to exercise it and to enable the exercise of other freedoms (to circulate, meet, work, live one's own private life).

There is a consensus among most participants that various members of society have to be included in mainstream media. The aim of pursuing the public interest by embracing a professional, representative, and democratic participatory-oriented journalism might have a positive impact on democratic citizenship and the consolidation of public debate. These examples highlight the journalists' attempt to develop democracy and citizenship, and open debates about society is important to the transformation of social structure. It seems as if Rudaw, in spite of its weakness, and social and cultural constraints, did encourage the debate and citizen participation, but tried to form a more organized public sphere and managed to influence these spheres with new ideas. Similarly, in order to contribute to a new public sphere, it has to overcome the social and cultural barriers to ensure the full participation of citizens. As Downing (1984, p. 19) claims, "If we are thinking of organizing democratic media, we cannot imagine them as liberating forces unless they are open to lateral communication between social beings, with their *multiple* experience and concerns."

5.1.1 Balanced participation of men and women

Balanced representation of women and men by recognizing publicly that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men of different background

and ages strengthens and enriches democracy (Pratchett & Lowndes 2004). Democracy requires that various citizens' voices be heard and discussed. There is a mutual relationship between democracy and women, as women need democracy in order to participate in main decisions that are important to change systems and laws, and democracy needs women in order to be a democratic government. The role of women in democratic processes is further emphasized in the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on Women's Political Participation (A/RES/66/130), which reaffirms that "the active participation of women, on equal terms with men, at all levels of decision-making is essential to the achievement of equality, sustainable development, peace and democracy."[39]

In Kurdistan, there have been few changes in issues such as participation of women. Thus, in spite of the efforts to achieve the balanced participation of men and women and stimulate and support women to participate in political and social decisions, the progress has been slow in increasing numbers of women in the political and journalistic field. For instance, of the 19 minsters in the current KRG cabinet, one position is filled by women. And, there are 111 seats in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (as stipulated in Law No. 1 passed by the KNA in 1992). In the current parliament, 39 of the 111 MPs are women. The legal requirement is that at least 30% of the parliamentarians are women.[40]

In media outlets, it seems that women have the weaker role, both as journalists and as sources, while men still dominate the news professions. In the last few decades, gender roles became an important subject, at least as introduced by women's rights advocates. In contrast to the traditional and religious perspective that men and women are different, and have complementary social roles, scholars consider social and cultural issues as the main obstacle to gender equality.

Choman Hardi believes that the main reason to exclusion and marginalization of women are norms and standards that are created by society. Hardi contends that "societies impose these norms and expect men and women to behave accordingly.

---

[39] http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/democracy/women.shtml (Read 25.03.15).
[40] http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=160&l=12&a=15057&s=04070000&s=010000
(Read 25.03.15)

Many mechanisms are utilized to create and enforce these differences between men and women including socialization, culture and tradition, education, religion and the media."[41]

The social norms, thus, shape and restrict a balanced participation of males and females within the newsroom and play an essential role in marginalizing and oppressing women. As stated in the third chapter, there was one female journalist in the Executive Board of Rudaw, which consists of 12 journalists. Additionally, none of the female journalists who were contacted regarding this research actually replied or were willing to take part in the research. Gender differences in Kurdish media are many, reflecting the society, the high rates of female illiteracy, and the traditional exclusion of women from the world of politics. Hardi argues that "the use of male-centred language in the media is an indicator of a system in which men are more privileged than women" (ibid.). Most of the participants in this study argue that social norms govern the society facts and sensations and impose uniformity of behaviour within the Kurdish society. Hiwa Jamal believes that "it is societal norms which puts pressure on women and expect them to behave accordingly." Shad Muhammad also closely related this to the norms of society, and contends:

> *Our institution such as other institutions reflects the facts of our society. It is one of the main reasons that we don't have many female journalists in Kurdistan. We don't have potential females in the Kurdish media. However, there are not ensured equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women. Furthermore they face a lot of problems; most of them will face abuse or harassments and inevitably resign.*

In this regard, an important question is, "whether this participant himself may represent an obstacle to recruitment of women?" How much opportunity do women have to appear in the news and form its content and meaning? In fact, wrong beliefs, attitudes, lack of confidence, high prejudices, and stereotypes against women's beliefs keep women from progressing to senior positions. Despite the presence of

---

[41] http://auis.edu.iq/node/1489 (Read 25.03.15)

women journalists in the media to disseminate knowledge and protect women's rights, but in traditional patriarchal societies this attendance has been challenged.

For instance, between 1970 and 2000s, journalism suffered from a lack of female participation. Yet since the fall of Sadam regime in 2003, female journalists have had an active and impressive presence in the media. They have different roles such as reporter, editor, columnists, news presenter and photographer, but rarely have held a senior position. However, I do not have fixed quantitative parameters for media in Kurdistan in general, but almost all management positions in the media are still held by men, reflecting their interests and values. These include positions such as general directors, news directors, and executive editors who decide and define news and other tasks linked with influencing the news. Researches by Metro Center show that the experiences and education of women do not guarantee them high positions in the field.[42] Ashti Abdulla argues that patriarchal attitudes and customs prevent women from being treated as equal to men. Women were and still are regarded as intellectually and physically inferior to men. "Surely, with these attitudes it is very hard for women to get the potency to be a good manager (ibid.)."

The absence of women in senior journalism roles, such as editorial and decision-making roles, represents a lack of diversity and inclusion in the media. Steiner (2011:118) claims that the presence of women reporters has had an important, positive impact in the newsroom. Women reporters "report on social issues and subjects that interest women and [women tend] to use more women, feminist organizations, and 'ordinary people' as sources; the resulting diversity benefits newsrooms." Bahar Munzir, a women's right activists, argues also that if there are more women in the high positions they can convey female views and better reach out to women.[43]

In Kurdistan, only a small part of news stories focus on the issues of women and only a small part of the people interviewed are women (Metro Centre). Most of the studies about mainstream media emphasize that the existence of representation in the level of decision-making has effects on the content of the media. Van Zoonen (1994) argues

---

[42] http://metroo.org/drejaWtar.aspx?NusarID=97&Jmare=146 (20.04.15).
[43] http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/01122013 (20.04.15).

that the number of female media producers work in a media outlet would be influential to create a more balanced media content (Van Zoonen, 1994).

Van Dijk (2009:202) also argues, "Women… who have no access to, and control over public discourse are thus largely ignored, or represented negatively when seen as a problem or a threat to the social mainstream."

Some scholars, to explain the barriers that prevent women from getting high positions, refer to this phenomenon with the metaphor "the glass ceiling." This term that is a product of various factors and aspects keeps women away from rising to the upper positions, regardless of their qualifications or achievement (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission[44]).

However, there have not been any studies about representation of men and women in media outputs and its relationship to the number of men and women in media organizations. Some studies in the West have confirmed that the increasing number of women in media organizations will lead to a less-negative presentation of women (Shoemaker, Vos, and Reese 2009).

Thus, to overcome *gender bias* it is important for media agencies to pursue a *gender balance* and inclusive regulations. Ako Mohmmad, director manager of Rudaw, in response to a question regarding promoting the equal participation of women and men, including running editorial and making decisions, emphasized the role of women in the democratic process, claiming that:

> *Women in Kurdistan are newer to journalism. We don't have our academic and professional institution [within Rudaw] to teach journalists, and accordingly give an equal opportunity to men and women, however it is on our agenda. We are now focusing on journalists who graduated from college of journalism. Unfortunately, there haven't be many talented women to get into senior positions. Otherwise, it is in the advantage of media to have diverse voices and a gender balanced newsroom.*

---

[44] Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. *Solid Investments: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, November 1995, p. 4.

According to this participant, communications departments and journalism schools are a relatively new phenomenon in Kurdistan, and to some extent might not be reliable in generating professional journalists. Thus, he suggests job training and in-house training and providing journalists' professional norms and values to constitute shared beliefs among Kurdish journalists, even in the relative absence of formal schools.

Thus, it must be asked to what extent have the media been able to provide opportunities for women journalists? Despite the potential of media in making women participate in decision-making positions, the desired performance for this purpose has not been attained. The field of journalism is dominated by a patriarchal culture in which women have been kept away from high positions. In addition, the adoption of positive measures in regard to promotion of women to managerial positions is very low.

Meanwhile, according to research participants, societal standards and values to a great extent explain the law regarding representation of women in decision-making positions. In order to change these attitudes in newsrooms, more women journalists, reporters, and managers are needed. In some transitional democracies, some media outlets have concluded that in order to achieve progress in their institution the participation of women in decision-making is required. However, even though some participants realized the importance of this issue, actual achievement of this goal requires a pervasive and systematic determination, because the main factor contributing to the lack of advancement of women is rooted in societal beliefs and individual attitudes. The glass ceiling term expresses a symbol of what prevents women from rising to the top and this arises from the false, negative, and biased attitudes and perceptions in the presence of women at work, particularly high senior positions. However, van Zoonen (1994:4) explained:

> *Power is not a monolithic 'thing' that some groups (men, capitalists, whites) have and others (women, working class, blacks) have not. Society is not constituted by orderly and dichotomous divisions of oppressors and oppressed. As the experience of black feminists has made perfectly clear, one can be subordinated on one*

relation (one woman vs. man) and dominant in another (of white women vs. black woman).

5.1.2 Tolerance approach of media and religion

Remarkably, the relationship between religion, the culture of religion, and new media technologies has become one of the important issues in modern societies. Of course, the relationship between religion, media, and society is very important today. The interaction and reciprocal influence of media and religion upon each other are issues that have been discussed from different perspectives. Therefore a vital question is, will the media, which have a role to play as a source of information about religious trends and ideas and also about challenging them, be capable of becoming a central force in reshaping public attitudes according to civil and democratic ideals? Furthermore, does media have a commitment to religious values?

Evaluation of how the Kurdish media deal with religion is important, at least regarding the critical condition of the Middle East with the emergence of Islamist radical groups.

Previously, in Kurdistan, partisanship was linked primarily to social class and party ideology more than to religion or ethnicity. During the 1990s and 2000s, a number of religious political parties, such as Kurdistan Islamic Union and Kurdistan Islamic Group, have emerged who have their own media companies to support their ideas. In addition, the fall of Saddam in 2003 and stability of Kurdistan in comparison to other regions in Iraq lead many ethnic groups, such as the Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians and Christians, to flee to Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus political partisanship has simultaneously started to involve ethnic-linguistic, religious, and ideological divisions. Hallin and Mancini (2004:281) believe that these institutions have "broad functions in structuring the public sphere, creating and circulating cultural and political symbols, and organizing the participation of citizens in the life of the community." Therefore a decline of a political and social institution based on religious faith, and its replacement by a more fragmented and individualized society, is important for democracy.

However the social and cultural context is still dominated by Islamic religious institutions, but the media in Kurdistan, such as Rudaw and NRT, have partly adopted professional criteria, and they have emancipated themselves from religious value-oriented framework and commitments. Rudaw presented a program entitled "Jihani Adam (Adam's World)," a weekly religious program, which promotes tolerance and more understanding between different religions. This could be inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue conducted with a number of clerics and religious leaders of Muslim, Christian, and other religions. The show constantly compares religious news events to similar situations in Kurdistan and would take stories to discuss issues that were connected to religious tolerance and coexistence. Shad Muhammad believes that Rudaw is aptly involved in creating discussions about religious trends and values, not just Islamic religion. He argues that:

> *When media spoke about religion, it was Islamic religion, because Islam is a dominant religion in the region. Rudaw encouraged pluralism and tolerance of different religions. For Rudaw, speaking about religion is a means to give information to the people. For example "Adams world" show talks about peace and tolerance from various religions such as Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity.*

According to research by Zrebar Journal (2014), intellectual debates in Kurdish media are more engaged in nonreligious issues: social and political problems in the region are related to ethnic, cultural, economic, and political discrimination and inequality, rather than to religion. There are also claims about confrontations between Islamic-oriented media, and national and secular media in Kurdistan. Based on this, by adopting different ideas each of them tries to develop its influence and attract more audiences. Thus leftists and nationalists are adopting secular criteria and adhering to free media, politics, and society from religion and on the other hand faith-based media networks adopt mass media to spread religious ideas.

Some participants believe that the Kurdish media have encountered religion with objective tolerance. Due to Kurdistan's religious cultural context, they are supporting the coexistence of religious social institutions with other society institutions. In this

approach, activity and the practice of political religion will be rejected. As Ranj Sangawi argues:

> *We can give a positive role to negative things, in order to get more transparency and openness. There are some prejudice issues in religion that I wouldn't like to refer to; instead I will look for pleasant and desirable things. The purpose is not denouncing religion, but to use it as an instrument to obtain more openness. For example, the analysts say that the Meccan suras are often regarded as the more peaceful suras. It is just like a knife, you can use it to kill people; or you can use it to make a nice salad.*

Thus the rise of media power and authority has accompanied the decline in the power and authority of religion in the Kurdish society.

Hallin and Mancini (2004:214) claim that religious confrontation encouraged the use of the press as an instrument for diffusing ideas and organizing civil society. Therefore a strong press tied to interests and perspectives of distinct social groups came to coexist with the commercial press.

Nevertheless, many journalists say that there are "red lines" around issues such as religion. Many people are religious and are not ready to adopt criticism. Journalists believe this is the reason not any one religion has been criticized seriously by the Kurdish media. Brants and McQuail believes that the Dutch had the same characteristics between the beginning of the twentieth century and the mid-1960s: "The Dutch society between the beginning of the twentieth century and the mid-1960s (and notably the first twenty years after the Second World War) was a principal example of 'segmented pluralism,' with social movements, educational and communications systems, voluntary associations and political parties organized vertically (and often cross cutting through social strata) along the lines of religious and ideological cleavages." (1997: 154) Hemen Abdullah described that the people in Kurdistan are either fundamental or secular and journalists have to be in the middle and produce a more balanced coverage. When asked if they have been in the situation where they were offended by extremists, he explained:

It is very difficult for journalists to report critically about religion. We have, for example, a small magazine in Erbil that has been attacked a while ago by extremists in response to publishing a critical article about the prophet. We can guarantee that the same doesn't happen to us. For example Ranj in his show invited two different opinions, Islamic salafists and moderates. We have been informed that Rudaw has been attacked by salafists who were trying to step in and hit the moderates. At the end, they have been detained and prohibited by the police to attack us.

It seems that the mind of Rudaw audiences and the public is still not ready for basic criticism of sphere of religion. However, Rudaw pursue a tolerance approach with religion, but in this situation, the media, intentionally or not, challenges the religious norms. For instance, most of the concepts and religious instruction, as soon as they are present in the media, are likely to find new meaning that is different or even contrary to religious principles. In addition, Rudaw does not broadcast with their programs messages that evoke religious hatred and incite violence. Thus the media as a cultural environment have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community (Hjevard, 2006). Thus media seems to have an extensive influence on the external aspects of religion, and by reanalysing them it constructs a new meaning from religious ideas. The meaning that the media, especially radio and television, are trying to reproduce of it may vary, and in some cases, may even challenge the traditional religious ideas.

As a consequence, institutionalized religion plays a less-prominent role in the communication of religious beliefs, and instead the banal religious elements of the media move to the front stage of society's religious imagination (ibid).

5.2 Democracy, media system, and the informed citizens

Freedom of expression and information, including the right to seek, receive, and disseminate information, is a fundamental right of individuals and an essential component of democracy. As argued in the second chapter, through circulation of information and rational debate, individuals may become enlightened and rational autonomous creatures who are able to participate in the democratic process. As Schudson (1998) argues, the ideal of the informed citizen arose as part of an attack on the power of political parties. The realization of democracy, therefore, is a process that starts from inside public knowledge to outside democratic institutions and lead to a vital change in the power institutions.

Thus, the mass media constitute the most important source of information and aiding the public in making informed choices such as the position of parties on key political issues and whom to vote for. It is hard to have responsible, participating, and self-governing individuals without a media system that provides citizens with a wide range of information on important issues.

According to most participants, reliable and useful information that "serves the public" is their priority. Jesper Strömbäck (2008:247) argues, "The democratic value of freedom of the press resides in the media's capacity," therefore media are supposed to provide a system which there is a flow of information from the government to the public and from the public to the government. Adnan Osman believes that

> *despite the fact that political parties have controlled most of media in Kurdistan, but developing free and private media to a limited extent gained freedom from state control. This has its impact on creating a more open society, and developing democracy.*

In this respect, Peter J. Anderson (2007, p. 65) claims that, "high-quality, independent news journalism which provides accurate and thoughtful information and analysis about current events is crucial to the creation of an enlightened citizenry that is able to participate meaningfully in society and politics." Osman believes that free and

private media, in the last few years, have tried to create well-informed citizenry. The Kurdish journalists' responsibilities include, according to him,

> *Updating people with objective information and news, interpreting political and social issues and discussing them in order to form public opinion. And this has surely a vital impact on executive, legislative and juridical power.*

Journalists and other media agents are inclined to see and present themselves as a different power versus political parties or the government. In this respect, they watch over political parties and elites on behalf of citizens and become the principal source of information about politics and society. However, political actors need the media for news about society and to communicate with the public and the voters. Hiwa Jamal, who in his daily show discusses different issues with political actors, explains the mutual dependency of media and political actors and claims:

> *Rudaw is a new media, but it has successfully become a reliable source of information for citizens. I think Rudaw was effective in the strengthening of professional values in journalism. Thus it is important for political actors how the media covers them. During the interviews, they are nervous, uneasy; therefore they are preparing themselves well for interviews. For example, Nechirvan Barzani, prime mister of Kurdish regional government, in an interview I had with him, told me that he knew how hard the questions would be therefore he prepared himself well for the interview. At the same time, because of the information that we are distributing, citizens are now well informed and also more involved in politics without fear.*

Hemen Abdullah also asserts the role of Rudaw in spreading a professional journalistic culture to enlighten individuals.

> *Rudaw was able to consolidate its position as the most influential media network. It has obviously been moving towards a model of journalism that informs people and debates are central to influence the citizens. This model*

has impact on individual enlightenment. In addition to other media competitors such as NRT, which lately closes in order to modernize and professionalize its TV channel.

In the study of how female and male journalists see themselves and their roles, Margareta Melin-Higgins (1996) presents four journalist approaches, which creates two dimensions.

The first ideal is "the bloodhound" the same that ideal in which this research uses the "watchdog" term. The bloodhound chooses to become a journalist to illuminate unsatisfactory conditions in society, and its job is to investigate wrongdoing and criticize elites (Melin-Higgins 1996: 102).

Another ideal is "the Educator," expressing the fact that many journalists choose their profession to express themselves or to influence others, and thinking journalists should give their audience new experiences through explaining events easily (ibid.). *"Although showing concern, the Educator is quite distant from her audience. She is altruistic and patronising at the same time. Teachers and advocates have been used to illustrate this ideal"* (ibid.).

The third ideal is "the Craftsman" who chooses journalism from a desire to disseminate news and believes journalists should be neutral reporters and reflect events and opinions in society (ibid.).

The fourth ideal is "the spokesperson," which means being a spokesman or spokeswoman and a conduit of an opinion. Journalists want to influence their audience, but listen often to their superiors and political actors (Melin-Higgins 1996: 103).

I believe that Rudaw and other media houses such as NRT and Hawlati have played an educational and informational role. The significant increase in educational, economic, and social standards, which can permit the broader parts of the population to be included and aware of mainstream media, have influenced the level of information in the public. They have become the primary medium through which people gain knowledge, and they try to reduce the knowledge gap between groups that other institutions and NGOs cannot breach. For example, media has started to

inform people about the law, citizenry, social rights, corruption, gender, and so forth. Here are some examples in this regard.

> *We are acquainting the new generation with media, newspaper and reading. There is a knowledge gap between various groups of society; therefore we are working hard on citizen enlightenment and human rights. I published regularly articles about the universal declarations of human rights to acquaintance Kurdish people with it. (Kamal Rauf)*

> *Our priority is informing society about everything that it does not know and needs to know. Rudaw has many promos to call attention of citizens to the inequalities that exist in society and highlighting more the works of people who really contributed to the improvement of Kurdistan. For example we have promos that focuses on how bad is to beat children, about corruption, bribery and drugs. (Ako Mohammad)*

These were examples of educational journalism, where Rudaw journalists and reporters actively searched for information and distributed it to the audiences. Thus, on the one hand, the journalists try to influence the audiences in different ways, and on the other those journalists who consider themselves to be neutral disseminate and reflect the information without changing its content (ibid.).

5.2.1 Access to the information

Access to state information is widely recognized as a favorable concept of freedom of the press and expression (Youm, 2009). Journalists must have access to credible news source to provide quickly information about decisions and events that took place. Political actors and government officials are considered the sources that have the power to create newsworthy events or statements. Those sources that have more power and authority are more credible than sources with less authority and status (Gans 2003).

Moreover, in order to guarantee the public the right of access to government information, countries such as Sweden in 1776, Norway did so in 1814, the

Netherlands in 1815, Denmark in 1848 (Hallin 2004) were recognized both the right of access to official documents and the freedom of the press.

Zencovich (2008:46) argues that a right of access to information is "to ensure that sources of information can be inspected, and thus contribute to the circulation of more reliable news, as well as to ensure greater transparency in the actions of public figures." He (45) believes that there are two forms of access: physical access to certain places (public buildings, sites of disasters, war zones, etc.) and intellectual access to documents. The Iraqi Kurdistan parliament adopted the law of access to information in mid-2013. Journalists in Kurdistan complained that the newly adopted Access to Information Law simply was not enforced. Rahman Gharib, general coordinator for the Metro Center, told CPJ that "Kurdistan is a region where law is not enforced, courts are not independent."[45]

Nevertheless, the release of government data to public scrutiny has positive effects in countries with low levels of transparency or high levels of corruption.[46] Journalists have relative access to information but less power to influence the direction of their interactions once they do gain access. The opinions of participants show the same attitudes to the issue.

> *We have a law about the media and access to information, but there is lack of law enforcement here. We can freely write and use the information that we are obtaining, but the authorities don't listen to us. For example, in countries like Norway, unfolding a political corruption appears to have terrible consequences for the political party or actors. Recently, media found out that Fuad Mahsum, the Kurdish president of Iraq has hired his daughter in his office. Her monthly salary is about 13 million dinars (70000 kr). Media has debated this issue a lot, but there haven't been any consequences. (Salam Saad)*

---

[45] https://cpj.org/blog/2014/05/mission-journal-the-kurdish-conundrum--more-outlet.php (Read 02.04.15).
[46] http://www.finnish-institute.org.uk/en/articles/861-knowledge-gap-and-the-information-environment-more-informed-citizens-or-a-growing-divide (Read 02.04.15).

Scholars have argued that obtaining political information is often dependent upon political ties that journalists have. Thus, journalists with political ties can easily get information and interview the political actors without obstacles. Moreover, they are going to be included in the official tours. Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that access of journalists to relevant political information is more dependent on their political ties, and it is more likely that political communication will tend to serve the process of negotiation among elites. Zuhair Al-Jezairy, director of the news agency Aswat al-Iraq, told Reporters Without Border: "To get information, you have to develop close relations with the political parties. Politicians refuse to make statements to independent journalists."[47]

Aso Hamid, director of the Speda TV satellite channel's News Department, objected to how independent journalists are treated and how journalists working for party-affiliated media are treated. He contends, "When Massoud Barzani returned from his official trip to Turkey and France in June 2010, only journalists with the media enjoying close ties to the KDP were invited to the press conference. The same holds true when he takes journalists with him on his official visits" (ibid.).

5.2.2 Investigative reporting: the media as a watchdog

As I argued in chapter 2, journalists may have their greatest effect when they act as a public watchdog, reporting scandals and immoral behavior. In the Iraqi Kurdistan case, investigative reporting was more closely tied to the partisanship role of the media, in a sense that media revealed violations and scandals about their opponents. A partisan press that reflected political wars characterized the media in the 1990s. The tradition of the partisan press, which was dominant, still perpetuates, but is more toned down than in the past. Liberal and private newspapers attempt to affirm their political autonomy versus the state, and this began to gain strength. Journalists additionally hold the belief that, without media criticism, their attempts for developing democracy are not as successful. Although investigative reporting in Iraqi Kurdistan is still in the beginning stages, journalists are able to exercise critical

---

[47] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 02.04.15).

surveillance over the activities of the key state institutions or carry out the watchdog function. The newspapers, such as Hawlati and Levin in the 2000s, began to publish more political critiques of the government, and the emerging of the KNN belonging to the Gorran movement, and private media such as Rudaw and NRT, foster a more investigative journalism. As debated in chapter 4, the private media outlets such as NRT and Rudaw have enjoyed a relative degree of political autonomy in relation to the Iraqi Kurdistan government relative to the context of the weak democratization of the region's organizations.

Thus, the rise in the publication of investigative reporting can be seen also as a consequence of a combination of factors, which include decline of party loyalties and increasing journalism autonomy, emergence of opposition parties, growth of economy and market, and desire of journalists for professional criticism.

Margareta Melin-Higgins (1996), in her four journalist approaches, uses the ideal of the bloodhound for journalists that illuminate unsatisfactory conditions in society and investigate wrongdoing and criticize elites (Melin-Higgins 1996: 102).

I found some journalists covering specific investigations. Kamal Rauf mentioned the report that revealed corruption in the budget by the two main political parties (PUK and PDK) and how the scandal had reached abroad. He states:

> *I published an investigative report about the annual budget of the two main political parties. I found out that they have expanded their annual budget to $35 million from the national budget without telling the citizens. After a while, the consulates of Finland, Norway and another European country visited my office and asked about the accuracy of the report. I told them that I have reliable sources, and the story was true.*

Smuggling Islamic State (IS) oil to the global market was another scandal that recently was revealed by Rudaw media. The scandal reached the front pages of the Kurdish and international media. Rudaw published various reports about Kurdish oil traders and politicians smuggling oil from IS in Iraq and Syria into Turkey, Iran,

or the Kurdistan Region itself.[48] Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani declares that "smuggling oil to ISIS is considered high treason" and that his government had "pursued every legal recourse to prevent that" (ibid.). Hemen Abdulla argues that Rudaw has two main investigative programs with sensitive topics and hard-hitting questions (the Ranj Show presented by Ranj Sangawi) and (Rudawi Emro, presented by Hiwa Jamal).

Most participants believe that the investigative reports and revealing do not create public responsibility. Gans (2003) argues that the watchdog might not have an effect on society, because no influential audience is paying attention. If the citizenry is not sufficiently aroused by illegality and corruption, the journalists' message falls on deaf ears. Likewise, Kurdish journalists might expect that the investigative stories influence the public and assume that by public protesting they would respond and validate their reports. Nevertheless, Gans believes that the effectiveness of watchdog stories in stimulating change is limited. "If villains are powerful enough they may escape punishment, and even if they are punished, they may be replaced by new villains" (2003:81).

> *News organizations have persisted in revealing power abuses and governmental wrongdoings, but this does not play a great impact in promoting political change. For example, a month after the scandal of trading oil with Da'esh (Islamic state) broke out; the case was discussed in the Kurdish Parliament and an investigative group has been provided for probing the case. Nevertheless, the revealing does not have political consequences; nobody has been resigned from the government or been arrested. (Salam Saadi)*

This explanation directs our attention to the consequences for watchdog journalism and of seriously questioning the government and development of democracy. In the region such as Kurdistan where news organizations and the state generally have close relations, revealing scandals and corruption may not have serious

---

[48] http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/131120142 (Read 10.04.15).

consequences. In Kurdistan society, where there is skepticism about the trustworthiness of politicians and public officials and where revealing and criticism of government official wrongdoing have become regular in recent years, revelations may have less effect than in situations where political organizations are widely institutionalized, publicly trusted or are expected to obey the law.

However, some scholars such as Gans (2003) argues that watchdog is the journalists' finest opportunity to show that they are working to advance democracy, whether the watchdog effect stems from investigative reporting or is a serendipitous result of legwork for a routine story.

Moreover, I found that there was no clear boundary between the owner and the senior editors of Rudaw. Evidently, Rudaw owner has a complex relationship with the executive managers and newsroom of Rudaw. He can contribute to the expansion of public debate, more transparency, but he can also create constraints to public debate or use Rudaw to promote his own political or commercial interests. These explain why Rudaw mangers are clearly not supporting news media that investigated Rudaw's sponsor (Nechirvan Barzani).

> Researcher: Have you conducted an investigation about whether Prime Mister Nechirvan Barzani had committed a corrupt act?
>
> *Hemen: Do not expect me to go around and try to scrutinize the corruptions of Nechrivan Barzani. In the Middle East nobody pays for the media that reveals his or her own corruption.*
>
> *Ako: We have not made investigations about Nechirvan Barzani. However, we were more courageous than other channels in criticizing him.*

Arguments that support these findings point to the fact that "Watchdogs do not bite their owners" (Waisbord 2000, p.6). Waisbord argues that for different reasons, news organizations may be interested in having relations with different actors. These are political relations that form the relationship of press with states, and markets, and differently affect the act or process of making news as well as the watchdog role of

journalism (ibid.). David Romano claimed that Rudaw had brought to light many cases of corruption and wrongdoing, but "it is quite possible that a real journalist tries to investigate certain topics, he would be stopped or pushed back." He also argues:

> *Journalists in this country, in the United States, who try to find out corruption of the president, would have some obstacles in front of them. It wouldn't be as bad as Kurdistan, but Kurdistan is still in transition to democracy.*

The extensive powers of political actors, and the submissiveness of some journalists and society toward political actors and the government, have hampered investigative journalism. Investigative reports concerning senior political figures, in particular regarding corruption, or reports concerning official wrongdoings, matters of a sexual nature and anything that comments on the family of the PUK and PDK leaders are out of bounds for public discussion. Journalists who have presumed to engage in these areas such as Sardasht Osman and Kawa garmiani have been killed.

Media owners see their media outlets as a tool for helping or protecting their interests. As Waisbord argues, "In countries where the state remained in control of vital resources for press economies rarely were news organizations willing to criticize governments out of fear that such reporting would have damaging political and economic consequences"(2000:*xxi)*. However, most participants admitted to the importance of investigative stories. The Rudaw journalists show their willingness to use the freedom to criticize and scrutinize political actors and government, unlike others who are highly submissive toward government and who generally felt constrained to do so or unable to talk.

5.2.3 Censorship and Self-Censorship

The media have been subject to strict censorship in Kurdistan, and the partisan media are in essence mouthpieces for political parties, suppressing any critical voices. Censorship exerted to the media resulted in a low-qualified media and a low-paid profession. Simultaneously, media outlets desired to maintain good relations with

the political parties, because political parties were the main source of income for the media. As I mentioned in previous chapters, this subordinated relationship in which the parties controlled the media became weak, and journalists have started to become more professional. Farhad Awni, former President of the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS), stated, "The censorship which was prevailing under Saddam Hussein disappeared, paving the way for an era of freedom conducive to the emergence of unlimited media."[49]

Although the first government of Nechirvan Barzani (2006-2009) was responsible for removing the censorship laws imposed on the press, and freedom of the press is further guaranteed in Law no.35 of 2007, state censorship of the media was continually used. The current government of Nechirvan Barzani (2012–2015) has generated wider spaces for criticism and freedom of speech.

While the current Kurdish government officially did not impose verdicts and laws to restrict freedom of expression or receiving and sending information, the outgoing violence against media outlets has led to reporters' fear and awareness to not anger the political actors and parties. Various forms of control included pressure on media and journalists, threating calls to them, and warning newsrooms about lists of the forbidden topics of the day. Many participants feared being censored or imprisoned for futile or unclear reasons, or more obviously for investigating the political figures.

Media and newspapers that have criticized the dominant norms, political figures, and official decisions have been attacked. In 2011, some masked man were setting fire to NRTs headquarters in Suleimania while they were reporting on protest events and clashes between the demonstrators and security forces.

In addition, some of the journalists who dared to criticize political figures and investigate their corruption have lost their lives. In 2008, Soran Mama Hama was killed in the Kirkuk. He had written articles about corruption for the independent Kurdish magazine *Lvin.*[50] In 2010, unidentified gunmen killed Sardasht Osman, a

---

[49] http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf (Read 14.04.15).

[50] Gulf Centre for Human rights. Iraqi Kurdistan: No safe haven for human rights defenders and independent journalists. November 2014, p. 7.

student and contributor to *Awene, Hawlati,* and *Lvin*. Osman had written a satirical poem speculating how different his life would have been if he had been born into an elite family. He was then abducted and later found dead, having been shot in the head (GCHR 2014). In 2013 Kawa Garmyani, a reporter for the weekly *Awene* and editor of Rayal Magazine, was shot and killed in front of his home in Kalar city. He had written several articles about corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan. It had been widely reported in the local media that Garmyani had been threatened by the PUK politburo member Mahmud Sangawi (ibid.).

The participants admitted the presence of the censorship, political suppression, and intimidation they experienced imposed by the social norms and government. Some participants talked about how they were intimidated by various figures.

> *I have been threatened many times for doing my jobs. My mobile is full of messages that bid me to shut my mouth. (Ranj Sangawi)*

> *I used to work in a partisan press before. My program was the first show that critically discussed issues facing our youth today. My show was stopped three times and banned at last. (Shad Mohammad)*

Consequently, journalists are obliged to work in a tough political condition that has gradually led to fear and the promotion of self–censorship among journalists and media outlets. In this regard McQuail (2013) claims that journalists cannot handle extreme insecurity and violence, which result in self-censorship. Thus, journalists' actions and practices have been restricted by self-censorship routines. Waisbord (2000) argues that persistent violence drives journalists to self-censorship. He contends that self-censorship is "the scissors in journalists' heads"; in addition, "it is the first filter, informed by reporters' expectations about what might hit editorial snags or require waging an uphill battle to get published"(2000:203). Thus, self-censorship prevents more things from being written at all. Here, David Romano gives his description of censorship and constraints in Kurdistan:

> *Romano: I've never been told, I can't write something. But, there are limits in every country. In Kurdistan, they are imposed through informal kind of*

constraints, self-censorship (a general sense of what you can and can't write about).

Researcher: What are the main reasons that journalists in Rudaw censor themselves?

Romano: Like journalists everywhere, they are going to assess whether or not they are going to piss off important powers including their editors and threaten their job.

Furthermore, the role that journalists played in the mainstream media, and the ways in which they resisted censorship, is a contested subject. Although self-censorship has been something mandatory for survival, some journalists are irregularly willing to resist it. Waisbord also argues that fears about personal safety and self-censorship to journalists do not completely disappear but gradually diminish (ibid.). The interviews show that some participants bravely resisted intrusion of various actors into their journalistic work and try to have a distinct role in society. Here are two examples of this:

> *In some conditions, we have been asked by the government to be quiet about certain revealing. They told me that they solve the problem, if we don't reveal it to the public.*
>
> *Researcher: Can you tell me which case was it?*
>
> *Yes, why not. The case was about the corruption in a women's safe house that I have personally worked on. However, the place was for survivors of sexual and gender based violence, most of them have been through horrible abuses. After revealing this corruption, safe houses that were owned by non-governmental organization, have been taken control of by the government. (Salam Saad)*
>
> *A while ago, I visited the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in London. I requested to see the director of NUJ….. I told him about my purpose to visit him. "Your organization was dispatched some media experts and academics*

to Kurdistan to write an academic report about private media Kurdistan. In the released report, Hawler post that is a partisan newspaper was considers as the best and most professional newspaper in Iraqi Kurdistan, while Awene newspaper, which is a private and independent media, considered as a non-professional and biased newspaper. (Kamal Rauf)

The media during the last few years has had a conflicting relationship with the government. Although state censorship of media is diminished, as some of research participants rejected the idea that a newsroom had ever been persuaded to change the content of a story that the government intended to censor, but the government intention to censor or to interfere in the news output is still high. Journalists and media organizations do sometimes censor themselves. They can talk about corruption in general terms but not investigate the details.

Nonetheless changes in political, economic, and cultural conditions are generally more concoctive to journalistic investigations. Therefore, some news organizations began to exercise a more powerful role in which they can improve public consciousness and monitor the government's abuses.

5.2.4 The potential of the Internet and other social media

As explained in chapter two, social networks and the Internet play a key role in providing a platform for diverse perspectives and disseminating information about acts of government, the economy, education, health, and essential needs for sustainable development.[51]

Proponents of this approach argue that the new media engaged people more in social life. Time that people spend on the Internet might influence their political confidence, political knowledge, and participation. Thus, according to the "mobilization" theory, the Internet will guide those who have been traditionally marginalized into the political process and thereby enhance democracy (Gibson, Howard, & Ward 2006).

---

[51] Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Civil society groups and NGOs have also found the Internet to be an effective tool for mobilizing the public opinion for protest actions and essential changes. In this regard, Best and Krueger (1990) argue that online communication, first, increases confidence among users, and second, this virtual space via improvement of political sources encourage people toward more participation. If the Internet is able to increase political knowledge to the same extent of political participation, it can play an influential role in mobilizing people to political activities.

Curran also argues the Internet is " a citizen-designed, citizen-controlled online communication network" with the "capacity mobilize the public to challenge the existing political hierarchy's monopoly on powerful communication" (2002:171). Thus, social, economic, and political changes obtained as a result of exerting the power of the Internet foster the process of development and democracy.

But could the Internet be a threat to democracy in Kurdistan? To citizen participation? It is surely not perceived as such. US case law has described the Internet as "the most participatory form of mass speech yet developed" (Zencovich, 2008:100).

The importance of access to the Internet in democratic transitional countries by governments, international organizations, and communication experts has been approved. The Internet and related telecommunications technologies can be considered as national and strategic infrastructure. The establishment of such a strategic infrastructure seems vital for these countries in order for communication to improve economic efficiency, governance, education, health, and quality of life, especially in the marginal areas. According to participants, wider connections within Kurdistan is improving the overall information infrastructure, and thus create positive changes in economic and political development. In addition, it provides greater interactivity and participation in political systems. According to McQuail (2013), the most significant features of Internet journalism are its diversity of form and accessibility, freedom from controls, audiences can easily interact and give their feedback, its non-institutionalized character, and its global reach. Adnan Osman claims:

At the era before the Internet, it was political actors and representatives who spoke instead of individuals, but now they don't need representatives and they can speak directly. Thus people can directly express their ideas.

Thus, the Internet, by making more information available to more people, bridges the gap between political actors and the people. An Oxford survey about the Internet shows that the Internet appeals to those people who think that governments are not responsive to citizens' concerns. Thus the Internet perhaps will help their chances of being heard and have an impact on the political process (Morrison & Coleman 2008:771).

Sheyholislami (2012) in an analysis of sociocultural aspects of the Internet in Kurdistan, argues that the Internet has facilitated a continuous and largely healthy dialogue among the Kurds from various regions.

Romano (2002:139) draws also attention to the importance of the Internet in Kurdistan as "a forum for discussions and arguments on ''forbidden'' subjects. Many of the participants confirmed that the Internet, blogs, and discussion forums provide major benefits including offering democratic participation of citizens. Hiwa Jamal describes the advantages of the Internet and social media in his daily show:

Social media and Facebook are doing for us what coffeehouses did; most coffeehouses provided newspapers and thus news become available in a variety of forms. Internet is a place for interaction and discussion. Facebook is also a facilitator and gives a speed to our jobs. Instead of search for people's question in the streets, people will ask their questions on our Facebook page.

According to this participant, the Internet will create more interesting situations of participation for the public. Blogs, Facebook, and Twitter and some other websites have the ability to build networks and relations among people. Thus, such acts will increase the strengthening of new groups, democratic participation, and perhaps make some political channels that were difficult to penetrate more transparent about their programs.

The presence of the Internet and its capacity to quickly combine text with speech,

image, and video, opening the communications sphere to anyone who wants to make an exposé and its ability to distribute it globally, and the virtually unlimited memory available in the Internet are potentially positive developments of the Internet. All these contribute in developing free flow of information and offer participatory opportunities for dialogue between citizens. As Hiwa Jamal argued, participation of citizens can be used to explore society concerns, debate citizens' problems, and build support networks. Rudaw is also providing a direct platform mechanism for relatively giving better opportunites to citizens. Hemen Abdulla argues that:

> *Rudaw has its own social media policy and strategy. Our social media group is constantly working on social media pages; they receive and evaluate requests and feedbacks, and they have interactions with the users. This has a huge affect on the growth of our audiences over time. It is through social media that I know about the popularity of my program (Top Story). For example during 5 hours my program had 120 thousand viewers.*

There has been a wide increase in the number of Internet sites, blogs, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter. An increasing number of users turn to the Web for quick headlines and breaking news. Rudaw's page on Facebook has around one million "likes." In addition, the Rudaw portal has a blog (Your Rudaw) as a means of "getting around the filtering" and publishes information directly from the public to the public.

Hemin Lihony, editor-in-chief of the online edition of Rudaw News Network, told CPJ that "newspapers could never play the role social media does," adding that 85 percent of Rudaw's Internet audience stems from Facebook and Twitter. "It is changing political parties' stances on almost every issue. Now, before making a statement, politicians would think of the reaction it might cause in social media.[52]"

---

[52] https://cpj.org/reports/2014/04/mountain-of-impunity-looms-over-kurdistan-journali.php (19.04.15).

However, the role of the Kurdish traditional press as a platform for public debate and discussion has not diminished. Television remains as one of the first and most reliable sources in the majority of the region.

Additionally, the Internet has challenged the notions of professionalism and the traditional role of journalism (Josephi 2009). According to participants Newspapers in Kurdistan saw a certain decline in their circulation as a result of development of online media in last few years. Media outlets have lost their monopoly on the dissemination of information; in addition, they have ceased to be a privileged source of information. As McQuail (2013) argues, the Internet encourages a new form of journalism that rejects formal organization and with it any claims to professional status according to the traditional model.

Adnan Osman has evaluated the rise of the Internet and social media:

> *We have to separate between the era before social media and the era after the social media. We used to participate and disseminate information through traditional media and television. Our perception of political events was constructed in context of this type of media. With rising the Internet and social media everybody can get a platform to speak. You can rarely find a young person who doesn't have Facebook or Twitter account. There are active interactions and discussions between online users. This leads to produce immense size of information. At the same time, it challenges the norms and standards of professionalism and objectivity. There are no such standards in Facebook, and no one can control libel or defaming in this abstract world.*

Accordingly, the development of new media in Kurdistan has brought forth a set of challenges beside opportunities. New media developments have led to critical changes to the journalists' work, influencing its quality and professionalism. Harper (2004:272) argues, "Online journalism places far more power in the hands of the user, allowing the user to challenge the traditional role of the publication as the gatekeeper of news and information."

In some cases, citizen journalism outpaces the traditional media. Ako mentions the

leaks of the news about death of Osama bin Laden on Twitter — that how the news of his death was published in Twitter before other more traditional media organizations. Salam Saad, editor in chief of Rudaw newspaper, claims,

> *The challenges that the Internet posed to the newspapers cannot be ignored, it has been very difficult to deal with events, everything is being publicized straightaway in the Internet. Most of the time they are outpaces us.*

According to the participants, the Internet, bloggers, and citizen reporters have challenged the "traditional" journalism in Kurdistan. Their effect is felt on the circulation of Rudaw newspaper. People are now likely to become news distributers and producers. The Internet, where millions interact, will let the people be a presence and form the virtual communities and interact with others who use the Internet, to talk freely about their concerns. Finally, the news and information is available on the Internet sites without the limitations that the other media has.

Other participants believe that the Internet's effects on traditional media are still manageable Ako Mohammad claims that there is low trust in, and reliability of, online news.

> *The Internet journalism has challenged the way that journalists have to work in a formal organization, but again people for accuracy of news relies on reliable and trustworthy news organizations.*

Ranj Sangawi states also that Rudaw has its own portal on the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter, thus people will send their important information and photos to Rudaw so that the information will win credibility and trust among the people. McNair (2011) argues that the emergence of the Internet has provided new opportunities for public participation in political debates, such as blogging and "citizen journalism." Thus, citizen journalists play a vital role in producing media content, but it's unlikely that they would have the capacity and professional dedication to become an accurate source of information. They, finally, depend on the media organizations to disseminate their ideas and information.

Internet technology, with all its different aspects, is considered the best and most unique symbol of modern communications. According to the discussions in this

study about the role of the Internet, it can be argued that the Internet, political development, and democracy are crucial subjects in the democratic transitional countries. Many researchers consider the Internet alongside its characteristics such as pro-interactivity, availability, lack of control, lack of ownership, and censorship avoidance as appropriate for the encouragement of political participation and democracy in the developing regions.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Discussion

Despite the emphasis on the essential role of media in promoting democratic goals, many other factors shape modern democracy, and it is essentially not rational to ignore the context of social and political roles, and without regard to the dynamic forces of society, recapitulate all politics in media. It is obvious that democracy and politics in a broader sense is formed by the interaction of different forces. Nevertheless, the key role of media, especially the new media that enhance public participation in the political sphere, cannot be disregarded. Thus media in different ways, including their coverage of political events, attempts to be a part of political debates.

In this regard, this research has examined the professional notions and attitudes of journalists, highlighting improvements in media performances in addition to indicating the role of journalists in developing democracy and specific conflicts of journalists with societal norms as well as political and economic interests.

The research has focused on the role of media and journalists in Rudaw media in Iraqi Kurdistan partly due to my personal involvement as a journalist in the region as well as the fact that the region is an example of democratic transition in the middle of a conflict hot zone. As McQuail has noted, "Only by knowing how the media themselves operate can we understand how society influences the media and vice versa" (2000: 244).

The research displays the existence of several external and internal factors,

specifically political, economic, cultural, religious, professional attitudes, and organizational structure that together create a complex setting for Kurdish journalists. All these factors have influenced the level of professionalism of journalists, and their efforts in the developing democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan.

My assumption was that Rudaw journalists seem more than the other media are able to challenge the dominant norms and standards and did make contributions to the advancement of democracy in Kurdistan. Journalistic professionalism is used by Rudaw journalists to show their autonomy and objectivity, and their will to empower public participation by enabling more dialogue among groups, and Rudaw voices the concerns of civil society in contrast to other media which are still functioning as supporters to the political parties and give attention to the actions of parties.

The results of this study suggest some major findings. First, participants have a relatively uniform perception about the professional role of Rudaw, however the research found some major political, societal, and religious factors that restrict the autonomy of journalists. It still seems that Rudaw journalists are showing greater potential for the exercise of a more inclusive and public service–oriented role.

Second, journalists are attempting to contribute in different ways, in promoting public participation. The participant role of media is undeniable; some scholars such as Habermas (1989) consider media the most influential form of participation. According to Habermas, participation constitutes the public sphere, thus if media attempts to serve the citizens, the public sphere participation will be more effective, and if media serve the authorities, participation would become propaganda tools.

Third, there seem to be inclusion in Rudaw's public sphere of interests of various segments of society (women and religious, and ethnic minorities), but this still needs to be expanded to involve less privileged sectors.

Fourth, investigative journalism relatively contributed to the advance of democracy, functioning as a protector of the public or as monitor power, in spite of a series of political and economic factors, the submissiveness of some journalists and society toward political actors and the government, have impeded investigative journalism.

Fifth, Internet and interactive media in Rudaw played a major role in public participation; the journalists emphasize how the social media contribute to the shaping of the public opinion, political and social beliefs of audiences. This is based on social and political development in different online interactions (blogs, social networking, and other websites).

The conclusions of this study are consistent with most of the other studies, such as the Waisbord (2000) study on transitional countries in South America, about the influential role of media in developing democracy. It indicates the Rudaw employees to monitor power, express a diversity of opinions, mediate public debate, make citizens informed—in other words, to be a channel for public participation and the dissemination of information.

Democracy presumes an open state in which people are allowed to participate in decision making and are given access to the media and other information networks through which advocacy occurs (McNair 2011:20). The democratization in Kurdistan is still an ongoing process and fragile. Independent broadcasting remains relatively weak. These constraints, familiar to press critics in developed democracies, reflect the influence of political and economic interests.

Removing state interventions will not simply lead to a democratic Kurdish media but rather the media needs to render media institutions more accessible, responsible, and participatory, advance new platforms of access for minorities and less privileged people. It is also to further democratize media discussions and journalistic practices, diminishing prejudices and expanding ethical and professional standards. Furthermore, it is to inform citizens and to guarantee a more responsible role for media in the advancement of a democratic society.

Democracy also presumes an audience sufficiently educated and knowledgeable to make rational and effective use of the information circulating in the public sphere (ibid.). Data from the interviews indicate that Rudaw journalists have gone beyond the role of being just a mirror of society or political tool for active politicians and attempting to embrace public service oriented journalism, which has a positive impact on strengthening of public debate, citizen participation and the formation of

citizenship and democracy. Responses from the participants show that they perceive their role as a mediator of public debate. It seems that Rudaw attempts to be enhanced so as to represent better the needs of various segments of Kurdish society.

The majority of participants perceived themselves to be striving effectively to overcome political, social, and organizational barriers. Adapting journalistic professional norms by Rudaw appears to broaden their professional practices and diminish the influence of the external hardships in which they face. Nevertheless, many journalists are party members (of different parties), while in many western countries it is a normative ideal not to be member of any party, since this may entail less independence.

According to this approach, the findings suggest that journalists, and especially the more senior ones, praise the professional and independent role of Rudaw of fulfilling the democratic mission; other journalists in turn were more critical in terms of their professional perceptions. For example when it comes to ownership Rudaw managers argue that Rudaw has conquered editorial and journalistic independence, while other participants accused the government of Nechirvan Barzani for not having transparent ownership laws and feel the need to foster a change in governmental ownership policy. They consider media ownership concentration of Rudaw as a problem that limits their journalistic roles and recommend diverse ownership that preserves the media from monopolization. This emphasizes the point that indeed, journalists and reporters who do not have a senior position could be viewed as more independent, objective, and distinct in their perceptions, in comparison with senior ones.

However, in terms of news content, participants do not perceive state censorship to play a significant role and are guaranteed free access to information and the freedom to express. Political and legal barriers by the Kurdish government to curb media freedom and public discourse seem to be on the decline. Journalists criticize political actors and claim to reveal scandals, internal conflicts that are a continuous feature of Kurdish political life and generate a political debate. Nevertheless, the study showed that the effectiveness of these stories in stimulating change is limited.

Media and communication technologies are a threat to traditional and totalitarian governments. States and governments are practicing imitative methods for control, governance and supervision their citizens. However, the citizens through media and other types of networks are getting access to information and participate in political decisions. Guaranteeing access of the citizens to the public service is very important. But first, it should be realized that media and new technological opportunities do not offer absolute solutions to deep-rooted problems of democracy in political and social systems of emerging democracies. Despite the significant improvements in concepts of access to the information, participation, and equality that have been achieved in recent years, there are still aspects of having a normative and ideal media, and they have not been fulfilled. Strong interests among those who control the mass media and are inside the government often hinder these ideals.

The study shows that Rudaw journalists are facing difficulties in dealing with political actors as well as cultural and societal norms. Rudaw is still dependent on its owner and official agencies as the main sources of revenue, economic support, and information. Some participants have been very optimistic about privatization of media in Kurdistan and widening of market competition between different private media outlets, whilst others have been pessimistic about the extent of intervention and interest of owners, which drive the media toward becoming a more political tool.

I have thus been critical here of the concentration of Rudaw ownership, which seems to force political and social agendas to comply with the interests of the owner and market laws. Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), owns Rudaw. As a result, although to a lesser extent than before, Rudaw owner and political actors seek to set the agenda of Rudaw and influence the content of news output in order to achieve their interests or silence critical journalists. Rudaw editors and owners relatively interfere in journalist's stories and might try to weaken journalists' status as important cultural and professional agents. They are also rejecting publish information or news by journalists because of their direct political, social, or financial agenda and interests. For example, when it comes to the corruptions of Nechirvan Barzani, Rudaw is not persisted in revealing power abuses by his owner. This unprofessional practice, which is widely common in the local

media, limits the role journalists in Rudaw media.

In addition, other social factors, especially religious and social customs and traditions, are also issues that significantly limit the journalists' professional roles. Participants worried that they are facing problems while raising critique in these areas because of the consequences, as well as the fact that their workplace might be powerless to support them against society or violent reaction by fanatical groups. The physical and verbal assault against critical media threatens most journalists in Kurdistan. Violence against the press has not disappeared, but the situation is better than a decade ago.

The interviews show that most of the participants have been threatened. Some participants recognize this situation and stay quiet on disputable issues in order to avoid physical harm, conflicts, particularly since they realize that they will not be defended by anyone, if they are attacked. Some others persisted in revealing wrongdoing and were ready to deal with consequences. For example, Ranj Sangawi explained in the research, how he stands against school corporal punishment and he has been attacked and kicked by a teacher.

Meanwhile, based on the results of the study, gender differences in Kurdish media are wide. Rudaw has a low compatibility in different dimensions with beliefs, values, laws, and regulations related to the promotion of women to senior or managerial roles. Increasing women's participation and holding managerial positions are considered as the main development agendas, but what is certain is that the strength of traditions, customs, and stereotypes in these countries is difficult to overcome. Media scholars believe that an increase in the number of women in media as managers and in senior positions will lead to change in the media content including less-stereotypical representation of women in media outputs (Shoemaker, Vos, And Reese 2009).

By and large, religious and social customs and traditions remain key problems, although the last few years have seen wider social inclusion and growth in public knowledge. Civil society and NGOs have also become stronger, and the state is slowly stepping up more of a democratic participation role, in spite of the

continuance of the wide corruption of some political actors. Media such as Rudaw have enabled large parts of the Kurdish society and the citizens to disseminate their views and participate in debates. Opposition parties are granted access to Rudaw, and some of Rudaw's journalists and managers are from different parties. Journalists and reporters, who intend to cover class, culture, minorities, and other issues, such as health, religion, and science, are included. This clearly gives the media the responsibility of being the mediators of the democratic process by serving the interests of minorities and encouraging participation and interactivity in general (McQuail 2013).

6.2 Recommendations for future research

The media plays a key role in promoting democracy, but also in hindering democracy to take root. It empowers democracy by enabling more dialogue among groups, monitor power, and become the voice of concerns of civil society. On the other hand the media can be a mouthpiece of the political parties and given privileged attention to the actions of parties. Future research can pay more attention to this dark side of media's role as serving politicians, to better understand requirements that make democracy and free speech work. This includes the further investigation of topics which would be beneficial for developing democracy. As I mentioned in the third chapter, there were some limitations in the structure of the interviews, which involves the lack of female participants. Gender equality history integrated in media's democratic role is still in transition. Despite high extent of gender inequalities in Kurdistan, it has potential to meet the challenges of transition. Thus. more research on media and gender, newsroom culture, and influence of social norms on female journalists are required to understand how gender can work in newsroom. As Steiner (2009) argues, more contextualized historical research on how men and women work, including how maleness and femaleness have been represented in the newsroom, will contribute to attempts to challenge conventional definitions of professionalism, including how gender can work, or be worked against, in the newsroom.

As I mentioned in the First chapter qualitative interview research often depends on the individual judgment of the researcher; and the information presented is more easily influenced by the researcher's personal interpretation. Therefore, future research also is needed to study the content of journalism and its influence to the democratic process. Analysing outputs of political media will be important in order to a better understanding of effects of different media institutions and their consequences for developing democracy.

Furthermore, the future research will also need certainly broaden its scope on the transformation of digital media environments. The rise in popularity of the Internet is playing an important role in setting agenda of the public. McNair (2009) argues that when media organizations adapt the new phenomena such as the Internet, blogging and social networking, the extent to which these new media can improve the performance of the political media as democratic assets remains a key question for scholars in both the political science and media studies fields. Little research has been conducted in Kurdistan about the effect of Web sites, blogs, and social networking sites on the public agenda of important issues. Thus an audience studies will need to discover how media (Rudaw) and to what extent do these media influence audiences in Kurdistan?

Finally, the chosen qualitative research method of this study could be switched into a quantitative method. Therefore, future research must also apply quantitative methods that involve more varied and random participants, as well testing and validating hypotheses about the influential role of media to develop democracy in transitional societies such as Kurdistan.

References:

Allern, S & Pollack, E (eds.) (2012). Scandalous! The Mediated Construction of Political Scandals in Four Nordic Countries. Gøteborg: Nordicom

Anderson, P. (2007). Competing models of journalism and democracy. In P. Anderson & G. Ward (Eds.), The future of journalism in the advanced democracies (pp. 39-49). Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Anderson. C.W. and Michael Schudson (2008). "News Production and Organizations: Professionalism, Objectivity, and Truth Seeking." Handbook of Journalism Studies. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch, eds. New York: Routledge.

Atkinson, Rowland, and John Flint. "Snowball Sampling." In The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods, edited by Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman and Tim Futing Liao, 1044-45. Sage Publications, Inc., 2004. doi: 10.4135/9781412950589.n931.

Baker, C. Edwin (2002) Media, Markets and Democracy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, C.E. (2007). Media concentration and democracy: Why ownership matters? New York: Cambridge University Press.

Barzani, S. (2010). Journalism: A guide to Academic and Responsible Journalism. Erbil: Aras institute.

Berger, G. (2000). 'Grave New World: Democratic Journalism Enters the Global 21st Century'. Journalism Studies 1(1): 81-100.

Beus, De, J. (2011). "Audience Democracy: An Emerging Pattern in Postmodern Political Communication". In Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy: Challenging the Primacy of Politics. Brants, K., & Voltmer, K. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bourdie, P. (2005) "The Political Field, The Social Science Field, and the Journalistic Field." Bourdieu and the journalistic field. Benson, R. Cambridge: Polity.

Brants, Kees and Denis McQuail (1997). "The Netherlands." In Euromedia Research Group, ed., The Media in Western Europe. London: Sage.

Bryman, A. (2012). Social research methods (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Byrne, B. (2012) "Qualitative Interviewing," in Social Research Methods, (3rd ed.) C. Seale, Ed., London, Sage.

Coleman, S. Morrison, D. E. & Svennevig, M. (2008) "New Media and Political Efficacy". International Journal of Communication, 2. 771-791.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five designs. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Curran, J. (2002). Media and power. London: Routledge.

Curran, J. and Seaton, Jean (2010) Power without Responsibility — The Press and

Broadcasting in Britain, London: Routledge, 5–128, 161–173, 209–302, 358–372.

Curran, J. (2011). Media and Democracy. London: Routledge.

Davis, J.J. (1997). Advertising research: Theory and practice. Boston: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Dijk, V. (2009) "News, Discourse, and Ideology". In The Handbook of Journalism Studies. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.) New York: Routledge.

Downing, J. (1984). Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Doyle, G. (2002). Media ownership: The economics and politics of convergence and concentration in the UK and European media. London: Sage.

Eisner, E. W. (1991). The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Eriksen, E., & Fossum, J. (2002). "Democracy through strong publics in the European Union?" Journal for Common Market Studies 40 (3): 401-24.

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. Solid Investments: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, November 1995, p. 4.

Gans, H. (2003). Democracy and the news. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gibson, R., Lusoli, W. & Ward, S. (2005). Online participation in the UK: Testing a 'contextualized' model of Internet effects. British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 7, 561-583.

Green, J. (2005) „Analysing qualitative data", in Green, J. and Browne, J. (Eds) Principles of social research, New York: Open University Press.

Gripsrud, J. Understanding Media Culture. London: Arnold; 2010. Print.

Gurevitch (Eds.), Mass media and society (pp. 243–262). London: Arnold. New York: Routledge.

Habermas, J. (1989) The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hallin, D. C. (1994). We keep America on top of the world: Television journalism and the public sphere.

Hallin, D. (1997). Commercialism and professionalism in the American news media. In J. Curran & M.

Hallin, Daniel C., and Mancini, Paolo (2004) Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hanitzsch, T. (2009) "Comparative Journalism Studies" in Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.). (2009). The handbook of journalism studies. New York: Routledge.

Harper, Ch. (2003) "Journalism in a Digital Age." In Democracy and New Media. Jekins, H. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT.

Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media. New York: Pantheon Books.

Hjarvard, S. (2006). The Mediatization Of Religion: A Theory Of The Media As Agents Of Religious Change. Northern Lights, 1-16.

Jensen, K., & Jankowski, N. (1991). A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research. London: Routledge.

Josephi B. (2009), Journalism Education in Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.). (2009). The handbook of journalism studies. New York: Routledge.

Kierulf, A. (2009). Freedom of speech abridged?: Cultural, legal and philosophical challenges. Göteborg, Sweden: Nordicom.

Krueger, R.A. (1994). Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Krumsvik, A. H. 2011. Medienes privilegier - en innføring i mediepolitikk, Kristiansand, IJ-forlaget.

Kvale, S. (1996). InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kvale, Steinar & Brinkmann, Svend (2013). Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing. London: Sage.

Matos, C. (2008). Journalism and political democracy in Brazil. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

McChesney, R. (1999). Rich media, poor democracy: Communication politics in dubious times. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

McChesney, R. W. (2004). The problem of the media: U.S. communication politics in the 21st century. New York: Monthly Review Press.

McChesney, R.W. (2008). The political economy of media: Enduring issues, emerging dilemmas. New York: Monthly Review Press.

McQuail, D. (1994). Mass communication theory. London: Sage.

McQuail, D. (2000). McQuail's mass communication theory. London: Sage.

McQuail, D. (2005). Mass communication theory. London: Sage.

McQuail, Denis. (2013). Journalism and society. London: Sage.

McNair, B. (2009), Journalism and Democracy. In The handbook of journalism studies. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.) New York: Routledge.

McNair, Brian (2011) An Introduction to Political Communication, London and New York: Routledge.

Melin-Higgins, Margareta (1996): "Bloodhounds or Bloodbitches. Female ideals and Catch 22". I: Kjønn i media. Konferanserapport. Likestillingsrådets publikasjonsserie, nr. 6, Sekretariatet for kvinneforskning. Arbeidsnotat nr. 2/96. Oslo: Likestillingsrådet.

Mohammadi, H., & Mohammadzadeh, J. (2014). The Evaluation of Kurdish Regional Governments Satellite channels. Zrebar, 83, 84, 177-202.

Newman, I., & Benz, C. (1998). Qualitative-quantitative research methodology exploring the interactive continuum. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press.

Pratchett, L. and Lowndes, V., 2004, "Developing democracy in Europe." Council of Europe.

Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2014). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Petaja, U. (2009) What is the Value of Freedom of Speech? In: Kierulf, A. & Rønning, H. (edt.) Freedom of Speech Abridged? Cultural, Legal and Philosophical Challenges. Gothenburgh: Nordicom. Pp: 23-34

Priest, S. (2010) Doing qualitative research. California: Sage Publications Inc.

Randall, D. (2000). The Universal Journalist. London: Pluto Press.

Romano, D.(2002). Moderncommunications technologyin ethnic nationalist hands: The case of the Kurds.Canadian Journal of Political Science, 35(1), 127–149.

Romano, D., & Gurses, M. (2014). Conflict, democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sanders, K. (2002). Ethics &Journalism. London: Sage.

Schudson, Michael (1978) Discovering the News—A Social History of American Newspapers, New York: Basic Books, 3–61, 121–164, 176–194.

Schudson, M. (1998). The good citizen: A history of American civic life. New York: Martin Kessler Books.

Schultz, Julianne. (1998) Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability, and the Media. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sheyholislami, J. (2011). Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shoemaker, P. Vos, T. and Reese, S. (2009). "Journalists as Gatekeepers." In The Handbook of Journalism Studies. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.) New York: Routledge.

Singer, J. B. (2003). 'Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism'. Journalism 4(2): 139 - 163.

Splichal, S., & Sparks, C. (1994). Journalists for the 21st Century. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Steiner, L. (2009) "Gender in the Newsroom". In The Handbook of Journalism Studies. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.) New York: Routledge.

Strömbäck, Jesper (2008): Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics i The International Journal of Press/Politics 2008 13: 228. Kan hentes her: http://hij.sagepub.com/content/13/3/228.

Strömbäck, J. (2010). Mediatization and Perceptions of the Media's Political Influence. Journalism Studies, vol. 12, no 4: 423-439.

Thompson, John B. 2005. The new visibility. Theory, Culture and Society. SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol. 22(6): 31–51

Tuchman, Gaye (1991) "Qualitative methods in the study of news" in the book A Handbook of Qualitative Methodologies for Mass Communication Research London: Routledge

Tuchman, G. (1997). 'Making the News by Doing Work. Routinizing the Unexpected'. In: Berkowitz, D. (Ed.). Social Meaning of News: A Text-Reader. Thousand Oaks: Sage. Pp 173 - 192.

UNESCO (2007). Model curricula for journalism education for developing countries & emerging democracies. Paris: UNESCO.

Waisbord, S. (2000). Watchdog journalism in South America. New York: Columbia University Press.

Waisbord, S. (2009). "Advocacy Journalism in a Global Context". In The handbook of journalism studies. New York: Routledge.

Waisbord, S. (2013). Reinventing professionalism: Journalism and news in global perspective. Cambridge: Polity.

Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin , & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.). (2009). The handbook of journalism studies. New York: Routledge.

Warburton, N. (2009). Free Speech. A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Warren, K. (2001). 'Qualitative Interviewing'. In: Gubrium, J.F and Holstein, J.A. (Ed.). Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method. Pp 83 -101. Thousnad Oaks, CA: Sage.

Watts, N. (2014). Democracy and Self-Determination in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In Conflict, democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Romano, D., & Gurses, M. New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

Weaver, D. (1998). The Global Journalist: News People around the World. Creeskill, N.J: Hampton Press.

Weare, C., (2002). The Internet and democracy: The causal links between technology and politics. International Journal of Public Administration, 25(5), 659-691.

Wiersma, W. (2000). Research methods in education: An introduction. Boston, MA. Allyn and Bacon.

Youm, K. (2009) "Journalism Law and Regulation". In The Handbook of Journalism Studies. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin, & Hanitzsch, Thomas (Eds.) New York: Routledge.

Zeno-Zencovich, V. (2008) Freedom of Expression. A Critical and Comparative Analysis. Milton Park: Routledge-Cavendish

Zoonen, L. (1994). Feminist media studies. London: Sage.

NEWSPAPERS AND INTERNET ARTICLES.

Abdulrahman, K. (2007, December 4). Retrieved February 5, 2015, from
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7094973.stm

Assyrian people. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_people

Association of Norwegian Editors. (2011, June 14). Retrieved April 30, 2015, from
http://www.nored.no/Association-of-Norwegian-Editors

Between Freedom and aBuses: The media Paradox in iraqi Kurdistan. (2010, November 1).
Retrieved February 5, 2015, from
http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf

Chaldean Christians. (n.d.). Retrieved from
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaldean_Christians

Choman Hardi Promotes Gender Awareness in Kurdish Media. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25,
2015, from http://auis.edu.iq/node/1489

Chomani, K. (2012, June 4). Nechirvan Barzani's association with media corruption ... the
Rudaw Company as an example. Retrieved February 5, 2015, from
http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/nechirvan-barzanis-association-media-corruption-
rudaw-company-as-example/

Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press. (2013, July 1). Retrieved February 9, 2015, from
http://presse.no/pfu/etiske-regler/vaer-varsom-plakaten/vvpl-engelsk/

Competitive Intelligence. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2015, from
http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/rudaw.net

First Kurds arrested for smuggling ISIS oil. (2014, November 13). Retrieved April 10, 2015,
from http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/131120142

Human rights report for 2014. (2015, March 29). Retrieved April 4, 2015, from
http://ihrckr.org/?p=1256

Iraqi Kurdistan: Free Speech Under Attack. (2013, February 10). Retrieved February 5, 2015,
from http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/09/iraqi-kurdistan-free-speech-under-attack

Iraqi Kurdistan: No safe haven for human rights defenders and independent journalists.
(2014, December 31). Retrieved February 6, 2015, from
http://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/28

JÄNTTI, K. (2014, May 1). Knowledge Gap and the Information Environment More
informed citizens or a growing divide? Retrieved April 2, 2015, from
http://assets.finnishinstitute.studiocoucou.com/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTQvMDQvMTUvM
TQvNDUvNTYvMjc1L0tub3dsZWRnZUdhcC5wZGYiXV0/KnowledgeGap.pdf?sha=9de7c
4de

KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IRAQ. (2009, September 16). Retrieved March 12, 2015, from http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4ab399c10.pdf

Moss, O. (2013, September 1). Rudaw: Putting Kurdistan in the spotlight. Retrieved February 6, 2015, from http://www.the-report.net/iraq/kurdistan-region-sep2013/654-media-rudaw-putting-kurdistan-in-the-spotlight

Mahoney, R. (2014, May 27). Mission Journal: The Kurdish conundrum--more outlets but not more 'news' Retrieved April 2, 2015, from https://cpj.org/blog/2014/05/mission-journal-the-kurdish-conundrum--more-outlet.php

Mountain of impunity looms over Kurdistan journalists. (2014, April 22). Retrieved April 19, 2015, from https://cpj.org/reports/2014/04/mountain-of-impunity-looms-over-kurdistan-journali.php

Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation: Statement of Commitments. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2015, from https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kkd/nrk-plakaten-engelsk.pdf

Rudaw - DMA-Media. (2013, October 16). Retrieved May 19, 2015, from http://www.dma-media.com/?s=rudaw

The Government and Men Media. (2015, April 1). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from http://metroo.org/drejaWtar.aspx?NusarID=97&Jmare=146

The Kurdistan Parliament. (2006, November 30). Retrieved March 25, 2015, from http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=160&l=12&a=15057&s=04070000&s=010000

What is Sustainable Development. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/sd.html

Women and Democracy. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2015, from http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/democracy/women.shtml

Women Demand Greater Role in New Kurdistan Government. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/01122013

Yazidi | religious sect. (2015, March 3). Retrieved from http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/652325/Yazidi

APPENDIX I. List of Participants

Ako Mohammad	The Director-General of Rudaw
Hemen Abdulla	Deputy Managing Director of Rudaw
Salam Saad	The Editor in Chief of Rudaw Weekly Newspaper
David Romano	Columnist and Associated Professor at Missouri State University
Ranj Sangawi	With Ranj, Talk Show Host
Shad Muhammad	Member of The Executive Board
Kamal Rauf	The Editor in chief of Hawlati newpaper, and one of the participants of "Chwar Qoli" program in Rudaw
Adnan Osman	Former MP from Gorran Movement and one of the participants of "Chwar Qoli" program in Rudaw
Hiwa Jamal	Presenter of Rudaw's Nightly Interview Program
Majid Salih	Media Advisor of Kurdistan Regional Government's Parliament

APPENDIX 2. List of asked questions

- Can you describe the key ways in which media can seek to influence and intervene in the political process?

- What are the relationship between media decisions and the influence of state, political and commercial entities?

- How and in what ways did Rudaw contribute in developing democracy?

- What will be the role of new media in encouraging participative citizens, engaging wider audiences and transforming politics?

- How do journalists themselves perceive their own role? What are the main roles available within the occupation?

- How does social structure in general influence the shape of the media system? What are the main social-cultural influences?

- What are the consequences of democratic politics and public sphere?

- How do the media (Rudaw) operate in order to obtain and retain professionalism?

- Different countries have different media systems. Does this mean they have different ways of viewing professionalism?

- How sustainable is Rudaw in the context of providing the public with useful, timely and objective information? How well does it serve as a facilitator of public discussion?

- Do you influence the political events through professionalism and objectivity or through partisanship and representativeness?

- Does Rudaw have access to government officials and official documents?

- How can the media exercise and write investigative articles when they have limited access to government officials and official documents?

- Do government monopolies control printing presses or newsprint or broadcast equipment?

- What role can/does Rudaw play in monitoring media freedom, setting high standards, and indirectly or directly training local journalists?

- What are the limits on media content and how are they imposed?

- What are the main reasons that journalists in Rudaw censor themselves?

- How is Rudaw financed? What percentage is funded by advertising and what part of advertising is government-originated?

- Have you conducted an investigation about whether Prime Mister Nechirvan Barzani had committed a corrupt act?

- Who was included in the mainstream media arena?

- Did Rudaw public debate, offering spaces for diverse opinion and opposing views and groups with less privilege?

- What are the main obstacles for female journalists to reach senior roles and directors in Rudaw?

- How and in what ways did Rudaw contribute in developing democracy?

APPENDIX 3. Map of Iraqi Kurdistan

APPENDIX 4. Map of Green (PUK) and Yellow (PDK) Zone