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# Trace and history: an investigation of Kurdish banner-making through contemporary art practice.

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**Trace and History:  
an investigation of Kurdish banner-making  
through contemporary art practice**

By

**Rostam Abdulazeez Hakeem**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## Author's Declaration

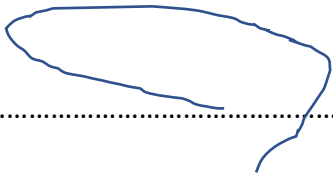
At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee. Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment. This study was financed with the aid of a studentship from the Kurdistan Regional Government. A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included the MARE 700 module. The following external institutions were visited for consultation purposes: Directorate of Martyrdom and Genocide, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq.

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## **Abstract**

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Title: Trace and history: an investigation of Kurdish banner-making through contemporary art practice.

This practice-led research project considers the culture of banner-making in Iraqi Kurdistan. The research is trans-disciplinary in character, combining artistic, historical, and sociological research. The calligraphers' workshops of the city of Sulaymaniyah in Kurdish Iraq are a focal point. Here the backing-boards to banner-making have absorbed traces of slogans written on banners for many different purposes over extended periods of time. The permitted appropriation of these backing-board palimpsests provides material for the development of an innovative genre of abstract painting, deploying calligraphy to embody a coded chronicle of communal life in Kurdistan. Concurrently, interviews with the calligraphers of Sulaymaniyah are undertaken, and these, in conjunction with conventional historical research into Kurdish banner-making, provide important context to the practice. Many first-hand stories of the calligraphers contain powerful socio-political insights, especially regarding the status of martyrdom in the region, and evidence of corruption in martyrdom designation. These insights lead to an invitation to a normally inaccessible archive, research into which prompts a significant shift in theoretical and artistic mode, away from personal expression through the globalised field of abstract painting, toward a socially engaged methodology deployed through an installation in the Archaeological Museum of Sulaymaniyah, in which the creative role is envisaged as means to provide the calligraphers of the city with a collective voice in response to a potent concern.

Contributions to knowledge are made through: the appropriation of distinctive material to develop a specific genre of abstraction; new insights gained through interviews with calligraphers; historical research from photographic archives, and martyrdom archives; through the culminating exhibition, the selection of key stories of calligraphers, combined in radical and provocative form to directly address their own community, with relevance also to the wider region of Kurdistan. Further artistic research interrogating these themes is presented as an exhibition in the UK.

## **Contents**

Acknowledgements	1
Author's Signed Declaration	3
Abstract	5
Glossary of Terms	7
Preface	9
Introduction	15
Chapter 1: Methodology	20
Chapter 2: Painting as Appropriation. Painting as Archaeology	34
Chapter 3: History of banner making in modern Kurdistan	66
Chapter 4: Shaheed Exhibition	151
Chapter 5: Conclusion	199
Appendices	207
Bibliography	241
List of Figures	253





## **Glossary**

Ba'ath: The Iraqi party founded in 1951, as the Arab Socialist Party (the word Ba'ath means Renaissance in Arabic)

ICP: Iraqi Communist Party

IKF: Iraqi Kurdistan Front

IMK: Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (Iraq)

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (also IS Islamic State)

Jash: Kurdish militias who supported by Iraq's governments against the Kurdish political movement. (Kurds called them Jash, meaning 'little donkey', but the Iraqi governments had called them 'Fursan' Knights)

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

PDK: Kurdistan Democratic Party

PKK: Kurdistan Workers' Party

PMC: People's Mobilization Committee

KF: Kurdistan Front



## Preface

As a Kurdish child, the backdrop to my upbringing was the Iraq-Iran war, and later the war fought by Iraq against the Peshmerga, the military forces of Kurdistan. As a family, we had little or no stable life routine, often moving between conflict areas, which forced me to leave school for a year. Sometimes we survived by good fortune. In 1987, having just moved to the village of Surdash, which was under Peshmerga control, the Iraqi army launched a large operation, over the entire day and night of July 18th, to take the village, during which four Peshmerga were killed, two of them a few metres from us. Many Iraqi soldiers were also killed. The Iraqi army then burned the village, and we were forced to escape to the next village and later the city. This was my first direct encounter with Peshmerga corpses that were later declared as martyrs.

Whilst at school in the 1980s, our activities were devoted to Ba'athist party activities, events and celebrations, especially celebrating Saddam as leader, the Ba'ath party itself, and the call for war. As students, we were forced to participate in such events, and special banners were made for us to carry. We felt shame at this, because we suffered from Ba'athist violence towards Kurds, so tried to avoid raising Ba'athist banners as much as we could.

After 1991, the political situation changed, and Kurdish parties took control of Kurdish majority areas. During the uprising that led to the change, the bodies of Ba'athist security and intelligence officers were put on the streets, and I witnessed how they had been beheaded. I began to go to political activities taking place near our home, and for the first time witnessed the activities of the communists (*Shuara*) who flew red banners on which their slogans were written in white.

Most families possessed weapons that gathered from when the region was a battlefield, and as a young man I began to draw such subjects, prohibited during the Ba'ath period. I began to study art at the Institute of Fine Arts in Sulaymaniyah, and based my paintings on personal and family memories from the time of the Ba'athist regime and the war.

During elections to the Kurdistan Parliament, taking place for the first time in the modern history of Iraqi Kurds, there was an intensive competition between parties in the election campaign. This campaign became called *Shara Paro*, meaning 'fighting cloth' due to the large quantity of banners, flags, and cloths used in the campaign.

The political situation deteriorated again due to internal battles between Kurdish parties, resulting in the killing of hundreds of Peshmerga. One of my relatives was killed by the KDP while he was a prisoner, and the party my family supported, the PUK, made black banners for his funeral ceremony, which were placed on his grave outside his family home. They were also placed on the PUK headquarters in Sulaymaniyah, and on the wall of the mosque where the funeral was held. From then onwards, as I went to work, I noticed black banners written for PUK martyrs, and became interested in calligraphy shops where they were made. I was fascinated by the colours that leaked from those banners onto the backing boards used by the calligraphers, especially the white colour that always seemed to dominate the surface.

I became absorbed by the daily accumulation that occurs on the backing boards and how these layers related to successive events in this area. As an artist, I was aware of the aesthetic qualities these marks held, and their potential for use in a language of abstraction, imagining at this point an abstraction vaguely suggestive of the social and political discourses embodied there.

This research project emerged from that dilemma. Eventually I would have to set aside my desire to become a contemporary painter in order to recognise the importance of the layered narratives of the banner-making process, and their messages for my culture, and my sense of identity. Although it was important not to forget their relevance to my own experiences, I also needed to go back into history in order to find out how banners were used in different epochs, and how changes in the socio-political situation affected their appearance.



## **Introduction**

Modern Kurdistan has a complex history which continues to unfold, and a territory which continues to alter, at considerable pace. Kurdistan is broadly defined as those areas with a significant majority of Kurds, and encompasses South East Turkey, Northern Syria, North West Iran, and Northern Iraq, to a total of around 190,000 square kilometres.

The Kurdish peoples continue to dream of an independent state with international recognition, but the division of their territory between the four contiguous nations has had the effect of weakening individual and collective rights. Over the past century they have also endured regular discrimination and oppression, most conspicuously in Iraq in the late twentieth century, when they faced genocide under Saddam Hussein. In Turkey and Iran, Kurdish identity has continually been frustrated by the forbidding of cultural practices and study in the Kurdish mother tongue. When Kurds in Syria finally liberated their area from the more recent threat of ISIS, and ran their region, the Syrian government still did not recognise their authority.

In light of such persecution, and the persistent denial of a national identity, it is hard to compare Kurdish culture with that of nation-states, where documentation and preservation of artefacts, histories and linguistic diversity is habitual. Kurds have few archives of their own, and each of the surrounding states have written Kurdish history and culture according to their own bias, with few Kurdish intellectual and philosophical materials to counter this appropriation.

A more accurate Kurdish history and culture is therefore dependent on more objective Western accounts and archives, whilst the use in this research of Western philosophy as primary reference permits an overarching global perspective to be applied to Kurdish contexts without the interference patterns produced by local Middle Eastern rivalries.



The research is concentrated on the part of Kurdistan in Northern Iraq, which gained autonomous status in 1970, and which was reconfirmed within the Iraqi Republic in 2005 (A more detailed history is contained in Chapter 3).

The practice of calligraphy has been important throughout Kurdistan from ancient times until the present day, both in private correspondence and in public display. The profession of calligrapher is an ancient one, and calligraphers' workshops are established in every town and city, fulfilling the important role of the accurate and elegant writing-up of public announcements of political events, special occasions, ceremonies and obituaries, as well as commercial announcements.

Although the growing use of computer technologies has begun to reduce this practice, banners made in these workshops remain part of everyday life in urban areas of Kurdistan. Produced on the spot and handmade, they have an immediacy and urgency of production. Each calligrapher paints his banners upright, and hence they are first attached to a backing-board (in wood or plastic) mounted on the wall. The colours of the cloth, usually cotton, and of the paint (now usually acrylic) are chosen according to a particular code of meaning, for example, white writing on black as symbolic of sadness or death. The material used for the banner is thin, often of loose weave, so that when the calligraphic stroke is applied, the colour leaks through the cloth onto the backing board, so that the board accumulates a residue of multiple slogans. These overlapping and intermingling layers of coloured text charting everyday life in the city are partly visible, partly obscured, as successive layers accumulate. Over the course of years, before the board needs to be replaced for a new one, long sequences of events, good and bad, catastrophes and celebrations, ideologies and beliefs, goods and services, leave their traces in a colour-dense palimpsest.

Kurdish or Arabic texts (and very occasionally English), in specific and culturally-coded colours, (e.g. one for an announcement of a death, another for a political affiliation) overlay one another on the supporting boards in new combinations and compositions.

This research project centres on the recognition that, whilst precise interpretation is impossible, these complex combinations of text and colour, a form of encryption, contain a rich aggregation of Kurdish social history, and offer the artist-archaeologist a glimpse into his own identity, and the greater identity of Kurdish culture, and of a troubled nation.

**Chapter 1** describes the methodologies of the research project. Certain methodologies were used from the outset, whilst others developed during the research, from both theoretical and practical insights. A key methodology was the interviewing of the calligraphers, as this supplied much of the material for all stages of the practical research.

**Chapter 2** begins with a discussion of my personal history and my early experiences that led to my interest in banner-making and its residues, and how such experience, combined with a growing interest in fine art painting, developed into this research project, and its first expression in a series of paintings, based first upon appropriation, and later on simulation.

**Chapter 3** contains extracts from the calligraphers' interviews, written as a composite history of first-hand knowledge of events received through commissions for banner-making. Whilst this is inevitably subjective, and therefore has, for the purposes of accuracy, been underpinned and contextualised by substantial historical research, it is in fact the highly personal, subjective nature of these records that lies at the heart of the final outcomes in practice.

**Chapter 4** records and discusses the installation in Sulaymaniyah Archaeological Museum that demonstrates the significant shift in my practice that occurs as a consequence of the interviews with calligraphers. The exhibition articulates the transition from an art practice

that prioritises a personal vision influenced by personal history, to a collective vision formed in collaboration with the calligraphers themselves.

**Chapter 5:** covers the presentation of the Shaheed exhibition, and considers critical reception, audience feedback, and personal reflection. It discusses new knowledge produced during the project, in both practice and theory, and in their interrelation. Proposals for future projects provoked by reflection on the exhibition are also discussed.

### **A Note on Language Complexity**

Martin Heidegger maintained that “language is the house of being”, and in such a personal research project, conducted in a second language, usually via translators and proof-readers, linguistic tensions inevitably arose. As the project progressed, my English improved to the point where I realised that many concepts that can be expressed in English do not readily translate into Kurdish, as that language is not sophisticated enough to capture the philosophical concepts required to underpin my methodological and analytical approaches.

This feature of Kurdish was an important consideration for siting the project within a western philosophical context, but adopting that context also allowed me to become familiar with a universal language of research and analysis used in universities across the world. Importantly, it also gave me a new perspective on the various claims and counter-claims made on Kurdish history by the four nation-hosts.

Nevertheless, when researching in Kurdistan, especially when conducting the interviews, I was naturally thinking in Kurdish, whilst also applying theory gained from researching in the UK. This conflict of thought-modes was intensified by the realisation that I would want the research eventually to be published in Kurdistan, and that therefore I would need to

prevent the theoretical contextualisation from become too locked into untranslatable English modes of explanation. Sections of the history chapter are occasionally affected by this concern. Later on, recognising that such a standpoint would likely compromise the quality of thinking portrayed in the text, I decided that if the work is to be published in Kurdistan, it would need to be in Arabic.

## **Chapter 1: Methodology**

### **Outline**

In order to understand whether a painting practice based on traces of Kurdish banner-making can reveal aspects of a socio-political context, I arrived at a methodology involving a combined approach through the following: the collection of physical materials (residues); the collection of related qualitative data in the form of narrative content; reflection upon these sources through both theoretical and historical lenses, and through artistic research, mainly a studio-based painting practice. The activities associated with each method initially occurred in sequence and then became a back-and-forth iterative process.

## **1: Collection of Materials**

The first approach was the task of collecting materials - the residue of the banner making process in my hometown of Sulaymaniyah, in the Kurdish region of Iraq (see Figure 1). At intervals, and over a period of time I collected from calligraphers' workshops their backing-boards, on which the daily act of calligraphy on fabric banners is supported and enacted. I also collected leftover pieces of fabric. I observed the making of the banners on repeated daily visits to the calligraphers' workshops, to ground my project in observation and reflective consideration of calligraphic residues. Without rushing to interpret the results, but instead making process observations, I aimed to open other pathways to understanding the residues, such as: what information might they reveal about the social and political fabric of Kurdistan? The collected residues are key to my artistic process, and a primary source for both developing and addressing my research questions.

I became fascinated by the calligraphers' boards, which I noticed in their workshops, in 2013. The similarity of the surfaces - the residue of the banner making practice - to modernist paintings, was striking. I started to collect and store them as a form of ready-made art material. This moment could be considered as the beginning of my research project.

The collected residues are various; the backing boards, cloth and canvases. These materials were utilised by calligraphers over different lengths of time before coming into my possession, and are a consequence of writing hundreds of banners. These overlapping layers of paint, containing the everyday history of the city and its citizens, remain partly visible and partly coated as the paint seeps through day after day, infiltrating the layers from days gone by. They comprise diverse and specific culturally-coded colours which differ

according to purpose, an aspect that I explore in detail in Chapter 3 as part of my historical research method.

On the supporting boards texts and colours merge to create new forms. Each stage brings new combinations and compositions. When initially looking at the backing boards it is not possible to read the Kurdish text exactly, but the colours make reading of the encrypted data of the events almost possible. In other words, one might say that these residues are effects of some causes: at first one is only able to see the effects, whilst the causes are largely absent.

## **2: Semi-Structured Interviews**

Observation and material-collecting and informal conversations with the calligraphers (research participants) motivated me to enquire further about these banners and to gain an insight into the causes of the residues. I needed to find a strategy to gain greater insights into the calligraphic process and its causal effects, and about the function of the banners in Kurdish society. Hence, I utilised the method of semi-structured interviews:

“Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation, informal and unstructured interviewing in order to allow the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions. The inclusion of open-ended questions and training of interviewers to follow relevant topics that may stray from the interview guide does, however, still provide the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding the topic at hand”. (Cohen D. and Crabtree B. 2006, as cited in Robert Wood Johnson Foundation 2008).

I needed to devise interview questions that would give insights into how the banners are used by people from different strata of society. Some of the questions originated from my own background as someone who had observed the banner-making process for several years and my personal participation in various events that the banners represented since Saddam's era to after the 1991 uprising. Some of the other questions were informed by the frequent debates and discussions I had with the calligraphers, mainly about the process of making the banners. Work in the studio, theoretical readings and tutorials with my supervisors prompted further related questions. While I thought I might anticipate the responses to some of the questions, the value of the semi-structured interview technique is that it was dynamic and fluid, leading to unexpected information.



Banners are a phenomenon used by Kurdish society for different purposes, for example the uses vary between ordinary civilian events, and events organised by political parties or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). I interviewed the calligraphers in order to know who commissioned banners and for what occasions. They might have been commissioned to: announce a family death; attend a demonstration or protest; to mark an historical or religious event; or to celebrate a martyr. These differences became more evident during interviewing the research participants. The responses of the calligraphers to the initial questions in the interviews opened further avenues of enquiry, creating sub-questions as the interviews progressed. The interviews with the calligraphers led to a second set of semi-structured interviews with a new group of research participants – the people who ordered the banners.

Sometimes the interview opportunities happened by coincidence. For example, when I was in a calligrapher's workshop, a group of people came to the shop to place an order for a banner, and I was then and there able to arrange to interview them. I was able through these interviews to obtain data directly from the main banner users at the time of the events for which the banners were needed. In some instances, I interviewed both the calligrapher and end user of the same banner. Various data was drawn from societal occurrences, such as political, social and religious events, and the interviews produced a considerable quantity of material.

In the academic field using people for data collection requires ethical procedure and approval, and understanding the grounds and contexts of the Ethical Approval form submitted to the University was a key research training process.

When I returned to my home city of Sulaymaniyah, I began the interviews systematically, meeting prospective interviewees one day in order to introduce myself and my project and ask for permission to interview the following day. On the day of the interview itself, I used an audio recording device for data recording the interviews, and afterwards I began transcribing the data in Kurdish, and then translated, or had translated, some of them into English. Original Kurdish transcripts of the interviews appear in the Appendix, and will remain in that form for the Arabic version of the document.

I noticed that the most insightful responses to the interviews were ones that took a narrative structure, with references made to the event that the banners had been ordered for. These stories were reflections of both personal experiences of the individual and more broadly of social and political events, revealing the rich layers of Kurdish society. The narratives informed my historical research and were also used as a source for my artistic practice, to scope out a new genre of painting.

One problematic issue revealed through the interviews was the case of the *Shaheed* or martyr, in Iraqi society in general and in Kurdish society in particular. When the interviews were transcribed and translated, I realised there was a problem with the definition of the term *martyr*, because as well as the term meaning both 'martyr' and martyrdom', those martyrs killed as patriots and those killed as traitors are both registered as a martyr in the KRG's records. This latter version contradicts the common idea of a martyr within the Kurdish struggle for their rights. This issue arose as a new subject to explore with the calligraphers and subsequently became a focal for my exhibition in which calligraphers produced banners drawing on examples of previous banners that had referred to Shaheed,

and which became the substance of the installation in Sulaymaniyah museum. The exhibition questioned the word *Shaheed* within its historical context (see Chapter 4).

The potentiality of the interview as a research method is significant because the interview material became a crucial source for both the practice and the historical understanding. The narratives gathered through the interviews are the main subject of the studio practice - transformed into colours and forms to produce new genre of artworks based on language and calligraphy. In parallel, the content obtained from the interviews brought to light the undocumented history of banner-making in Kurdistan, and significantly, was the means to reveal socio-political issues - providing a new perspective for me as an artist to consider Kurdish identity through the residues of banner-making. Thus, one returns to the society through these residues, and search by asking questions and by observing.

### **Method 3: Philosophical, Artistic and Historical Lenses**

Selected philosophical ideas provide a lens for the artistic research, while the work of other artists provides contextualisation. The concept of the palimpsest, developed when considering the backing-boards, provided a useful metaphor for the theoretical investigation. Meaning is not only framed on the surface but is embodied in the material layers and released through contextual understanding.

In the calligraphers' workshops, each layer imposes a further a trace on the others, giving so the object an aspect of Julia Kristeva's *intertextuality*. (The Chicago School of Media Theory, 2003). Derrida's notion of shifting meaning between temporal and spatial contexts (Derrida, J. 1981) is also relevant to an understanding of how meaning may become embodied on the backing-board surfaces. The viewer also plays a key role, in that glimpses of information or significance, accessed through the recognition of certain words in conjunction with certain colours, also has potential to generate new meaning, and in this sense, the project aligns with Umberto Eco's philosophical text *The Open Work* (1989).

The works of several artists were useful reference throughout the project. Certain works of American artist Cy Twombly provided an initial inspiration for paintings incorporating text. Research into the work of Glenn Ligon and Fiona Banner were also useful regarding the generation and deployment of texts on a two-dimensional surface. Although their works vary technically, both use language within the painting process to highlight socio-political issues, and hence are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2; Mona Hatoum was instructive both in terms of her use of text, but more importantly her installation strategies, which are considered in Chapter 4 in relation to the *Shaheed* exhibition. Jeremy Deller proved a potent example when it came to the use of banners in contemporary art.

Ligon was especially influential, for, as Alex Farquharson says of his work,

Ligon treats language as not purely literary, but he seeks to discover a new strategy to show his artistic imagination. For this purpose, Ligon relies on borrowing phrases from literature and other external sources in order to construct layers of linguistic structure. Language is the most important element for most of his artworks. He changes the text structure through the process of accumulation and repetition the text and demolishing the original text and he builds the new relationships between the words and the sentences. This kind of linguistic act on his painting surfaces, certainly leads to a series of interrogations and paradoxes aimed at changing the original material first, and secondly, he is attempts to show his artistic vision concerning social and political issues as well as reality. In his practice, Ligon appropriates from an assortment of sources series of words that he transcribes some of the time verbatim and at different times in a rehashed arrangement.

(Ligon, G., Farquharson, A. and Manacorda, F., 2015: 16).

In Ligon's process the texts sometimes reoccur and become layers upon each other so that the audience are not able to read them, or sometimes a sentence is repeated several times.

According to Manacorda, the Ligon method relates to literature and is based on selection

from a variety of different sources. The language itself as a communication tool is

transformed into a technical configuration through which more meaning is extracted, a

method is derived from the process of selecting the appropriate colour and surface. His

method also relies on the process of repetition in the writing of texts and words in order to

convert the text into one with into multiple meanings, and containing a strong sense of

intertextuality.

For Ligon's, language and residues of language become the main characters in producing an

abstract painting, an approach which helped me formulate the method in which participants

in my interviews have a role in producing my artworks.

Another artist reference for whom text is a major element is Fiona Banner. In an interview

in Banner illuminates the use of texts as a method:

I wasn't articulate about this stuff and I spent much more time writing and trying to circumnavigate some of the problems of the image that way than usually making any work; it was writing as a way of seeing, really. I suppose I was trying to see a way around these things. It wasn't a formal kind of writing and it wasn't public. Then I began making notes on how I could make pictures... notes on what things looked like. Those notes in turn became the pictures. To begin with, I used writing as a way of un-making', getting distance, and then I began building up images and scenarios by using language. Essentially, I began making and un-making with language and then making and un-making language itself (Banner, F. cited in *The Power Plant*, 2007: 3).

According to Banner, writing is a part of instruction and destruction. The words are a method to illustrate violence as she explains: Language is an important element in some of her works, especially the verbal language of war films. She tries to change the image using language as visual form to approach with historical issues and navigate them. Through this kind of methodology, she tries to show her voice and imagination and transforms the existing elements that consist of duration - colour, light into visual language.

Fundamentally I feel I can make a more legitimate picture thusly. Frequently the words get packed to the end of the page when I'm reaching the end of the drawings, mirroring a directness to get the thing completed before the model falls or loses the stance, or the light goes, or on the grounds that... yet formally, words mirror a duration (Banner, F. cited in *The Power Plant*, 2007: 5).

Meaning is not fixed or static in her works, they are always dynamic and changeable, and the artist considers herself a researcher and investigator, as she explains within the interview:

Various works talk to each other, some deliberately challenge others. The work is in flux, I do not think the meaning settles, I do not think it is conclusive, and I do not think it should be. It is investigative and explorative. That is what I mean when I said earlier "you can't fix meaning,"-meaning changes according to all sorts of factors, historical, momentary, ever changing personal references etc. So, this conversation

has been good, because we have been, verbally, in motion (Banner, F. cited in *The Power Plant*, 2007: 21).

According to Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, Banner transcribed war films, and her interpretation of visual action is made into drawings of the letters of the alphabet. Some of her works include letters in neon alongside neon accentuation marks. She transcribed 'Don't look back' in 1999 - the narrative about Bob Dylan - three times from memory, which she characterises in a dialogue with Joanna Pocock as "a more personal project ... about my love of Dylan and how impossible it is to be a fan" (Joanna Pocock, 'From Arsewoman to Unstable: A discussion with Fiona,' ([www.interviewstream.zkm.de](http://www.interviewstream.zkm.de), 2004). Their talk prompts a reference to THE NAM, (1997), Banner's distribution of unedited records of six Vietnam movies. Banner qualifies the large volume as "a tracing rather than a re-presentation". (*The Power Plant*, 2007:32).

Transcription is used by both Ligon and Banner as an essential tool in the artistic process, producing different forms of abstract paintings. Each employ taking texts from diverse sources to reveal new perspectives on racism, war and gender violence. Similarly, transcription plays a part in my artistic research through collecting and transcribing data sourced in the interviews. The narrations expose themes, including social and political issues, which can be transcribed for use in the painting process.

## Historical

Considering the historical context became one of the key approaches within this research project, because through analyzing data from interviews and undertaking a literature review, new knowledge began to emerge that had a strong influence on the trajectory of my research, and on my activity as an artist. The new knowledge in Chapter 3 does not present the fact of history solely, but agrees with Foucault's definition: "archaeology does not seek to reconstitute the 'truth' of history, but show how any period is made up of a series of discourses: it is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object" (cited in Felluga, D. 2011: 140). In this sense, writing about the history of the banner-making is not just the recording of historical information but it is an attempt to understand how the banners played their role in any period of the Kurdish socio-political history.

Writing the history of banner-making is an important act for the Kurdish people because the Kurds, as a nation, have no independent status to build institutions for writing and archiving their history. An historical approach is necessary to find overlooked aspects of Kurdish identity, and this is illuminated by the phenomenon of banners. Through exploring the history of banner-making through the testimonies of the calligraphers themselves, a different view of history becomes possible. The calligraphers' stories are discourses from different periods, combining as a form of collective voice reflecting on key socio-political issues.



#### **Method 4: Artistic Research**

This was the central research method for the project, identifying appropriate subjects, provoking new modes of inquiry, and expanding the domain of research. It is also the method through which the relevance of the project as a whole is made manifest.

My artistic research methodology involved constant reflection on the intentions behind the production of artworks, and their likely consequences, including issues of appropriation and originality, and of audience reception. Detailed application of the methodology will be discussed in Chapter 4 when I record and discuss the culminating Shaheed (Martyrdom) exhibition, and in the next chapter when I provide a commentary on my painting practice.



## **Chapter 2: Painting as Appropriation. Painting as Archaeology.**

“My good Adso,” my master said, “during our whole journey I have been teaching you to recognise the evidence through which the world speaks to us like a great book.”

Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, Bompiani, 1980

In this chapter I outline the initial methodology adopted for my studio painting practice, and the progress of the paintings from appropriation mode to mimicry mode, following further research in the calligraphers’ workshops in Sulaymaniyah. At this stage I was reading widely, and multiple theories and questionings were beginning to affect my approaches. For this reason, I have sought to preserve a broadly linear, chronological structure in this chapter rather than over-formalise the interrelationship of theory and practice.

As I partly recounted in the Preface, my childhood in Sulaymaniyah city, living close to calligraphers’ workshops, meant I had daily eye-contact with the banners produced in their workshops, and I recognised these banners as important to social interaction. However, as a Kurd, I had complex feelings toward the use of banners. During the Iraq-Iran war, and the first Gulf War, the Ba’athist regime forced schools to protest against Iran and the US, and school administrators were provided with banners to this effect, making students wave banners in protests and marches. When I was in high school, Ali Hassan al-Majid, also known as Chemical Ali, visited Sulaymaniyah to open an art project, and our school (Rojhalat) made banners for that occasion, and forced students to take them to the art project site. That same year, 1988, Chemical Ali used chemical bombs in Halabja to kill thousands of Kurds in the operation known as Anfal, and thus I was deeply ashamed to have been a part of Ba’athist events.

After 1991 banners became an important medium for party propaganda, and consequently huge numbers of banners, in various colours and sizes, were displayed in public places.

During the civil war between Kurdish parties (1994-1998) black banners were made almost every day for martyrs who died for their political beliefs, and on my way to work I encountered these every day. This memory continues to have an important influence on my artistic outlook.

At the time, I was interested to understand the role banners play in the sharing of news and propaganda within Kurdish society, and how their colours symbolically divided Kurdish society into groups. I also noticed how the text of each banner left its traces, like a palimpsest, on the calligraphers' backing-boards, and how this palimpsest offered itself as a metaphor for collective memory. The similarity of such surfaces to modernist paintings was striking. The decision to collect these complex surfaces, whilst also observing the methods and skills of the calligraphers, became a key strategy in my developing research.

The process of painting in the Plymouth studio began at the time I was reading the news about Sulaymaniyah on Kurdish websites reporting on recently begun battles between ISIS and Peshmergo forces, and the accidental slaying and kidnapping of the Yazidis. I began transcribing extracts of such news onto banners, using, as closely as I could, the same method and style of banner script as the calligraphers themselves use, and simulating their materials. I used one piece of cloth to write on, using thin fabric so that the colour easily soaked through allowing the script traces to accumulate on the MDF board I had installed behind it.



Figure 1: Backing boards collected from various calligraphers' workshops. 2011, Sabunkaran, Sulaymaniyah (Photograph Sheelan Hakeem).

An initial question was whether to allow theoretical research to lead, and have the painting respond to this, or to begin painting and allow that to become the dynamo for the production of written reflection and theoretical inquiry. After consulting Sullivan's thoughts on artistic research, I decided that the painting process should lead<sup>1</sup>. As the layering process gained traction, a clear connection with the concept of palimpsest developed. The term 'palimpsest' was used by the Greeks, to describe animal skin (that would later be called 'vellum') on which writings are made and later erased (often by the act of scraping) in order to prepare the surface for new writing. Because the erasure cannot be total, an intersection or interference of various layers of writing accumulates.

The idea of palimpsest was used as a metaphor in the field of psychology by Sigmund Freud. In his *A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad* of 1925 he develops this metaphor by imagining a piece of paper placed on a waxed area for children to write on. When the writing is made onto the paper it is visible, but when the paper is removed, the writing disappears, leaving mere traces on the waxed area. Freud relates this process to the human psyche, and he

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<sup>1</sup> "By the latter half of the 20th century, the process of making and understanding visual images had taken a linguistic turn. Influenced by postmodern theories of interpretation, artworks were seen as texts whose meaning was shaped in part by their contexts and genres, as the prior knowledge the viewer brought to the artistic encounter". (Sullivan, G. 2010: 18).

According to Sullivan, Donald Schön's idea, "Knowing-in action", "reflection-in action" and "reflection-on-art practice," tells us that "effective practitioners have the capacity to bring implicit and tacit understandings to a problem at hand and these intuitive capacities interact with existing systems of knowledge to yield critical new insights". (Sullivan, G. 2010: 67).

"The artist is the key figure in the creation of new insights and awareness that has the potential to change the way we see and think. The studio experience is a form of intellectual and imaginative inquiry, and the studio is a site where research can be undertaken that is sufficiently robust to yield knowledge and understanding that is individually situated and socially and culturally relevant". (Sullivan, G. 2010: 70).

"First, practice-based research needs access to experience in all its variety... Second, the role of practice-based research in the wider artistic and scientific community demands that it, in a self-reflective and self-critical way, is aware of its own grounds and possibilities... Furthermore, practice-based research has to take into account the possibility that has a wider than academic effects, even when theoretical, practice-based research in the arts has an effect on future artistic experience, be it individual or collective... that experience is hermeneutical through and through raises not only questions of validity for the interpretation, but also for recognizing that interpretation are not final, that experience has no end or ground and that, therefore, constant criticism is the only way to go forward". (Hannula, M., Suoranta J. and Vadén, T. 2005: 42-44).

views the waxed area as a metaphor for the human unconscious. Through the process of my paintings, I considered Freud's idea of this remnant collective memory, and extended it through the ideas of Jung to explore notions of the collective unconscious. This latter extension was eventually rejected as being too speculative, but the boards collected from the calligraphy workshops, bearing the thoughts and emotions of a range of people, accumulated daily on top of one other, might withstand scrutiny as an oblique form of collective memory.

This research led me to Julia Kristeva's ideas on intertextuality (Orr, M. 2003), as I considered that this type of meaning may be available within the text remnants, as each layer is 'in contact' with the previous one. The incidents resemble a chain in which one link joins to another, and thus an incident of today is associated with one from yesterday, or from the previous month and so on. Intertextuality applies more directly to literary fields, but due to the nature of my subject matter – the everyday 'performance' of text - it was clear this relevance could apply to certain specialist types of visual art. Readings of semiology allowed interpretations of the text remnants as forms of symbol, and the 'indexical' definition of Charles Peirce in which the indexical sign is defined as the direct contact of two objects in a cause and effect relation in which the cause would disappear to leave the effect (Nöth, W. 1990).





Figure 2: The beginning of studio experiments. 2014-2015 (Photograph Ala Uzire).



Figure 3: Making banners from layers of texts. 2015 (Photograph Martin Brooks).



At this stage, abstract painters including Cy Twombly, and Raymond Hens were useful examples, as both artists deploy text within the process of painting. Hens collects disposed textual material such as outdated posters, to be re-used in painting, whilst Twombly uses writings from ancient civilisations, especially Greek mythology, as a formative part of his paintings. In parallel, a more practical goal at this juncture was to discover the notational significance of the various colours I was using.

During this painting phase, I returned briefly to Kurdistan to collect data, hold a series of interviews, collect more banner remnants, and further document the process of banner-making by the calligraphers. I started my interviews with people from a wide range of classes of the community, including politicians, religious persons, wage earners, the middle class, and representatives of women's organisations - selecting representative individuals for my interviews, and of course asking them if they would agree to take part in my research. The questions were devised according to the individual's circumstances, the common points being the writing of banners for various occasions, and the colours used by each group.

As the interviews progressed I realised that the calligraphers were a type of medium for all these different classes, and I began to question them more closely. My questions for the calligraphers were specifically: how they became calligraphers; about their clients; the differences between banners made during recent compared to historical periods; and memories from working as calligraphers. Using a semi-structured interview technique new questions would naturally arise from their answers.

I visited calligraphers on a daily basis to become familiar with their working style, and the type of commissions they were receiving, whilst compiling photographic records. I walked in

all areas of the city - not simply areas familiar to me - in order to understand variations in style and methods used.

Each calligrapher paints his banners upright, and hence they are first attached to a backing-board of wood or plastic, mounted on the wall. The colours of the cloth, usually cotton, and of the paint (nowadays acrylic is most widely used) are chosen according to a strict code, for example, white writing on black as symbolic of sadness or death. The material used for the banner is thin, often of loose weave, so that when the calligraphic stroke is applied, the colour leaks through the cloth onto the backing board, so that the board increasingly accumulates residues of multiple slogans. Over the course of years, the sequence of events, good and bad, catastrophes and celebrations, ideologies and beliefs, goods and services, leave their traces in this colour-dense palimpsest.

My research project centres on the recognition that, whilst precise interpretation is impossible, these complex combinations of text and colour, are a form of encryption and contain a rich aggregation of Kurdish social history, offering this artist-archaeologist a glimpse into his own identity, and the greater identity of his culture, and of his troubled nation. The residues of banner-making were integral to the process of producing new paintings. Although the causes of these residues were obscured, or absent, the interviews I had conducted with the original makers could be characterised as a search for the causes - as an excavation of meaning.

Interview:1  
Date: 10/06/2015 at: 10:00 pm  
Name of interviewee: Sarbast Namiq Muhamad (SNM)

Rostam (R): Can you tell me, how did you come be a calligrapher? Who taught you?  
SNM: I became familiar with calligraphy through my teachers at school. I improved through imitation and by using a copy book entitled "Kuras Khat Al Arabi" (Arabic Script Brochure). In this book there were Ba'ath Party mottos of the Qadisiya War. In 1985 I visited Nawzad Jamal who was the owner of the Darul Khat Shop and commenced working as an assistant and there I stayed until 1993.

R: What kind of fabric did you use for the banners?  
SNM: Under Ba'ath rule Sira cloth was usually used to write the banners in any colour. At that time colour held no significance, it was only importance was to make the mottos legible.

R: Which subjects did you write about in that period?  
SNM: Banners were written for ceremonies, for instance when a location was 'cleansed' of Iranians or at the time of the elections, the banners were written. Most of the banners were made of orange or yellow cloth in order to be seen.

R: Who decided on the subject matter, and how did you prepare?  
SNM: Slogans and texts were decided on centrally, according to specific Ba'ath Party departments. I dealt with them just as customers, not as The Ba'ath Party. Directorates and local headmen authorised the banners. The 'Popular' 1 Army Unit sometimes visited and wanted me to write fifty banners, for example four on one topic, maybe five on another, which were then distributed widely. In the elections, especially the local government elections, calligraphers were ordered to write banners. Letters were sent to us from the local government and we were taken there [to local government offices] by Land Cruisers. There, they informed us that we had to comply and we were taken to the halls<sup>2</sup> to write banners, for instance at Goizha School. Then we went to Jamya<sup>3</sup> to get the cloth and we bought the paints and gave the receipts to them.

R: Do you remember any phrases composed at that time?  
SNM: The banners were written like this: "Election Centre 9 Election No. 1267 the voter ....."

R: Which colours were regularly utilized? Were the colours used symbolically? And were the banners written just in Arabic or was Kurdish also used?  
SNM: The banners were written in Arabic and sometimes in Kurdish. Red, blue, black and green paints were used and the texts were 'shadowed'. We were using white and yellow cloths since specific colours for the banners themselves were not imposed but we were usually careful not to make any mistake since people were frightened. Calligraphers generally did as ordered in this work since we had to earn a living. Outside the cities there were calligraphers among the Peshmargah, including the martyr Bekir. They used to write things about the revolution, for instance, leaflets and common slogans like 'Live Bravely if briefly' or 'Long Live the Toilers Group and Revolutionaries'.

<sup>1</sup>Popular' infers a reservist unit only active during the war years  
<sup>2</sup>Election venues, of which one was the Goizha School  
<sup>3</sup>Jamya is a Baath Party organisation

Figure 4: Sample interview. 2015



Figure 5: Omer Salim's calligraphy workshop. 2015 (Photograph Halo Lano).



Figure 6: Appropriating calligraphers' methods of making the banners and gathering traces. 2016. (Photograph Martin Brooks).

The first texts I used in the paintings were purely experimental and without significance, but following the interviews, the texts employed in these processes of mimicry became increasingly loaded, both with information and with emotional engagement. To retain faithfulness of process, it was important that sufficient stories overlaid each other so that the full intention of any one banner could not be fully or, in some cases, even partially deciphered, but instead stories mixed with other stories, all of different colours depending upon purpose and allegiance, in a form of palimpsest.

Rather than a true attempt at analysis and evaluation, this enabled me to find new meanings to harness in my process. Whilst transcribing the interviews, questions of how I might transfer these stories into paintings arose. I realised I could take quotes from the stories and place them as texts into the paintings. To achieve this, I simulated the calligrapher's method, transposing their stories with paint onto new cloth, and repeating this process until a disappearance and demolition of language occurred.

Language plays a significant role on the banners as an initially legible text which accumulates until it becomes illegible trace on the backing boards. The language contained in the stories from the interviews is relatively straightforward. Selecting colours for transcribing the stories is, as with the original commissioned transcription, based on content of the stories, using the colours with the relevant symbolic connotation.





Figure 7: Sampling a different scale of painting with a different background. 2016-2017 (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).



Figure 8: photograph showing the two different works produced from a single process: the banner itself, and its trace that has leached through the fabric onto the backing board. 2016-2017 (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Derrida proposed that meanings are not firmly established, but are different and deferred (i.e. elsewhere, at a given time). He illustrates this with the idea that if we check the dictionary for a word, we establish definition by means of another word, which needs defining, and so on, in a relational dance.

Having encountered Umberto Eco through Derrida, and read Eco's *Open Work* (Eco, U. 1989) I also read his novel, *The Name of the Rose* (2004) and was absorbed by his treatment of remnants as clues for analysing past incidents and unveiling political and social problems.

Although I recognised that the act of borrowing was integral to my process of painting, the texts I chose to use were very different from the subject-matter of the calligraphers, who simply transcribe texts from their clients (e.g. news of those who have died; demonstration slogans; propaganda of political parties; commercial advertisements...) In contrast, realising that their recollections are an important element for forming new perspectives on the cultural discourse of Kurdistan in different epochs, I obtained stories from the calligraphers themselves. Rewriting these stories in the form of layers borrowed from the calligrapher's subject matter and technique as a form of selective re-creation, producing complex new forms and meanings.

To assist in these decisions, I looked closely at Glenn Ligon and British artist Fiona Banner, (*The Bastard Word, The Power Plant*, (The Power Plant (2007), especially Banner's transcription of scripts from films about the Vietnam War, made at different scales onto canvas, so that an abstract product develops from a loaded political source. The process of painting at this point took time to develop and perfect, as the amount of colour leaching through the cloth was insufficient. It took much repeated writing of texts in order to get enough of a trace of colour on the backing boards.

The colour of the text selected depended upon the theme of the stories because in Kurdistan the calligraphers' colours symbolise political parties. Out of the same painting process, two distinct sorts of paintings arise: the accumulated traces of the stories on the backing boards, which I began to understand as a highly specific genre of abstraction; and the accumulated stories on the fabric of banners themselves, which I realised might become an artwork of a different nature.

The works on the backing boards, made from accumulated residues of coloured texts, similar to a palimpsest, were largely illegible. The texts on the fabric banners had some words able to be read, but as the successive stories are superimposed with previous stories any particular story is hard to decipher and thus appropriation remained a key method for the production of the paintings.

In the Middle East, especially in Iraq, it is interesting to note that legal issues such as intellectual property rights in the cultural field are non-existent, whereas in the West there needs to be an awareness of copyright and intellectual property rights when using the materials of others in academia. Any of my own initial concerns regarding the ethics of appropriation were assuaged once I realised such a strategy is now a common methodology in contemporary art, nevertheless, I followed ethical procedure for my use of both the residues obtained from the calligraphers, and the stories from the interviews. Such a procedure is I believe, a necessary moral obligation in academic research<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Artists have occasionally been called out for infringing intellectual property rights, a good example being Damien Hirst's show of 24 spot paintings in Los Angeles 2017, when he was accused of plagiarising the Australian aboriginal tradition of dot painting, handed down for many generations, and especially that of Emily Kngwarreye. Hirst denied having reproduced the style of the Kngwarreye's paintings, but Barbara Weir, an Australian desert artist, insisted when interviewed by ABC that Hirst had appropriated the painting style, without even understanding the culture behind it (Schwartz, O. 2008).





Figure 9: A calligraphy workshop in Nawadar, Sulaymaniyah, 2015, showing the backing board with the accumulated traces from bannermaking. These are ordinarily discarded by the calligrapher when they are deemed too thickly layered with paint to work on top of. (Photograph Halo Lano).



Figure 10: Photograph showing appropriated traces to begin making a new painting. 2016 (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Such considerations are vital for researchers intending to use the materials of others, and for this research project, two different ethical permissions were sought: the first to interview the participants, and to use their eye-witness accounts; the second, a consent letter from the calligraphers enabling me to repurpose their used backing-boards for the making of my own artistic works - I had come to know the calligraphers well, and would not have wished any of them to feel they were being exploited.

A consent letter was provided and signed by the calligraphers to confirm that they understood that these materials were not going to be exploited for commercial purposes. This moment of artistic appropriation tallied with the positive Marxist definition of appropriation: producing new understanding through appropriating materials that have not been produced for consumption. To cite Evans:

while for Marx appropriation was simply the form in which exploitation took place, because capital appropriated alienated labour, and dispossessing the workers from their own appropriation of the product of their labour, artistic appropriation...became a legitimate and necessary method: a kind of self-defence. That which Marx believed should be abolished, in order to achieve 'real appropriation', was now one of the inevitable preconditions that could at least be artistically appropriated (Evans, D. 2009: 215-216).

In the studio, I began with the actual sections of backing-boards from the calligraphers' workshops in Sulaymaniyah, obtained, as previously noted, by explaining the subject and purpose of my research and requesting the use of their old backing-boards. It is also important to state that these boards I obtained from the calligraphers' workshops had no commercial value, and as they inevitably become too thick with paint accumulation to be workable, they are normally thrown away. In this sense certainly, exploitation was avoided, but I also hoped the calligraphers might gain insights into the importance of their role as banner-makers. (In the end, as Chapter 4 will make clear, I decided to address this and give

the calligraphers an authentic voice through my practice).

Appropriation strategies are now common in contemporary art, where appropriation is viewed as “the intentional act of the artist in which they make use of pre-existing objects and methods of others in order to produce new works of art with new meanings”(Schwartz, O. 2008). In the academic field however, it is essential to be aware of stricter ethical principles, including respect for privacy and autonomy, attribution, and respect for intellectual property (2008). This strategy dates back to the early 20th century.

Cubism was among the first artist movements to involve appropriated materials in painting, as can be seen in the work of Juan Gris and Georges Braque. Images were collaged from magazines and newspapers and having been removed from their original context contributed to new meanings. A more radical appropriation strategy was introduced by Marcel Duchamp’s landmark ready-made work *Urinal*, which shocked audiences not so much for its subject matter, but because it was a pre-existing object taken out of its original context, placed in a gallery setting, and signed as an artwork (though even this did not belong to the artist).

Duchamp's intention, to liberate art from the traditions of the handcrafted artefact towards thought phenomena, has had a remarkable effect on our perception of art today; contemporary art tends to be interested in revealing cultural and political issues such that art is not only aesthetic, but rather, it raises issues (Meireles, C. 1970. *Insertions in Ideological Circuits*, as cited in Evans, D. 2009: 51).





Figure 11: Building up layers of text to obtain traces. 2017 (Photograph Ala Uzire).



Figure 12: Stories over stories - using diverse colours and fonts resulting in fragments of traces. 2017 (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Half a century later, appropriation was extensively employed by the Pop Art movement. Everyday images were taken from popular culture and re-used in reproduction, juxtaposition, and repetition, the ultimate exponent being Andy Warhol. Another American artist Robert Rauschenberg, would take non-traditional materials, specifically photographic imagery and objects, and attach them to his paintings to generate a new dialogue around appropriation and painting. As Douglas Crimp in his essay *On the Museum's Ruins* put it:

I suggested that Robert Rauschenberg's works of the early 1960s threatened the museum's order of discourse. The vast array of objects that the museum had always attempted to systematise now reinvaded the institution as pure heterogeneity. What struck me as crucial was these works' destruction of the guarded autonomy of modernist painting through the introduction of photography onto the surface of the canvas. This move was important not only because it spelled the extinction of the production mode but also because it questioned all the claims to authenticity according to which the museum determined its body of objects and its field of knowledge (2009:134).

Evans usefully applies Duchamp's innovation to the realm of politics:

If Duchamp's intervention was in terms of art (the logic of the phenomenon), it's correct to say that it applied to aesthetics. If it thus announced the freeing of the habitual from the handmade, it's also correct to say that any intervention in this sphere today would necessarily be a political one (Duchamp's collocations having the merit of shifting our perception of art away from artistic objects towards the phenomena of thought; given that the art works being made today tend to be concerned with culture in general rather than art alone). For aesthetics is the basis of art, politics of culture (Evans, D. 2009 P.51).

Authenticity of an artwork became an increasingly complex issue giving rise to myriad debates with the advent of Postmodernism, in which appropriation was a central strategy. Hayley Rowe notes that appropriation denied the notion of "originality" and so freed up the viewer to renegotiate the meaning.

Art theorists have often latched the issue of appropriation onto Roland Barthes' concept of 'the birth of the reader', for as meaning is deconstructed by postmodernist approaches, readers or viewers become producer rather than merely consumer.

Barthes concluded that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (1977, as cited in Irvin, S. 2005). This has had a great influence on linguists and critical theory. The way became clear to deconstruct and reassemble text, and readers are now free to generate their own interpretations. It can therefore be said that literary work is created in two parts: one by the author as an hypothesis structure; and the second by the sensibility of the reader.

With the author out of the way, the reader, or appropriation-artist, finds they have the freedom to discover new interpretations. It is the reader who determines the meaning through his personal interpretation, and that meaning can change from day to day and from reader to reader. As Foucault said: "what difference does it make who is speaking?" (as cited in Irvin, S. 2005).

Barthes' recognition has broader significance for this research project, as my attempts to generate a distinctive abstract voice, evolved into a concern to express multiple voices.

An integral characteristic of my methodology is its trans-disciplinary nature, which benefits from other fields of knowledge. Such an approach common in contemporary art, as Chris





Figure 13: Using stencils of political figures superimposed with political slogans. 2018 (Photograph Ala Uzire).

Dercon, former director of Tate Modern Gallery, suggests:

“Contemporary art is representing a cultural space where many different disciplines feel suddenly at home. Whether they be imitated, taken seriously or not, contemporary art is welcoming pseudo-sociology, pseudo-urbanism, pseudo-research and pseudo-activism.”

(Dercon, C. as cited in Art Basel 2015).

There was a pronounced historical and even archaeological aspect to the methodology, because the subjects and objects I researched had the characteristic feature of obliquely storing a history of the events. Interviewing a variety of people about the past, combined with recovering the memory of the calligraphers who had written the past (albeit in an unpreserved form), was a key strategy to this methodology.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault offers a distinctive opinion about history and history-recording - differentiating himself from other historians. Foucault as sociologist, philosopher and archaeologist probes and searches, perusing the past to form new understandings.

Archaeology is also a significant term for the analyses of Sigmund Freud despite working predominantly in the field of psychoanalysis. In some form, Freud depends upon the past for understanding and treating psychological ‘disease’, using an archaeological metaphor of mind.

A useful reference in this respect was the project *The Way of the Shovel* (Roelstraete, D. 2009 e-flux.com) curated by Dieter Roelstraete, in which he considers the contemporary artist as archaeologist, scanning the pages of past methods of the other knowledge-fields for producing an artistic work.





Figure 14: Building up layers of text to obtain a body of traces. 2018 (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).



Figure 15: Building up layers of text to obtain a body of traces. 2018 (Photograph Ala Uzire).

The theory behind the readymade was explained in an anonymous editorial published in the May 1917 issue of avant-garde magazine *The Blind Man* run by Duchamp and two friends: “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, and placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object” (Tate. Org, Art Term: Readymade 2019).

The process of writing banners neatly fits Peirce’s definition of ‘indexical sign’ as in opposition to symbols and icons as a category comprising not only natural, but also many conventional signs. A sign vehicle is an index if it is “really affected” (Peirce, C. 2.248 as cited in Nöth, W. 1990: 113) by it as referential object. “The index is physically connected with its object; they make an organic pair, but the interpreting mind has nothing to do with this connection, except remarking it, after it is established” (§ 2.299 as cited in Nöth, W. 1990: 113).

What I gleaned from Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* is how the writer, artist, or author, may work by means of a special method. My role of a detective in this project (like William in the novel) allowed me to reach a position that I could not have previously imagined. The events I address are in the margins of history, with few ways to lead us back to them. Here the function of the research project is to lead to invisible areas, and re-show them in a new light, in order to provide new insight.

Re-enactment is but one strategy considered by Roelstraete, D. (2009) in his reflection on artists who investigate historical events via archives and other available historical materials. Roelstraete suggests an artistic research methodology which helps bring past events back to life, as a kind of reconstruction and mending of memory, and in particular to prevent forgetfulness:

Our culture’s quasi-pathological systemic infatuation with both the New and the Now ‘youth’ has effectively made forgetting and forgetfulness into one of the central features of our contemporary condition, and the teaching of history in schools around the globalised world has suffered accordingly (Roelstraete, D. 2009).

In an analysis of Foucault's archaeology, Barry Smart (2002) found that:

the object of archaeological analysis is then: a description of the archive, literally what may be spoken of in discourse; what statements survive, disappear, get re-used, repressed or censured; which terms are recognised as valid, questionable, invalid; what relations exist between 'the system of present statements' and those of the past, or between the discourses of 'native' and foreign cultures; and what individuals, groups, or classes have access to particular kinds of discourse [2] (Foucault as cited in Smart, B. 2002: 48).

Foucault also found that:

The archive of a society, a culture, or a civilisation cannot be described exhaustively: or even, no doubt, the archive of a whole period. On the other hand, it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say-and to itself, the object of our discourse-its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance. The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence, it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions, levels... (Foucault, M. *Archaeology of Knowledge*:130 as cited in Enwezor, O. 2008: 16).

In the article "Michel Foucault and Archaeology" (Willette, J. 2014), provides us with a number of important aspects of Foucault's archaeological method which he used as a new way of historical approach. In other words, the archaeologist studies not so much the object itself, but how the object was constructed out of discourse. The mechanics of discursive formation, as it were, and how the discourse was created had to be studied without being concerned about what "truth" content the discourse might or might not contain. This was an intellectual move that re-directed the way in which historians treat documents, meaning that if what was analysed was the mechanisms of creating a discursive object, then the intellectual would be "disengaged" and critique would be re-located to mechanics and away from effects (Foucault as cited in Willette, J. 2014).





Figure 16: A original backing board salvaged from a calligrapher's workshop. 2011 (Photograph Sherko Aziz).

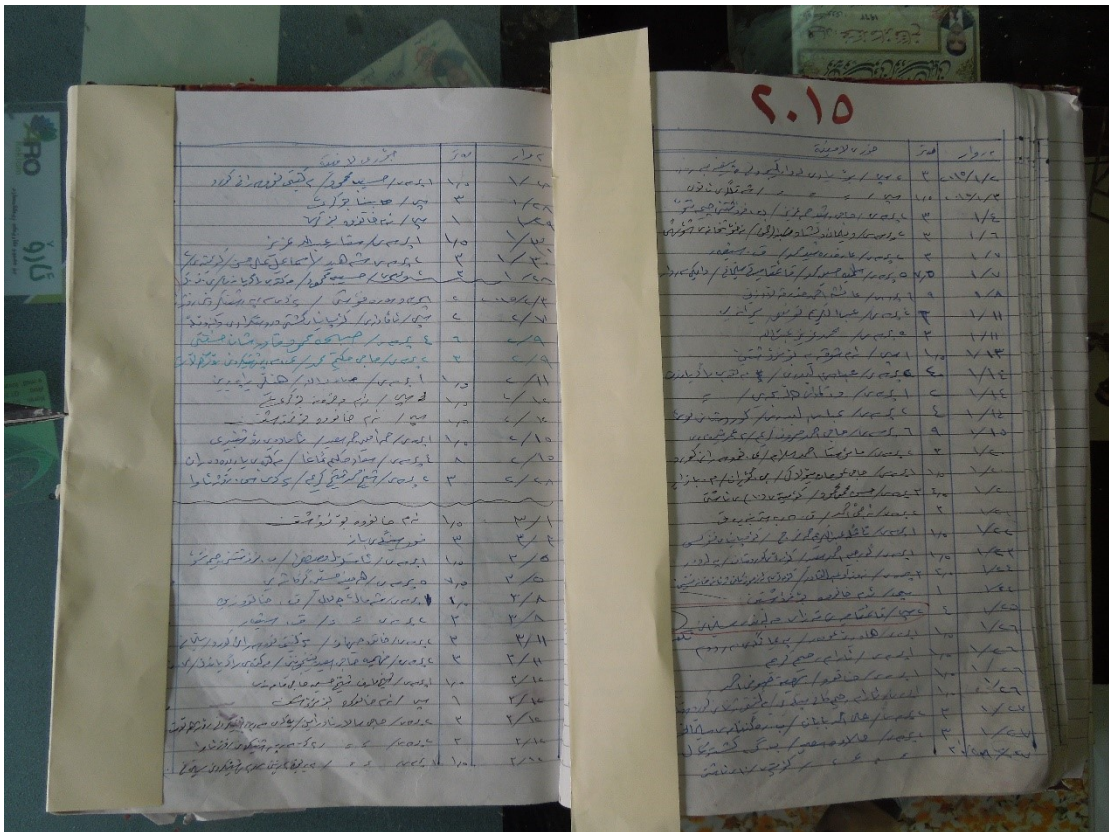


Figure 17: A calligrapher's order book showing dates and details for commissions. Jwankar, Sulaymaniyah calligraphy workshop. 2015 (Photograph Sdiq Abdula).

Foucault remained important throughout to my project, because as philosopher he continually returns to history. Historian Roy Porter points out:

By digging through history, engaging in what he called archaeology of knowledge, Foucault questions fundamental assumptions about modern experiences; assumptions that form the basis of the distinction between good and bad, sanity and madness, normality and sexual deviancy (Porter, R. as cited in Open Culture, 2013).

Foucault rejects the idea that returning to history is nostalgia, he maintains that through investigating history he can analyse the phenomenon of the modern world. History for him is a store of unused ideas.

Porter again:

Foucault is the great explorer of the perverse, Foucault takes the traditional victims of history - the mad, the perverse, the bad, the sinful, the criminal, etc. he doesn't romanticise that - he avoids doing that - but actually shows that within them there is a mirror image of society (Roy, P. as cited in Open Culture 2013).

Similarly, my interrogation of the history of banner-making was intended as an excavation of the past. Research questions, which fed into the interviews, would out of necessity, involve other disciplines and fields of knowledge, including politics, economics, culture and religion. Interviews would often proceed in the way Freud worked on his patients; I attempted through conversation to gain an understanding about the traces on the banners through uncovering the discourses that lay behind them.

I used the semi-structured interview form to be able to visit hidden corners of past and dig in profound places. The interviews proceeded mainly as a questioning of an individual's memories, to refresh their minds - especially in relation to the writing of banners. As writing banners is used in all aspects of Kurdish life, the interviews would gradually move outward to explore wider issues. In most of the interviews with calligraphers, I asked how

and when they learned calligraphy, which took them back to the teaching system at school, and to specific political and economic circumstances. So these are all linked together.

What is important here is that such dealings with personalised history is not only about exploring or documenting them but also how to transform that history to an understanding of our present. Foucault describes this in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*:

Let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorise' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument (Foucault, M. 1972:7 -8).

Through an active digging, Foucault comes to view the past as a crime to be solved and related to the present. An additional relevance of Foucault's vision for my project is his idea that history should be converted into monument.

Finally (and most importantly, perhaps), art and archeology also share a profound understanding—and one might say that they are on account of this almost “naturally” inclined to a Marxist epistemology—of the primacy of the material in all culture, the overwhelming importance of mere “matter” and “stuff” in any attempt to grasp and truly read the cluttered fabric of the world. The archaeologist's commitment is to earth and dirt, hoping that it will one day yield the truth of historical time; the artist's commitment is to the crude facts of his or her working material (no matter how “virtual” or, indeed, immaterial this may be), which is equally resistant to one-dimensional signification and making-sense, equally prone to entropy—yet likewise implicated in a logic of truth-production.

Furthermore, there can also be no archaeology without display - the modern culture of museum display (if not of the museum itself) is as much “produced” by the archaeologist's desire to exhibit his or her findings as it is by the artist's confused desire to communicate his or hers” (Roelstraete, D. 2009).





Figure 18: Large scale painting made from traces, using a variety of socio-political stories as source material. 2018 (Photograph Baz Ahmed).



Figure 19: Detail of the painting. 2018 (Photograph Baz Ahmed).

## Reflection

This chapter charted how my initial research into the workshops of Sulaymaniyah calligraphers led firstly to an appropriation strategy in which the traces of banner-making, imprinted and overlaid onto backing-boards, were removed from their original context and taken to my studio. Some of these boards were cut up and reassembled, others worked over, and others preserved as 'found' or 'ready-made' artworks. By changing the spatial context and usage of the material extracted from the calligraphers' workshops to the studio, the materials were converted into an artwork through what Evans (2009) calls 're-coding':

The general understanding of appropriation art is still influenced by this critical-subversive emphasis today; this even goes as far as the current lexical definition that describes 're-coding' or a 'shift in meaning' which... takes place purely due to the fact that an original image has been appropriated" (214).

The next phase was to turn the calligrapher's method, by way of mimicry, into a new means of generating paintings. Part of the mimicry was to first construct a studio version of the backing-board, which had the effect of producing both new banners and new traces for me to consider in a studio context. Both the pieces of cloth and the backing-boards would generate new artworks.

This process of mimicry was further informed by ongoing interviews with the calligraphers, whose stories became the reference material for the new 'banners' (the pieces of cloth I used). The repeated writing of these banners, in order to overlay the backing-boards many times (to reproduce the palimpsest) offered me a radical new means of image-creation within the realm of contemporary abstraction.



As an unexpected effect, these repeated transcriptions caused me to recognize the inherent importance of the stories themselves. Through ethical procedures and conversations with calligraphers, I had understood and accepted that appropriation of the backing-boards was a valid artistic strategy, one that did not exploit the calligraphers, however, when it came to using their stories, I was not prepared for the feeling of responsibility that accompanied the layering of these often-disturbing accounts that caused their meanings to become illegible. This realization would in part prompt the shift in methodology documented in the next chapter.

In the products of these processes, I recognised overlaps with the Islamic calligraphic tradition, in which portions of text are, through large-scale calligraphy, transformed into linguistic designs for display in mosques and other sacred situations. I knew this reference would appear stronger to Western eyes, as they would be unable to detect the secular nature of the information I was transcribing, but felt that the obliteration of the text would distinguish it from that reference point. For a Kurdish, Arabic, or Middle-Eastern viewer I made use of the passing similarity, in it allowed me to subvert conventional expectations, and provoke interest and curiosity.

I also appreciated that an artist such as Cy Twombly, to whom I looked in the early phases of my studio research, used handwritten (though not calligraphic) text as a component in his layered, gestural paintings, and that artists such as Fiona Banner have made work based upon large amounts of transcribed text.

My practice is intended to provide new understandings about painting in relation to embedded socio-political issues, and the manner in which gradual accumulations of loaded meaning might pass via a form of palimpsest into illegibility, and thereby abstraction. For a Western audience, this illegibility retains a rhythm and colour palette particular to a Kurdish or Arabic context, and hence provokes a culturally-specific curiosity that distinguishes it in intent and visual surface from abstract painting in the Western canon, whilst to a Kurdish eye (or to one who understands Arabic) the abstraction will emit glimpses of potential meaning leaking through the visual suppression.

### **Chapter 3: Banner-Making in The Modern History of The Kurdish People in Kurdistan.**

#### **Introduction:**

In this chapter I consider the development of banner-making in Kurdistan, particularly southern Kurdistan, using the city of Sulaymaniyah as a key example. In order to understand the reasons behind the emergence of banners as a cultural product in Kurdish society, it was necessary to consider them within the context of modern Kurdish history, and to appreciate the role banners played as medium for the transmission of socio-political messages during these historical events.

As a consequence of being colonised and not having an independent state, Kurds have not been able to extensively record their own national history. They also have had no institutions to archive their cultural products. As a result, no definitive history of banner-making in Kurdistan exists, and it was therefore necessary to refer to alternative sources to conceptualise the history of banner-making.

This chapter therefore, uses information gathered from on-site interviews conducted with calligraphers in their workshops, supported by photographic evidence uncovered in research at the British Museum. This chapter also uses information gathered from books, documents, and other archives in order to understand the historical context of banner-making in Kurdistan. Throughout the chapter, the development of banner-making is set against key historical moments (captured largely as footnotes) as each political, religious, economic or social shift impacted upon their development, particularly in the significance of attributes of the banners themselves. At the conclusion of the chapter I record my own contribution, through practice, to the debate.

Banner-making is a common phenomenon in Kurdistan, especially in the city of Sulaymaniyah. Banners are written for diverse reasons, for example, for demonstrations, political party events, national celebrations, memorials, as well as for seminars and cultural activities. One of the most common uses of banners are for burial ceremonies, and when someone dies, the time and place of their funeral and burial is written onto banners and displayed publicly. Black is a symbol of eulogy and condolence.

Banners are mostly written as a way of disseminating news and displayed in public areas so that the largest possible number of people can read them. The banners are in different colours and sizes depending upon the requirements of those who commission them. The font size and colours are also designated according to subject, because within Kurdish society the colours are divided among the political parties - each colour symbolizing a particular party. Black is a symbol of eulogy and condolence. The text fonts are considered as well, thus calligraphers do not write banners spontaneously.

In order to understand the reasons behind the emergence of banners in Kurdish society as a cultural product, it is important to consider them within the context of modern Kurdish history, in particular its political and historical events. Moreover, it is important to know how the banners played their role as a medium for the transmission of socio-political messages within historical events.

## **Sulaymaniyah as centre of Kurdish political demonstrations**

During an interview (3rd of August 2015), historian Sediq Salih stated that banners that appeared in the later era of the Ottoman Empire were used in political events. Photographs showing banners of that time have been published in books. At the end of the 19th century, when the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) **إتحاد و ترقى جمعیتی** was established, the new party demanded reform of constitutional and parliamentary rule in order to determine the authority of the caliphate of the Ottoman Empire.

Kurds thereafter participated in political movements within the CUP party, established by intellectuals and other learned people of the city. Two Kurdish members among the leaders of the CUP Party, Abdullah Cevdet and İshak Sükuti Diyarbakıri, were educated, forward thinkers, spoke foreign languages, and were familiar with the European lifestyle.

Based on personal notes of the late Izzat Kaka, Salih understands that demonstrations took place at Sarai Square in Sulaymaniyah when the Unionists took power. He believes that, although there is no written evidence or photographs to prove that banners were used in those events, banners had indeed been raised. In the same interview, Salih stated that during the 20s and 30s, political activities began to take place in the cities of Southern Kurdistan - in particular Sulaymaniyah - which became the centre of Kurdish political demonstrations, especially by intellectuals, including writers and poets.

There is a photograph from the 1930s (Figure 2) showing such a Sulaymaniyah protest. This is a significant document because banners are clearly visible in it. The image shows a series of demonstrations in which banners are being used to express demands.

In order to understand the reason for banner-making in the 1930s, particularly within Sulaymaniyah demonstrations, we must first consider the demonstration itself and refer back to prior events and significant incidents.

The geopolitical changes after the First World War started when, *Mosul Vilayet* in southern Kurdistan, was invaded by the British Army when still under the power of the Ottoman State<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> On the 7th of November 1918, Britain and France made an agreement, in which a new map was drawn up for the Middle East (Sachar, H. 1969, as cited in Corum, J. 2001:18). According to that agreement, independent states were to be established for the Arabs and also for the Kurds, however, in establishing Iraq, the Kurds were ignored (McDowall, D. 1996, as cited in Corum, J. 2001:18). A Sunni was assigned King of Iraq, but neither Shiites nor Kurds were taken into account despite them forming the majority (Sachar, H. 1969, as cited in Corum, J. 2001:18). One of the high-ranking officials of Britain in Baghdad, Sir Arnold Wilson, wrote a letter to London, describing the situation as follows: "The Kurds wish neither to continue under the Turkish government, nor to be placed under the control of the Iraqi government." Wilson continued: "In southern Kurdistan, 4 out of 5 people support Sheikh Mahmoud's plan to set up an independent Kurdistan". He added that Kurdistan was anxious to break ties with Turkey (A. Wilson 1931, as cited in Chaliand, G. 1992:161).

In 1920, revolts against the British invasion broke out again throughout Iraq. The situation became so critical that the British officer Sir Aylmer L Haldane requested the use of poisonous gas to suppress the revolt. Churchill agreed with the use of poisonous gas against those "uneducated tribal people" - mostly referring to the Kurds (Glancey, J. 2003 the Guardian). When the three *vilayets*, or districts, of Basrah, Mosul and Baghdad were unified, British authorities brought in a king from Hejaz, but the Iraqi component was not taken into account. The Shia did not want to be ruled by Baghdad, while the Kurds wanted their own independent state. By establishing *Iraq*, Britain sowed the seed of instability for the future (Hopwood, D. 2014, BBC). In 1920 Britain and Turkey signed The Treaty of Sevres. According to the agreement both Kurdish and Armenian nations were granted their own independent state. This formally introduced the Kurds as a nation; however, this was not carried out and remained on paper only. During that period, Kurds strived for their own rights but were suppressed by the Turks and the British (Simons, G. 1994: 263-264). On the 23rd of August 1921, a referendum was organized to assign King Faisal for Iraq, but Sulaymaniyah boycotted it (Lukitz, L. 1995: 34). Between 1920 and 1923 the British discussed establishing a free state for the Kurds by merging the southern and northern part of Kurdistan, but this did not happen.

Sheikh Mahmoud who had declared a revolution, was able to control Sulaymaniyah, and in October 1922, announced himself Governor of Kurdistan. After a few days he formed a government cabinet of eight ministers, these consisted of tribal people, capitalists, and educated figures of Sulaymaniyah. They published a newspaper called *Kurdistan Day*. In 1923 Britain decided to end the power of Sheikh Mahmoud, justifying it by saying that Sheikh Mahmoud had a relationship with the Shi'a of Najaf and Karbala and the Kamalists, who considered the state of Mosul part of their own (Gorgas, J. 2008: 540). In May 1923, in order to suppress the revolution of Sheikh Mahmoud, Britain attacked Sulaymaniyah with a large army of 6000 soldiers and raided with IRF air forces (Napier, M. 2018: 43-44).

The air force which was established in 1922 in Iraq was the strongest division, armed with newly developed technical weapons (Tucker, E. 2012: 181). Sheikh Mahmoud fled to Iran. The next year in May he reappeared in Sulaymaniyah and announced a Jihad against the British. The IRF raided Sulaymaniyah again on the 27th and 28th of May 1924 (Napier, M. 2018: 43-44). The leaving of Sheikh Mahmoud opened the door for a new politics; the new administration of Sulaymaniyah was supported by tradesmen (Gorgas, J. 2008: 540). On the 24th of July 1923, The Lausanne Treaty was signed to replace The Sevres Treaty and The Republic of Turkey was formally recognized. There were some articles in the agreement that stated that non-Turkish nations have the right to speak in their mother tongue, but this was ignored, pushing the Kurds into a deeper plight (Chaliand, G. 1992: 161-162). After the Lausanne agreement, the League of Nations sent a committee to the State of Mosul to hear the requests of its people and to make a case study about the region, with the aim of formulating the best solution (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J. 1992: 88-89).



Figure 1: Map showing the main border area under the control of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of World War I, 1914 (NZ history).

## Banners in the new Iraqi state: from Monarchy to Republic:

When Iraq was established as a new state, the political situation in Kurdistan entered a state of conflict, and there were military clashes between the British and the Kurds. Although in the mid-1920s the League of Nations attempted to find a solution to the Kurdish issue in Iraq, it did not achieve any agreement on Kurdish rights<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> After the Lausanne agreement, the League of Nations sent a committee to the State of Mosul to hear the requests of its people and to make a case study about the region, with the aim of formulating the best solution (Bulloch, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 88-89). The committee prepared and filed its reports from January till March 1925 and submitted them to the League of Nations. The reports refer to the majority population of Mosul as Aryan-speaking Kurds, who were neither Arabs nor Turks. Some Arabs lived there, but relationships were not good and the following suggestions were offered: On the basis of an ethnic argument, one would have to conclude that the best solution would be to set up an independent Kurdish state - seeing as the Kurds account for five-eighths of the population - in which case, one would be justified in augmenting this figure to include the Yezidis, who are Zoroastrian Kurds, and the Turks, who would be easily assimilated into the Kurdish population. According to this estimate, Kurds would represent seven-eighths of the *vilayet's* population. However, in order to ensure Iraq's economic survival, the commission finally suggested that the *vilayet* be tacked onto the Iraqi state, "given satisfaction of the following preconditions:

- 1) The country will remain under the League of Nations mandate for a period of about 25 years.
- 2) The desire of the Kurds is that the administrations, magistrates and teachers in their country be drawn from their own ranks and adopt Kurdish as the official language in all their activities."

The Iraqi government decided to recognise Kurdish language and to allow it to be studied in schools - but only in primary schools. Some publishing of books in Kurdish was allowed and some ministerial posts were given to Kurds (Chaliand, G. 1992: 161-162). In the spring of 1926 Kurdistan School was established, with the aim of improving education, but later they sought autonomy and to make improvements to the economy. This motivating factor was behind the demonstrations of September 6<sup>th</sup>. The political movement that gathered around the Kurdistan school came about for the following reasons: the agreement between Iraq and Britain; for Iraq's independence; it bore no reference to the rights of Kurds; and because of the imbalance of power among Sulaymaniyah figures - especially the firing of Tofique Wahbibey as the Governor of Sulaymaniyah.

In 1929 Iraq was progressing towards becoming an independent country, the Kurdish representatives in the parliament of Iraq submitted a letter to the Iraqi prime minister requesting the fulfilment of the promises of 1926, but the government did not take them into consideration. The Concordance of Anglo-Iraq Treaty<sup>4</sup> was signed the year after, in which rights for Kurds were included (Gorgas, J. 2008: 541-542). In 1930, Britain wrote a letter to the League of Nations forsaking the promises made previously to the Kurds concerning the establishment of a Kurdish state; it mentioned that no security and stability would be gained unless that promise was revoked. They mentioned that Kurds were incapable of self-rule, and spoke negatively of them, for example:

On political grounds... Although they admittedly possess many sterling qualities, the Kurds of Iraq are entirely lacking in the characteristics necessary for political cohesion and self-government. Their organization and outlook are essentially tribal. They are without the tradition of self-government or self-governing institutions. Their mode of life is primitive, and for the most part they are illiterate and untutored, resentful of authority and lacking in sense of discipline or responsibility (Bulloch, J. 1992: 95). According to that memorandum, Iraqi officials asked for the negative points to be rescinded, adding that they could in fact work with the Kurds to rule the country - the Kurds having many famous figures who held high positions during the Ottoman era, but the British responded by returning the report without any changes whatsoever (Chaliand, G. 1992: 159).

In 1930 Britain removed the mandate and thus Iraq became an independent country, but the Iraqi airspace was still under the control of the British forces and for the training of the Iraqi army (Short, M. and McDermott, A. 1975: 10). Between 1929 and 1930 many memoranda were submitted to the League of Nations and British authorities by various people and



In the summer of 1930, further demonstrations broke out in Sulaymaniyah. On the 16th of July 1930 - the same day that King Ghazi visited the city, the first big demonstration took place in Sulaymaniyah because the 1929 agreement did not guarantee any rights for the Kurds.

On the 10th of August 1930, the Iraqi prime minister planned to visit Sulaymaniyah, and this news spread fast among the opponents. The day before, Ahmed Fayaq Bey, who worked on the staff of the Real Estate Registration Directorate and was a member of the Sulaymaniyah court, arrived from Kirkuk. He presented a statement in lieu of the government stating that he would become Governor of Sulaymaniyah in place of Tofiq Wahbi Bey. Angry students attacked him, and he ran to a police station, from where he was later sent back to Kirkuk.

Later, when the Iraqi prime minister, together with British officials, visited Sulaymaniyah, a demonstration was organised by the teacher Rafiq Helmi and Mohammad Salih Qaftan. The demonstrators consisted of about fifty science students from the Kurdistan evening school. According to British reports, some of Sheikh Qadir's fighters participated in the demonstration.

Both political parties of autonomous and federal Iraq held a meeting in the Saray building in Sulaymaniyah, in which The National Party submitted a memorandum for establishing a Kurdish state under the supervision of either the League of Nations or the British authority.

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committees about the rights of the Kurds within Iraq, and although British advisors and the Iraqi government made promises to observe the Kurdish language as a formal language, these were not honoured.

After the articles of the Anglo-Iraq concordance were advertised on the 1st of July 1930, a committee was formed by 11 well-known people, who sent a letter to Geneva requesting to establish a state for the Kurds under the supervision of the United States. They were also planning to boycott the Iraqi elections, which were to be held that same year. The British wanted the election to be held and be successful, so the new government - which included the British Administrative Inspector Captain Alban - had to work for the agreement so that the elections were not hindered (Gorgas, J. 2008: 542-543).

After the meeting the nationalist spokesman Ramzi Fattah came out to describe the meeting's details, whereupon the fans carried him on their shoulders in triumph (Gorgas, J. 2008: 543).

British authorities were continually urging the Sulaymaniyah officials, via their advisors, to be patient to achieve the autonomy they sought, in order to keep Sulaymaniyah calm. At the end of August 1930, Tofiq Wahbi Bey was fired from his position as governor of Sulaymaniyah, the reason given was that he was inciting division. Later, the nationalist party arranged a demonstration opposing that decision, and when Ahmed Fayaq Bey was duly assigned Governor of Sulaymaniyah, the people were angered all the more (Gorgas, J. 2008: 544). In early August, Captain Alban commanded Sulaymaniyah officials to take part in the election, despite their not wanting to (Gorgas, J. 2008: 545). On the 6th September 1930 – regarded as a solemn day in Sulaymaniyah - a demonstration was organized (Figure 2). This was reported by some as 'rioting', referring to the demonstrators as 'rioters', whereas poets such as Fayaq Beakas, Peramerd, and Sheikh Salam Azzabani, who had taken part and influenced the demonstration, described the demonstration in more positive terms (Gorgas, J. 2008: 545).

British Administrative Inspector, Captain Alban, reported that "on the 6th of September 1930, thirty areas of Sulaymaniyah were invited to approach Saray for election, during which fifty students, angry guys, pugnacious, marched downtown, gathering in the shopping centre of Saray. Tensions rose among the people. Some held rods, sticks and stones in their hands and began to attack the police with them and also with coffee shop chairs causing injury. Military reinforcements arrived. The situation worsened and shooting was heard. An Iraqi policeman was shot dead. The sound of pistol shooting was heard, and two other soldiers got injured, the soldiers then began to shoot in the air to disperse the crowd. In the end, 13 people were shot dead and 23 injured, all were of the poor classes. It was reported that people

wanted to boycott the election, but that foreign hands were behind the incident” (Gorgas, J. 2008: 545-546).

Another report, written by P. S. Mumford, a civilian employee, claimed that people wishing to stop the elections gathered gradually, and that the angry crowd began to pelt stones at the policemen. After half an hour, Iraqi armed forces reached the area and started shooting at the crowd. According to the report no shooting was detected from the people’s side. As a result, 16 were shot dead (10 of which were young), and 50 were injured. 4 soldiers were slightly injured, and one was killed by friendly fire. In the afternoon that same day, hundreds of people were arrested, including leaders of the National Party (Gorgas, J. 2008: 546). Salih stated that such protests were organised by a group of educated Kurdish figures, and because no party was at that time established, they called themselves The National Organization.

In my interview (July 2015) with Ahmed Hamid, he said that after the First World War into the mid-twentieth century, there were many Iraqis who had studied abroad, returning with new ideas and political ideologies, and organising a new political platform so that they could ultimately form a political party. A group of such men managed to turn their organization into a party, initially called *The Association Against Imperialism*, which later became known as Kifah Al-Shab (The Struggle of the People). A year later, on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1934, the name changed to the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP).



Figure 2: A demonstration on September 06, 1930, showing banners in use at Sara square, Sulaymaniyah (Zheen Centre, 2015).



Figure 3: A protest in Baghdad 1948, showing a banner which reads: "The Kurdish people demand the release of Barzani, and demand food and shelter for their families" (Zheen Centre, 2015).

Hamid stated that the ICP leaders were sent to the Soviet Union to study at the KUTV (The Communist University of the Toilers of the East) in Moscow. Marxist ideology in Iraq can be traced back to the ICP, specifically to their leaders educated in Soviet universities. They wanted to liberate Iraq from imperialism, to establish a democratic government, and to reform agriculture, build national factories, and give rights to labourers, peasants and intellectuals. Hamid maintains that the colour red, used for the Communist Party banners, derives from that used by the Communists in the Soviet Union. Iraqi Communists appropriated this colour, in the way that red tends to be adopted by most leftist parties in the world.

Hamid states in the interview that during the fourth ICP congress, they decided to establish two branches: one for Kurdish society, and another for Armenian society, but this idea did not last long because the Iraqi government accused the Armenians of being British collaborators. Consequently, while King Ghazi was in power, the Iraqi authority turned against the Armenians, arresting, imprisoning, and killing many of them, although a few managed to flee. Hamid mentioned "I remember when I was young, opposite our house there was an Armenian neighbour, but one day the man came back and took the children and left. People asked him why they had to leave in such a manner, and the man shouted: 'All Armenians are under threat'".

In the 1940s, new Kurdish political parties were established, some of which ended briefly, while others still exist.<sup>5</sup> According to Salih, S. (2015) the use of banners directly related to the political situation in Iraq, because people used banners to demand their rights.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1941, The Hiwa Party, or *Hope*, was established, led by urban intellectuals who embraced a broad political spectrum from left to right. It was a nationalist party, and an attempt was made to distance the Kurdish political movements from the tribal identity. They sent memoranda to western powers to obtain international support to oppose the government in

In an interview conducted in June 2019, Bahadin Nuri <sup>6</sup> said that in 1946, several protests happened in Baghdad that they were aware of from newspaper reports, but “I did not hear of any protests that happened in Sulaymaniyah. I remember the first protest that I took part in happened in May 1946. The protest was organised by the Iraqi Communist Party to support the Palestinian issue against Zionism. The Iraqi Communist Party had many diverse members within the Iraqi society, including some from among the Jewish community. One of the participants, who was a member of the Iraqi Communist Party, Shaul Tawiq, was of Jewish origin. He was murdered during the protest by police and martyred because of it”.

According to Salih, S. (2015), after the uprising of the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1930, urban mobilisation decreased and there were therefore no protests or boycotts until 1948<sup>7</sup>. Iraqi

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Baghdad, meanwhile encouraging people to support Kurdish nationalist demands (Gunter, M. 1992: 66). Hiwa was influenced by the ICP, being one of the largest and most powerful organisations in the whole of Iraq. Support came from the working class, employees, students, and peasants (Hamid, A. 2015).

In 1946, The Democratic Party of Kurdistan, or the PDK was established, and Mustafa Barzani became leader of the party. Their political agenda was for autonomy for the Kurds, independence, and democracy for Iraq. Along with the Iranian KDP they had the same dream of Kurdish rights. They claimed that the party existed to build a system where everyone in Kurdistan could live equally, having adopted Marxist and Leninism ideology - their program was close to that of the ICP. In contrast, the KDP defined itself as a tribal, conservative, and aristocratic party, dominated by the Barzani's family (Chaliand, G. 1992: 165).

The first congress of the KDP was held in Baghdad while Barzani was in Mihabad. The KDP wanted to convince all the Kurdish parties to join KDP such as Shorsh (Revolutionary Party), Rizgari (Liberty Party) and the K.J. Although most of them accepted, Ibrahim Ahmed who was one of the first congress members, preferred to be out of the KDP. When the Mihabad republic collapsed in 1947, Qazi Muhamad was executed, and Barzani and his followers fled to the Soviet Union as Barzani had failed to convince the Iraqi government to allow him to stay. Barzani took refuge in Soviet Azerbaijan, where he remained until he could return to Iraq after that military coup in 1958 (Mustafa, N. 1996: 52-54).

<sup>6</sup> Bahadin Nuri was born in February 1927 and he was a general secretary of Iraqi Communist Party from 1949-1953. (Interview 2019).

<sup>7</sup> The Portsmouth Treaty was signed on the 15th of January 1948. Students immediately reacted angrily to the new treaty. The police responded violently, killing 4 and injuring many. The government tried to calm the situation but masses of people - coming from all social classes - organized large protests on the 27th of January 1948, which they called the Al-Wathba Uprising. It was one of the greatest urban mobilizations in Iraq showing the power of the opposition and how they could mobilize masses of people from all cities. It took everything the authorities had to quell the protesters, nevertheless, hundreds were injured, and 77 protesters were killed. Consequently, the prime minister was forced to resign, and a new government was formed (Marr, P. and Al-Marashi, I. 2017: 51-52).

Despite the ICP leaders being in prison, they played a powerful role and Fahid was able to bring many different factions together for the Al-Wathbah. He organized the *Lijnat al-Taawn al-Watani*, or The Committee for National Cooperation, to lead the revolt - this included The National Unity Party, The Progressive Members of the National Democratic Party, and the underground Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq. Kamil Qazanchi became a committee leader despite being left-wing and not a member of the ICP (Ismael, T. 2008: 39).

popular opinion, mainly led by the ICP, was all for ending the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, which was initially set up to provide a 'close alliance' between the two countries, for when it was to become a member of the League of Nations, and thus an independent state, but this turned out to be an empty promise. Iraq politically, economically and militarily, remained under the control of Britain. In 1948, the Iraqi authorities negotiated a new treaty with Britain, because there was opposition to the existing treaty, and claimed the new one to be different to the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. This served to conciliate the opposition, but overall, Britain remained in control of Iraqi foreign affairs (Hamid, A. 2015).

Nuri, B. (2019) pointed out that one of the slogans of Al-Wathba was against the parliamentary election system. Elections were conducted in two phases using an electoral system brought over from India, a British colony, that were easily manipulated by the British administrators. One slogan says: "End two-stage elections - we want direct parliamentary elections", a slogan that continued to be used until the uprising of 1952, when the government announced a decree to cancel the two-phase elections, replacing it with a direct election model.

Nuri, B. (2019) noted that, after the Al-Wathba uprising in 1948, people enjoyed a kind of freedom until May 15th 1948, when several demonstrations took place in Sulaymaniyah:

"One day, we held a demonstration in front of the British Culture Centre which was close to the Grand Mosque. The centre was burned by the demonstrators. Meanwhile, someone called Ali Haj Mullah Sharif, a national traitor, had his motorcycle destroyed. A remnant was raised up by protestors, comprising around 300 to 400 youths, shouting: 'Strike it. It is a broken drum'."



Salih, S. (2015) said there are photographs that show Kurdish protesters holding banners with slogans. Importantly, text in Kurdish cities was written in Kurdish, whereas in other areas, such as Baghdad, it was in Arabic (Figure 3).

Nuri states that after the victory of the Al-Wathbah uprising of 1948, the Iraqi Communist Party organized several protests in Sulaymaniyah. The main slogans in those protests were against British colonialism, and for Iraqi independence - the focus was not on Kurdish national issues. All parties, even feudalists, were against British colonialism.

According to Hamid, A. (2015) the ICP in the 40s was one of the most powerful opposition parties in Iraq, owing to having supporters from all social classes. When Iraq joined the Arab allies against Israel in May 1948, Iraqi authorities used the war as an excuse to convert civil rule to military rule, and eventually the Iraqi authorities campaigned against ICP's members. Consequently, ICP leaders were executed and many were arrested, and others had to flee abroad.

According to Nuri, B. (2019) the Al-Wathba uprising involved all parties. Although the Iraqi Communist Party was one of the most influential parties of the time, Al-Wathba was not only a success for them. Other parties included: The People's Party, led by Aziz al-Shan; a leftist party known as 'The Bourgeois Junk Party'; the National Union Party, led by Abdel Fattah Ibrahim; The National Democratic Party (NDP), - one of the traditional bourgeois parties under the leadership of Kamel al-Jadrji; the Istiqlal Party - a right-wing nationalist party. The KDP had no influence in Baghdad, however, they did participate in some of the demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah.



Nuri, B. (2019) observes that a number of changes occurred in the leadership of the Communist Party while Fahad was in prison. “Before the execution of Fahad, Sasson Dalal and Rafiq Chalak elected to lead the party. Sasson Dalal made a statement to all branches of the ICP Party organizations throughout Iraqi provinces including Sulaymaniyah. The statement was addressed to ‘Our great partner in danger’. During that period, Hamid Othman was head of the Sulaymaniyah branch and I was a member of the organization. They selected me to lead the demonstration in solidarity with Fahad and his colleagues. I organized three demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah. One of the demonstrations happened to commemorate Al-Wathba and the other two took place in February. We told the party members to attend the demonstration at a designated place and time. One of the demonstrations started in front of the mosque near the Hawza Wishkaka. I led the protest, for which we had brought a coffin covered with a black cloth to feign a funeral, and we attempted to go into the cemetery. We had two banners, one of them was protesting against colonialism, and we wrote on it: ‘Glory to the Martyrs’, and on the other we demanded the immediate release of Fahad and his colleagues. The text was written in black onto white cloth. The demonstrators numbered only about 200, as there was decline in political support due to the increase in military rule during this period, creating fear. Soon the police arrived, along with security and intelligence forces, numbering more than the demonstrators. When we arrived at the *Mizgate dw Darga* mosque, we decided to end our protest, realising that the situation was serious”.

Although the Iraqi authorities managed to suppress the opposition, in 1952 the ICP led other large-scale protests in cities such as Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. In their message, they demanded 50 percent of oil revenue should go to the Iraqi people, the country revert back to civil rule, the government release all prisoners, and civil organizations gain permission to work. In response, the government killed 8 protesters, one a Kurd from Sulaymaniyah. They also suspended a number of newspapers and banned all political parties (Hamid, A. 2015).

Nuri, B. (2019) stated that the slogans of those demonstrations in Sulaymaniyah were generally against colonialism and its agents, meaning also the monarchy and its government. One read: 'Restore the people, or, victory to the people' illustrating how the main focus was on national goals and independence, rather than democracy, which was not considered an important topic at that time. Most slogans were ordered by the Communist Party, and banners made for those slogans were then distributed to party members.

## Banner-making and its usage in the era of the Republic of Iraq

In 1958, the political system in Iraq changed from monarchy to republic<sup>8</sup>. Eventually, the overthrow of the monarchy was welcomed by the Kurdish people; it became a time of great hope and optimism. The new constitution was written on the 27th July 1958, recognising Kurdish national rights: "Iraqi society is based on complete co-operation between all its citizens, in respect of their rights and liberties, Arabs and Kurds are associates in this nation; the constitution guarantees their national rights within the whole of Iraq" (Article 3) (Chaliand, G. 1992): 165). Kurds from cities and towns went to Baghdad with their banners to celebrate the new government (Figure 4 & 5).

Pero, M. (interview, July 2019) states that Saeed Muhsen and Jamal Bakhtyar were working as calligraphers in the middle of the last century, and that he learned from them. "One day, Saeed Muhsen attended our school to make some banners for the celebration of *Nawroz*, forbidden during the monarchy. Mr. Muhsen began to outline the text on the banners and told me to fill in the gaps. That was my first attempt at writing on banners. In that era, the government defined Nawroz as a *tree* or *spring* celebration, not as a Kurdish national day, but still a time to show Kurdish ambitions. The photographs show people dressed in Kurdish costume and displaying banners. The banners were in strong support of Qasim's revolution and saw the KDP as symbolic for their struggle" (Figure 6).

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<sup>8</sup> On the 14th July 1958, *The Free Officers* led by General Abdul al-Karim Qasim, organised a violent coup d'état to end the monarchical system in Iraq and thereby making it a republic state. While Barzani, the KDP leader, was on holiday in Prague, he got a telegraph about the coup, saying he should return to Iraq. By the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, Barzani arrived in Baghdad where he was welcomed by Kurdish and Iraqi crowds. Meanwhile, the KDP was officially recognized as a political party and, importantly, several Kurdish newspapers gained publication rights, including the KDP's organ *Khebat* (Struggle), and *Kurdistan's Azadi* (Liberty) owned by a section of the Kurdish ICP, as well as *Hetaw* (Sun), and *Zhin* (Life) (Gunter, M. 1992: 11).



Figure 4: Kurds travel from outlying towns and villages to congregate in Baghdad to celebrate the new government. Banners can be seen to read: "The delegations of the districts of Sheikhan, Zakho, Halabja, Shaqlawa, and Kalar, etc. salute the revolution" (Zheen Centre, 2015).



Figure 5: At the same celebration as above, this central banner declares: "The delegations of Kurdistan salute the revolution ... the delegation of Rawandouz" (Zheen Centre, 2015).



Figure 6: The 21st of March 1959 celebration in Nawroz, Sulaymaniyah. The text on the banner reads: "The Kurdistan Democratic Party is the greatest leadership of the Kurdish people". (Archive of Fatah Saeed Shaly, Zheen Centre, 2015).





Figure 7: A gathering showing an image of Abdul al-Karim Qasim above the door, along with three banners. Kurdistan, 1959 (Zheen Centre, 2015).

A few years after the establishment of the new regime, political relations between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad deteriorated<sup>9</sup>. In the 1960s there were also divisions among Kurdish politicians themselves, especially among the leaders of the KDP, which had an impact on allegiances within the Kurdish community<sup>10</sup>.

Pero was a student and a member of the Kurdistan Student Union during the Kurdish revolution of the early 1960s: "We were working in secret in the cities, and the Peshmerga were fighting in the mountains. Banners were requested for a Student Union event, which took place in Kirje, in the Surdash area, in 1962. I met Taha Baban and Jamal Abdul who also worked for the student union. I and Jamal Abdul made the banners, and Nushirwan Mustafa, leader of the student union, sent someone to collect them. We wrote nearly sixty banners and slogans for the Kurdish revolution and at the end of each slogan we wrote 'Up with the leadership of Barzani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party'".

According to Pero, this event happened again a year later, but the slogans were changed and the name of Barzani was not written on the banners: "I spoke to Taha Baban and said

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<sup>9</sup> The situation in Iraq deteriorated due to Qasim's decision to rule Iraq through military power with which he brutally suppressed both the right- and left-wing including the ICP. Freedom of expression was restricted. Ibrahim Ahmed who was a KDP general secretary was arrested because of an article in which he criticised Article 2 of the Iraqi constitution. He wrote that the Kurds of Iraq were part of the Kurdish nation, that Iraqi Arabs were part of the Arab nation, and that not all Iraqi people are part of the Arab nation. Ultimately, a rebellion broke out between the Kurds and the Iraqi government, who exploited certain tribes, arming them to fight Barzani - taking advantage of the internal division among Kurdish tribes (Chaliand, G. 1992: 165). Conflict flared up again between the Kurds and central government, and Barzani found himself leader of a full-scale armed movement against Baghdad. Although his position was strategically strong, the Iraqi army was bombing villages and causing casualties among civilians - notably women, children and old people (Gunter, M. 1992: 13).

<sup>10</sup> In addition, in November 1963, when Barzani negotiated with General Arif for Kurdish autonomy, the KDP's political bureau, led by Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmed criticized Barzani's deals because they believed it was not clear exactly what Barzani was proposing and blamed Barzani for not informing them about the negotiation. After a KDP congress in July 1964, Barzani dominated because he was supported by tribes and had 15,000 supporters among the Peshmerga. In contrast, the political bureau came from an urban background. As a result, Barzani successfully expelled Talabani, Ahmad, and other key members from the party, and they fled to Iran (Ghaliand, G. 1994: 59).

that I realised that the situation was about to change according to the specified content of the slogans. I was right, because before long the KDP broke up”.

He refers to the splitting of the KDP into two parts: *Jalali*, and *Malay*. Talabani opened his office in Bakrajo, Sulaymaniyah, and at the end of 1962 and the beginning of 1963, banners were collected and displayed in Sarai Square. Jalal Talabani came to Sarai and delivered a speech on the top of the Nuri Ali Palace. Talabani said in his speech that they agreed with Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr on the decentralisation of Iraq, and autonomy for Kurdistan (Pero, M. 2019 interview).

In the 1960s, changes in the administration of the Iraqi government occurred through coups<sup>11 12</sup> and the Kurds suffered from the oppression of these governments<sup>13</sup>. On June 9th 1963, authorities declared a curfew in Sulaymaniyah, but people from the countryside did

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<sup>11</sup> On the 8th February 1963 in very bloody coup, the Ba’ath Party’s military commanders secured power by assassinating Qasim. For a while, President Abdel Salam Arif and Mustafa Barzani agreed to end military hostility. Arif exploited ceasefire to reorganize the Iraqi military and prepared a full-scale armed campaign against the Kurds. According to Mustafa (1996), the Iraqi military sent its barbarous military intelligence force called *Lywa al-eshrin* to Sulaymaniyah, killing and arresting many people and destroying villages, while around the city people closed their shops and managed to escape. If someone asked what happened, people said that the Earth had cracked.

<sup>12</sup> On the 17th of July 1968, the Ba’ath Party was able to gain power via a military coup. The pan-Arabism was a fundamental ideology of Ba’athism, associated with radical Arab nationalism. Although Socialism was another part of Ba’ath’s ideology, in the 1980’s, it accommodated capitalism (Kafala, T. 2003, BBC News). As Kaplan, R. (2018) stated:

“That deeper force is the legacy of Ba’athism. A toxic mix of secular Arab nationalism and Eastern Bloc-style socialism that dominated Syria and Iraq for decades since the 1960s, it made the regimes of the Al-Assad family in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq completely unique in the Arab world... As a rule, the more abstract and totalizing the ideology, the more blood that follows in its wake. That’s because once a leader is toppled or challenged, such ideologies provide for no intermediary layers of civil society — between the regime at the top and the tribe and extended family at the bottom — to hold a country together”.

<sup>13</sup> From the 1960s to 1970’s, war and negotiations between Kurds and central government in Iraq happened several times. The casualties of conflict during that time were many on both sides (Simons, G. 1994: 267), and there was no progress for the Kurdish dilemma because of Iraqi political instability. Iraq could not achieve anything through its military campaigns against the Kurds. Eventually the Iraqi government, led by The Ba’ath Party, proposed autonomy through negotiations with Barzani. The Iraqi president Ahmed Hassan Al Baker and Saddam Hussain’s vice president, selected Aziz Sharif to negotiate with Barzani who had a left-wing background. Meanwhile, Michel Afleq, one of the Ba’ath Party board members and leaders, believed that Kurds should enjoy autonomy and supported a new resolution for the Kurdish problem. (Gunter, M. 1992: 14).



not hear this, and went as usual to the city centre for their commerce. As a result, many were killed. State forces buried the victims in mass graves (Mustafa, N. 1996: 74-75).

When the curfew was ended, people opened up the mass graves in order to move the victims to the city's graveyard, where they made a grave for each individual. 280 corpses were found (Figures 10 & 11) (Chaliand, G. 1992: 167). As the photographs show, white banners were erected over the new graves, with texts on them.

According to Pero, Ali Omer, Omer Hamdi and Hama Faraj (Xala Hama) worked as calligraphers in the 1960s. They used red and orange cloth for banner-making and the texts were written in *Ruqaa* font. Another calligrapher named Khalid Zamdar appeared. At the beginning of his career, Zamdar had a workshop in the Iskan neighbourhood then later moved to Sabunkaran street. According to Aziz, S. (interview June 2015) because Sulaymaniyah was far from cities such as Baghdad and Mosul (where, for instance, Yussif Zanun, one of the most famous calligraphers in Iraq lived), and there was nowhere for people to go to learn calligraphy, those who were interested in the profession had to rely on copying.

The next political phase between the Kurds and Baghdad began with the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1970 agreement<sup>14</sup>. According to Hamid, A. (2015), as the agreement was declared, people warmly welcomed it, celebrating throughout Baghdad and Kurdish cities (Figure 14). Although the

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<sup>14</sup> The Ba'athist-ruled Iraqi government signed the autonomy agreement with the Kurds on the 11th March 1970. This was considered a significant achievement for the Kurds because it included most of the Kurdish people (Al-Khalil, S. 1989: pxxiii). The agreement included 15 articles to be implemented within four years. It recognised the Kurds as an equal ethnic group along with the Arabs in Iraq. It also gave the Kurds representation in the government system. Meanwhile, Kurds could be self-governing in majority Kurdish areas and it devised cultural and language rights (The Kurds, minority rights group report). The agreement was welcomed by both sides, while Ahmed Hassan Bakir the president of Iraq gave a speech on Iraqi TV declaring that "Our people, Kurds and Arabs, have regained their unity. Our fraternal relations are henceforth firmly based and will not be undermined." Meanwhile, Barzani was interviewed on the same day and he described the agreement as the idea of Ba'ath party (Chaliand, G. 1992: 170-171).

KDP signed the agreement with Ba'ath party, the ICP supported it and participated in those celebrations organised for the occasion. In Sulaymaniyah, a crowd of people attending the meeting in Sara square included Shukri Sabri Hadithi, the city governor(Figure 15). The KDP representative gave a speech, but the governor did not allow Dr. Frais, who represented the ICP, to read his statement.

Salih, S. (2015) stated that on the day of the declaration agreement many people attended with banners, and both wings of the KDP participated. Banners in Kurdish areas, such as Sulaymaniyah, were written in Kurdish, whilst the banners in Baghdad were in Arabic.

People celebrated every year on the 11<sup>th</sup> March, and they made many banners, writing on them: 'Long Live the Anniversary of the Holy March Agreement' (Figure 16). Moreover, according to the agreement, *Nawroz* was recognised as the Kurdish National Day (Gunter, M. 1992: 16). The March agreement appeared to be an opportunity to resolve the Kurdish issue in Iraq<sup>15</sup>, but when it failed<sup>16</sup> it led to a new armed conflict between Kurdish political forces and the central state in Baghdad<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The March Agreement was a significant step for the Kurdish cause - if carried out - but peace talks had reached an impasse because of a lack of certainty on both sides. The Iraqi authority held the advantage in negotiations as they could easily muster their army into battle. Ebrahim Ahmed the previous general secretary of the KDP said of autonomy: "depend on our strength and that of our enemy." (Gunter, M. 1992: 14).

<sup>16</sup> The March agreement collapsed for a number of reasons, but particularly for Kirkuk being rich in oil. The Kurds demanded that the disputed areas be a part of the autonomous region, but the Iraqi authorities dismissed these demands, altering the demographics through the process of *Arabization* - forcibly displacing the Kurdish population from Kirkuk and the other disputed regions. The Iraqi authorities conducted raids on Faili Kurd properties and in September 1971, nearly 40,000 Faili Kurds were deported to Iran, and forbidden to take any of their belongings with them. Meanwhile, the Iraqi Ba'ath regime failed on two attempts to assassinate both Barzani and his son Edris Barzani (Gunter, M. 1992: 17).

<sup>17</sup> In January 1974, negotiations started again between the KDP and the Ba'ath regime about implementing autonomy, which they had signed in 1970, but no decisive solution was reached on the issue of the disputed areas, especially Kirkuk. However, Barzani officially declared the right of the Kurds in Kirkuk to be a part of the autonomous region. Eventually, in March 1974, the autonomy law for the Kurdistan region of Iraq was issued by the Ba'ath regime, but the KDP, led by Barzani, rejected it, viewing the new agreement as too far from the agreements of 1970, hence it was declared, but without the consent of the Kurds (Karsh, E. and Rautsi, I. 1991: 80). Consequently, another round of war began, and as a result, many people were displaced without shelter, food, and medication, causing many fatalities among the young and old. According to the Iraqi government's report, 1,640 Iraqi militants were killed and 7,903 were injured on the other side, and although there were many casualties among the Kurds, there were no specific numbers recorded (Chaliand, G. 1992: 182-181).



Figure 8: The banners say: "The group of performers and singers of the KDP". 1060, Mawat *Shorshi Ailul* (Zheen centre 2015).



Figure 9: Photograph showing the banners written with the same text as above (Zheen centre, 2015).



Figure 10: Burials at the Sulaymaniyah Cemetery, 1963 (Zheen Centre 2015).



Figure 11: Sulaymaniyah Cemetery, 1963 (Zheen Centre 2015).





Figure 12: Jalal Talabani giving a speech at the KDP meeting at Koyea 18th March, 1963. The text on the banner reads: "Long live the Kurdistan Democratic Party leadership of the Kurdish people" (Salah Rasheed, *Mam Jalal Didary Taman*, 2019).



Figure 13: Jalal Talabani and Ibrahim Ahmad in 1960 in front of a banner written in Arabic (Salah Rasheed, *Mam Jalal Didary Taman* 2019).





Figure 14: The celebration of the autonomy agreement, Baghdad, 11th March 1970. The text on the banner reads: "Collective working. Revolution and construction" (Kurdipedia.org 2013).



Figure 15: The celebration of the autonomy agreement, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 11th March 1970 (Kurdipedia.org 2013).

In the mid-1970s there were several confrontations between Barzani and the Iraqi army. In the end, Barzani decided to end his political movement and abandon armed resistance. He took refuge in Iran with his followers and after leaving for the USA, eventually died in the late 70s.<sup>18</sup>

The collapse of the Kurdish movement was a major blow to their hopes of ever gaining national rights, and after the KDP forces disbanded, *Komala* was the only political organization left, and it continued its resistance against the Ba'athist regime (Bulloch, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J. 1992: 146). Formed at the end of the 1960's Komala was grounded on Marxist ideology, but according to Hamid, A. (2015), their ideology was actually closer to Mao Tse-tung's, and they founded themselves as a modern organization, appealing to the younger generation. Until 1975, Komala worked underground because they were critical of the KDP being a traditional, conservative, and tribal party, through which Barzani's family was trying to dominate the Kurdish political scene.

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<sup>18</sup> In early 1975, the war began intensively and the Barzani-led Kurds, were being supported by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi - the Shah of Iran, so they could face Iraqi forces powerfully. In order to undermine them, Saddam signed The Algiers Agreement with the Shah. In the agreement, Iraq agreed to move the maritime line of Shatt al-Arab to be the border between the two countries and in return, Iran had to cut off all support to the Iraqi Kurds. On the 23rd of March 1975, Barzani met with the Shah and decided to stop the fight against Iraq, and as a result thousands of Peshmerga withdrew to the Iranian border and the rest handed over their weapons to Iraqi forces. Barzani then went to the United States where he stayed until he died in 1979 (McDowall, D. 1992 :98-99).





Figure 16: The anniversary of the autonomy agreement, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1971 (Zheen Centre



Figure 17: The 8th KDP congress, left to right: Nouri Shawess, Mustafa Barzani, Kamuran Bedir Khan, and his wife, Natacha. Nawpurdan Kurdistanland, Iraq,1970. Certain phrases can be read on banners: “8th KDP Congress. Peshmerga Heroes. Long live the Republic of Iraq. Long live the struggling president”.,(Wordpress.com 2015).

New political movements emerged to continue the political and military struggle against the central government<sup>19</sup>, but clashes between Kurdish parties resulted in casualties among their followers<sup>20</sup>.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, significant changes took place in the political situation in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Iran. Saddam Hussein took power in Iraq, and meanwhile the Shah's regime was changed to an Islamic Republic<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup>19 In June 1976, Jalal Talabani, a former leader of the KDP, established the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and began a coalition of different Kurdish forces; the most prominent of them being Komala (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J. 1992: 146). Appearing more modern and socialist, they influenced the urban educated classes in the province of Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and the eastern regions of Iraqi Kurdistan. The PUK called for a secular system, a constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights, and to be 'democratic and self-governing'. After the 1975 Algiers Agreement between the Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein, in November that same year, the old KDP was renamed The Kurdistan Democratic Party's Provisional Command (KDPPC) and led by Barzani's sons Idris and Masood Barzani with Sami Abdulrahman. It relied heavily on Kurdish tribes. After their ninth congress in Iran in 1979, Sami split from the party due to differences between Sami and Barzani, in particular Idris's relationship with the Iranian Islamic Republic. He went on to establish his own party which was called the Kurdistan People's Democratic Party (KPDP). In addition, Dr. Mahmoud Othman who was one of the most prominent Barzani leaders, split from the KDP, and after 1978 he formed the United Socialist Party of Kurdistan, then he decided to establish a political party on behalf of the Kurdistan Socialist Party which then split into another organization (Gunter, M. 1992: 33-34).

<sup>20</sup> A year later, the PUK began a military campaign against central government. The relationship between the two parties, the PUK and KDP, from the very beginning was rife with competition, tension, and conflict, and the two sides did not hesitate to resort to arms if necessary. Talabani sent 800 Peshmerga from the PUK to the Turkish border in order to gain a clear supply route - 300 of them were driven straight into the hands of the Iraqi and Turkish army (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J. 1992: 146). The first armed clashes between the two parties occurred in spring 1978. Many died. Ali Askary and some of the commanders were taken captive, and later executed by the KDP.

<sup>21</sup> The 'Republic of Fear', as it was coined in the book by Kanan Makiya, emerged when the Ba'athists came to power, especially after the 1970s. Iraq turned into a totalitarian regime, disrupting the role of the people, parties, and intellectuals. In 1979, President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr announced his resignation, transferring power to his deputy Saddam Hussein - elected President of the Republic and Secretary General of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party, and leader of the Council of Revival of the Revolution. The Iraqi people suffered under the ruling elite led by Saddam Hussein, through decades of totalitarianism, tyranny, and one-party domination, resulting in the halt of any political activities of the Iraqi people and their political forces. The Ba'ath Party had almost half a million members in 1967 (Makiya, K. 1998:39, as cited in Stansfield, G. 2016: 98-99), but this number was increased to one million during Saddam's reign in the mid-1980's (Moss Helms 1984:87, as cited in Stansfield, G. 2016: 98-99). The Ba'ath Party was a nationalist party which adopted the ideology of *Ba'athism*, meaning *renaissance*, or *awakening*. They believed in uniting the Arabs under one sovereign state. "One Arab nation with an eternal mission, the party's credo consisted of three words: Unity, Freedom, and Socialism" (Miller, J. and Mylroie, L. 1990: 85-86).

### **Banner-making in the Era of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists.**

The Ba'ath Party used various means to spread its national and partisan ideology, including the education system. Most calligraphers I interviewed confirmed that calligraphy was learnt by copying, and that no institution or special department within institutes existed to learn it. Muhamad, S. (2015) records in his interview that during the Ba'athist Regime, there was a book called *The Arabic Calligraphy Notebook - Kuras Al-Xat al-Arabi*, which formed part of Arabic lessons in schools. Inside the book, texts were Ba'ath Party ideological slogans. The texts were written in dots, and the students had to follow the dots to learn calligraphy, in a form of subliminal propaganda.

The Iraqi Ba'ath Party adopted the idea of a one-party system because it did not believe in pluralism; it was an exclusionary party that believes only in its own ideas<sup>22</sup>. This was one of the cruellest periods in recent Iraqi history. The Ba'ath Party held sole authority and was the political decision-maker within the state, and because it did not believe in sharing power with opposition political parties, there was no voice for the people. The dictatorship was maintained by the most powerful means, and the people were suppressed through economic, political, and social mechanisms.

Today, colours are used by different parties, but at that time, because of their dictatorship, the Ba'ath Party claimed all colours, and Ba'athists used any colours they liked on their public banners. Muhamad, S. (2015) in the interview stated that under Ba'ath rule Sira cloth

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<sup>22</sup> Ba'athism exploited its control of the state to become the main sectarian tool of repression against Shi'ites and Kurds. The party was anti-democratic, and during the Saddam era it turned into an organization that promoted extremist Arab nationalist thought - reaching the peak of political power was its supreme goal via non-democratic means. As Makiya described: the "opposition can no longer arise except in people's minds, and then it is not really an opposition at all" (1998:37-81 as cited in Stansfield, G. 2016: 100).

was usually used to write banners in any colour. Consequently, within that period, colour held no significance, it was only important for the mottos to be legible. Banners would be written for events such as: ceremonies, elections, or when a location was 'cleansed' of Iranians. Most banners were made of orange or yellow cloth, so they were highly visible (Figure 18).

Hassan, R. (2016) points out in an interview that in the 1970s Khalid Zamdar (Figure 19) was a famous calligrapher in Sulaymaniyah, and with the help of assistants in his workshop he made most of the banners at that time, partly because demand for banners of protest was low. During the Ba'ath Party regime, demonstrations were limited and when they did hold a demonstration, people had to abide by Ba'ath conditions. For example, on Labour Day when people were taking part in a march with their banners, the slogans written had to come from the central authority of the Ba'ath party, distributed via the civil unions. These demonstrations were exploited by the Ba'ath Party to present its own ideology as propaganda. On Labour Day, for example, when the banner slogans were about workers and working hours, these were combined on the same banner with slogans from the Ba'ath Party, for example: 'Unity, Freedom, and Socialism, Ba'athism is the way'.



Figure 18: Hundreds of thousands of people celebrate Saddam's birthday, Mosel (YouTube AP Archive, 2015).

Hassan, R. (2016) said in his interview that despite the official demonstrations organized by the Ba'ath Party, in 1977 people in Kurdistan protested against the Arabisation of the education system in schools. The Ba'ath Party planned to change social science lessons, such as history, geography and culture, from being taught in the Kurdish language, to Arabic. The Kurds opposed this and carried out mass protests in most cities and towns. Some teachers promised to instruct these topics half in Kurdish and half in Arabic. They also promised that tests of these subjects would be easy, in the hope of preventing the situation from deteriorating.

Hassan was keen to relay his experiences and share stories from the Saddam era, when he had a calligraphy and painting workshop on Sabunkaran Street. "I was interested in Hemin 's poems - a nationalist poet. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, he returned to Iran and began to read his poems in Kurdish areas as part of the Iraqi KDP's activities. Hemin was a member of the IKDP since the time of Qazi Muhammad. The Ba'ath Regime followed those who used the names of intellectuals and poets for their workshop names. "I decided to use his name as the title for my workshop. I made a plate and I wrote: 'Hemin Calligraphy and Painting' (Figure 10). I also placed his portrait beside the name and hung it in front of the workshop."

One afternoon Moulazm Muhsen, a terrifying Ba'athist security officer in Sulaymaniyah, responsible for killing and torturing many Kurdish activists, came to my workshop with bodyguards who surrounded the street. He himself entered and began questioning me about the workshop's name and what it meant. I explained how it was taken from a Kurdish poet. He asked, "Do you know where he lives now?" I answered no, but that I know his poetry, and just wanted to use his name as the name of my worksho





Figure 19: Khalid Zamdar, standing in front of his banner-making wall. Sabunkaran Street, Sulaymaniyah, 1983. The text on the banner reads “Under the supervision of the Governor of Sulaymaniyah and the Directorate of Culture and Society in Sulaymaniyah, the opening of the second exhibition of the artist 'Khaled Zamdar', in the Museum Hall, on the 16th of April on” (Khalid Zamdar. Facebook, 2016).



Figure 20: Hemin Calligraphy and Painting workshop, Sabunkaran Street, Sulaymaniyah (Rauf Hassan Archive 2016).

One of my friends was there and he intervened, saying that it was not an important thing, just the name of the poet. Moulazm Muhsen hit him hard. Then he demanded a ladder, paint and a brush and climbed up, defacing the sign. He said I had to remove the sign soon and that he would be back to check that evening. After that I changed it to a landscape, with my own name as the title of the workshop.”

Between 1980-1988, Iraq underwent a period of bloodshed, including the 8-year Iran-Iraq War<sup>23</sup>, which resulted in thousands of deaths (an estimated 500,000 people lost their lives) and displaced thousands of families. In parallel, there was conflict between Kurdish parties called *Bra Kuji* (Killing Brothers) in the mountainous regions<sup>24 25</sup>. In the early 1980's, as a result of divisions within the opposition, especially between the National Democratic Front, and the Democratic National and Patriotic Front, a civil war broke out in Northern Iraq. This division reflected negatively on relations between the Kurdish parties as they inherited the differences of their personal leaders. This added more obstacles to the situation, not to mention the overall project. According to Hamid A. (2015) the ICP was present in both Fronts, while the KDP and the PUK were on different sides, so that division sometimes took

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<sup>23</sup> In 1980, the Ba'athist regime began the eight-year war against Iran, in order to end the influence of the Iranian revolution that had turned Iran into a Shi'a state. Saddam expressed concern that the Shi'a revolution could spread to Iraq, due to the presence of the Shi'a in the South. Saddam wanted to have full sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab. During the war, Iran provided assistance to the Kurds in order to carry out uprisings against the Iraqi government, whilst Iraq supported Kurdish forces in Iran to fight the Iranian army in the Kurdish area (Stansfield, G.: 111).

<sup>24</sup> Mustafa, N. (1996), stated that, on the 23rd of August 1983, we got the news that the violent fighting occurred between the PUK and the SPKI in Kania Rasha near Sekanian in the Jafaiati valley. There were 7 dead and 7 injured from the PUK, including Jamal Ali Bapir, the PUK's commander, and Smail Gawralee. The SPKI said there were 6 dead and 5 injured including Sherko Shix Ali - the SPKI's commander. Both parties accused each other. Sherko was killed by Jamal. Sherko's brother who was called Aras and was a PUK fighter was killed in the Hakari Battle by the KDP. Jamal was killed by Sherko's brother Sherzad. This was the tragic moment of internal Kurdish war (209).

<sup>25</sup>The Kurdish parties appeared to be of an armed nature, rather than a political party. Despite the presence of city types and intellectuals among the parties, tribes in rural communities dominated (Brown, S. 1999: 217). Nevertheless, the Iraqi regime remained concerned about the possibility of a Kurdish-Iranian alliance and displaced about 600,000 Kurds to camps on Iranian and Turkish border areas south of the country. Saddam fought against the Kurds from 1980-1988, destroying almost all villages. In the offensive campaign in 1983, he killed about 5,000 - 8000 thousand Barzani and buried them in mass graves in Southern Iraq (Brown, S. 1999: 214).



the form of violent fighting between the opposition parties, for example: between the ICP and the PUK, between the PUK and the SPKI, and between the KDP and the PUK. This resulted in the conflict escalating between Kurdish parties, weakening their influence against central government, and leading to the outbreak of the Kurdish conflict.

For Ba'ath Party events, calligraphers were forced to make banners. Notably, the election of the legislative and executive assembly of the autonomous Kurdistan region. "I remember the day we got the message from the governor of Sulaymaniyah Province, and how we were forced into the car and taken to the governor's residence. In the meeting the security officials said it was the duty of every calligrapher to participate in this national campaign. Sherko refused, but the security officials were aggressive, saying: 'It's your duty and as important as being a soldier on the front line. If you refuse to participate you are a coward in the face of the enemy and if you don't do your duty it will be seen as national treason.' And he asked again: 'Did you give blood-money or gold to support the government in its war against Iran?' I said not. He said: 'You should be in prison.' and 'You're a kind of bacteria'". (Aziz, S. 2015 interview).

Aziz added that once again he was called to call at one of the Ba'ath headquarters, bringing a brush as they wanted him for some calligraphy work. When he arrived, he was taken to a room, and received by a man in Ba'ath uniform costume, who introduced himself. The man asked him to write a letter with his blood to renew a vow to the president. The blood was in a vessel. It seems no one could reject the Ba'ath party at that time, which is why he felt the need to write the letter in blood. Each time he looked into the blood he felt nauseated, but

nevertheless he was obliged to write. It is worth mentioning that the script was as follows:

“I promise to be a loyal man with my soul and body for the president (God Preserve Him)”.

Muhamad, S. (2015) explained that the slogans and texts were decided on centrally by the Ba’ath party: “I dealt with them simply as customers, not as the Ba’ath Party” he said.

“Directors and local head-men authorised banners. The Popular Army Unit sometimes visited me and wanted me to write fifty banners, with maybe four on a single topic, maybe five on another. They were distributed widely”. The banners, he said, were written in Arabic and sometimes Kurdish. Red, blue, black and green paints were used, and the texts were ‘shadowed’. “We used white and yellow cloths, since specific colours for the banners were not imposed but we were careful not to make mistakes as people were frightened.

Calligraphers generally complied as we had to earn a living”.

During the ongoing war between the Kurds and the Iraqi army, the two sides held short-term negotiations which ended without agreement<sup>26</sup>. When fighting between the PUK and the Iraqi army restarted, it was even more devastating<sup>27</sup>. The Ba’athist regime used all their military resources, and also used Kurds against Kurds by forming the so-called *Jash (Little Donkey)* forces, formed of clans who had influence among the Kurds<sup>28</sup>. When the Jash were

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<sup>26</sup> The Kurdish Party’s armed struggles against the Iraqi regime continued, and in 1983 the PUK negotiated with the Iraqi government alone, without the KDP. These concessions collapsed in 1985 due to disagreements about self-government. Pressure from the Turkish government prevented the implementation of the agreement, and it fell to Turkey to threaten the Iraqi government by cutting off the Iraqi pipeline that runs through its territory. The PUK directed major operations against the Ba’ath regime. The former Iraqi regime, although it was a socialist Ba’athist regime, deliberately called for military operations in Kurdish cities and villages. (McDowall, D. 1992: 104-106).

<sup>27</sup> According to a report of Amnesty International Organization for Human Rights, the Ba’athist regime avenged the PUK and began to arrest numbers of young Kurds in cities, especially Sulaymaniyah - the centre of PUK support. They alleged that these youths were in Kurdish parties. 300 people were arrested. 23 were executed in public. 8 were buried alive in the city’s cemetery. Furthermore, around 200 civilians were killed for allegedly demonstrating against the executions. (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 158).

<sup>28</sup> For the purpose of fighting the Kurdish movement and the Kurdish parties in the mountains, the Ba’athist government formed a national defence battalion called *Jash or Little Donkey* - formed from the main Kurdish clans. A chief would be appointed as a *Mustashar or*, commander of the battalion, depending on the region. Each battalion included between 1000 - 1500 *Jash*. Some joined and became *Mustashars* because they had disagreements with Peshmerga leaders, and

deployed by the Ba'athists against the Peshmerga, hundreds on both sides were killed. A major source of confusion and anger in Kurdish society is that many Jash members are registered as martyrs by political parties, as well as by the KRG. This source of discontent and social disturbance was part of the motivation for the *Shaheed* exhibition discussed in Chapter 4.

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Kurdish opposition forces took control of several areas, but Iraqi forces used chemical weapons to suppress them<sup>29</sup>. Iraqi forces attacked the so-called forbidden areas with brutal force, ending their attacks with a bloody massacre.<sup>30</sup>

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others joined for money. They became collaborators with the Iraqi Army in most military operations that took place in Kurdistan, especially in the Anfal operations, and they allowed killing, capturing, and also, looting and theft in the villages and towns. Some *Mustashars* committed crimes against their own people, and some helped people to escape Iraqi forces for bribes. (Brown, S. 1999: 217). Corruption was rife in the appointment of *Jashes* by the *Mustashars*, one of whom described the situation: "Our situation was not easy. We were three years with Jash. We wanted to keep our people safe. I had 1,500 men from tribes. I was defending my people, 1000 of whom were living in peace because of me. There was no work in Kurdistan and no way to get money. The government was bringing men from Sudan to work but would not take Kurds. By enrolling in the Jash the Kurds did 15 days duty per month. Many had escaped from the army. They were all asking me for safety so as not to be killed in the Iran-Iraq war. So we defended them by putting them in the Jash...most went to their houses and did nothing, I only took 50 men for duty. My enrolment book says 1,500, so I took money for 1,500, but I only used 50 people full-time on behalf of the others". (McDowall, D. 1996: 355).

<sup>29</sup> In spring 1987, the Peshmerga controlled many areas in northern Iraq. The PUK had a strong presence in Sulaymaniyah province, the KDP in Badianan, and the Iranian army controlled the mountainous positions near Sulaymaniyah. Nevertheless, supplies were provided by the Libyan authorities to the Kurds such as anti-helicopter weapons which put huge pressure on Iraq's army. Saddam decided to send his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid as secretary of the Northern Organization Bureau. He had the authority to use all military weaponry in the Kurdish areas - including chemical weapons. (Bulloch, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 159).

<sup>30</sup> Ali Hassan al-Majid was nicknamed Chemical-Ali or *Ali al-Kaimawi* by the Kurds for ordering the use of poison gas in the 1988 attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja, killing thousands of Kurds. This was the beginning of the *scorched-earth policy* in Iraqi Kurdistan. (Directive SF/4008 1987, as cited in Phillips, L. D. 2005: 22).

*Ali al-Kaimawi* began the genocide of the Kurds: he used weapons, and chemical weapons, destroying villages, burning fields and farms, and poisoning all water sources. He considered these villages as forbidden areas and ordered the soldiers to catch all those found there and execute them.

On March the 15th 1988, with support from Iran, the PUK seized control of Halabja in the mountainous region of Kurdistan. The response was swift, and on March 16th, 1988, the Iraqi army began to bomb the city. The Air Force fired more than 200 shells filled with mustard and sarin gas. Within five hours thousands of people, mostly women and children, died, and their bodies were burnt. Thousands were injured. (Bulloch, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 142-146). Although the tragic event was covered by the western media, it was alarming for the international silence - Saddam was a Western ally in his war against Iran. (Bulloch, j. and Morris, H. 1991: 88). After the Halabja incident, Hassan al-Majid oversaw another campaign against the Kurds, called the Anfal campaign. This campaign went from February to September 1988. (The word *Anfal* is recited in the Koran.) in this campaign Iraqi forces, with the cooperation of the *Jash*, killed thousands of people in a mass murder and buried them in the deserts of Southern Iraq. They burned their homes and fields, and looted their animals and goods. (Phillips, L. D. 2005: 23). Ali Hassan al-Majid had all the powers to suppress the Kurds, if he failed in any attack with Peshmerga, his response was to arrest young people and execute them in urban squares. It can be said that the ruling Ba'ath Party, which followed the ideology of "One Arab Nation", did not tolerate diversity, or the existence of other ethnic minorities that did not fit its own ideology. (Bulloch, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 156-160).



Figure 21: The Third *Komala* conference during negotiations between PUK and Saddam, 20th July, 1984, Mergapan. Behind Jalal Talabani and his colleagues are suspended *Komala's* banners with slogans that read: "In order to strengthen *Komala* in the field of class struggle, in order to apply the principles of *Komala* organisation" (Salah Rasheed, *Mam Jalal Didary Taman*, 2019).



Figure 22: Ali Hassan al-Majid, nicknamed Chemical-Ali or *Ali al-Kaimawi* (YouTube, Al Jazeera Arabic 2016).

After the Halabja and Anfal campaigns, the Kurdish political movement was vulnerable to setbacks and divisions<sup>31</sup>, and needed to consider unity in order to maintain their political integrity and organize themselves for future opportunities<sup>32</sup>. During the 1980s, victims among civilians and combatants reached into the hundreds of thousands, whilst thousands of families were displaced<sup>33</sup>.

According to calligraphers at that time, banners were made for the Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein as it was the only ruling party in Iraq, and Saddam was the head of state. The Iraqi regime was an authoritarian dictatorship, and the opposition parties were not able to engage in any political or civil activity inside the cities, although they were armed in the mountains and in the liberated villages of Kurdistan.

Ba'ath Party events were numerous and varied, for example: the 17th of July was the day of the Ba'ath Party, and July 14 was the birthday of President Saddam Hussein. On this day, there was interest in how the name of Saddam should be written on the banners - the colour, line and font style. This the calligraphers did under pressure and out of fear. The phrase: *God protect him* was always written next to Saddam's name.

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<sup>31</sup> The Kurdish political movement was subject to reversals and divisions. This occurred when the Iraqi government started the Anfal campaign - to control all those areas that was under the rule of the Kurdish opposition parties in the mountainous regions. In these campaigns many Kurdish political activists were arrested and killed by the government, and some of them fled abroad. The Kurdish political parties called for unity after years of divisions and internal conflicts - in order to put pressure on the government. (Brown, S. 1999: 216-217).

<sup>32</sup> In June 1988, the parties formed the Kurdistan Front which included the: PUK, PDK, PASOK, KPDP (Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party), the IMK (Islamic Movement of Kurdistan), and the Kurdish branch of the ICP. The aim of this front was to unite the Kurdish forces and with the cooperation of the Iraqi opposition, to fight the government, and ultimately to form a democratic government and gain autonomy for the Kurds. (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 5-6).

<sup>33</sup> In August 1988, the 8-year war ended. During this bloody war half, a million Iraqis and 1 million Iranians had been killed, and both urban and rural infrastructure had been destroyed, causing a humanitarian disaster. (Black, I. 2010 The Guardian). Due to the Anfal and Halabja disasters, all the villages in Kurdistan were completely destroyed and were uninhabitable for both humans and animals - the government deeming them forbidden areas. The state built settlements for the villagers who had been displaced. (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 98).

During that period, the Ba'ath party gave orders to all the schools, departments, and other governmental establishments and directorates, obliging them to write banners about their allocated expenditure fund. People would be interrogated for negligence, and so many banners were made and fixed up in the streets, parks and all public places.

Omar Saeed noted in the interview conducted in July 2019, that during the 1980's - the war era - banners were displayed everywhere: in the streets and shops, on the walls of government offices, and civil organizations, and so on. In those days two types of banners were made: the first were black and used for those who were killed on the battlefield when their bodies were returned to their families; the second type were made in red, yellow and blue, and utilized for Ba'athist slogans, propaganda for Saddam and his statements, war propaganda, the Day of the Province (Figure 23) and other such events. After the end of each event, the banners were thrown away.

Saeed said: "My mother salvaged some banners to make her family's duvets from as the economic situation was not good and fabrics were difficult to come by (Figure 24). And so, my mother transformed banners into items that became an intimate part of the family's daily life", Saeed states. "People were confronted with pictures of Saddam everywhere, every day on television, and even as they slept, Saddam's slogans were covering our bodies: *Saddam lives, Qadisiya lives*, etc. I remember when my little brother was bedwetting. One morning my mother asked my brother to stop it because if they found out that he was urinating on Saddam's name, they might kill us all!"



Figure 23: Schools marching with their banners, Sulaymaniyah Province Day, 1980s (YouTube, kamarantv, 2011).

According to various calligraphers, the Ba'athists had little concern for the colour of the fabric and the font of the banners, but focussed instead on the text and the size of Saddam Hussein's name. A mandatory condition was that the name of Saddam must be different from the rest of the text and it must be the largest text on the banners. The colour of the text on the banners depended on the colour of the cloth so that if the colour of the cloth was dark, a bright colour was required for the text and vice versa.

Muhamad, S. (2015) pointed out that the black in Kurdistan, as with all colours, is symbolic. Black is a symbol of death so that when a person dies or is killed, their relatives have black banners made upon which the information is written, this then is displayed in public places. A number of calligraphers claim the black banner was first used at the funeral of Adnan Khairallah (Figure 25). He was the Iraqi defence minister, and also Saddam's brother-in-law and cousin. According to the official statement from the Iraqi government at the end of the 1980's, Adnan Khairwalah died in a helicopter crash in a sandstorm. The Ba'ath Party forced all government departments, institutions, and marketeers to make black banners for this historic event. On that day, public places throughout Iraq were covered with black banners and slogans, and thereafter the black banner became more common, with the text containing information about the person who died or was killed - the colour of the text changing according to ideology, or the position of the deceased person in the community.





Figure 24: Duvet made from Saddam's banner, 1980s. The text reads: "Employers Club, Long live the victory maker... Saddam is Great" (Omar Saeed, 2019).



Figure 25: Saddam Hussein honours Adnan Khairallah (Algardenia.com 2015).

Muhamad, S. (2015) in his interview said that one of his nephews was martyred in the Qadisiya war. The officials in charge wrote out a banner text for him. It said: *The Hero Martyr [name] was Martyred in [place] Battlefield'*. The Ba'ath organization wrote its own banners for those who died in the Qadisiya battle. Sarabast argued that outside the cities there were calligraphers among the Peshmerga, including the martyr Bekir. They used to write things about the revolution, for instance propaganda leaflets, or common slogans like: *Live Bravely if Briefly'*, or *Long Live the Hardworking and the Revolutionaries*.

## Banner-making in the discourse of the Kurdish uprising

At the beginning of the 1990s, Iraq and Kurdistan entered an important historical phase with the entry of Iraqi forces into Kuwait<sup>34 35</sup>, as the Kurds were able to control predominantly Kurdish areas during the uprising (Figure 26 & 27). Banner-making developed in its structure in parallel with political situation.

According to McDowall, D. (1992) The uprising, or *intifada*, started on March 4th, but it began on March 5th 1991 in northern Iraq, from the small town of Ranya<sup>36</sup>. This spread to Sulaymaniyah and would end up in the city of Kirkuk, which was liberated on the 19th of March 1991. The Kurds were able to liberate more than 90% of Iraqi Kurdistan during the two weeks of continuous uprising. Worth noting was that all the people of Southern Kurdistan - with their vast diversities - all participated. (117).

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<sup>34</sup> On the 2nd of August 1990, the Iraqi Army took Kuwait. 100,000 soldiers occupied it within hours. Saddam Hussein recognized Kuwait as one of Iraq's provinces. At the UN emergency meeting, they asked Iraq to immediately withdraw from Kuwait. Iraq ignored all international requests to withdraw its forces. Within three months, western countries formed an international coalition, led by the USA, to end the occupation. (BBC on this day 2 August). In the beginning the international coalition refused to involve the Kurdish parties in any strikes against Iraq, but the Kurds did not want to directly participate anyway having had such previously catastrophic encounters with Saddam. (Bullock, J., Morris, H. and Bullock, J 1992: 9).

On the 17th of January 1990, the International Coalition began its military campaign against Iraqi forces in Kuwait, resulting in the Iraqi Army briefly collapsing, and by the 28th of February, there was a ceasefire. (BBC on this day 2 August).

<sup>35</sup> The US President, George W. Bush, asked Iraqis to revolt against the Iraqi regime. The uprising began from the cities of southern Iraq - specifically the city of Basra, and the Iraqi army withdrew from Kuwait, and because of the destruction of military vehicles by US forces, the Iraqi soldiers were left having to return to Iraq on foot. On the 2nd of March 1991 in Saad Square in Basra, an Iraqi soldier opened fire on a statue of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, shouting slogans against Saddam. This sparked the popular uprising. The uprising spread from the south to the Kurdish region in the north of Iraq. (Galbraith W. P. 2003 The Ghosts of 1991. The Washington Post).

<sup>36</sup> The institutions of the Ba'athist Regime, the security services, the intelligence services and the Popular Army were subject to the blows and retaliation of the people. The *Jashes* took an active part in the uprising and most of them were joined by the Peshmerga forces against the government - some of the *Mustashares* becoming commanders in the Peshmerga. Furthermore, some of them had their own troops and others still had been involved in the crimes against their own people, nevertheless they kept themselves inside the Kurdish parties. (Brown, S. 1999: 217). (Strong-men, such as Tahsin Shawais in Chamchamal, remained relatively independent, and though not a tribal leader, gained status as a *Mustashar* in the 1980's and had a reputation as a brave Peshmerga, but also sided with Baghdad in 1980. (Muller, 1992: 20, as cited in Brown, S. 1999: 217).

The uprising lasted about a month and at the end of March was suppressed by Saddam's forces with a green light from Western alliances. The campaign has displaced more than one million people to the borders of Iran and Turkey<sup>37</sup>.

After the migration of millions, the United Nations issued a resolution to establish the safe area, and then people began to return to their cities and villages<sup>38</sup>. With the establishment of the safe area, the Kurdistan Front began negotiations with the Iraqi government, but the negotiations failed and then Baghdad withdrew its troops and government administration in the majority Kurdish cities. The withdrawal of Baghdad led to an administration gap<sup>39</sup>, and to fill this gap the Kurdistan Front held the first elections for parliament<sup>40</sup>. The Kurdish

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<sup>37</sup> The March uprising was brief for a variety of reasons, especially because of regional states, of post-Saddam political changes, Turkey's fear of a Kurdish presence in Northern Iraq, and Saudi Arabia as Sunni states feared the forming a Shi'ite state in the south. The international coalition and the George W. Bush administration withdrew, allowing Saddam to suppress the March uprising. The regime savagely attacked the cities of Kurdistan (Arbil, Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk and Dohuk) began in the hands of the Iraqi military forces due to the unequal balance of the Iraqi military with the Kurdish forces. Eventually more than 1.5 million Kurds were forced to escape to the two neighbouring countries. Hundreds of children, women and elderly people died in the harsh climatic conditions. (Phillips, L. D. 2005: 24-25).

<sup>38</sup> International news agencies and satellite TV broadcast the tragic images of this migration, shocking the world, forcing leaders across the world to step in protect the Kurds. As a result, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1991, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 688 - a decree to establish a no-fly zone for the Kurds. (Stansfield, G. 2016: 136). After establishing this safe zone, people began returning to their towns and villages. At the beginning of 1992, the Iraqi government withdrew, leading to an administrative vacuum. People began looting. Kurdistan was in chaos and there was a lack of food and medicine. (Gunter, M. 1992: 88-89).

<sup>39</sup> The Kurdistan Front (KF) was one administrative area the government withdrew from but decision-making among the Kurdish parties was difficult because they would veto each other. (New York Times, February 1992, *Kurd's Dream of Freedom Slipping Away*, as cited in Brown, S. 1999: 245). According to Kutschera (1997: 122), the division of revenue was 30 percent each to the KDP and the PUK, and 10-15 percent each of the smaller parties. (As cited in Brown, S. 1999: 245). The United Nations imposed an economic embargo on Iraq and the Iraqi government imposed another siege on the Kurds. The Kurds suffered economically, and all humanitarian supplies were cut off. (Laizer, S. 1996: 49).

<sup>40</sup> Kurdish negotiations with the government failed due to the subject of autonomy. In January 1992, The Kurdistan Front (KF) withdrew from the negotiations and decided to hold elections for the Kurdistan Parliament in order to manage the administrative vacuum in the region. (Brown, S. 1999: 219). The KF decided to run elections on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1992 but this was delayed to the 30<sup>th</sup>. The excuse given was 'technical problems' at the polling station, and then it was postponed to a further 48 hours under the pretext of 'defective ink'. The KF was eventually appointed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May. The Kurdistan Front was composed of eight parties; seven of them participated in the elections. Each party decided upon a designated colour as the symbol of their political party: KDP - yellow; PUK - green; SPKI and PSOK - black and blue; for KPDP - Blue (when united); white with a red star - Kurdistan Toilers party; red - the Kurdistan section of the ICP; indigo - The Assyrian Democratic Movement; among other Islamic parties. (Gunter, M. 1992: 90). Elections were held for 105 seats; 5 Seats were for Christians and the remaining seats were distributed by the two main parties. The government formed a 50-50 system, and if the minister was from the KDP party, his deputy must be from the PUK party and vice versa. This affected government decision-making. The election for the president of the Kurdish Liberation Movement was held simultaneously. Barzani and Talabani were among the most prominent candidates to compete for this post, but this did not work because the votes for each of the main candidates were equal; Barzani receiving a little more than Talabani. (Stansfield, G. 2016: 137-138).

people had hoped that the elections would reduce their tragedies, because their people had suffered greatly from the economic situation, lack of salaries and corruption<sup>41</sup>.

The political differences between the two sides were embodied in colours or so-called *Shara paro*. This began in the first elections in May 1992 while power was divided 50/50 between the PUK and the KDP. These two sides were in the struggle against each other in various political stations, and as a result, Kurdistan was divided into two different regions: Green and Yellow. Talabani, in the areas of influence of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, offered his authority (with his green flag and a green building) and on the other side, the KDP divided a neighborhood with walls, and yellow flags. (Laizer, S. 1996: 126).

As Abdula, S. (2016) pointed out in the interview that after the uprising, gathering in public places became the norm, and it was not uncommon to see about 500 people gathering around someone if he/she was reading a script on a wall. For instance, when a party member was giving a speech in the cultural public hall it became so crowded that people assembled to listen outside, on the off-chance of getting a seat inside. The situation now is very different, for even if a leader gives a talk, no one cares. Initially people were thirsty for Kurdistan and freedom, as the blood they had shed was for this reason.

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<sup>41</sup> The Kurdish elections brought hope to the Kurds to improve and stabilize the political and economic situation. However, in some districts, the two parties clashed as they did not accept the election results. In Chamchamal, 10 people died as a result. Nevertheless, the other parties were loyal to the main parties. (Brown, S. 1999: 220). The economic situation had a negative impact on local life, and people had to sell off their personal property to survive - even their doors and windows from their houses. This situation led to class strife in Kurdish society, the vast majority being poor. Rice, bread, potatoes and dates, became the staple food for most people and they could not buy meat. Some people were getting richer as a result of their relationship with party leaders - smuggling goods to other countries. (Laizer, S. 1996: 125). Peshmerga salaries were higher than the normal salaries and therefore most people, especially young men, joined the Peshmerga. The police authority was weak and political parties intervened in court decisions and having an influence on decision-making. Many problems arose among villagers over the land ownership on the villagers return home to their burned lands. In some cases, such problems led to killing, and if the murderer was a relative of the parties, the problem was resolved by them and the murderer had released him from prison. (Brown, S. 1999: 221-222).



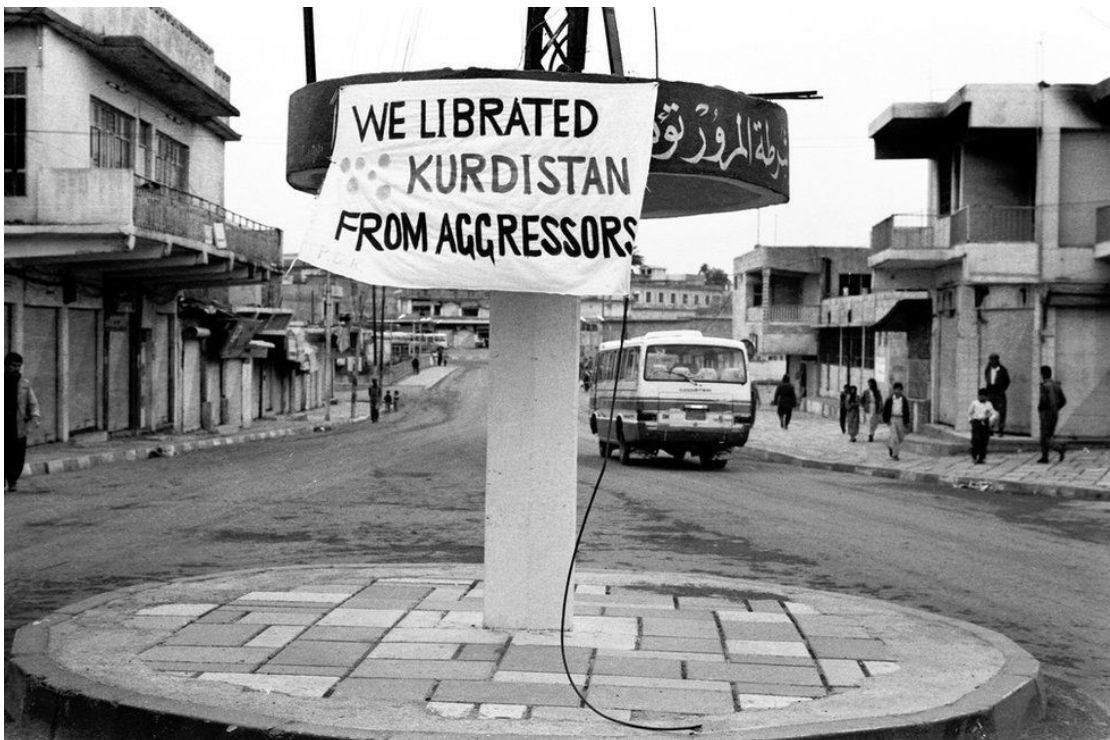


Figure 26: The uprising, or *intifada* of March 1991 (BBC News 2016, Photograph Richard Wayman).



Figure 27: The uprising, or *intifada* and the gathering for the Halabja anniversary at Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 16th of March 1991 (K24 2016. Photograph Fayaq Hamasalih).

Abdula (2016) stated that the communist movement also influenced the youth, and they had a young following (Figure 28 & 29). Most of their slogans appear superficial, and gradually their influence waned, with many followers slipping into the other parties.

The phenomenon of banner-making changed considerably from Ba'ath party times, with its formal constraints, especially in the colours used, because the political situation changed from one party to a multi-party system, and most banners were made for political events. In the Green Zone, the PUK was the ruling party, and on the annual anniversary of the party, banners were made for martyrs at the battles of Anfal and Halabja (Figure 30).

The human rights situation at that time was poor, as there were many abuses by powerful parties such as the PUK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party against rival parties<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Authority was in the hands of the two main parties (PUK and KDP) who had their own militias, security and intelligence, and they also had their own slogans about democracy, pluralism and freedom of political action. But these were only propaganda and rumours and not reflected in reality because they arrested and persecuted other party's followers. The only party that posed a threat to them was the Islamist movement in Kurdistan, because they also had militia present in the border areas close to Sulaymaniyah. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ٢١). The human rights situation was bad, and the parties arrested members of the Communist Party, PKK, Tekoshen, and the Workers' Union who were imprisoned without trial. Protesters were shot and arrested, for example, in the demonstration of the 26th of September 1992, against the Turkish bombing. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ٦٠). The Kurdish parties violated against human rights in 1991 by killing prisoners, executing the opposition after the virtual trial, and violations against demonstrators. In 1993, when a war broke out between the parties, violations reached their worst; the situation deteriorated when fighting between the PUK and the KDP began, with the participation of the Islamist movement against the PUK. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ٧٧). Political parties in Kurdistan did not want to assist investigations conducted by human rights organizations to uncover crimes against humanity. In this way, suspects were constantly violating human rights, and those mainly responsible were the two parties as they governed the region. The PUK was the most powerful and dominant in Sulaimaniya, and the KDP was in full control of the areas of the Badinan areas. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ٧٨). At the end of 1993, the conflict between the KDP and the socialist (HSK) party was brought to the brink of military tension and armed conflict. As a result, the Democratic Party controlled the Socialist Party headquarters in Sulaymaniyah. In order to ease this tense situation and restore peace to the city, a large group of people demonstrated peacefully in front of KDP headquarters, but in response, to disperse the demonstrators, the KDP's Peshmerga opened fire on the demonstrations, killing four and injuring 60 of them. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ٩٧). In another gathering in Sulaymaniyah on the 13th of June 1994, the funeral of Osman Qala Manuor was held, which was a large march. The PUK opened fire on crowds, killing dozens of them (Osman was a leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and was killed by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in the Punjab region). According to the PUK, 14 people were killed and 46 injured but the PDK argued that 51 people were killed but later 22 people were killed in the event. According to Amnesty International reports PUK forces fired at the crowd. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ١٠٠). In another incident, PUK forces opened fire on protesters on the 1st September 1994, when the Kurdistan Workers' Organization carried out a demonstration with the participation of the Kurdish refugees who had fled from Kirkuk (under the policy of Arabization and displacement that Saddam had enforced against the Kurds). This demonstration opposed the decision declared by the Governor of Sulaymaniyah to destroy those homes made by the displaced people. On this day, Bakir Ali the poet and one of the organizers of the demonstration was killed by the PUK forces. Some sources say that the Special Forces followed him and then killed him. (له بلاوکراوه کانی ریکخراوی لیپوردنی ناونه ته وهی ١٩٩٥ : ١٠٣-١٠٤).





Figure 28: The text on the banner reads: “Long live socialism, down with capitalism”. Communist (*Shuara's*) processions in Sulaymaniyah, 16th of March, 1991 (Bahar Munzir's Archive, 2015).



Figure 29: Communist (*Shuara's*) protest in Sulaymaniyah in front of KF office, 18th of March, 1991 (Bahar Munzir's Archive, 2015).

In addition, the KRG, formed after the uprising, was weak because the two main parties had the greatest power outside the government.

Conflict and competition for power led to the civil war<sup>43</sup> resulting in thousands of deaths, and many people went missing<sup>44</sup>. There were numerous memorials after the uprising, most of which were held in March, such as those for the chemical bombardment of Halabja, Anfal, Neuros, the liberation of Kurdistan from the Great Intifada, and the establishment of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. It should be noted that most of the banners for these events were made throughout the area for PUK events.

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<sup>43</sup> At the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994, conflicts between the two parties reached their worst and led to armed fighting and civil war. The PUK, led by Jalal Talabani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Massoud Barzani were the most prominent parties at the time, prompting them to share money and influence. These two parties did not agree, and the war intensified. The dream of a unified government was not achieved. Erbil was controlled by the PUK. Moreover, the Talabani Party was ahead of Barzani Party politically and militarily and confined it behind the border areas adjacent to Turkey. (Dodge, T. 2005: 51). The geographic location of each party influenced events and conflicts between the Kurds, in particular, the two main parties, because the PDK was geographically connected to Turkey, KDP was assisted by Turkey to fight the PKK. On the other hand, PUK was close to Iran. (Stansfield, G. 2016: 150). On the 31st of August, Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard invaded the city of Erbil at official request, and a call from Massoud Barzani personally to the Iraqi leadership at the time asking to extract the city of Erbil from the hegemony of Jalal Talabani. The Republican Guards marched towards Erbil with Barzani's Peshmerga, who were supplied with the yellow striped cloths of the Democratic Party leadership which they tied around their arms to distinguish them from the rest of the Peshmerga. Jalal Talabani's party were swept away in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and driven over the Iranian border. About 39,000 people fled their homes and were displaced into Iran. (Dodge, T. 2005: 51). In October, Sulaymaniyah was controlled by the PUK with Iranian weapons and support. After controlling the Erbil, the KDP was more powerful than ever before. (Stansfield, G. 2016: 150-151). In September 1998, Barzani and Talabani signed The Washington agreement to establish a formal peace treaty. The two sides agreed to end conflict and share revenues and power. (U.S. Department of State 2001).

<sup>44</sup> According to some sources, during the fighting between the PUK and the KDP between 1994 -1998, approximately 3,000 fighters and civilians were killed and around 10000 were displaced. (Abdulrahman, F., Archive, Niqash). In the course of this conflict, thousands of Peshmerga and civilians were killed, and a number of people were missing. There was no information about their graves or place of death or any evidence of their fate. According to the reports of the Kurdistan Parliament there are 120 files for the missing, but other sources refer to 200 to 850 files. There was no evidence or accurate information on how they were killed or whether they were still in prison and the responsible parties have concealed the information and have not prepared to disclose any information about them. The parties and government did not say they were killed or alive. And their relatives continually demonstrated to have their fate revealed or whether they had in fact survived. However, the government paid the salaries of the missing people in the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal. (Abdulrahman, F., Archive, Niqash).

In the Green Zone, green cloth was used especially on PUK occasions and national events. For example, the uprising memorial was written on a green cloth, but the other parties wrote in their own colour, e.g. KDP used yellow, the Communist Party used Red, the Social Democratic Party used blue, and the Kurdistan Islamic Union wrote in brown.

As Rasheed, H. (2015) pointed out in the interview, “we wrote on the green cloth in white, but we used a different colour for words such as *PUK*, *Intifada*, and *chemical bombardment*. For example, we used a black banner for events such as the chemical bombardment memorial because it inferred sadness. The word *Halabja* was written in green, and red was used so it looked like bloody drops sprayed on the surface of the banners, suggestive of bloodshed. But as for the colour of the word *intifada*, we used a bold, clear orange.”

Beyond the political problems in Kurdistan, there were, and still are, social issues, especially that of women’s rights, an important issue in Kurdish society linked to family reputation and honour (Figure 31).

According to Munzir, B. (interview 2015), after the uprising in 1991, many women were assassinated in southern Kurdistan, in particular those who supported the Ba'ath party. Many women were killed because of the *Sharaf* issue - important for the Kurdish man because they see women in terms of the reputation of their families. Weapons were present in every family and every house. The political parties distributed weapons to the tribes to gain their members for their parties - forming tribal systems in the Kurdish society. The court and the police were weak, and the Kurdish parties had no experience in the administration because they came from the mountains, having been fighting against the state system for a long time.



Figure 30: Anniversary of Halabja, *Halabja Taza*, 16th of March 1991 (Dana Halabjai, Kurdistanpost.nu, 2016).



Figure 31: Women protest in Sulaymaniyah against killing women on the 28th of May 2014. The text on the white banner on the right reads: “The Unity of women is the key to solving problems. Women’s Liberty Organisation in Kurdistan”, and the purple banner on the left reads: “No to the trading of women, Women’s Liberty Organisation in Kurdistan” (Jian archive 2014).

Munzir said that most women's organizations belonged to other parties, and that their role was passive because they did not consider or defend the rights of women in society but were interested in Kurdish national rights. In those days if a person or any of the activists invoked the issues of women, they were regarded as members of the Communist Party. He states that “ after 1991, people had the opportunity to organize their activities as we did. As a group from the left wing, we organized an event on the 8<sup>th</sup> March - a women's day at the Sulaymaniyah secondary school. We had activities such as reading about women's rights, reading poems and singing. Also, we had banners which we displayed. There was a commune in Sulaymaniyah interested in the left wing, and this grew quickly, but the Kurdistan Front was barred from joining. People who supported the left-wing organized mass protests against the KF decision, raising red banners with slogans.” (Munzir, interview 2015).

Faris, J. (2015) said that black banners were made for martyrs during the civil war, and that he made a number of banners for each martyr (Figure 32), and placed some at the front of the martyr's house, some in the mosque, and some on their graves. On their Memorial Day (which was after fourteen days had passed) some banners were placed in front of a ceremonial hall. The fighting took place daily and there were casualties, and each month there would be about ten memorials for martyrs in Sulaymaniyah. Rasheed, H. (2015) said: “During the civil war I made ten banners for ten different people in just one day. On another day, I made eleven banners for martyrs who had visited on the day of *Arafah*, the day before Eid Ramadan.”





Figure 32: Families of victims of the internal war gather. The text on the black banner is “Martyrs of Revenge storm ... Defend the Homeland” (Fayaq Hamasalih, Kurdipedia.org 2016).

As Abdula, S. (2016) states, “during the conflict between the PUK and the KDP, commanding officials, even the PUK leadership officials, had no problem traveling to Turkey by land through the ‘Badinan’ zone. It was only the common people who suffered in this respect; the struggle was there among the lower classes: brother against brother and family against family. I believe that the leadership members with their spouses and children moved easily, travelling to Europe through the zone of the KDP with no problem. Simple people were not aware of that.”

Abdula also observed that the struggle between the PUK and the KDP was clearly visible in the form of banners. For a period, the SDP was united with the KDP, and they merged their slogans and colours; even their banners were half yellow and half blue. They also had a new slogan which was significant for them, saying: *yellow and the sky like blue, Mr. Mohammad and Barzani are the two* and written on the banners of both those two united parties.

Despite political and military concerns, both Presidents Talabani and Barzani’s differences and divisions were deepening. Their aggressive behaviour towards each other was to have a significant impact on the fracturing of the social structure of the Kurdish society. The differences and divisions spread into the city, villages and even within the Kurdish family, and were embodied in colour on the line of conflict, the yellow being Barzani's share, while green was exclusive to Talabani members. The supporters wore clothes of their party colour, and showed disdain for the other colour to express their loyalty. (Salih, S. 2015, Interview).



Muhamad, S. (2015) faced a problem once: “when I wrote a banner for someone. I chose the colours and shaded the text with another font, and I shaded one part yellow just to aestheticise it with nothing further behind that decision. When the person returned for the banner and saw it, he was angry and said ‘what is that yellow you added? Don’t you know two of my brothers got killed by their hands<sup>45</sup>?’ Having argued about it loudly I then flushed away a gallon of yellow and erased the text. During the civil war the colour yellow was not allowed to be used for any occasion in the Sulaymaniyah zone, whilst the colour green was not allowed in the Badinan zone - one might even get knocked down for carrying a green rosary bead. A martyr’s name was written in green if it belonged to the PUK, while a martyr of the Communist Party was made in red, and the SDP’s in blue.” (Muhamad, S. 2015, interview).

In my interviews, there are a number of accounts of political issues affecting social relations, even within families, e.g. if one of two brothers supported the PUK and the other supported the PDK, they would not accept each other. Neighbours would also fight each other over their political differences.

After 1991, most banners were made for party events, such as the annual anniversary of political parties, election campaigns, events related to party martyrs, as well as party propaganda. Each party would use its own colour for making banners (PUK: green, KDP: yellow, ICP red and so on). When government departments held national or party events,

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<sup>45</sup> The hands of the PDK who use yellow as their symbolic colour.

the writing of the information would be on a green banner, because most of the directors of government departments were loyal to the PUK.

Despite the influence of nationalist and leftist parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, certain Islamist parties retained an influence on Kurdish society, and remained in conflict with other parties<sup>46</sup>. Muhamad, S. (2015) in his interview recalled an incident which happened when he was writing banners: “One day a man approached me. He told me to write a number of banners to mark the occasion of the killing of Mullah Abdul-Qahsari at the Tasluja checkpoint in a conflict between the Islamic party and the PUK. I was unaware of that problem, so I wrote the banners and put them outside to dry. My neighbouring shop owner came into my shop and asked me: ‘What have you written?! Don’t you see the security guards are hanging around the area?’ I rushed out and gathered in the banners. The day after, the man came back for the banners and I blamed him and told him: ‘You should have told me about the problem. Because of you I was about to get into trouble.’ I now always inquire when I write a banner for someone, because I know only some parties are allowed. If the party is not well known I inquire, and if I realize that something is against the regime<sup>47</sup> I will not write it. For example, if one asks for a Daesh<sup>48</sup> flag I will not make it.”

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<sup>46</sup> Islamic parties have a presence in Kurdistan, particularly the Kurdistan Islamic Movement, which was established as a result of the Islamic revolution in Iran and supported Iran from its war with Iraq. After 1991 they became stronger. And in 1994 after their differences with the PUK and then led to the bloody war, which weakened them, but after the events of the 31st of August 1996 they were able to control Halabja near the Iranian border. They became more radical when some of their leaders returned from Afghanistan. The Islamic Movement faced divisions and splits which were led by the establishment of other Islamic parties such as an Islamic Group of Kurdistan (IGK) in 2002 which is led by Ali Bapir. The PUK in its zone was a dominant party and they had problems with other parties such as Islamic parties. On the 4th of March 2003, when Mullah Abdul-Qahsari returned from his party’s meeting from Ahmed Awa district to the city of Raniya, he, along with four of his bodyguards were killed at the Tasluja checkpoint by the PUK forces. (Dodge, T. and Simon, S. 2007: 142-143). Some of the members who believed in the jihad against the PUK and the KDP broke away from the Islamic movement and on the 31st of August 2001, Jund al-Islam was founded under the leadership of Mullah Karekar. According to some PUK reports, Osama bin Laden had tried to separate the group to establish the Radical Group. (Dodge, T. and Simon, S. 2007: 142-143).

<sup>47</sup> Kurdish regime

<sup>48</sup> Islamic State

“When the PUK attacked the Communist Party in 2000, our organization was banned because it was treated as part of the Communist Party, but our organization was not a communist organization, but in some respects, had similar policies to women's rights parties. The PUK closed our shelter, and at that time we kept a woman named Nahida, who had escaped from her family. Unfortunately, the PUK handed Nahida back to her family and she was killed by them. One day later and she was buried with five members of the Communist Party who were killed by the PUK” (Munzir, B. interview 2015).

Munzir explained that there were many activities organized for women in Sulaymaniyah - such as seminars, workshops and protests. Banners were raised to protest for women's rights. Mamusta Sakar, who was from the Sar Kapkan region of Rania, was killed by her father in her bed while she slept because of her wanting to marry her colleague. "They protested as a group of women, free people, and activists on the 8th of March, against the murder of Mamusta Sakar, in front of the Sulaymaniyah court building. We made several banners showing people's anger at this brutal violence against women in Kurdistan. The banners were all pink and the texts were written in black. Unfortunately, her father was released in a public amnesty.” (interview,2015).

Munzir explained that they have an organization for women, with goals such as: changing personal status laws, preventing men from polygamy, preventing female genital mutilation, and preventing violence against women. “There were brutal acts of violence against women in some tribal areas because we found two women in the Rania area (Kazhal Xidr and Kazal Jamal) who had their noses cut off because of *Sharaf* issues. We found another woman whose hands and feet were bound with a chain, and imprisoned in a bathroom because she

was suffering from mental health. We had a shelter to keep these women who had fled their families because of the threat of death and those who had been violated there”.

In the Second Gulf War, Saddam's entire regime fell, and Iraq entered a new political era. A new constitution provided for a federal system of Iraq in which the Kurdistan Region achieved autonomy. The two main parties in Kurdistan (PUK and KDP), unified the administration<sup>49</sup> and also held a number of elections for the parliament and the presidency of the Kurdistan region.<sup>50</sup>

The main authority in the region was subject to the politics of the two ruling parties who often used human and economic resources for the benefit of their parties and families. As a result, the region suffered from bureaucratic and financial corruption, and those who exposed or criticized this corruption were often assassinated or arrested<sup>51</sup> (Figure 33 & 34).

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<sup>49</sup> The political situation in Iraq changed after the fall of Saddam Hussein and the rule of Ba'ath's regime in 2003. The US-led International Coalition attacked Iraq in March 2003 and ended the Ba'ath regime in Iraq. (Angrist, M. 2013: 287). In 2005, Iraqis began writing the country's new constitution, and Iraq is now known as a federal state. (Washington posts 2005). Under this constitution, Kurdistan enjoyed autonomy, the right to form a parliament, and the election of a president for the region. The Kurdistan region was divided into two separate government administrations. In early 2006, the two administrations were unified, and the Peshmerga forces were selected to be the military forces to protect the territory. (Romano, D. and Gurses, M. 2014: 144).

<sup>50</sup> After the fall of the Saddam regime, the administration in Kurdistan held a number of elections for the Kurdistan Parliament in 2005, 2009, 2013. (Romano, D. and Gurses, M. 2014: 144). Kurdish power in the Kurdistan region is party authority, because the two main parties have control over government institutions, the government suffers from non-independence, and the two main parties intervene in government policy and decision-making. The creation of employment opportunities in the public sector is not by skill, but through party relations and loyalty to the families of political leaders. The party intervention in the KRG was very clear in all aspects of government - even in universities and education. The two parties, the PUK and the KDP, have full authority over the movement of trade, constrictions, and the oil sector, using all the financial capacities of their parties. (Romano, D. and Gurses, M. 2014: 144-156).

<sup>51</sup> There have been numerous violations against human rights and freedom of expression, particularly against journalists. The people of Kurdistan were not silent against these violations, and they did great protests in most cities. When Sardasht Osman was killed and his body was found on the 26th of May 2010 in Mosul, this tragic event led to the anger of people in all cities, and they held demonstrations against the parties and the government to uncover the criminals. Sardasht was one of the journalists criticizing corruption in Kurdistan and he wrote the story about corruption, referring to the name of Masoud Barzani and his daughter. Such criticism led to his killing. (Al Jazeera 2010, The murder of Sardasht Osman). He is not the only journalist killed under the Kurdish authorities, but there is a list of names of journalists who have been assassinated at different times. This happened only because of their criticism of the administrative and financial corruption of the parties and their political leadership. On the 21st of July 2008, Suran Mama Hama was assassinated in Kirkuk, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2010, Sardasht Osman was kidnapped in Erbil and his body was found in the city of Mosul, Kawa Ghermiani was assassinated in front of his mother on the 5th of December 2013 at 9 pm, and Widad Hassin was kidnapped in Dhoek August 2016 and found dead, and Shakri Zinadin, a KNN TV cameraman's body was found near his village on the 1st of December 2016. (نوری، ب. ۲۰۱۸: ۱۲۵)



Figure 33: A protest about the murder of Sardasht Osman in Sulaymaniyah. The text on one black banner reads: “No to the killing of freedom. Yes to try those convicted.” The red banner reads: “KDP and the government must uncover the murderer of Sardasht Osman” (AP/Yahya Ahmed. cpj.org 2011).



Figure 34: Protest for Kawa Ghermiani, who was assassinated on the 6th of December 2013 (Shwan Mohammed. RT 2013).

According to most calligraphers, the writing of slogans and banners for government institutions was centralized, and distributed by the ruling party in Sulaymaniyah. As the heads of the institutions were all from the PUK green dominated all the banners made by government offices at this time.

There have been numerous protests in Kurdistan, particularly in Sulaymaniyah, against corruption, non-transparency, and monopoly of power by the two parties, the PUK and the KDP. One of the most prominent demonstrations took place in Sulaymaniyah on the 17th of February 2011, under the influence of the Arab Spring, when seven demonstrators were killed and 250 injured in the centre of the city, called Sarai Azadi. (Human Right Watch 2011).

Kurdish relations with the central government in Baghdad have not been good from the beginning of the formation of the Iraqi state to the present day. The main reason for this bad relationship has been Kirkuk, a city rich with oil. Kirkuk was the main reason for the failure of agreements between Iraqi authorities and Kurdish politicians, especially in the fight for Kurdish rights. The issues around Kirkuk are complex, but banner-making provides a different view of the political issues in the city.

In my interview with Faris, J. (2015) a PUK calligrapher in Sulaymaniyah, I asked if he had a special memory. He replied: "I have a sad memory: when the Iraqi government issued Law No. 24 in 2010, against Kirkuk, it caused anger among its people; they held mass protests inside the city, and asked me to write 2500 banners quickly. I started banner-making with sixteen assistants and under some pressure, finished by morning, and sent the signs to Kirkuk. I was happy because I finished all the banners, and saw them on television, in the

protest that rose up from the people. But suddenly my happiness turned to sadness because the protest became a tragic event due to an explosion among the demonstrators, which killed many people and injured a lot of them. That's all I saw on television. I saw the banners that I made mixed with the blood of the demonstrators. We had made the banners on white cloth and we wrote slogans in black.”

Banners are also made for religious events such as the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. White banners are made for such events and the text is written in different colours. (Rasheed, H. interview, 2015).

Ramadan is one of the occasions in Kurdistan where banners are made by people to offer their respect. Haji Mohammed Rostam said he sets up a banner for Ramadan every year (Figure 35). “The reason for making this banner is to advise people that God has imposed Ramadan on all Muslims. God states in the Holy Qu’ran that Muslims should fast and respect this month. When people come to my place or pass on this road, there are many Kurds who cannot understand the Arabic language, so I decided to divide the banner into two parts - the upper Arabic text in black, and the lower in Kurdish and in blue”. He explained that he chose white cloth, because the colour white is sacred and used by religious people in religious customs, and Imams also use it for their turbans. (Interview 2015).

In fact, according to Faris, J. (2015), most of the banners in Sulaymaniyah were written in Kurdish, although on certain occasions they would make banners in other languages, such as Arabic and English. When Iraqi leaders visited Sulaymaniyah, some banners were made in



green and the text written in Arabic, depending on the political or government leader.

However, when American arbiters of power after the fall of Saddam visited the city, (e.g. Jay Garner and Louis Bremer), authorities raised banners in English to welcome them. Faris said at some point between 1993-1994 he also made a black banner in English in honour of a Mr. Stewart - an employee of the Australian CARE humanitarian aid organization who was murdered in Chamchamal.:

“One evening, two people from the PUK came to my house and asked me to make an English banner for Mr. Stewart's murder because they wanted to send the body to his country. I had just got married and I was living in one room. There was no electricity and I had an oil lamp. So, I wrote a text in the dark of the night, the text was in green on the black cloth because it was at the PUK's request. They took it the next day to cover the coffin”.

All the interviewers agreed that colours have been divided among political parties and turned into political symbols. This means there is no neutral colour in Kurdistan, and such strict division reflects the lack of social cohesion. In cases of political or military conflict, the wrong use of colour, including the colour of clothing, can cause problems for individuals. In government institutions, the use of colour is important, especially the colour of official files. When someone has papers requesting something in a government department, he needs to be aware of the file colour, as otherwise the request may be rejected or delayed.



Figure 35: Haji Mohammed Rostam sets up a religious banner for Ramadan every year in Naly street, Sulaymaniyah, 14th of July, 2015. The blue and red text is the same written in both Arabic and Kurdish: “O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous” (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Islamic State, the radical Islamic group that emerged in Syria in 2013, attacked several areas in northern Iraq in mid-2014. Iraqi army forces collapsed in these areas and withdrew. These military gaps in the areas were filled by Peshmerga forces, and hence in certain regions, IS carried out heavy attacks on the Peshmerga who in some areas were forced to withdraw and cede control to IS. One of the most horrifying events in the period was the massacre of the Yazidis, which was carried out by IS in Sinjar in August 2014. (BBC News 2017, Who are the Kurds?).

According to a UN investigation, about five thousand young boys and men were killed and up to seven thousand women and girls were abducted to be used as sex slaves. The remainder of the population not captured by IS escaped to Mount Sinjar. (Beck, J. 2016, Aljazeera). According to the Minister of Martyrs at a press conference, 1760 Peshmerga troops were martyred during the beginning of the war of IS until mid of 2017. (Omaraway, A. 2017, YouTube). All calligraphers interviewed made many banners for Peshmerga's martyrs during the war of IS, and recalled the PUK and the PDK using their own colour for those martyrs belonging to their party. Strangely perhaps, the PKK did not use the colour black as a background for their martyrs. Rasheed, H. (2015) states that "I once made banners for martyrs at Kobani on black cloth, and when family came to collect their banners and saw they were in black, they told me that the colours were all wrong, because the PKK uses white on red in their burial ceremonies. They also advised me that the PKK itself had changed their symbolic colour from black to red. The PKK had special texts for their martyrs such as: 'We are sad about the death of this martyr'; 'This martyr did not die'; 'A real martyr

of Kurdistan' in addition to the name and the title. These are very different to party slogans in southern Kurdistan".

After 2010, Kurdistan faced many political and military events, most notably, the war on the Islamic State in Iraq from 2014 until the end of 2017. The other major upheaval was the Kurdish request for independence in September 2017. Such events have had profound repercussions for the people of Kurdistan, across all human and economic fields.

According to Abdula, S. (2016), the war on IS led to an economic crisis, a situation was characterized by unusual circumstances, which were harsh especially because the government cut salaries of their employees in half, which then affected every aspect of the economy. "So, if you look at the backing-board, you can see colours such as red, blue, and black left from white banners written for commercial purposes, for example, selling property, renting houses or shops and so on, because people were unsure about their future, so they tried to sell everything they had in order to get money for basic needs such as food and heating"(Figure 36).

Following the outbreak of war on Al-Da'esh in 2014 the political situation deteriorated in the Kurdistan region, and the economy was severely impacted by a drop in the price of oil. During that period, the KRG issued a partial deduction from state employees' salaries, in order to reduce the financial crisis experienced by the region<sup>52</sup>. As well as the deduction, the government also failed to pay salaries on time, and a delay of two months or more was common (mof-kr.gov.org).

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<sup>52</sup> A decision was issued by the Council of Ministers of the Kurdistan Regional Government No: (64) of 2/3/2016 and circulated this decision by a letter from the Council Secretary No: (824) of 16/02/2019. (mof-kr.gov.org).





Figure 36: Commercial banners, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 23rd of June, 2015. Text on one banner reads: “Friday market in Freedom Park is now open for goods at wholesale prices. The main street behind Freedom park, Park Tower Mall” (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).



Figure 37: A demonstration against corruption, Sulaymaniyah. 18th of July, 2015. Text on the banner reads: “Requirements of the Kurdish people: 1. Constitution of the Parliament; 2. Independent Commission; 3. Freedom of expression; 4. Facilitate and change the education system; 5. Management of military forces under the supervision of parliamentary committees; 6. Bring the oil agreement to parliament; 7. Statistics of the number of employees in electronic form: etc., (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

As a PhD student in the UK, I was severely affected by that political and economic situation, as I was funded by the Kurdistan Regional Government - funding, which was postponed, and has not yet been paid.

Meanwhile, in Sulaymaniyah, many protests that took place during the war against IS about the economic crisis in Kurdistan. Most of the protests were organized by employees of government departments and teachers, because of the salary cut by the government. As an employee and as an artist I participated in a number of protests in 2016 and 2017. Most of their banner slogans were anti- corruption, demanding transparency of financial resources, and also requiring the government to pay and compensate their salaries for previous years (Figure 37).

In the past ten years, there have been regular and numerous mass protests against the government in Sulaymaniyah, often organised due to public perception of government financial corruption. Public demonstrations were often supported by opposition parties, especially the Change Movement, (founded in 2009). Various communities participated, all making their own demands and making use of different slogans either written on banners and leaflets, or delivered by chanting and shouting.

I participated in some of the protests in Sulaymaniyah and documented them (Figure 38). In late October 2017, I heard that a large demonstration involving many teachers, employees and activists was to take place on 13 November. That morning, I took my specially-made banner to the protest venue. Near the demonstration square, I saw several security men in civilian clothes carrying assorted weapons, heading towards the demonstrators.

I was fearful for my safety and the safety of others, because of the protests of February 2011, where 10 protesters were killed, and hundreds were imprisoned (Salih, B. 2012. dengiamerika.com).

The banner was made of red cloth and clipped to two wooden sticks (Figure 39). My choice of text for the banner was based upon selections from the interviews I made with calligraphers and was an accumulation of various slogans painted in white. Aesthetically, the colour composition of white on red cloth shows up clearly, and it is very attractive in a crowd. On the other hand, the accumulation of the texts due to their over-layering, meant that the sentiments expressed became illegible. The demonstration began in front of the Directorate of General Education in western Sulaymaniyah, where one of the main roads had been cut off. Demonstrators formed in the square and began chanting slogans against the government and the ruling parties. Some slogans related to employees' rights, such as the provision of salaries to employees by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and demands for the government to abolish the rule that reduced employees' salaries.

There were various factors that led me to participate in this protest in this way. The key point concerned my relationship with my own historical research on banners in the history of Kurdish society, and I was especially interested in the role of the banner in conveying Kurdish demands during political events in recent Iraqi history. Banners have always been used to convey specific messages from particular community groups, all relating to the discourse of the era. As an artist working in another culture, however, with a different view of events, I purposely developed a different approach to the use of banners, the intention being to give the banner an unfamiliar role.





Figure 38: Large demonstration involving many teachers, employees and activists, Sulaymaniyah 03rd of October 2016 (Avar Hamid).



Figure 39: A demonstration against corruption, Sulaymaniyah, 13th of November 2017. The banner reads: "Close the party's offices to set up schools" (Avar Hamid).

The protests were quite confused, and there were contradictions in the messages of the protestors, so I felt that any one individual text could not adequately represent the demands of the demonstrators. I decided instead to present an ambiguous banner slogan, derived from my process of transforming familiar information into unfamiliar states, to provoke a more complex response. My idea was to suggest a multi-layered debate, one that has continued over many decades, often with the same themes and expressing the same desires, but without achieving resolution. The banner thus behaved in the manner of an 'open work' according to Eco's definition.

Certain decisions were also informed by continuing research into artist Jeremy Deller, and particularly his sensitivity to the cultural and political environment in his use of banners in protests or processions. His participation in the 2009 Manchester International Festival, for example, involved him commissioning a range of banners to pick up on the many contradictory elements used in the festival. Deller described the atmosphere as a "social surrealist event full of bizarre, funny, wrong-seeming things" (Deller, J. 2009). One example, designed by David Hockney (Figure 40), consisted of image and text, with the phrase "The Unrepentant Smokers" set above a depiction of an ashtray, carried by a group of avid smokers as a form of freedom of expression and mild confrontation. Audience is a clear consideration for Deller, as this mode of presenting ideas differs from exhibiting in galleries and museums mainly through its accessibility, and hence the potential for communication with a wider audience.

In the Sulaymaniyah protest, hundreds of teachers and other staff formed a mass demonstration, marching from the Directorate of General Education towards the court and

the office of the governorate of Sulaymaniyah to present their demands. During the march, participants asked me about the banner - why the texts were indecipherable, and why there was no clear message. The idea of using a banner as an artistic act was totally new to them. Some of the organizers of the protest thought I was a member of the Communist Party and asked if I would leave the event because they did not want a party agenda to exploit their protest. Others who I spoke to about my intention, and who knew it was an artistic performance or intervention, were delighted to have an artist at their event.





Figure 40: A banner designed by David Hockney, made by Ed Hall the banner reads: "The Unrepentant Smokers, DH 09" 2009 (jeremydeller.org 2016).

<b>Timeline: Banner-making in The Modern History of The Kurdish People in Kurdistan</b>		
<b>Banners in the new Iraqi state: from Monarchy to Republic:</b>		
<b>Events</b>		<b>Effects</b>
1918	<p>Following the collapse of the Ottoman Sultanate at the end of the First World War, British forces occupy the province of Mosul. Agreements are signed between the major countries. Kurdistan is divided up between four main countries: Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria.</p> <p>P: 74</p>	<p>The first appearance of banners in Iraq is in response to the creation the new Iraqi state. Early banners are used in civil protests to express Kurdish political motivations and appeals for cultural and national rights. Poets and intellectuals play an instrumental role in organising initial protests, and thus are partly responsible for the appearance of banners.</p> <p>Due to the economic situation, banners are only made in small numbers</p> <p>Banners appear as part of a major protest, displaying short nationalist slogans.</p>
1920	<p>Britain and the Ottoman Empire sign the Sèvres Treaty, under which the Kurdish people are granted their own independent state.</p> <p>P: 74</p>	
1921	<p>A referendum is held to appoint King Faisal in Iraq, but Sulaymaniyah boycotts this.</p> <p>P: 74</p>	
1922	<p>Sheikh Mahmoud, declares a revolution, and takes control of Sulaymaniyah. He declares himself king of Kurdistan.</p> <p>P.74</p>	
1923	<p>Britain decides to end the authority of Sheikh Mahmoud and they attack Sulaymaniyah. The Treaty of Lausanne is signed, replacing the Treaty of Sèvres, thus worsening the Kurdish situation.</p> <p>P:74</p>	

1930	Britain removes the Mandate, and so Iraq becomes an independent country.  P: 76	
1930	6 September. A large demonstration is organised in Sulaymaniyah, resulting in the killing and wounding of many demonstrators.  P: 78-79	
1934	Announcement of the founding of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP).  P: 79	
1946	The Kurdistan Democratic Party (PKK), is established. Mustafa Barzani becomes leader of the party. Their political agenda is Kurdish autonomy, independence, and democracy in Iraq.  P: 82	
1948	The Portsmouth Treaty is signed, and students immediately respond angrily in what is termed the Al-Wathba Uprising. Several demonstrations take place in Sulaymaniyah against colonialism and for the independence of Iraq.  P: 82-84	The phenomenon of banners becomes a familiar sight in the Al-Wathba uprising and associated events during this period. The Communist Party organise protests in all cities, and slogans derive from the ideology and political orientation of the Communist Party. Kurds highlight their new demands and political dreams in banner texts.
<b>Banner-making in the era of the Republic of Iraq:</b>		
<b>Events</b>		<b>Effects</b>

1958	<p>Iraq becomes a republic, and the new Iraqi constitution recognises Kurdish "national rights". Politicians enjoy the freedom of political action, and Barzani returns from the Soviet Union.</p> <p>P: 87-90</p>	<p>National and cultural rights of the Kurds are reflected in the development of banner usage, where protest is no longer the only area for their use. Banners appear in cultural events, such as Nowruz. Student organisations are now permitted to express their viewpoints and demands through banners.</p>
1960s	<p>The situation deteriorates in Iraq, with a number of military coups occurring in the Iraqi government. Clashes and negotiations take place between the Kurds and the central government, at the same time the Kurdistan Democratic Party splits into two wings.</p> <p>P: 91-92</p>	<p>A dissident group from the KDP uses political banners in the cities, due to their privileged relationship with the central state in Baghdad.</p>
1970	<p>After Ba'athists take power, a March agreement is concluded between the Kurds and the central government, granting autonomy to the Kurds, including recognition of the Kurdish language and the Iraqi constitution, indicating that the Iraqi people "consists of two nations, the Arab and the Kurdish".</p> <p>P: 93</p>	<p>The agreement creates a new opportunity for banner slogans to appear in public on political and cultural occasions. Banners appear in both Arabic and Kurdish languages.</p>
1974	<p>After four years of relative calm, the Iraqi government changes the terms of the agreement, but the Kurds refused, and military conflict begins again.</p> <p>P: 94</p>	
1975	<p>The Kurdish revolution collapses following the signing of the Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, putting an end to Iran's support for Barzani.</p> <p>P: 100</p>	



1976	The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is established, led by Jalal Talabani - previously a dissident from the Kurdistan Democratic Party.  P: 102	
1978	Violent fighting takes place between the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leaving many dead.  P: 102	
<b>Banner-making in the Era of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athists:</b>		
<b>Events</b>		<b>Effects</b>
1979	Saddam Hussein takes over the presidency and authority in Iraq.  P: 102	Events organized by the Ba'ath Party and Saddam increase significantly, and the production of banners increases accordingly.
1980	War erupts between Iran and Iraq which will last for 8 years. A violent military conflict breaks out between the Kurdish parties and the central government.  P: 108	Colours at this point are not symbolic, as the Ba'ath Party is the only party. Instead colours are used to attract attention for propaganda, and banners serve Ba'athist ideology and Saddam's authority.  Ba'athists are concerned with the size and clarity of the texts, especially in the use of Saddam's name.
1983	Negotiations on Kurdish Autonomy between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the central government in Iraq.  P: 110	
1985	Negotiations end, and military violence starts again. The Ba'athist regime retaliates against the PUK and begins to arrest several Kurdish youths in various cities, especially Sulaymaniyah, the PUK support centre.  P: 110	Black banners become commonplace in funeral situations, due to deaths from the Iraq-Iran war, in particular the killing of Adnan Khairallah.

1988	The PUK, with the assistance of Iran, seized Halabja. The response of Iraq is swift. On March 16, 1988, the Iraqi army begins bombing the city with chemical weapons, and within five hours thousands of people, mostly women and children, die.  P: 111	
1988	Iraqi forces launch the "Anfal campaign" against the Kurds, killing thousands of people and burying them in the deserts of southern Iraq. They burn their homes and crops.  P: 111	
1988	After reconciliation between Kurdish parties, they form the Kurdistan Front, which aims to unify Kurdish forces in cooperation with the Iraqi opposition.  P: 113	
<b>Banner-making during the Kurdish uprising:</b>		
<b>Events</b>		<b>Effects</b>
1991	After Saddam's defeat in the first Gulf War, the Kurdish uprising starts on March 5 and Kurds take control of a large area in Kurdistan. The uprising is suppressed due to the refusal of the US-led international coalition forces to intervene in support of them. More than a million Kurds flee to Iran and Turkey.  P: 119	The uprising marks an important stage for the development of banners, as they begin to reflect the authority of Kurdish parties; Kurdistan transforms from a one-party system to a multi-party system. Cloth colour and text colour on banners take on symbolic roles.

1991	In April after international news agencies release tragic images of this migration, the world is shocked, and the United Nations establishes a "safe area".  P:120	<p>Each party chooses a specific colour as symbol in the 1992 elections, and this symbolism is reflected in all banners commissioned by party institutions and supporters.</p> <p>The political party colours are:  KDP - yellow;  PUK - green;  SPKI and PSOK - black and blue;  KPDP - Blue (when united);  Kurdistan Toilers party- white with a red star;  Kurdistan section of the ICP - red;  The Assyrian Democratic Movement - indigo</p> <p>Banners are now made in large numbers, especially for nationalist propaganda, election campaigns, national events, remembrance of the tragedies of Halabja and Anfal, and martyrdom events.</p> <p>Banners are now seen in many areas where they were previously not common, such as religious occasions, and for commercial advertisements.</p>
1992	After negotiations fail at the beginning of this year, the Iraqi government withdraws from Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dohuk, leading to an administrative vacuum. On May 17, the KF decides to hold elections for the Kurdistan Parliament to manage the administrative vacuum in the region.  P: 120	
1994	In May, clashes begin between Kurdish parties, the most intense of which are between the KDP and the PUK (until 1998), which leads to division of the region into two zones, green and yellow. As a result, thousands of people are killed.  P: 125	
1998	Under the supervision of the United States, Talabani and Barzani signs a peace agreement.  P: 125	
2003	The second Gulf War leads to the fall of Saddam Hussein and the end of thirty years of Ba'ath rule.  P: 134	

2005	Iraqis begin writing the country's new constitution, and Iraq is now considered a federal state. Under this constitution, Kurdistan enjoys autonomy, the right to form a parliament, and to elect a president for their region.  P: 134	
2005	Within this new political situation in Iraq, the administration in Kurdistan holds several elections for the Kurdistan Parliament.  P: 134	
2008-2016	Within the Kurdish authority, numerous violations occur against human rights and freedom of expression, especially against journalists.  P: 134	
2010-2017	Kurdistan faces many economic, political, and military difficulties, most notably the war on the Islamic State in Iraq. Meanwhile, in Sulaymaniyah, many protests took place during this time against corruption and the economic crisis in Kurdistan.  P: 142-143	Shaheed exhibition. I participate in the major protest in Sulaymaniyah, displaying a red banner with indecipherable script, caused by overwritten texts accumulating, thus not providing any specific meaning.
2017	Kurdish authorities hold an independence referendum, but it does not obtain international recognition.  P: 141	

## **Chapter 4**

### ***Shaheed (Martyrdom) Exhibition***

In this chapter I record and discuss the most significant exhibition arising from my research, a major public installation at Sulaymaniyah Archaeological Museum.

The exhibition is important both on its own terms, as a challenging and provocative event in the life of the city, and for my research, because it represented a major change of focus in my methodology.

I will record and discuss the exhibition in four parts: Background; Preparation; Martyrdom Research; Exhibition (including the cube narratives and diagrams).

Reflections on the exhibition, along with comments on my transition from studio painting, will be housed in the Conclusion.

*Note: In Kurdish 'Shaheed' means both martyrdom and martyr - depending on context. The title of the exhibition, Shaheed, was intended to convey both of these definitions.*

## Background

My installation, sited at Sulaymaniyah Archeological Museum, Iraq, in October 2017, represented the culmination of a three-year period of research, yet took an unexpected form, in that it embodied an abrupt shift in my methodology.

Until the installation, the emphasis of the practical research had been the use of texts either appropriated from, or informed by, interviews with Sulaymaniyah calligraphers (and a few carefully selected non-calligraphers), to forge a specific strand of abstract painting.

Interviews had been conducted with the calligraphers in order to understand their personal connection or engagement with the material they turned into banners, and to uncover background stories to some of the texts. Continually repeating their stories in paint, through my own studio 'banners', to create 'trace paintings', had allowed me to appreciate the important role calligraphers played in my culture, and the richness and relevance of their memories.

I recognised that a more empathetic approach to my source material was moving my concerns away from the production of aesthetic artefacts, towards a more socially or politically engaged practice, a method I had encountered whilst researching the British artist Jeremy Deller. I wanted the often-traumatic narratives of my fellow countrymen not simply to be layered as abstract traces on a canvas, causing recognisable meanings to become obscured by multiple iterations, but instead to find ways of retaining some meanings in the finished work. One worrying issue with this was that many of the stories might lead to revenge attacks or hate attacks, so control of the narratives (and their legibility) appearing

in a collaborative work needed through some mechanism to be returned to the calligraphers themselves.

From Eco's writing I had absorbed his notion of the two types of artistic message, univocal and plurivocal. Through a position of openness (which he claims is the foundation of all art) pluralistic communication may be integrated, and Eco states that "plurivocality is so much a characteristic of the forms that give it substance, that their aesthetic value can no longer be appreciated and explained apart from it" (Eco, 1989: 42 as cited in Elmo Raj, 2015: PP. p, 329).

Art of all ages has addressed historical events, but a considerable body of contemporary art now excavates (to use a word taken from my own methodology) historical detail to re-evaluate it. An important artist in this regard is the British artist and Turner Prizewinner, Jeremy Deller. One of Deller's key methodologies focuses on examination of historical narratives through the re-staging of the original event, which he notably did in 2001, by arranging the re-enactment of the Battle of Orgreave using some of the original participants of the demonstration. "Basically, I was asking the re-enactors to participate in the staging of a battle that occurred within living memory, alongside veterans of the campaign. I've always described it as digging up a corpse and giving it a proper post-mortem, or as a thousand-person crime re-enactment" (Deller, J. 2001).

*The Battle of Orgreave Archive (An Injury to One is an Injury to All)* includes texts, documents, objects, videos, and other archival material in an installation that describes two different events: the first a strike by the National Union of Mineworkers, specifically a clash between the miners and the police at the Orgreave Coking Plant in Yorkshire on June 18



1984; the second, the re-staging by Deller in 2001. The exhibition was divided into two rooms, and presented in such a way as “to blur the boundaries between its status as objective document and historical monument” (Tate 2001).

Deller explains having seen the event in a television report when he was eight years old:

The image ... stuck in my mind and for years I wanted to find out what exactly happened on that day with a view to re-enacting or commemorating it in some way. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the strike, like a civil war, had a traumatically divisive effect at all levels of life in the UK. Families were torn apart because of divided loyalties, the union movement was split on its willingness to support the National Union of Mineworkers, the print media especially contributed to the polarisation of the arguments to the point where there appeared to be little space for a middle ground. So, in all but name it became an ideological and industrial battle between the two sections of British society (Deller 2002, p.7).

Memory, history, and document are the main resources of Deller's work, through which he presents his personal vision on socio-political issues. Deller's choice of theme and source material resonate with those of my project, and although the cultural context, methodology and presentation are all very different, both approaches fit with Roelstraete's description of artists “that attempt to shed the light on the dark corners of the past” in that “they either make artworks that want to remember, or at least to turn back the tide of forgetfulness, or they make art about remembering and forgetting: we can call this the *meta-historical mode*, an important aspect of much artwork that assumes a curatorial character” (Roelstraete, D. 2009).

In 2017, whilst presenting my research in Sulaymaniyah, I was approached by a well-respected curator Zana Rasoul. At first, we discussed the idea of an archaeological methodology in the visual arts (which triggered the idea for the eventual venue), but I also outlined the change of emphasis I was experiencing in my practical research, and the desire

to have the calligraphers of Sulaymaniyah participate in an exhibition of mine in a more open way.

Rasoul made an initial approach on my behalf to the Director of the Sulaymaniyah Archaeological Museum, Zana Rasoul, who requested a more detailed proposal. The concept I eventually presented to him – as outlined in the next section - recorded the shift in my intentions, and it might be argued that this proposal for the Shaheed exhibition defined the moment when my concerns adopted more socially-engaged strategies.

Despite the potentially controversial nature of the proposal, the Director appreciated the significance of the material, and agreed to my idea of an installation in the main atrium of his museum. This was a great privilege, but also presented great challenges in terms of practical visibility and audience interaction and reaction.

## Preparation

My research is intended to work against forgetfulness through a process of recreating the past, and, as Benjamin states: “he who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.” At this stage, my focus had become the excavation of appropriate personal memories and narratives from (mainly) calligraphers, to transform them, in the way Foucault suggests, into a monument, so that we can understand our present.

My research methodology shared certain aspects of Freud’s approach to psychiatric illness. Freud considered himself to be an ‘archaeologist’ of the mind, and through dreams, memories and stories he would navigate layers of the unconscious, delving into childhood histories to reveal possible causes behind present problems, in order to suggest appropriate treatment. The archeology metaphors offered by Benjamin and Freud presented me with a way of conceptualising my task. Archaeology for the Shaheed exhibition took place within the field of memory, especially the living memories of people directly in contact with events that concern the theme, specifically the calligraphers of Sulaymaniyah, gaining a unique awareness of events in their society through the medium of banner-making.

While interviewing these calligraphers, I noted that ‘Shaheed’ was one of the most frequent and compelling words recorded, so much so that it was impossible to speak of banners without using this word. ‘Shaheed’ was used both as a positive recognition of a martyr, but in some cases, was associated with exploitation, because families of martyrs are rewarded through state funding and hence the naming of martyrs is subject to corruption and falsehood. Hearing various stories from different perspectives revealed to me that, because

each party has notably different approaches to 'martyr' and 'martyrdom', the meaning of the word was unstable. One calligrapher's story in particular intrigued me:

Once upon a time a Mullah wearing his mantle and turban visited my shop, he had a photo of a soldier in his hand whom he claimed to be his son. He asked me to redraw the photo, but to change his military beret to a Kurdish turban because a political party promised him to name him as their martyr.

This story was a key factor in inducing me to research other cases in which victims gain martyrdom falsely and undeservedly. The exhibition plan thus began to focus upon war and its victims, as a means of questioning how both the slain and the murderer are accounted for, who is entitled to confer the title of 'Martyr' or, 'Shaheed', and in what manner it is conferred. In a territory that has witnessed much fighting, most of the concerns related to the legalisation of warfare, and its narratives, symbols and expressions, have gathered around the word 'Shaheed'.

Once I had decided on central concern of the installation in the Sulaymaniyah Archaeological Museum, the theme awoke personal memories of the civil war of the 1990s. As a young man, I would walk to the centre of Sulaymaniyah, along the way encountering banners for those deemed 'martyr', killed in clashes between the KDP and the PUK (or between the PUK and various Islamic parties). I recall being fascinated by these martyrdom announcements, with their written evidence, e.g. "on that day X was killed ... in this area... at the hand of mercenaries" or "at the hands of the enemy of the Kurdish people and its national identity" etc. This personal reference gave me strong motivation in the curatorial phase of the planning and design of the installation.

I returned to the calligraphers' workshops for this new research phase. Key decision-making in the installation relates directly to an interview conducted in August 2015 with calligrapher Sarbast Namiq Muhamad, who explained that the black banner is an essential means of displaying news of a death or tragic events (such as those at Anfal or Halabja). Henceforth texts written on black banners and their historical context, became a specific line of inquiry. It caused me to imagine whether the black banner might prove to be the most consistent witness to all the tragic events that have occurred in Kurdistan.

During an interview on the 3rd of August 2015, the calligrapher Sarbast Namiq Muhamad recalled that during the Ba'ath Party regime when soldiers were killed, the Ba'athists would display black banners on the walls in the neighborhood of the martyrs' families. The banners proclaimed the martyr as a national hero, among other anti-Iranian slogans of propaganda — the regime thereby attempting to justify its war against Iran by convincing the Iraqi people that the war was for the protection of its people and its land.

My initial methodology was to visit the workshops of many calligraphers and explain the exhibition concept and its relation to the subject of martyrs and martyrdom, discussing with each of them the implementation phases of my project, and the manner in which their profession and their 'witnessing' (albeit at one remove) of martyrdom would be used.

The calligraphers were initially astonished at how an artist could question the 'Shaheed' issue, as it is sacred to the majority of people, especially those Kurds still struggling for independence. Kurds were involved in the war against IS during this time, as well as other external threats, drawing them into further sacrifice for their national interests.

I was fortunate that the calligraphers I approached were willing to participate in my project, and were often intrigued by the theme of my exhibition and the opportunity to use their professional ability in another arena.

I made daily visits to calligraphy workshops to work with them to produce banners from their stories. Normally the text within each banner is divided up: the first section consists of information about the martyrdom itself, while the second consists of propaganda. We would discuss the usual approaches, but I would make it clear that their participation was now predominant, and they were free to choose colours, fonts, and text composition. In discussions about relevance and meaning, each calligrapher selected their own stories. If any story had the potential to get them into trouble, I suggested they use the repetition method, whereby text is painted in layers in such a way as to render it illegible. Another tactic (employed only once) was to reverse the banner when displayed on the cube structure.

As well as the participation of calligraphers, I discussed the subject of the exhibition with people from institutions associated with 'Shaheed', including Mala Bahadin (full name: Bahadin Mohammed Abdulrahman) of the Martyrdom Directorate.

After long discussions with each calligrapher, information and narratives uncovered important issues. The narratives related to different epochs, including the period of the *Ba'ath* regime, extending to the fall of the *Ba'ath* Party in Iraq.

## Martyrdom Research

In parallel with further visits to calligraphy workshops, once I had determined the exhibition would focus on the crucial concept of martyrdom in Kurdistan, in which the identity of my people, and the delineations of parties were wrapped up, it was necessary to uncover further contextual information. My artistic intervention was designed to examine the nature of martyrdom through the use of multiple informed voices, to call attention to the way in which the Kurds attempt to sanctify their tragedies, encouraged by financial rewards, rather than consider the full implications of individual deaths.

Firstly, it was important to establish some definitions and distinctions which could inform my selection of narratives, depending on the opinions expressed, and my decision as to where they should be placed upon the cube:

The word 'shaheed' (plural 'shahada') has the meaning of 'martyr' and is closely related in its development to the Greek 'martyrios' in that it means both a witness and a martyr (i.e., a person who suffers or dies deliberately for the sake of affirming the truth of a belief system). (Cook, D. Intro. Cambridge University Press, 2007).

According to Khosrokhavar, the definition within Islam is slightly different, martyrdom being a death resulting from fighting against the enemy of the religion of Allah (Khosrokhavar, F. 2005:11). He also states there are important differences between the culture of martyrdom in Sunni and Shi'ite Islam:

The Sunni martyr is one who dies 'in the path of God' by taking part in a jihad. In Shi'ite Islam, martyrs have something in common with the tragic saints that we find, for similar historical reasons, in southeast Europe. ...Shi'ite communities have often been persecuted or, which is more important, have perceived themselves as being persecuted by Sunnis. (Khosrokhavar, F. 2005:4).

Cook (2012), states that "Contemporary martyrdom is closely associated with nationalistic resistance movements in the Muslim world" and this definition appears true in the Kurdish



case. According to information received from interviews, the word 'martyr' regularly appeared in political conflicts, particularly in relation to the conflict between Kurdish parties and the central system in Baghdad. The definition of martyr is further complicated by internal conflicts between the Kurdish parties.

According to new Iraqi laws after the fall of the Ba'ath regime, the definition of 'Shaheed' changed from that of the Ba'ath era. Chapter two, Article (5) defines who is the 'Shaheed' and who is included in this law:

First: The martyr: Every Iraqi citizen who lost his life because of his opposition to the past regime...or by the acts of that regime directly, or due to imprisonment or torture, or due to genocide, or the victims of chemical weapons and crimes against humanity and coercive displacement.

Not considered a martyr for the purposes of applying the provisions of this law: everyone who was working with the past regime in its various institutions, or of the Baathist party, or loyal to the regime, or killed because of internal authoritative liquidations. Chapter two, Article (6). (Al-Shuhada'a Establishment law, Establishment of Martyrs 2006).

On November 21st, 2015, the Iraqi Government amended the 'Shaheed' Foundation Act, for example with this new paragraph:

The provisions of this law shall not cover the death of an internal party, or power struggle, or personal disputes with the former Ba'ath Party in its repressive apparatuses (General Security, Intelligence, Special Security, Special Protection, National Security, Military Security, Saddam Fedayeen, Military intelligence and other repressive formations) or was cooperating with them or covered by the Accountability and Justice Act. Chapter two, Article (5). (Al-Shuhada'a Establishment law, Establishment of Martyrs 2015).

A number of KRG<sup>53</sup> sources were examined, and interviews conducted, but no precise definition of 'Shaheed' was available. In an interview with Mala Bahadin, conducted in 2017, he referred to the ways in which the 'Shaheeds' were registered, and how they were

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<sup>53</sup> Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

classified according to their contribution to the Kurdish revolution (e.g. 'Battlefield', 'Citizen', 'Sarwari', 'Anfal', or 'Halabja'). Bahadin pointed out that names of martyrs were recorded during the 1961 until the war against Islamic State. He also stated that victims of internal wars from other Kurdish parties, including Islamist parties fighting against the PUK, had been registered. The Islamic Movement in Kurdistan, however, registered their martyrs in Arbil<sup>54</sup>, because they were killed by the PUK.

During the internal war, some Islamic parties supported the KDP against the PUK, which is why Islamist parties tried to register their martyrs in the KDP's sphere of influence.

Bahadin stated that during the internal war when the KDP recorded their martyrs they would write: "this martyr was killed by Jash Jalalis<sup>55</sup>", and that remains in their records, whereas the PUK wrote that they were killed in the civil war.

When the curator and I began preparing the Shaheed show, I realised that visiting the General Directorate of Martyrs could be important in order to expand the concept of the exhibition. I first arranged an interview with the General Director of the Directorate, I asked for permission to visit the archives to gather information, to which he agreed. He told me about the challenges facing the Directorate in recording a dead person as martyr. They require a list of documents to prove that the person has been killed due to a political context. They also have to verify that the person was not a traitor, "nor had anything to do with the enemies of the Kurdish movement" (Interview with The General Director of the Directorate of Martyrs and Anfal: 2017). I was given a copy of the martyr registration sheet

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<sup>54</sup> Arbil is a capital of KRG.

<sup>55</sup> Jash Jalali is a word used by Massoud Barzani's party against Jalal Talabani and his party. Talibani and his followers were named (Puppet, Jash) of the Kurdish enemy.

- those approved by the Director. According to archive department staff, a major problem with the registration of martyrs is that if a person comes and requests to register their dead relative as a martyr, but the case cannot be accepted for not meeting the requirements for registration, that person may then go to the KDP party, who would accept their dead relative as a KDP party martyr in order to increase the membership of their party.

Staff of the Directorate of Martyrs, (in a confidential discussion) stated that they do not know how the KDP record martyrs – the KDP have a specific section within the Directorate of Martyrdom to record their martyrs but the decision-making is hidden. Directorate staff went on to say that if they refused to register a person due to lack of reliable evidence, the KDP might accept them as a martyr, simply in order to increase their followers.

A specific question I asked Mala Bahadin concerned those who collaborated with Saddam against the Peshmerga, and were killed during Saddam's time, who are now registered as martyrs. He replied that he does not accept that interpretation as “it would be shameful to register someone as a ‘Shaheed’ who was in the Iraqi army, or Jash, or collaborated with the Ba’athist regime against the Peshmerga”. (18 September 2017).

He recalled a memorable meeting: “Once a lady came to my office and asked to talk to me alone. She wanted to know why her father's martyr payment was no longer being paid to her family, to which I replied, that according to rumours her father was a Jash. She responded: “If my father was a Jash, then why did you accept him as a Peshmerga fighter after 1991 and send him to the battlefield — where he was killed for you?”



وزارهتی کاروباری شهیدان و نهفانکراوان  
به‌رئوه‌به‌رایه‌تی گشتی کاروباری شهیدان و نهفانکراوان / سلیمانی

**زانیاری شهید**

کۆد	که‌م و کوری دۆسه	که‌م کووری دوسیه‌ی نییه
ناوی شهید	نازناو	
جۆری شهید	سه‌نگەر	سنوری پارێزگا
به‌رئوه‌به‌رایه‌تی	به‌رئوه‌به‌رایه‌تی شه‌هیدانی سلیمانی	
پله		
سال و شوینی له‌دایکبوون		
س به‌یوه‌ندی شه‌هید رخ	س به‌یوه‌ندی شه‌هید ب م	سالی شه‌هیدبوون
هۆی شه‌هیدبوون	شوینی شه‌هیدبوون	
باری کومه‌لایه‌تی شه‌هید	ناوی خێزان	
ناوی دایک	لایه‌تی سیاسی شه‌هید	

**زانیاری وارس**

وارس	به‌یوه‌ندی وارس به‌ شه‌هیده‌وه	کوری
سال و شوینی له‌دایکبوونی وارس		
ژماره‌ی مندال	ژماره‌ی خێزان	
پیشه‌ی وارس	خویندکار	ناوینشانی وارس
ژ تله‌فون		
بانک / بنکه		
مووچه‌ی نوێ	قه‌رزى کۆن	مووچه‌ی ده‌رماله
عقار	سلف	دینار
کۆی برین	کۆی مووچه	د. متال
تێبینی		

١٨ ئایلول، ٢٠١٧

بانکی زانیاری

Figure 1: A martyr registration sheet (2017).

As shown in the report of the Ministry of Martyrs, there are many people registered as martyrs of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) who were not killed as a Peshmerga on the battlefield, but who died in various other incidents, such as: “fell from a horse, cave collapsed, stung by scorpion, moving household goods, consuming the wrong medicine, while giving birth, injections, mountain collapse, fell from the ceiling, thunder, suicide, unknown bullet, electric shock, unintentional shot, accident, died from the cold, illness, by the will of God or social problem” (Awene.com report: *Many KDP's martyrs have no connection to the term Shaheed*. 2018).

According to a statement of the Shaheed minister, there are also significant numbers of people alive, who have nevertheless registered themselves as martyrs and receive salaries from the government. Anas Daski, a member of parliament, has stated there has been corruption in the registration of martyrs and accepts that in some cases, Peshmerga have been identified as a Shaheed who are still alive”. (Salih, S. Minister of Martyrs: *There are still people alive but registered as martyrs*, 2018).

There are established procedures when dealing with archives and archival material, but I focused on artistic approaches in order to consider a new piece of work (made after the Shaheed cube). Artist-curator Uriel Orlow has drawn on various archives for his artworks, and provides an insight into his archival method via letters exchanged with Ruth Maclennan. Orlow argues that the site visit is an important first step, and reveals a context through the location and storage method of the archival material. He asks: “Indeed, what is the meaning and status of the archive as a whole, operating as it does like a memorial behind closed doors?” (Orlow, U. and Maclennan, R. 2004: 80). The second step relates to navigating

through those layers of materials, whether physical or oral histories. Orlow emphasises that the artist needs to find diverse ways to deal with this “memorial behind closed doors”, and that he himself is directed by the material's associations whereby the archive turns into a "model and as a prompter for art" (Orlow, U. and Maclennan, R. 2004: 80). He points out that the significant role of the artist is in selecting the material, because the artist is thinking of "matter and meaning". For him the "archive is a central component of the ambivalence that artists can feel towards making things at all, and situating them in the world at large, and within their own story of their life and work" (Orlow, U. and Maclennan, R. 2004: 86).



Figure 2: The martyr archive department. 2017 (Photograph Zana Rasoul).



Figure 3: The martyr archive department. 2017 (Photograph Zana Rasoul).



## Exhibition

The final installation consisted of a four-sided cube, without a top or base, 3 meters high and 5.25 meters long, stitched from 24 individual banners, either black - normally signifying death, or red- normally referencing left-wing opinions or parties. The structure resembled a sacred cube, or Ka'aba in shape and colour. Each banner contained an event recollected by a calligrapher, and written by that calligrapher, its legibility and emphasis partly determined by myself and the individual calligrapher. The process of selecting and writing the banners took five weeks, and the stitching together and installation took two weeks.

The Ka'aba at Mecca was the central reference for the form. As a place of pilgrimage and worship for Muslims, the Mecca Ka'aba is perhaps the most important structure of all, and therefore gives the cube a peculiar potency. The idea of constructing this cube from banners was in part informed by the tradition of pre-Islamic poets, who wrote poems specifically to be hung up on Ka'aba walls in Mecca. According to Robson, there might be seven or ten of these poems, and they were referred to as *The Suspended Odes* or *The Hanging Poems*, which subsequently became the title of a collection of poems selected from the most famous pre-Islamic poets<sup>56</sup> (Robson, J. *The meaning of the Title Al-Mu'allaqa* 1936, pp. 83-86).

In order to view all the banners, the audience had to walk around the cube, evoking the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (Arabic: Maka) and the concluding walk, once in Mecca, around the Ka'aba. This rotational movement of the viewer was deliberately designed to induce interaction with the narratives represented, and engagement with the meaning of the word

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<sup>56</sup> "Noldeke has pointed out that Hammad collected these poems, and that therefore they did not form a collection which already existed under the title of Al-Mu'allaqat. Ahmad al-Nahhas (d. 338 or 337) was the first to say they were hung on the Ka'ba, and he did so without quoting any authority. Noldeke also doubts the genuineness of the poetic contests on the ground that it would have been very difficult to find impartial judges. He concludes that we should keep to the meaning of the word "suspended", but interpret it as meaning that they are put in a place of honour because of their value". (Robson, J. *The meaning of the Title Al-Mu'allaqa* 1936, pp. 83-86).

'Shaheed', and how it has been used by ruling authorities for their own interests through various periods in time.

In producing the installation over several days, with many assistants, I wanted to explore the role and uses of language. The texts themselves bear witness to the various historical issues, all of which, according to my research, have an impact on present day Kurdish culture and politics. But specifically, by deploying language in various degrees of legibility is to question the use of word Shaheed, and to demonstrate that interpretations of the concept of martyrdom vary enormously, to the degree that they resemble a form of propaganda.

In the fabrication of the cube, the banners were used in an unfamiliar way, most obviously because they were stitched together in blocks. This action gave the process a additional significance, as it reminded me (as I recount in Chapter 2) of the mother of Omer Saeed having stitched banners together to make bed covers for him when he was young. Those banners, once threatening and insulting, were rendered into something safe, protective, and caring. Similarly, with the cube, the assorted accounts of tragedy, and corruption were sewn together as a collective act of resistance and redemption.

The cube concept also bore a resemblance to Mona Hatoum's 1996 piece, *Current Disturbance*, which proved a useful secondary reference when planning the installation.

Hatoum's works have strong socio-political narratives bound up with the concept of national identity. Her visual language involves some strategies adopted from Surrealism but her more sculptural, structural work incorporates aspects of architectural design, some formed as site specific installations, deriving meaning from historical, geographical or political contexts. In the Shaheed installation the viewer could encounter the cube in relation to the exhibition environment, specifically, the archaeological objects, and vice

versa; they could now encounter the museum's artefacts in relation to the cube. They could experience the relationship between the cube as contemporary art within the historical context of the museum. I found it helpful to frame this approach to the viewers' engagement with the Shaheed installation with approaches discussed by Claire Bishop in *Installation Art: A critical History* (2005).

Bishop notes that Ilya Kabakov's installation art has often been interpreted as theatrical, with Kabakov describing the spectators as actors and the role of an installation artist as a kind of director of a play (Kabakov as cited in Bishop 2005: P.14). And with regards to his term 'Total Installation', Kabakov describes the effect on the spectators as an 'engulfment', stating that "we are not just surrounded by a physical scenario but are 'submerged' by the work" (Kabakov as cited in Bishop, 2005, P.14). Bishop also writes about the influence on early installation art of pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, and specifically his impact on Allan Kaprow, who states:

Dewey maintained that we can only develop as human beings if we actively inquire into and interact with our environment. Being thrust into new circumstances means having to reorganise our repertoire of responses accordingly, and this in turn enlarges our capacity for 'experience', defined by Dewey as heightened vitality ... the complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events (Kaprow cited in Bishop, 2005 P.24).

The necessity of activating the spectator and giving them the opportunity, through creating an environment, to heighten their awareness, and experience the world anew, may be undertaken in order to achieve multiple interpretations. As Bishop explores with regards the feminist art practice of Mary Kelly, the way that installation art can provide multiple perspectives releases the viewer from the traditional single point perspective "which

centres the viewer in a position of mastery before the painting, and by extension, the world” (Bishop 2005, P.35-36)<sup>57</sup>.

In *Shaheed*, decentring, immersion and experience were combined - the spectators entered into a multidimensional space in which they encountered many historical objects from different eras, and were surrounded by multidimensional relationships between those objects, which place the subject of martyr in both familiar and yet unfamiliar historical contexts, enabling new interpretations.

Bishop also emphasises the direct presence of viewers, and in *Shaheed* I wanted to generate the atmosphere of a culturally-specific artwork, and a site-specific artwork, that could not be replicated anywhere other than in this museum, in the city of Sulaymaniyah.

The curator, Zana Rasoul having chosen the venue of the exhibition - the Sulaymaniyah Archeological Museum - gave the inauguration speech, in which he remarked that a provocative installation had been produced, and how the concept of the exhibition resonated with the museum’s ethos , for here was a place dedicated to the display of the archaeological history of an important Middle-Eastern culture, while my research demonstrated a visual and verbal delving into social, political and religious histories of the Kurdish people. He continued “What happened in this region is the result of our past mistakes as a nation. We could have reduced or prevented violence, but this did not happen. Art in our society was not involved in socio-political life or in conveying a humanitarian message. So, what is important in this exhibition is that although the Kurdish revolution has not achieved its ambitions, Rostam is concerned with the holiest word for

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<sup>57</sup> As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “I do not see [space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Bishop, 2005, P.50).

our people — *Shaheed or martyr*, and he has brought this word into the context of visual art, and questioned it.”

Reben Majid<sup>58</sup> argued that the word *Shaheed*; the sanctification of death, is unstable. He asserts that martyrdom is dependent on who holds power, so for instance, if someone was killed and declared a martyr during the Ba’athist regime, he is no longer seen as a martyr in the new regime. More recently, if a person from the Hashd Al-Sha'abi (People's Mobilization Committee - PMC) is killed, he is considered a martyr by the Iraqi government, but Kurds have different definitions and may not recognise this. Definitions of *Shaheed* therefore rely on the power structure.

Other comments by Zana Rasoul to introduce the exhibition reflect the conversations I held with him leading up to the exhibition:

Writing has a long history in Iraq, where it appeared in human civilisation for the first time. Writing has become an important means of expression in human history, and has become a tool in contemporary art, where artists have the opportunity to use multiple methods. Language is an important tool in every society to communicate and express emotion, and it possesses an expressive and aesthetic character that may be used in the making of artworks. The stories written by calligraphers allow the audience to understand how people express their feelings, experiences and information through the use of simple phrases and sentiments. After long discussions with Rostam about his ideas for the exhibition, we proposed the exhibition to the Sulaymaniyah Archeology Museum. Rostam explained that he employs methodologies that could metaphorically be described as archaeological, both in his practice and his theoretical research, excavating and moving between layers of Kurdish memory. This archaeological approach... dictated that the museum became the relevant option. Both within the museum and within Rostam’s research, there is an exploration of ideas and objects that have historical value in this society. This relationship can produce new knowledge in the context of the museum.

Reben maintained that the word ‘martyr’ is questionable in this context, and related this questionability to the historical artefacts that surround the cube. The kings of Mesopotamia

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<sup>58</sup> Reben Majed is a contemporary artist and curator who graduated from Goldsmiths, University of London. He documented the process of making *Shaheed*, and he participated in the TV program commenting on the show.

would request or commission workshops to inscribe stone or ceramics with details of their lives and victories, as they were constantly vying for immortality, and there can be no doubt that history has been written by those with a connection to power: “for example: these large vases used to preserve the body of kings after their death, or those texts written in the Assyrian civilisation, made to record the activities and wars of the kingdom”

On the opening day, the poet Qubad Jalizadah read his famous poem: *The Martyr Walks Alone*:

For fear of the neighborhood heckling

For fear of stoning

For fear of shame

He took himself to a ruined place

He burns his colourful posters

He strikes his head with both hands

He cries profusely over his perfect record

*Shaheed*

Until his martyrdom

He is walking with his red coffin

This Coffin

Is full of loneliness

full of regrets

full of disappointment

*Shaheed*

A mosquito tells him

Your wife has married a traitor

Your daughter is desecrated by a traitor

(translation: Rostam Hakeem 2019)



## **The Cube Narratives**

These notes are provided on each of the banners I chose for inclusion in my Shaheed exhibition. As previously described, banners were formed from conversations between myself and individual calligraphers, but the final responsibility for the specific memory, story, phrase etc., was left to the interviewee. The explanations are therefore not intended to be exhaustive, but are derived from first imagining myself in the position of viewer, attempting to decode each one without background knowledge, and then adding a few intimate details from the interviews for the purpose of clarity. My role as interviewer, commissioner, artist and curator produced complex theoretical interference patterns, which in the end I was forced to solve through creative engagement with each banner, according to their textual and visual properties. Their arrangement was consequently a combination of curatorial and aesthetic considerations.



Figure 04: Entrance view of the Shaheed cube, 2017 (Photograph Halo Lano).

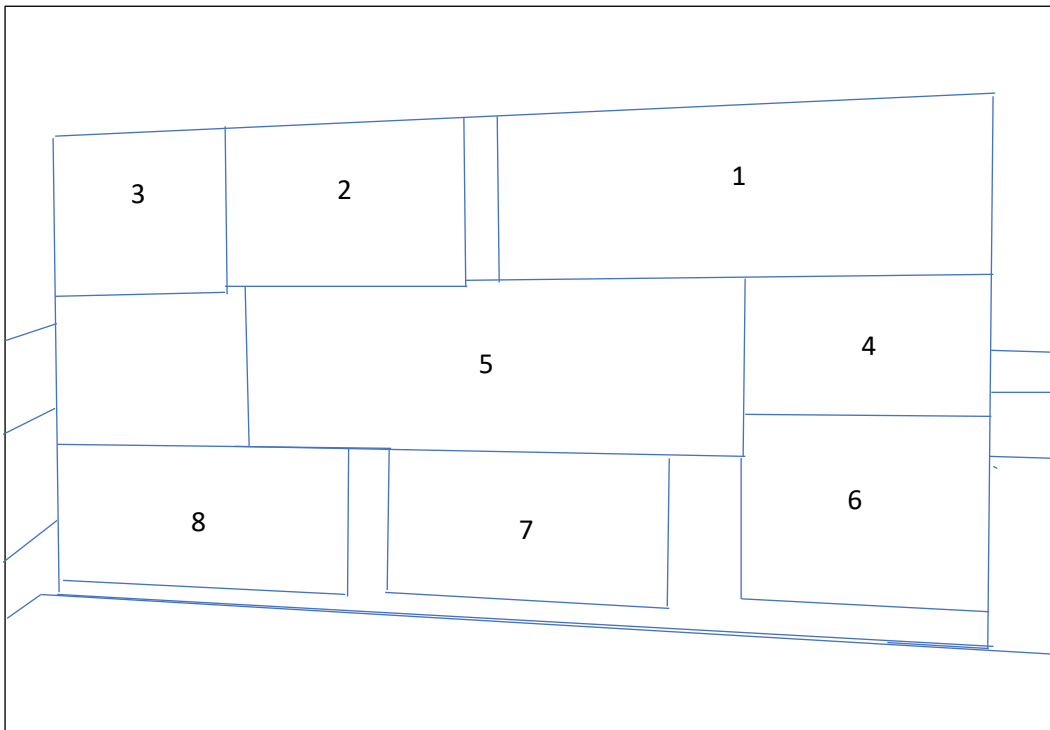


Figure 05: Diagram of entrance side, 2017.

## **Entrance Side:**

### **Banner 01**

This banner contains layers of stories relating to the 1994-98 civil war between the KDP and the PUK. According to the calligrapher H. A. in Kapki Hamad Axa, there lies a hill between the yellow and green political zones, where many Peshmerga were killed. The hill was a strategic place for them, and so its name became known to most people, though now we hear nothing of it. The banner was made in accordance with the decisions of the calligrapher who was commissioned for the original banner, and who I later interviewed. The yellow text represents the KDP and green the PUK. What we see between them is the white colour that represents death.

02 consists of layers of linguistic expressions published by the party's TV and radio station which was related to the battlefields between the Kurdish parties during the civil war. The phrase "martyrdom of a group of Peshmerga heroes" was very familiar to those who remember the civil war because they hear it repeatedly. Through the repetition of expression, the composition becomes a linguistic echo.

03 is located in the upper corner and half the banner is on the other side. The cloth colour is symbolic of left-wing parties, in particular the Communist Party. The text describes a story Communist Party martyrs killed by the armed forces of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. The audience would be familiar with the signification of the colour red, but the text is repeated and therefore illegible. The contextual relationship of the signs, however, points a pathway that allows the potential for interpretation.

04 combines some expressions used by Kurdish parties during the bloodiest wars of modern Kurdish history (as I recount in the chapter 3). The phrases consist of: *in the heroic resistance; martyrdom of a group of Peshmerga heroes; Peshmerga brave*; but due to the process of repetition, and collapse of linguistic rules, they remain incomprehensible.

05: The text says: “Once upon a time a Mullah wearing his mantle and turban visited my workshop; he had a photo of a soldier in his hand whom he claimed to be his son. He asked me to redraw the photo, but changing his military beret to a Kurdish turban and add a Kalashnikov barrel behind his shoulder because a political party promised him to name him as their martyr. I told him, you are a religious man, do you not feel embarrassed? Why would you wish to do that? He said he would give me extra money, and he repeated his demands, but I refused because I would feel guilty if I made these fake things.

Unfortunately, the parties were competing to increase their numbers of martyrs, which led to corruption. People were making up these fake stories in order to get a monthly salary”.

06 consists of layers of text that have accumulated one atop another to switch the banner from its narrative purpose to a purely visual one. In this contextual relationship the message hints at issues of martyrdom, but gives no clear message.

07 says: “My uncle was an old man of about seventy years old. In the Ba’athist era he died on the street when a car hit him. The driver was a man from *Jash* and in those days the case was resolved quietly. After the Kurdish uprising in 1991, my uncle was registered as a martyr by one of the dominant political parties running the government.”

08 says: "During the civil war between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, when a person was killed from, for example, a member of the KDP, the name would be written in yellow. Then they wrote an apologetic expression about the incident of (the name of the person) and they wrote martyr's brothers name and they indicated that he was martyred during a heroic battle by (the name of the party). And rest in peace."



Figure 6: Side of the cube opposite the Sumerian Cylinder, 2017 (Photograph Halo Lano).

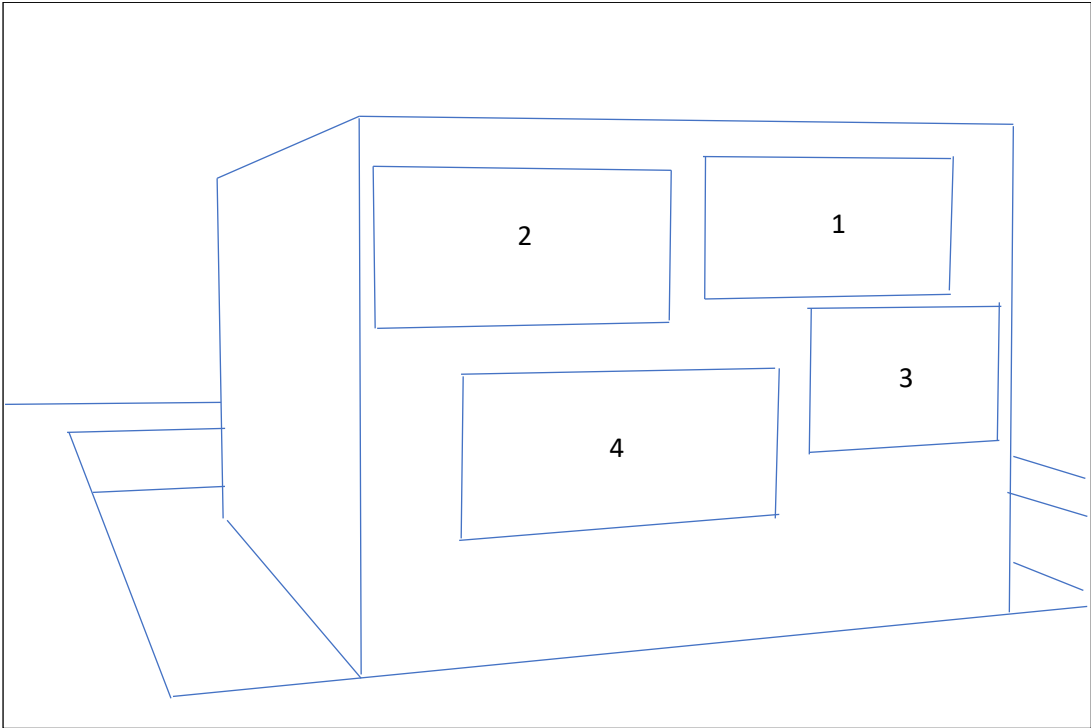


Figure 7: Diagram of Sumerian Cylinder side, 2017.

### Side of the Sumerian Cylinder:

Banner 01 is the story of how banners were written for martyrs during the internal **civil** war called *Bra Kuzhi*. “When a person was killed on the battlefield, for example if he was a member of PUK's Peshmerga, the full name of the person was written in green, followed by other information such as the date and place of the incident ... The opposing party would also be mentioned, as in: “he was martyred by the Turkish *Jash* or *Yellow Tail* (in reference to the KDP party). The last line indicates that the dead person has reached eternity”.

02 This is the story of a war. “Although IS had a plan to control Kurdistan and began their repeated attacks, they were foiled by the Peshmerga defending their country. This holy land was not a place for those terrorists, but was gained through the sacrifice of many Peshmerga soldiers. One time when they fought in a specific area, a group of heroic Peshmerga were martyred, and their martyrdom ceremonies were announced by their military units and a banner was made for each of them. I made all the banners at night for each of those immortal martyrs, but the next day when they came to collect banners they said that Peshmerga (P.M.Q.A.M.) was not killed but only injured, and captured by IS”.

03 shows layers of phrases, and one of them referring to the name of a hill, *Kapki Shilana*. This hill was a part of conflict zone during the internal war. Many Peshmerga were killed on both sides in order to control it. The other text is illegible, but nevertheless allows glimpses that serve as a reminder of the conflict, and the number of the victims.

04 This banner has the aspect of an image, in that rather than simple text, it is an onslaught of text that causes blurring. It creates curiosity in the audience to move closer in order to



obtain the specific meaning, but continues to frustrate up close. This lack of intelligibility or specific meaning encourages the viewer in their own interpretation, informed by the loaded context<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Glenn Ligon says: "I'm interested in what happens when a text is difficult to read or frustrates legibility—what that says about our ability to think about each other, know each other, process each other." (Art news. The Writing on the Wall: Glenn Ligon on Borrowing Text to Expose American Racism, in 2011. 2016).



Figure 8: View of the Jar side of the cube, 2017 (Photograph Halo Lano).

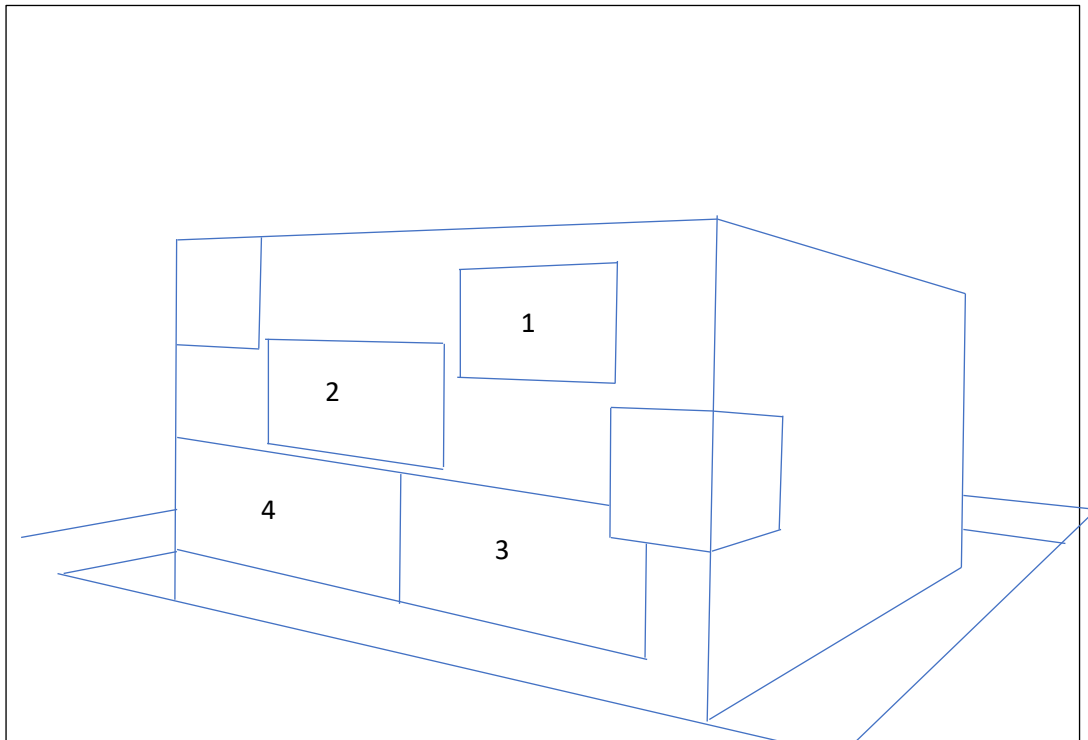


Figure 9: Diagram of the Jar side, 2017.

### **Side of The Jar:**

Banner 01 is an accumulation of the phrase: “they were martyred in Sarkabakan”.

Sarkapkan is a name of the place which was a strategic area during the internal war for both the KDP and PUK. The names of certain hills and mountains was common during the civil war because so many Peshmerga (on both sides) sacrificed their lives to control terrain.

According to the calligraphers, when the martyr's body reached his family, black banners would be hung over the wall of the mosque, on the house of the victim, and also in public areas. Phrases on the banners give some information and sentiment. The current government do not want memorial days for victims, as they do not want any justification for martyrdom.

02 provides a story that goes back to the Ba’athist era. “During the Iraq-Iran war, if a soldier was killed on the battlefield, the Iraqi government registered him as a martyr. Black banners were placed by the local Ba’ath Party office. The government would then provide food for the martyr's family. Later the government would invite the family to visit them in order to honour them, and compensate them with a car, piece of land, a telephone and monthly salary.”

03 This red banner appears in the top corner, showing no specific message or story, but the red colour suggests a connection with the Communist Party or the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), who use red in their martyr ceremonies.

04 Here the viewer/reader faces difficulties in how to read the text, because it is not a simple story, more a wave of words and sentences. The reader may grasp certain words

such as: *Anfal, Halabja, Shaheedi Sarkrda* (Martyr-leaders) as they mingle in a complex palimpsest<sup>60</sup>.

05 The story on this banner goes: “During the Ba’athist regime, there was a man who was a puppet of the Ba’athist regime, and quickly becomes the commander of the Special Forces tasked to seek out and arrest opposition members, the Peshmerga's families and the rebels. He is no longer alive, but the strange thing is that he was registered as entitled to the martyr “leader” denomination ...donation? in the martyrdom registration list by the ruling party in Kurdistan. In addition, “the martyrs are immortal” was written in gold colour in large size font as a background for the text. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter, I decided to display the banner in reverse, to make it difficult to understand.

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<sup>60</sup> This structure of this object does not imprison meaning but allows it mobility and potential for transformation, in the way that Dillon notes in his *Revelation of Erasure*: “What the eye picks out as meaningful on a printed or marked surface is mostly down to learning and convention: the legible text or image floats free of the surrounding remnants of abandoned language, meaningless doodles or flaws in the texture of the flat support. The real message hangs in the air like a street full of neon. Still, there is something seductive about the idea of an erased truth lurking between the lines(Dillon, B. 2006, *The Revelation of Erasure*. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-8-autumn-2006/revelation-erasure>).



Figure 10: View of the Gilgamesh side of the cube, 2017. (Photograph Halo Lano).

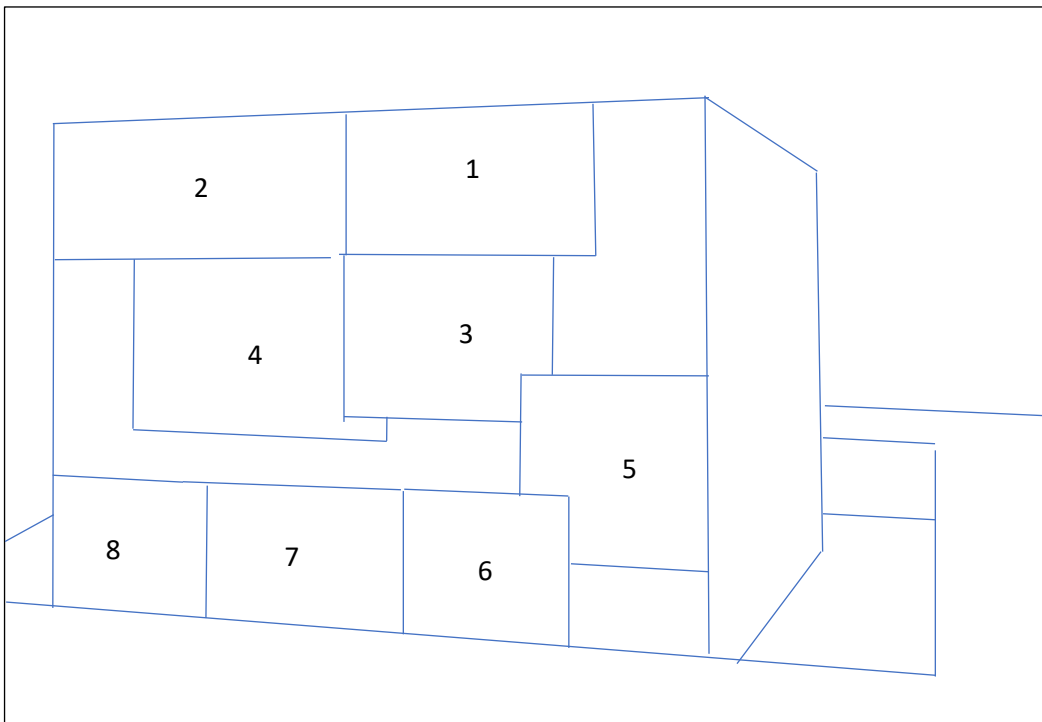


Figure 11: Diagram of Gilgamesh side, 2017.

## **Gilgamesh side:**

Banner 01 The text reads: “During the Iran-Iraq War, there was a specialised group on the battlefield called the Death Squad, wearing a magenta colour beret. They were responsible for monitoring and killing soldiers who did not fight or fled the battlefield. They would put their bodies into a plain wooden coffin and write “cowardly” on the coffin. Although the Iraqi flag was used to cover Iraqi martyr coffins, it was not used on the so-called cowardly. They did not receive government privileges because they were not registered as martyrs, and the government forced their families to pay for the bullets that killed them.”

02 This operates as a type of mass grave in which everything becomes mixed, the surface filled with words and colours displaced from their origin<sup>61</sup>.

03 The texts are located on the left and do not cover the entire surface. They are written in plain white, and the Kurdish viewer can decipher *Kapki Hamad Axa*, from three words in different locations on the banner surface. It is the name of a hill, and familiar to most Kurdish who remember the PUK-KDP as many Peshmerga were killed on both sides in trying to control it. To reconstruct the name, viewers must consider the context of the exhibition and piece together the connotation.

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<sup>61</sup> I included this banner partly for its illustration of Kristeva’s ideas on intertextuality, in particular the role of pheno- and geno- text, clarified by Johnson as “the pheno-text is the surface phenomenon of a text present before us, whereas the geno-text is the operation which engenders the pheno-text, is the cause of its genesis.” (Dillon, S. as cited in *The Chicago School of Media Theory*. 2003). Through the intersection of pheno-text and geno-text, a paradoxical sense is generated, which does not stabilise, reminiscent of Barthes’s notion of “ideal textuality” which has a slippery nature: “In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilises extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable [...] the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language”. (Barthes, R. as cited in *The Chicago School of Media Theory*. 2003).

04 The text reads: “At the end of the 1980s, the Iraqi's defence minister (Al-Friq Al-Rukin, Adnan Khairalh al-Tuffah) died when his helicopter crashed. The Iraqi government declared mourning throughout the country, forcing all government departments, schools, markets, and districts to make black banners for the event, since which time the use of a black banner has become common practice in most Iraqi cities (although in southern Iraq it was already common during the Iran-Iraq War)”.

05 The text reads: “The funeral of the martyr (<sup>62\*</sup>...) one of the Peshmerga in battalion ... he was martyred by the IS terrorist group in the area of ...Battalion 1.” This is the standard text structure for martyr banners during IS war, a formula which continues to this day.

06 This banner consists of repeating the phrase that dates back to the war between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and Ansar al-Islam or Jund al-Islam. The phrase is "Martyred in Xel Hama". On the 23rd of September 2001, 43 PUK's Peshmerga were captured by Ansar al-Islam or Jund al-Islam in the village of Xel Hama. They brutally killed them, then mutilated their bodies (GKsat.tv 2015).

07 is composed of repeating a story relating to banners made during the Ba'ath era. Words such as: “Ba'ath era”, “Don't remember” “Jash” can be seen, but the meaning collapses under the accumulation of the text.

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<sup>62</sup> This space is for writing the name of the martyr.



08: These layered stories deal with a 'Shaheed' case, but does not have a conventional narrative. Repetition, linguistic relations and structure is effaced and new relationships begun, concerned with the problem of inadequate representation, or when the subject requires an overt frustration of clarity.

## Reflection

My *Shaheed* installation was highly successful in generating public engagement with its theme. For a piece of contemporary art in Iraq, it employed unfamiliar methods and a controversial setting. These methods of social-engagement, collaboration and installation were also new territory for my own practice, even though the material being examined and presented was similar to that in my studio-based paintings.

There was also some controversy attached to the reception of the exhibition, which resulted in demonstrations outside the museum, extensive press coverage, and interviews on radio and television, recordings of which are included in the appendix. I judged the controversy a positive thing, as a key objective was to give the calligraphers of Sulimaniyeh their own voice on the concept of martyrdom, thereby exposing the inconsistencies and corrupt practices the concept encourages.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thinking on the interrelationship between subject and object provides some perspective of the *Shaheed* installation. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) he argues that perception is not just visual, but an act of the whole physical body. The requirement to walk around the cube, in the manner of circling the Ka'aba at Mecca, viewing the stitched banners in relation to objects in the collection of the Archaeological Museum produced a powerful interaction. An example was the connection of the Shaheed cube with an object recently acquired by the museum representing Gilgamesh, one of the most important mythical figures concerning death and immortality in Mesopotamia. Gilgamesh struggled for eternity but failed, and became convinced that death was inevitable

and unavoidable, but that individuals could gain immortality through their deeds and works. The connection to the theme and narratives of *Shaheed* cube was consequently a stark and powerful one, particularly for an informed museum-going audience.

All stories on the cube focus on the subject of martyrs and martyrdom, yet as we have seen, 'martyrdom' does not have a rigid definition, but alters in meaning according to the ideology and the structure of governing power, whilst the stories presented were uneven in their legibility. These two main factors gave the cube an intertextuality that fits Derrida's description in *Position*:

No element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each 'element' ... being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing ... is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces (Derrida, *Position* 1981: 26).

In selecting the cube narratives, I did not wish to leave the audience to search for a hidden meaning, but rather to engage in the production of multiple interpretations with different connotations. This was encouraged through strategies employed to promote interaction between the installation and the viewer, for as Duchamp says:

The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act (Duchamp 1957, *WMD*, 140 as cited in Judovitz, D. 1995: 149).

This approach to making and receiving again comes back to Eco's *Open Work*, as "a work that does not generate a definite conclusion (in both the physical and intellectual sense) but implicates the viewer in imagining an appropriate end to the artwork" (Park, S.

*Understanding "Open Work" in Interactive Art. 2006: iii).. ..making the Shaheed cube "a closed form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an open product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity" (Eco's *The Open Work* 1989: 4).*

No singular or ultimate meaning was conveyed, rather the stories contributed to a democratic work. By reading the texts as they moved around the cube, the audience encountered multiple layers of meaning, some intended, and others generated as a consequence of the interference patterns established between the narratives, in this way authorship of meaning is transferred from the artist to the audience (Park, S. 2006: 4).

A crucial intention was to engage the audience by placing a radical, potent composition in a space normally only used for the conventional display of historical artefacts. This juxtaposition was intended to be thought-provoking, and to invite the audience to involve themselves in new interpretations.

Although the *Shaheed* cube and Hatoum's *Current Disturbance* (1996) share a basic form, they are technically quite distinct, particularly, in the case of *Shaheed*, the collaboration with other makers. From a conceptual point of view, however, they share intellectual dimensions as both come from political conflicts, and include a critical dimension to socio-political issues, transforming memory into a creative product. In Hatoum's piece, the audience is also "invited to circumambulate, but here the wire cages, electric lights and sounds serve to heighten the vacancy of the interior space thus inferring human absence" (Al Quds. 2013). Hatoum's concern that her audience experience familiar objects in an unfamiliar context was a useful reflection on Shaheed:

I always try to make the work in such a way that it can include you and your experience as well as mine. If I'm trying to convey a feeling of instability, I'm not doing it in a kind of documentary sense. I'm creating a work that you can experience physically – it's not necessarily an illustration of a specific event. (Mona Hatoum -as cited in Sbitti, R. 2018).

Baudrillard's thoughts on language and propaganda remained a useful reference throughout the design of the exhibition, especially the way in which I selected stories with different levels of legibility to sit beside one another. Baudrillard saw that language as a means of communication prevents us from reaching "reality". He also described ideology as a "false consciousness" that did not represent the truth but rather concealed it (Felluga, D. 2011) and that reality becomes inauthentic when language is used to represent an event.

Language remains one of the most important tools of propaganda for politicians in Iraq, and banners as cultural media within Iraqi and Kurdish communities have been exploited by politicians to justify their wars. The information provided by these banners, including news stories, relates to Baudrillard's warning in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (1995) that news and propaganda are used to blur the collective vision: "Iraqis blow up civilian buildings in order to give the impression of a dirty war. The Americans disguise satellite information to give the impression of clean war." (Baudrillard (1995, p62).

When the words of a martyr, or the description of a martyrdom, are brought into an archaeological museum, their meaning is detached from normal usage, and must contend with a place traditionally used for research, information and inquiry. In removing the idea of the 'Shaheed' from its sacred context and placing it in the historical context of the museum,

the subject matter is deconstructed and reformed (in the manner of Derrida's "*intertextualite*") rendering it open to debate and questioning.

As previously documented, the use of calligraphers was an integral part of developing the Shaheed exhibition. One aim of this process was to heighten their awareness of their daily work, and to demonstrate the role banners can play in life, as well as in art. As a result of living under the totalitarian Baathist regime, and then in various states of warfare, Iraqi Kurds were isolated from the world and their artists had no connection with the West. Art education at Universities and Art Institutes remained in the system established for academic training established in the mid-twentieth century, and hence most Kurdish artists used an academic style. After 2003, when Saddam's regime collapsed, Kurdish artists could travel to Western countries, and experience new ways of practicing art, but this openness occurred away from the educational institutions in Kurdistan.

The generation of contemporary artists in the west, particularly after the 1970s, increasingly engaged with fields beyond the *personal* (Bishop, C. and Sladen, M. 2008: 9). As Nicolas Bourriaud points out in his text *Relational Aesthetics* (1998):

The possibility of a *relational* art (an art that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interaction and its social context, rather than the assertion an autonomous and private symbolic space) is testimony to the radical upheaval in aesthetic, cultural and political objectives brought about by modern art. To outline its sociology: this development stems essentially from the birth of a global urban culture and the extension of the urban model to almost all cultural phenomena. (Bourriaud, N. 2002 as cited in Bishop, C. 2006: 160).

Bourriaud proposes that changes that have taken place in the socio-political context, allied with technological progress, have opened up the field of art. As a consequence,

contemporary intentions in art have altered aesthetic and intellectual structures, and artistic tendencies have tried to get closer to social groups to exchange knowledge.

Although the *Shaheed* exhibition reflects these new strategies, it should be made clear that my decision-making developed organically from my personal interactions with the calligraphers. Once I recognised the direction of travel for my work, I found it necessary to further understand its place in the global contemporary art scene.

Bourriaud also emphasizes the role of art in social cohesion and the promotion of dialogue among various components of society:

We can leave aside the problem of the phenomenon's historicity: art has always been relation to some extent. It has, in other words, always been a factor in sociability and has always been the basis for a dialogue. One of the image's potentials is its capacity for 'linkage' [*reliance*], to use Michel Maffesoli's term: flags, logos, icons and signs all produce empathy and sharing, and generate *links*. (Bourriaud, N. 2002 as cited in Bishop, C. 2006: 161).

The use of banners in Kurdish society might be understood as this type of 'linkage', providing the basis for dialogue through the texts presented in public places, although the quality of the dialogue has changed according to the governing political systems (c.f. chapter 2). The participation of the calligraphers provides a new relation between social groups, as well as a sharing of skills and knowledge. This discourse of participation is an attempt to counter the passivity, isolation and lack of sharing that has occurred due to the past political and social system.

According to Bishop, a key objective of participatory art is to work against isolationism within society, that can lead to alienation. Alienation may occur as the product of dictatorial



regimes, contemporary capitalism, or totalitarian socialism. She proposes that “Art must be directed against contemplation, against spectatorship, against the passivity of the masses paralyzed by the spectacle of modern life” (Bishop, C. as cited in Thompson, N. 2012: 36).

Bishop also suggests how these goals might be achieved:

Beginning from this premise, participatory art aims to restore and realize a communal, collective space of shared social engagement. But this is achieved in different ways: either through constructive gestures of social impact, which refute the injustice of the world by proposing an alternative, or through a nihilist redoubling of alienation, which negates the world’s injustice and illogicality on its own terms. (Bishop, C. as cited in Thompson, N. 2012: 36).

Socially engaged practice has the potential to cohere society, because it helps communities to feel that they are part of the ‘fuller picture’ of society – according to Bishop, “to re-humanize social bonding contemporary artists may try to fill those interstices between the classes of society caused by the ruling regimes, especially capitalism”:

For many artists and curators on the left, Guy Debord’s indictment of the alienating and divisive effects of capitalism in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) strike to the heart of why participation is important as a project: it re-humanizes a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production. This position, with Marxist overtones, is put forward by most advocates of socially engaged and activist art. Given the market’s near-total saturation of image repertoires - so the argument goes - artistic practice can no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander. (Bishop, C. cited in Thompson, N.2012: 35).

Until the *Shaheed* exhibition, most calligraphers could not see how banners connected to other fields of knowledge. They certainly did not realise the potential for contemporary art

to draw attention to their banner-making, or that their knowledge derived from banner-making could be valued. Through their participation, the 'interstices caused by totalitarian systems' such as Baathist regimes in Iraq, one-party ideology, and one-Arab nation, (denouncing minorities such as the Kurds, as described in Chapter 2), would be filled. The democratic intention behind their inclusion was made in the hope that this small step would be a step toward a re-humanization of Iraqi society.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

As I have noted previously, the practical and theoretical research contained in this thesis can be traced back to my childhood awareness of the calligraphers' workshops of Sulaymaniyah.

In revisiting the workshops as an artist many years later, I was struck by the visual potency of the banner-making processes, in particular the residues of that process left on the backing-boards in the workshops, and sought to use this potency in the context of global contemporary art and my ambitions as a painter.

During the course of the research this intention has undergone profound changes. Initially the issue of appropriation was paramount, and remains to this day a background concern that I pay constant attention to. Next came the recognition that the banner-making process through a studio mimicking, offered two methods in one – a 'positive' method of calligraphic paint onto cloth, and a 'residual' method of layered marks, which eventually produced, or recreated, a palimpsest abstraction. Both processes contained the question of cultural specificity, which forced me to consider whether paintings made from such sources could escape their cultural origins, and whether they would wish to.

This consideration, which certainly remains relevant if I decide to produce paintings again in future, was superseded by the realisation that, in my interviews with the calligraphers, powerful narratives were being generated. I began to use these narratives as the content of the calligraphy I applied to cloth in order to produce traces, but at this point realised that the visual/verbal palimpsest, instead of being an abstraction, had become an obscure

receptacle for the history of my people. Layering the stories repeatedly in paint, to achieve a similar density of layering as I had found in the calligraphers' workshops, impressed upon me their relevance to contemporary Kurdish society, whereas the act of rendering them illegible grew less important. It was at this point I embarked on a more systematic history of banner-making, sources for which were sparse, employing a mix of historical research and photographic interpretation, with the eye-witness accounts of the calligraphers themselves.

This recognition produced a marked shift in both practical and theoretical approaches, in which linguistic and painterly strategies were overturned in favour of socially-engaged, collaborative, and installation practices. Having been forced into this shift by the demands of my subject matter and my intended audiences, I recognise them as new developments, and because mine is not an artistic practice with a defined end, I also understand there is much more research and theoretical underpinning to do.

The realisation of the *Shaheed* cube marked a crucial step in this respect, in that I was able to incorporate my own research in an installation that depended upon collaboration with the calligraphers themselves. The collaboration allowed me to activate a process through which their informed voices on the subject of Martyrdom – a consistent theme of their narratives, and for their banner-making, to become heard in combination, to a degree of legibility that each calligrapher was comfortable with.

Due to its timing, the insight that led me to the archive at The Directorate of Martyrdom and Genocide, that has since prompted further works, is only lightly touched upon in this text, despite its relevance to the last phase of the *Shaheed* cube installation.

In the first phase of the project, contributions to knowledge were offered through the formulation of highly particular processes. These began with appropriation, and also involved mimicry of the calligraphers, but developed into a more complex method, in which the transcription of detailed narratives produced a loaded form of abstraction, with relevance to both Kurdish and non-Kurdish viewers. My practice from this phase is therefore intended to provide new understandings about painting in relation to embedded socio-political issues, and the manner in which gradual accumulations of meaning might pass via a form of palimpsest into near-illegibility, and thereby abstraction, without losing all their significance.

Through continued interviews with the calligraphers, preserved in the Appendix in Kurdish as original reference material, relevant narratives were collated alongside conventional historical methods to form a brief history of banner-making, a further contribution to knowledge, as such a history previously existed only in the form of anecdotes and photographs.

The historical perspective arising from the eye-witness accounts of the calligraphers directly impacted the design of the *Shaheed* installation, in which the idea of the palimpsest is supplanted by the notion of multiple perspectives and multiples voices as expressed in the ritual form of the cube, to be walked around, itself a loaded action for an Islamic audience. The contribution to knowledge in this piece includes a radical new proposition for contemporary art in Iraq, in terms of it incorporating sensitive, emotionally charged narratives; employing approaches unfamiliar to artists in Iraqi and the region; and the final

installation being sited within an important archaeological connection, emphasising that history is continuous and also present.

Local and regional feedback to the exhibition was strong, and the exhibition received considerable media attention, some of it captured in the media archive in the Appendix. For my own reflection on the process I naturally noted the protests against the exhibition, in particular the defacing of promotional material around the region, but I was more concerned with informed responses. When interviewed about the *Shaheed* exhibition on KNN TV, Journalist and curator Bakhtiar Saeed remarked that “it is evident that the idea for the exhibition in Sulaymaniyah museum is a new one, not seen before. Furthermore, the way in which the idea was implemented differs from traditional approaches, in that Rostam took advantage of the banner form by using the calligraphers’ narration to review and revisit historical events. Through those stories, he also remembers the victims killed in various events.” He went on to explain, “the calligraphers are important sources because they bore witness to events that took place in Kurdistan through the making of banners”. In the same television interview, the artist and poet Shara Rasheed reflected on how the exhibition offers a set of important considerations around the issue of the martyr and martyrdom: “the question that arises is: do we have a common opinion of a martyr, or do we have a specific definition of a martyr? Who is the true martyr?” She goes on to explain that in the continuous wars of the Kurdish region there are many victims, but the exhibition asks: how may one martyr be distinguished from another, and how the sanctity and value of martyrdom might be approached.

Hashim Hama Abdula, Director of the Sulaymaniyah Museum, commented that he saw the banners as a form of historical narration, and when placed alongside archaeological objects that incorporate ancient writings (cuneiform, Aramaic, Arabic) a historical dialogue is sparked between the contemporary artwork and the archaeological objects.

He also recognised the exhibition's relation to the archaeological context as a means of reanimating the collection for contemporary audiences, and was made more aware of the role of the viewer as activator in the museum. In the exhibition he noted that as the viewer walks around the *Shaheed* cube trying to make sense of the banner narratives, they encounter the archaeological objects (and their information captions) encircling the cube<sup>63</sup>. The viewer thus experiences a rich interweaving of information and connotation, and is invited to bring them together in a broader awareness, as Derrida would encourage.

The exhibition had a markedly positive effect on Sulaymaniyah Museum visitor figures, with many hundreds who had not previously visited the museum attending. Abdula recognised that art installations in Western museums have had a similar significant impact on visitor numbers and visitor appreciation as the *Shaheed* show. He now envisages an expansion of the museum building to accommodate more projects and more visitors.

The positive reaction to the museum exhibition demonstrated to me the effectiveness of socially-engaged artistic practice in bringing together the fractured communities in Sulaymaniyah and Kurdistan. I saw that this held potential for further developments, and

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<sup>63</sup> Abdula reported that the exhibition had inspired him to display the Paikuli inscription nearby, as he felt a resonance. The Paikuli inscription is a relic from the Sassanid period, consisting of texts carved on stones that originally formed the wall in the castle of Paikuli, written in Pahlavi and Ashkani language.



began to prepare proposals for further related works. The first project envisaged an open-air situation, to which calligraphers are invited to make banners for participants while they debate issues crucial to current Iraqi society, as it transitions from dictatorship to democracy. Participants will request sentences or phrases that arise from the debate to be made into banners, that then become available for other purposes, such as performances, meetings, demonstrations, and independent artworks. A second project is designed specifically for art institutions, with the intention of activating debate on cultural issues in Kurdistan and Iraq. A banner will be used to invite prospective participants to a discussion inside the selected cultural institution, and other banners will be used to prompt debate, with the aim of promoting inclusivity and allowing each participant 'finding their voice'. Banners will also record the ideas that emerge, to be used in future events. Potential topics for debate might include: the culture factory, the Artist Union, Sulaymaniyah Contemporary Art Museum, and the Venice Biennale<sup>64</sup>.

In contemplating the wider relevance of my research, I consider that the history of banner-making should be of interest to a spectrum of social scientists in the Middle East and beyond, whilst the martyrdom testimonies of the calligraphers will perhaps interest a Kurdish and an Iraqi audience more directly. The distinctive processes and methods employed in the studio will have relevance to artists working in diverse cultures, with different subject matters, whilst the methodological innovations that the *Shaheed* installation required should prove a powerful example to a contemporary artist operating in Iraq or the broader Middle-Eastern region, but will be more familiar to a Western audience.

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<sup>64</sup> I have also designed a performance piece prompted in part by the museum director's own reflection on the exhibition outcome (and recorded in more detail in the Appendix) in which an activist research methodology responds to a reference object from the Archaeological Museum.

In forging a connection between ancient artefacts from the region, a central Islamic ritual, the everyday witnessing of the calligraphers in their daily practice of transcription, and the layered social history of the Kurds, the *Shaheed* exhibition proved a fitting conclusion to this research project, a conclusion which, when I commenced this research prompted by a childhood memory, I certainly could not have envisaged.



## Appendices

### **Interview 1**

#### **The famous calligrapher (Hiwa Saeed Rasheed) August 1<sup>st</sup> 2015**

Q. when have you commenced as a calligrapher?

A. After 1988.

Q. How did you learn to do that?

A. I have practiced on Hashim Al-Baghdady brochure. In the beginning, I learned Ruqa'a font theme then the other font theme. I used to write small banners and not big ones.

Q. And when have you worked in a shop?

A. It was around 1988 after the chemical bomb attack and later then I moved to Iran.

Q. What was the first banner's title about?

A. It was a morning banner that I wrote it in an erroneous way for a teacher, once he has come back to fetch it he said why have you written it like that?

Q. How did you write banners after the uprising?

A. I used to work for a party and later I was arrested, in 1984 I was released. After a period I travelled abroad when I heard that my father had been arrested I returned and I was arrested and released again. After the uprising I worked as a calligrapher in a PUK Committee.

Q. What were the works?

A. They were mostly the party slogans especially about PUK.

Q. What colors were used?

A. Green was always used.

Q. Did you purchase cloth in rolls for banners?

A. After the year of 2000, writing the banners has evolved for the memorial occasions of uprising, sometimes we were writing banners for a month for all the parties. I had sometimes bought around eight to nine rolls. Even if I had bought a hundred rolls they were certainly used up. A person who works for PUK headquarters 1 in Sulaymaniyah named: Jabar Sabir; said that it sometimes we use five hundred rolls.

Q. What were the cloth colors mostly used up?

A. Green and yellow.

Q. How were they written?

A. In Ruqa'a font theme and with white paint.

Q. Were there any other color used?

A. Sure, the PUK was used in a larger font size in red or a light shaded green, and/ or the June 1<sup>st</sup> was written in a large font, if the memorial was for Halabja, then the word Halabja had to be written in large font.

Q. How did such writings come to you?

A. If they were PUK's then they were coming from PUK Sulaymaniyah HQ-1. The total of thirty to forty banners were written for all the department buildings thus all around were covered with green.

Q. Were the governmental directorates writing banners?

A. Yes, the writings were in white colour on green cloth.

Q. Were they writing on other colored banners apart from green?

A. Depending upon my memory, the governmental departments were writing just on green banners.

Q. And what if the occasion was for KDP or another party's memorial?

A. For KDP memorial I had not seen banners fixed on the department buildings except for their headquarters and in the quarters.

Q. In what period have you received lots of work within your work history?

A. In 1999 and 2000 till 2012 the city was full of works, as far as I'm concerned, I were sometimes inquired to write about forty or fifty and sometimes one hundred banners for PUK.

Q. Were there any problem in banners writing?

A. There was rivalry among the colours. It happened that when someone asked me for a work and meantime seen by the other party's member by chance thus he did not come back for anything else.

Q. Does it mean that it had influences on people?

A. Of course it had influences because he has been brain washed. For instance, if some one's two brothers were martyred in the front of PUK then he would never concede for the opposition party as he shared his suffering with that party. The internal civil war had too many effects on people, like my family; we have sixteen members martyred in the hands of these parties: three were hanged by Baath party, two sentenced with death in Mosul, two were killed by KDP at Grdi Goshia and the rest were killed by the Islamics. If you won't belong to a party in this country your condition will not remain well. Being independent and not belonging to any party it's for many years and they are not going to issue my working permit. If you interview the calligraphers you will realize that each of them belongs to a party and each has his own salary.

Q. How can a burial ceremony banner be written?

A. The name of the deceased person would be written in a big font size, his/ her father, brother and son or daughter as well as the directorate where the deceased had worked before in addition to the date and the mosque where the burial feast would be held. If the deceased person belongs to a party then they ask me to write with different colours and not only with white and they also ask for writing with their wanted colour. Many times I have received some certain people who belonged to officials asked me to write eight 2meters sized

banners while the ordinary people's banners are one meter size, and sometimes asked for more than ten to fifteen banners. I couldn't realize that he/she belonged to which party because I have written banners for all the parties... Even if the banners have no misprints or mistakes in but sometimes, they asked to write a new one due to the colour. I have once written a banner for a real estate agency in Zargata quarter. It was the property of two persons whom they each belonged to a party, I have had the colours with me and there I asked one of the owners how to write, he inquired that he wanted green colour for the whole writings but I urged him to let me write the numbers in red in spite of that he insisted to write the whole in green. When his partner returned and saw the green banner he became upset and said they are erroneous while there were no errors in the writings but he disliked the green color that's why he asked me to change them with yellow or he will bring another calligrapher to erase this green writing and change it to yellow besides the other guy was still insisting on the green, they were arguing till I left. Let me narrate something else for you, once upon a time I went to Erbil and wearing a dark green Kurdish national costume because green is nicer to wear than yellow. As I reached the first check point of Erbil they asked me to get out of the vehicle and later they insulted me so much.

Q. How were the banners written for the religious occasions?

A. Sulaymaniyah was the advanced city regarding to that aspect, at Mia'araj night which is one of the annual occasions; a white banner was written which was twice bigger than the two parties' banners, they were fixed everywhere around Sulaymaniyah quarters and blocks. There was also the prophet's birth date occasion when banners were written for it as well.

Q. Is colour regarded as a significant point for the religious occasions?

A. No, what is important is only the banner background that must be white otherwise it can be written with red, yellow, green, blue and multicolour. Only the parties focus on colour.

Q. Has any other colour been used apart from black for ceremony banner?

A. Yes the PKK use other colours, I noticed that when I have written some banners for their martyrs of Kobani city on black banner, once they have seen the banners they told me that they are wrong colours because PKK use white and red for their burial ceremonies of the dead ones. They have also advised me that PKK itself has changed from black to the mentioned ones.

Q. What about their slogans?

A. They write that ***they are saddened with the death of ...***, later they write ***martyr is immortal*** and above they also write: ***"the real martyr of Kurdistan*** plus the name and nickname" this differs so much as if compared to our banners, they use their banners for graveyard and marching.

Q. Does the civilian society organization have banners to write?

A. Yes it has and as follows:

- ✓ Students Union with pink and red
- ✓ Halabja: light green script on white background
- ✓ Women Union: white script on purple background
- ✓ Socialist Democratic Party: with light blue
- ✓ The miserable occasions like (Halabja, Mass Exodus and martyrs) all were in black

Q. What about the restaurants which fix banners in Ramadan fasting month?

A. This is just like imitating of a tradition, I write them every year otherwise formerly the governor was not granting permits to all of the restaurants to fix banner.

Q. How many times have you changed your calligraphy board so far?

A. Only once because each three to four months period we scrape it but the flex paper should be changed between 6 to 7 month otherwise it became useless and makes trouble in writing.

Q. Do you make your brushes by yourselves or you buy them?

A. We had made them by tins and cut their heads with scissors but they were more convenient during writing because they were not flexible.

Q. How big were the banners?

A. There were the following sizes for writing as follows: 3 mtr, 7 mtr, 10 mtr and 15 mtr

Q. Were there any odd request from people that you could not write?

A. Yes for instance, demagogic people, although my career is calligraphy but my conscience won't let me to write such things.

Q. Have you received requests for writing banners at the beginning of Daash war?

A. Yes just for the Peshmarga martyrs, I personally have written 4 to 5 ones but during the internal civil war I have written 10 banners for 10 different persons in a day. Once I have written for 11 martyrs who all came to me in Arfa day prior to feast.

Q. How was your career during the elections?

A. It was a very good period because we had got a fruitful work.

Q. Which colour seems independent within your work?

A. White background banner with black font script, otherwise green belongs to PUK and Yellow belongs to KDP

Q. And how is your career by now?

A. Unfortunately due to shortage and delay of governmental staff salary our working level has decreased so much, it's just as a dried out lake in which grooves are visible at its bottom

## Interview 2

Bahar Munzir, Head of Human Development Organisation

July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015

### **Q. Could you tell us about your political and feminine work?**

A. My work will return to after the Revolution in 1991 that occur some political changes, some ideologies and beliefs were born, a political circumstance which was extremely different from the political conditions under the rule of Saddam who was totalitarian and no one was allowed to work freely except some concealed movement of Islamic and communists. Since the revolution of 1991 a wide domain has been created allowed everyone to work and organize themselves especially to be active in the field of women work. Within our society everything was not organized and they work in single person. One of the projects was presented on 8 of March 1992, the women's day, at Sulaymaniyah High School. A lot people were present. It was like a ceremony with anthem and narratives and clarifying the women rights which was organized by some communists.

### **Q. Did you write mottos?**

A. Yes, but now I cannot remember the contents, but we had a request list and one of them was housework that marginalizes women and cannot communicate with society then after a year we founded an organization.

### **Q. What was your relationship with the communists about?**

A. I was not in relation yet but some of those women had political relation since Baath time for example Sarnjee Kreakay was one of those group as well as the vanguards crew and communist movement were available. After 1991 Communists movement party had armed people in public.

### **Q. Were they named as Shurah (council)?**

Yes, but it was not conditional to be a Shurah member meanwhile you belong to communist party and the contrary is true as well. At that time they had headquarter and armed people men and women co-existentially even in Halabja as it was difficult because the political Islamic were in power and due to the area's neighbourhood and closeness to Iran.

### **Q. Did you have any activity like demonstration?**

A. After the other women organizations has joined, this independent organization had its role, for instance regarding women assassination as during that time the court and police directorates were not carrying out their duties accordingly, it was easy to have weapon at home. The issue of the political forces entered into the city from the mountains that had no urban experience; has regenerated the tribal matters as they armed the tribes. This induced Kurdish people to take honor into their consideration strongly. Those women who had relation to Baath party through Iraqi Women Union or if had worked in any Baath organizations; were assassinated as per a list. There were some women who had relations and also some people while who were Baathist; as a result their sisters were murdered.



**Q. Was the assassination source familiar?**

**A.** The source was terror, at the time that Kurdistan United Fronts had power. When they entered the city they started killing the Baathists. It was easier for the men to join a party and become an armed but being a Baathist for a woman had a weak role.

**Q. Which organization was active for women issue then?**

**A.** There were organizations which protested, the women organizations inside the parties were not protesting in the form of remonstrance, as far as they are concerned; Freedom for Kurdistan was the core of the issue. But anything would not connect communist notion to liberation.

**Q. Were your critics against Kurdistan United Fronts? Did the other organizations hide their subject matters?**

**A.** During that period if anyone had talked about women issue, they might have been named them communist or independent organization. It's apparent that too much pressure were practiced especially by the political Islamic, that circumstance within itself has increased the political Islamic since the Islamic parties have rearranged themselves after the uprising and also they were supported by other states thus they had a considerable fund while during that period everything was too expensive as Baath regime was not letting stuff reach Kurdistan in addition to that Iraq was under economic sanction due to Kuwait war. This had created a bad effect and resulted in expensiveness and poverty. This was one of the factors which strengthened the political Islamic. During the economic blockade they were approaching the quarters to distribute breads and veils. We were working for that case that it had drawback.

**Q. Where had you received financial aids?**

**A.** From outside by our people and some rich people, none of the states subsidized us. We had showed our agendas and programs in our offices once people approach and see them they soon understand our intentions. For example we had written: **No for terror and women assassination, Yes for a justice law between women and men. No Islamic law, not directly, but through amendment of personal affairs laws. The domestic duties must be socialized; polygamy must be stopped as well as forced marriage.**

**Q. What were your activities and actions like, were they in the form of demonstration or seminars?**

**A.** Shutting the councils has resulted in a massive and crowded demonstration some leftist and modernist people have raised red banner which was written with this request: **Don't shut down the councils, Kurdistan united Fronts must not shut the councils.**

**Q. Were you using red color during your demonstration?**

**A.** yes of course we were using red colors because we were leftist and the red color is a symbol of leftism. What I have stated was the first demonstration which I took part. Many seminars and colloquies were held. No vacant and free seats were left in the cultural hall of

Sulaymaniyah where the seminars were held. We had arranged a series of seminars about criticizing the terms of women lives in the cities and towns.

**Q. Were there any censorship on you?**

**A.** One of the incidents that I can never forget was that we entered a seminar held by someone belonged to the political Islamic in the cultural hall, the available women were in veils and the men were in bushy beards. Once we reached there we realized that the seminar was held against us in the name of *(the red nights)* the red you mentioned, the one who were managing the seminar belonged to Islamic movement party. I don't like to mention as he has different thoughts at the moment. Five members' women of the independent organization come out to register for participation. As one of them wrote down her name to talk they couldn't find out that she was one of us although we were different among them while entering the hall with our costumes unlike theirs. They were hinting to that these communist people want to preserve the sexual relation between brothers and sisters. When the lady went up to the stage, she explained the statements and come down we realized that something will happen that's why we went to her and then they started spitting us. That comrade of us remained for two months in a village with her brother because they threatened to kill her.

**Q. Which parties mostly share this conflict? Was the government absent during that period?**

**A.** It was between us and the Islamics. Our newspapers had lots of readers, our seminars were crowded as we were holding them in public areas, for instance we held March 8 seminar in the square of driving Trial in the presence of too much people. We didn't participate in the election of 1992. There was disunion between patriotic union of Kurdistan and Kurdistan Democratic party Thus later they imposed 50 by 50 system but never the less they didn't concord and after two years started internal war. This catastrophe had made our act and activities difficult among two militia parties, PUK was governing green zone and KDP was dominating on yellow zone. We were working in both sides as they couldn't come to us due to their frictions and problems till they reached an agreement in 1997 and after three years PUK struck our organization and shut it down.

**Q. Was the war between PUK and communist party? Were you a part of communist?**

**A.** Yes the war was between PUK and communist party. We were not a part of communist but there were some closeness between our opinions. Some people of communist party were believing in our acts but meantime shutting communist party, caused to shut our organization as well.

**Q. Were there any killed ones?**

**A.** Yes there were. A shelter was established with the cooperation of Norwegian NPA organization which was one of those that assisted independent organizations for opening a shelter to protect women. Our armed girls were moving to Pishdar and Bitwean districts to save women from murdering. They were bringing to the shelter. Two girls whose noses were cut had been brought to our shelter.

**Q. Where were they from?**

**A.** From Raniya, both girls' names were Kazhal as follows: Kazhal Jamal and Kazhal Khidir.

**Q. What was the reason behind that?**

**A.** The reason of relationship, their father in law family had deformed them as a disgrace; they were protected by the shelter. We had brought another girl whom was roped with a chain inside a bath due to her unhealthy mental state.

**Q. What was your meeting or demonstration mostly for?**

**A.** March 8 was one of those occasions when activities were carried out, prior to shutting the organization activities were organized for substituting personal affairs law, equality between men and women and women circumcision.

**Q. For which women issue you had the most activities?**

**A.** For women murdering which is the most significant aspect I still work for. It's for about 24 years and the government couldn't issue a law for women and men equality. Our organization was shut in 2000 and its permit paper was withdrawn. One of those women who were protected by the shelter had been handed to her family by PUK at night, her name was Nahida and she was murdered the day after. The bodies of that woman and the five communists whom were killed, buried by municipality next to each.

**Q. Was demonstration held accordingly?**

**A.** No because they were searching for those people who were members and fans so that they would be arrested and /or killed.

**Q. Which year?**

**A.** 14- 7 – 2000, every year we visit their tombs and memorialize them . We protested against PUK. Two years were also memorialized in the black spot where assassinated.

**Q. When has this organization been established in which you're working for?**

**A.** It has been established in 2007. We had a logo, in which its color was black the word LIFE was scripted and it also has a yellow sun inside. But upon the request of the Yazidees, we have changed the black color into purple. We had a voluntary project in Duhok in the months of July and August 2014 for registering the names of those children, girls and women who were kidnapped by Daash. We could meet the Yazidees there and we had the forms which had LIFE group logo in black color. When they saw the forms they hesitated because the black color symbolizes Daash. Once we declared the names of the kidnapped people we also stated that we have changed the black color into purple.

**Q. I have seen purple banners written with white what about them?**

**A.** Our banners are white and written with orange color because orange is an anti-violence color.

**Q. When a woman is assassinated, what do you do for? Do you write on black banners as some parties and people do?**

**A.** No, we never write on black banners neither do ceremonies but we demonstrate. One of the cases that introduced us among Kurdistan society, KRG and Parliament everywhere was a case of lady in the name of the teacher Sakar, she was a teacher aged 28 years old, she was killed by her father whilst she was asleep because she wanted to get married to the man she loved. Both of them were teachers in Sarkapkan village near Rania district. Once we heard the news we were stunned. This incident took place before the establishment of Zheyen (LIFE) group. Thus we announced the campaign of the teacher Sakar and invited people for. The 8<sup>th</sup> of March that year after a month and few days we collected people in front of Sulaymaniyah court and raised banners and slogans saying *justice for the sake of teacher Sakar and her killer should not be freed* in addition to some other slogans I can't remember all. The banners colors were pink written with black. It was a great treachery practiced against that girl even the government president has talked about this issue. But her father was freed with an amnesty decision. We were around 20 to 30 women who participated in 13 court sessions, we twice could take photos with us and later they didn't let us anymore.

**Q. Will you do your activities in November 25<sup>th</sup> ?**

**A.** yes we have our activities every year.

**Q. What have you done for the Yazidees women?**

**A.** After a short period we were going to the camps during our weekly days off including: Badgit Kandal and Khankea camp where 6500 families dwell as well as the cities and anywhere they dwelled. We were visiting them for registering the names of the children, girls and women who were under Daash irruption. We collected data and submitted them to Kurdistan and Sweden Parliaments. After Daash war we have organised an armed group and trained on the weapons although we faced criticism saying that we are a civilian group how should we carry weapons but; the situation requested so as Kurdistan was in danger.

**Q. Are you doing political activities?**

**A.** Yes I'm politburo member of Communist party.

**Q. How are your supporters like?**

**A.** I believe that our supporters numbers will get increased because of the political gap in addition to that there are no more opposition parties left and all the parties are running the government.

**Q. Was the communist party striking by the PUK effective to decrease your supporters?**

**A.** Certainly yes because our activists opted out to leave abroad.

**Q. To the best of my knowledge you had too much people during Shurah period, so what was your debilitating related to ?**

**A.** It was related to that we were continuously struck, for example the Islamic parties were declaring that we are against Islamic law and we won't fit with Kurdistan culture.

**Q. Wasn't it relating to that PUK was dominant and had great number of armed forces here?**

**A.** Yes it's apparent that PUK was in power, what had concerned them was that this movement was growing, attracting the youth and won the women case. Another significant point that Iran inflicted against us was publicized in KAYHAN newspaper mentioning that ***Iran praises PUK for striking communist party.*** We still keep the newspaper. This cannot be seen as just an accident but it was a planned conspiracy because communist was also banned in Iran and PUK has close relationship with Iran that's why Iran asked it to do so. The same as now Turkey inquires KDP to move against PKK. Kurdistan Region has never been free and the neighboring states have always intervened; Iran from one side and Turkey from another. Thus striking communist party is partially relating to Iran demands.

**Q. How is your state and what are your activities by now?**

**A.** We have regained permits, do activities and acts and we don't have funds from the government because we don't believe in it.

**Q. Will you manage activities for communist party memorial or Marc 8<sup>th</sup> ?**

**A.** Yes we are going to do it, lest I should forget in 1999 two of our friends got martyred in the hands of Islamic movement with the collaboration of KDP. So they are going to be memorialized and also we have done a great campaign for constitution issue.

### Interview 3

#### Sdiq Salih (Historian) 03-08-2015

Q. As a member of this organization and well aware of history, can you inform us about the history of banners in your archive, in regard of writing banners in the social and political history of Kurdish nation.

A. We do not have evidence of written scriptures, but photos might serve as a vital evidence for your work. To my knowledge, banners coined after the Ottoman Empire reign, which was used during the political occasions. Some photos for the ottoman era published in books which show that banner came to being in late Ottoman era.

In particular in late 19 century when Itihadw Taraqi party established, it was a green party asking for the establishment of constitution and application of parliament under the shadow of Ottoman rule, to put limits on the authorities of the Caliphate and Ottoman Sultans.

Since then the parties were established by people who were educated and come from the cities and even the Kurds were involved in the establishment of the party too.

Two of the participants in this activity were (Abdullah Jawdat and Isac Scoty Dyar bakir) they were educated and knew languages, aware of the European lifestyle, since then political movements arouse in the Ottoman rule and banners were used the demonstrations.

Izadeen Kaka in his journal mentioned that at Sara Square in Sulaimaniya where demonstrations took place against the Ityhadyakan who came to power, it is possible that the demonstrators used banners.

In the twenties and thirties in this particular part of Kurdistan at that time the political terminology for this part was Kurdistan the south the British named it like this, and was known as state of Musul in the Ottoman era in 1921was linked to Iraq.

After the decision to link this part of Kurdistan to Iraq, in sulaimaniya particularly the recommendation of the investigation committee to the United Nations is not implemented which consist of the formalization of Kurdish language in the Kurdish resident areas and to be use in the schools and the courts. it was like some kind of autonomy for the Kurds, neither the Iraqi government nor the British comply with the recommendations, So due to that disagreement provoked.

These disagreements will take different forms; I believe banners during that time until the revolution of Kurdish nation in 1991 used for a political reason. In the political occasions where there was a chance banners used.

From the political unrests in the twenties and thirties there is one or two photos from the demonstrations at Sara Square on 06-09-1930 there was banners raised in the gatherings in which the banners stated (legitimate Kurdish demands, long live the justice of United nations).

Q. Was it written in Kurdish?

A. Yes, it was.

Q. Were the texts in the banners influenced by any party?

A. they were not for any parties, these unrests were led by a cluster of educated people, and they named themselves (National commission), they were a very civilized group, even they published announcements.

Now we have a copy of this announcement which was published on Sept. 1930 within some points talk about the squad of demonstrators. State that, where the demonstration started and marched and gathered at Sara square.

In the assembly point Ramzy Fattah who was one of the leaders of the National commission who spoke on behalf of them and prior agreements on what would be their slogan. Once they achieved what they have come for then they started to dismantle the gathering. But because the Iraqi Government was not intact they feared this unrest to persist and spread widely.

In fact this was a focal point in the history, and the government did not listen to the demands of the demonstrators. There were several demonstrations one of them was in July, and the massive demonstration took place on 06-09-1930, Fayaq Bakas led the demonstration as it is mentioned in the historical sources.

Q. Is there any photos?

A. There are two photos that I can show it to you, this was a focal point if the government fulfilled the demands of the people at least this bloodshed would not happened. Same for Kurds it would not be like to start carrying weapons and struggle for the Kurdish cause in which it affected badly on the Kurds in Iraq same for the Arabs who were affected like the others. This became a cross-cutting matter which is not solved until now in Iraq.

The British were ethically responsible for this because they established this government; they should have transferred same experience for governance like what they have in Europe to Iraq, so Iraqi monarchy system might have survived up until now and these accidents would not happened. Amen Zaki Bag who was one of the Kurdish historian mentioned in his book Motakhylat Aswad some awareness for the King Faysal which is about some Iraqi authorities that conducting a policy which is going to lead to distraction not for the Kurds only ,but also for all Iraq in general. He gave example in his book one of them he talk about if the an English could change a Scottish person to English then the Kurds will become Arabs also.

So I appeal you to stop this injustice against Kurdish people and let them to have their national identity preserved in Iraq and not feel that they are second class citizen. Unfortunately this was not heard, there was not any broad thinker in Iraq. The British were responsible for establishing such government especially Baath regime.

The matter of writing banners for political reasons, once there was freedom banners were raised after the Sara square demonstrations banners were banned.

Q. Were there any killed in the demonstrations? A. yes ,20 killed and wounded and some of the wounded died due fear of taking them to hospital, according to the documents from the British government that lately revealed, even there were 10 minors who got killed they were students of science school.

Q. Who were the shooters? According the British government documents, the unrests were massive so the government had to bring Tofiq Wahbi to be the chef of Sulaimaniya even he was the dean of the military college and the people were happy for that. But the government were skeptic about him so they move him from the position, then the unrests began one more time, they put an English person in his position his name was (Iliam).

People were throwing stones that were their weapon they threw stones at the windows of Sara Building. They cannot control the people so they brought other forces from Hamiya and this group started shooting at people based on the documents the name of the officer who ordered the shooting I think his name was Mahmood Hilmi, and banners after this incident perish. In the 40<sup>th</sup> there were demonstrations took place but I think there was not enough freedom to raise banners.

In the demonstrations on January 1948 which all over Iraq against the Portsmouth convention with the British at that time Salih Jabir was running the Iraqi government in Baghdad. The demonstrations made the government to move from the power and a new government established in Iraq Said Mohammed Sadir set up the government, a new era for Iraq arouse numerous magazines and newspapers came to being. In the history of Iraq the first Kurdish political magazine published named Nizar in Kurdish and Arabic languages Aladen Sujadi was the editor.

At that time freedom was prevailing for demonstration, the Kurds participated in the demonstrations even in Baghdad were the delegations of the cities gathered the Kurds participated in the demonstration wearing Kurdish clothes, but the situation changed rapidly and the rule of oppression began many of the magazines and the newspaper closed this continue until the time come to the revolution of 1958 I say it was an military coup because the military coup happened over the monarchy. In this time there was freedom until the revolution of September started. Once the monarchy is overthrown and the establishment of republic there were freedom and demonstrations, during the monarchy there were no any political parties exist. It was approved in the law of assembly 1922 in Iraq it was applicable during the monarchy era I think in point number 5 article 4 it says parties are not to establish based on national or religion, while there were lots of national Arab parties ,but for the Kurds it was prohibited, so most of the movements were secretly active for example Komalay Sarbakhoye Kurdistan (Kurdistan Liberty Group) Zardashi assembly and fraternity party , Kurdistan democratic party they were all secretly active until the republic established, it was for the first time one Kurdish party permitted to work Kurdistan democratic party in 1959.

Then formal organs of struggle the editor was Ibrahim Ahmad until 1961at that time there were freedom to demonstration took place to support Abdulkarim Qasim there are photos evidence of banners were used.

Q. At the time of the convention of March the 11<sup>th</sup> were there any banners used?

A. Yes, may be in the cities where KDP split up into the followers of Jala Talabani and the followers of Mal Mustafa , the followers of Jala talabani used banner because they were living in the cities in Sulaimaniya there is chances that they used banners.



Q. Why the political bureau of KDP is called the red turban?

A. Mala Mustafa was alone; he was the follower of left wing and the communist ideology in Iraq, so that KDP intervened a clause in their by-law that was derived from the ideology of Marks and Lenin for their works. At that time the world was divided into western block and eastern block Soviet Union which they stand before the western world and capitalism to bring people from the followers of Jala Talabani Mawi ideology (Masiton) it was very popular at that time.

Q. the yellow color of KDP was it exist long time of it came to being after the 1991 revolution.

A. in the 70<sup>th</sup> may be I have not observed that, but I think it came to being after the 1991 revolution.

Q. What about the red color of communist party?

This was existed long time ago the axe and the red star .

Q. Komala used the color red?

A. Yes that is right.

Q. Was there any conflict between them?

A. Yes , even Khabat magazine which was published in Baghdad they working in the sun light then they start to work secretly , when KDP split into two parts in 1962 , the abstracts that were published by the political bureau headline was red and Jalal Talabani part , I think the KDP was blue I cannot remember well.

Q. after March 11<sup>th</sup> convention how was banners written?

A. writing banners increased for political reasons we are talking about it in general, KDP was more like a party.

Q. Do you remember the calligraphers of that time?

A. the one that I remember who was very well-known was Khalid Zamdar at Sara square , at Kawa street Ali Omer they were writing the signs for the shops and beside that they wrote banners as well after the year 1973 till 1991.

From 1930 the banners were mostly Kurdish the March 11<sup>th</sup> convention was written in both Kurdish and Arabic. Those ones made in Baghdad was written in Arabic and those ones that written in Kurdistan were written in Kurdish some times in Arabic as well, then after 1957 banners were all in Arabic because the demonstrations led by the Baath party.

Q. do you remember any banners from the Baath party for the election, Saddam's birthday, 14<sup>th</sup> of july or 17<sup>th</sup> of july?

A. they were all in Arabic language there was not any occasion related to the Kurdish people, like Nawroz, even March 11<sup>th</sup> that was related to the Kurds was not celebrated.

Q. before the Kurdish revolution, did color represent any significance for the Kurdish people in politics, was there any specific color that reflected the Kurdish people?

Q. in fact the color red had some significance after 1975 and the establishment of PUK, including Komala were a left wing party , the communist party were in agreement with Iraqi Government until 1978 they were using banners in red color in the occasions or the axe and the hammer the communist logo.

They had a magazine published in Arabic and Kurdish it was in red and black color same like the banners they used.

Q. these colors at Baath regime era where they able to representing anything in the cities?

A. No, it was so hard wearing black color was a risk growing beard was a risk, there were courageous people who wore black like those who were mourning for the lost of their love ones.

The colors with a meaning mostly were red and black even the writing on the wall were mostly in these two colors it was attractive and the government was trying to erase them as soon as possible.

Q. In the time of the Iraq Iran war where there any occasions took place?

A. yes, one on of the things I remember I was a student in the University, and they forced us to demonstrate against the convention of Anwar Sadat with Israel in 1977 , they were mostly Arab worlf occasions and had nothing to do with the Kurds, often they were forcing people to make gatherings against Iran during Iraq Iraq war ,but most of the people were trying to avoid the gatherings or to sneak out of it.

Q. I remember when I was student a gathering held for unveil a statue by Ali Hassan Majed it was for the war with Iraq , there were banners , but I do not know whether the people made it of the Baath party made it for the gatherings?

A. the party wrote it and gave it to people to carry them. Before the Kurdish revolution the party start to built wall within the neighborhood to make sure people cannot run, I remember when the situation was in chaos in the main street it was too hard to get away and flee. One of the wall built was Qazazakan wall, I still remember I was with brother Rafiq he was a teacher in Najaf we were walking from Sara to twi malik and there were two Arabs walking in front of us, my brother told me do you know these two are from the security forces I told his how do you know that he said one day I was going back to Najaf one of them was sitting next time and he told me that he works with the security forces in Sulaimaniya and he said Sulaimaniya is a dangerous place how could you manage to live their. All of a sudden while me and my brother were walking Peshmarga showed up and killed both and we did not know where to run.

Unfortunately these incidents are not recorded I as a historian I did not write them down to know about our self K and what is Anfal one of them is Mam Jalal who said to the Arabs we forgot about the Anfal.

Q. After the Kurdish revolution the Kurdish society divided into the colors why it that is it because of the elections?

A. When the revolution happened and the government administration organized again there was kind of freedom , a new political era came to being , but without any planning all the parties were working for the sake of themselves only , it spread out in a way that cause serious disorder after the talks with Baghdad did not lead to any understanding. the election is due to the rule of the Kurdistan coalition, to settle down the matter they had to run for the election, once election is the headline so the parties needs as much as people to follow them. Then the issues started and the Kurdish parties evolved in an abnormal way.

Q. Each of the parties select a specific color?

A. yes, in my opinion if we study theselection of these colors by the parties in the psychological and social aspect it means something.

Q. Distribution of the people over these colors, how did it affect the community especially when the war between yellow and green and the other colors occurred?

A. It will lead to the distraction of the family bonds and social bonds, for instance it will create issue between the members of the same family if there is be different opinion, or the relatives, so in general people will separate from each other. Even for the security forces green and yellow, some people get fanatic about is and say my blood is yellow or green which lead to killing and unrest between the people. The accountability is, mostly on the parties not he people.

Q. This is because each of the parties had their own economy and armed groups?

A. the parties only cared about how many followers they have, we did not have a good mind of thinking to use the situation to the best of the nation after the revolution to resolve the issues with the central government and the neighbors. The issues deepen up to the extend each of the parties were only thinking about the empowerment of their own party, then the co existence was something impossible.

When you have national army and prepared in the context of the country they will not fight for the sake of any particular party, and to defend a party that damage the interest of the nation, even the small parties were in struggle to make their own armed groups, because they straight forward come from the partisan fights and the already had their own armed groups.

They could not get into agreement within dialogue and they did not show any concession to each other and they did not consider the bad situation that the nation was going through. People were starving, but the Kurdish parties were busy with their own interest, they were rich because each of them was holding custom point within their jurisdiction and they were collecting tax.

Q. who was the most powerful party in the region after the revolution?

A. In the green zone PUK was in power, they were struggling during the Baath party against them and Baath party could not overthrow them so they used chemical weapon.

Q. How is the aspect of democracy in green zone where they hold the armed groups?

A. The revolution was a focal point in the history of Kurdish nation but unfortunately these parties could not take benefit if it. To sit down and put a new strategy, Because they came from the mountain as partisans now it is different they need to run the cities by official administrations, it was true that we did not have experience but we could sit and put down a plan and to have everybody know about the boundaries that cannot be crossed, and even the election worsen the situation.

In the elections you need people, counterfeit in the elections because we did not invent election like the process that going on in Europe.

Q. Each of the groups had their own armed groups, is it possible to have democracy in place in such situation?

A. It is impossible in the existence of armed groups to have a democratic election. And the constitution was to serve the interest of one party even Baghdad was intervening in it. For instance I could not believe KDP win the election because since 1975 KDP was vanished from this country. How they got all these votes when they were not exist on the most difficult time of the nation were PUK was struggling, because we notice the existence of PUK in Soran region so this changed the balance of power and the issued deepened.

Q. After 2003 there were some elections took place how was aspect of democracy at that time?

A. When there is election there is opposition but we did not have such thing from the start of the revolution there were opposition against KDP and PUK we have to keep in mind that there were some opposition among the educated people and free thinker .there were a group who published free magazines like Bakhtyar Ali, Mariwan Wrya Qania, Barzan Faraj, at the same time they were holding seminars and they expected the civil war, I was following their work. The prediction that that PUK and KDP is obtaining leading to civil war got true. The civil war divided all the people into two parties and it affected democracy after the war

It was big mistake for both parties especially PUK because when in war military people arise and rule so PUK became a party ruled by military people, PUK was not like this they used to be a educated party.

Q. The war was only between PUK and KDP or the Islamic groups as well?

A. Yes, the Islamic groups involved in the war Bzwnawa and they did not have that much experience but they were very enthusiastic toward their cause, they made big mistake because the war led them to distinction.

Q. How many got killed roughly in the war?

A. Thousands, but the people who got killed in the war between PUK and Bzotnawa might be tens of people but the number of the missing is quite big there are a lot of families waiting for the return of their love ones.

Q. Is there risk of another war?

A. yes same mentality of the parties they had when they were partisans, there are some changes, in general they seem careless, and as an individual I always fear to happen again.

Q. Now can you say we have a unified government one unified army and financial source?

A. No, until now you can see the division of power between green zone and yellow zone, most of the time I see the flag of party then the flag of Kurdistan and Iraq, it should be Kurdistan flag first of all.

#### **Interview 4**

**Anwar Salih: Head of information department of the PUK 1 organization in Sulaymaniyah (2015).**

Could you let us know when PUK has built up?

PUK was reported the first revelation in 1975, and the year after was begun destining against the Iraqi administration.

What were the PUK points?

The PUK points were attempting to acquire Kurdish perfectly fine country and uniformity.

Where is the PUK geopolitics work?

PUK account the entire Kurdistan as its place to battling.

Where is the most PUK member's?

Historically, PUK power was in entire of south of Kurdistan before 1991 however after 1991, when the PDK returned to Bdinan range and PDK made a pressure on our members in that district so PUK power in that region was decreased. PUK characterize Sulaimany as its green castle, and the most of its power is located in Sulaimany and also Garmian was other where that PUK has more members, and Karkuk still is a noteworthy site for the PUK.

Where is the green zone?

The green zone is Sulaimany area, Garmian, Halabja, Pshdar, Qaladze, Rania, and Sulimany they all are called green zone.

After 1991 PUK was administrated that area. Can you give us a chance to know about the length of time that PUK was the intense party in the green zone and what was changed in its power, and what is the present circumstance of the PUK?

After 1991, According to those circumstances, PUK has struggled to federalism for Iraq and made Kurdish autonomy administration. That plan was emerged in election that was took place 1992. PDK and PUK were the powerful parties in this region and they were established parliament and government. PUK was found its power in Sulaimany. Every parties, if it is styed for a long time in the government, it is faced many negative things which is cannot obtain all people's ambitions so it is facing objection. PUK has done many things in all sectors but it was not satisfy all people as a result, the change movement was separate from PUK and it is influence PUK power in the region and lost most of seats in parliaments and government.

After 1991, as indicated by those circumstances, PUK has attempted to federalism for Iraq and Kurdish self-rule organization. That arrangement was developed in election that was occurred 1992. PDK and PUK were the intense politic parties in Kurdistan, and they were built up parliament and government. PUK was discovered its power in Sulaimany. Each politic party, in the event that it is styed for quite a while in the administration, it is confronted numerous negative things which it can't get every one of individuals' aspirations

so it is confronting complaint. PUK has done numerous things in all sectors however it was not satisfy all people. Consequently, the change movement groups were divided from PUK and it has an impact PUK power in the area and lost a large portion of its seats in parliament and government.

The influential period for PUK, was begun after 1991 until the division of change development from the PUK. About %48 to %49 of Kurdistan was under the PUK controls; however after elections for parliament which was occurred in 30/04/2013 PUK turned into the second greatest force in Sulaimany. Despite the fact that PUK is the second politic power as indicated by the election, PUK has an intense armed force and fighting against the IS in the broad territory. PUK has more than 18000 martyrs.

How and when did chose the green as image for PUK, and who was chosen?

After 1991 the race was occurred so consequently each politic party must be has its own colour as a symbol, wherefore the green colour was chosen for PUK. Moreover, PUK has its own logo which is formative from the red rose represent the martyr blood's, branch of olive tree as an image for the peace, a branch of wheat as an image life, welfare and straggling. Those all are holding by a hand which is represent the people hand, and the logo's background is the green colour which is the symbol of PUK Green is a symbol for reborn, modernity, and living in a social and politic life. It was selected according to PUK principle and programs.

The green is reflected on many things, and Sulaimany was covered by green banners in the PUK events.

For the PUK occasions, the green was always utilized for making banners, decorating cars, decorating offices, designing for clothes, decorating guns and green also utilized for decorating books and the newspapers writing for instance, for the new Kurdistan newspaper's writing green is utilized. In addition, green give us power during the election campaign. This means that PUK is distinguished from the other politic parties by its own colour which is green. This is a part of PUK identity and history. The PUK followers are very proud when they are using this colour for their clothes and banners and so on. The green now is a PUK cod and symbol. If you see green anywhere especially in this region, immediately you know this is a PUK colour.

Have you ever green made problems for a PUK's followers especially in civil war especially between PUK and PDK or PUK and Islamic groups?

Of course, they treated in an aggressive way. This has done by PDK and Islamic groups. If someone has worn green T-shirt or neckless, they were insulted even he was not the PUK followers, so they were treated as a PUK member's. Maybe it was the same for someone utilized yellow in green zone. During the civil war people may killed or insulted when they utilized green, but now the situation is different.

## Interview 5

### Haji Mohammad Rostam (shop owner at Nali Street) 14-7-2015

Q. How long have you been working here?

A. since 2003 or almost for fifteen years.

Q. Have you studied in school?

A. In 1958 I studied for a period, I was living in the countryside, I used to graze animals but later when I moved to the city I studied in a night school in Sarkareaz quarter between the 1980s-90s. I am good at reading but my writing is poor.

Q. Have you worked in politics?

A. I worked for the revolution in the 1970s in the cities, during that period Kurdish people liked to work in politics towards Kurdish autonomy. I wanted to see Kurdish success.

Q. There is a fixed banner above your shop; what is that for?

A. This banner symbolizes Ramadan month, everything has its own sign and this banner denotes a Ramadan welcome. Almighty God has stated in the Holy Qur'an that God has imposed Ramadan on you as he imposed on previous generations and religions. In another verse God says that the Qur'an was been delivered [to Muhammad] in this month. Therefore I write such words on banners In Ramadan month of every year and it has become a memorial for me to welcome Ramadan. Almighty God has urged us to carry on such duty. Some people simply think that only in Ramadan God will be worshipped. This is not fair because praying for God is a task that should be accomplished and fasting is the same.

Q. So do you want to express something for people who pass by and read this fixed banner?

A. Well this is for the people I want to show that God says it and we have to obey it as it's an inevitable duty.

Q. I see you have chosen the Verse haven't you?

A. Yes I have, this verse is included in **Baqarra (cow) Surah**, and I chose it and then took it to the calligrapher. I have a Kurdish interpretation Qur'an opposite to the Arabic version. This is beneficial because everyone cannot understand Arabic in our country. So I took it to the calligrapher and asked him to write the VERSE both in Arabic and Kurdish.

Q. Is it your first year you have ordered such a banner?

A. No, I have ordered one every year since 2007.

Q. The banner is written with two colors - blue and red, does it mean anything or has the calligrapher himself chosen them?

A. Not at all, the red font is for the Kurdish verse and the other is for the Arabic. If they were in one color then they would look too similar and it is prettier.

Q. So it's just for differentiating the languages?



A. Yes exactly, that is the reason.

Q. Why have you chosen a white background for the banner cloth?

A. The script will be seen better on the white background

Q. Is there a holy color according to Islam?

A. I never heard about that, colors are a personal preference.

Q. Is it only for decoration?

A. Yes as I told you I have not heard what is the holiest color, for example if you write on a blue background the banner would not look as clear as on the white one, it doesn't relate to holiness. But in Islam people desire white. For instance they mostly wear white clothes and say it's holy, the religious men also wear white turbans.

Q. But in most of the mosques and shrines green is used, people wrap green cloth around the tombs and on the trees above the reverends' tombs and they even paint the domes with green!!

A. I personally have not heard that this green color is used with an intention but I have seen the reverends' tombs where green pieces of cloth are wrapped around and some say that the Sheikhs used green.

Q. Do you compose and order banners only for Ramadan or for other occasions?

A. I compose them for memorial [birth date] of the **Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)**.

Q. What about national occasions? Do you order banners ?

A. No

Q. Do you do it for the deceased ones?

A. Yes , this would be written as an acknowledgement for the relatives and neighbours.

Q. Depending on your memory; since when have people used black banners for the funeral ceremony?

A. To the best of my knowledge since the sixties, and I have no Idea regarding before that time. The black cloth is a symbol of the burial ceremony.

Q. Once you compose the banners, do you add your name?

A. No I just write the Verses.

Q. Do you write the same thing every year or do you make changes?

A. If it's for Ramadan fasting month I just write that, and what relates to the birth date of the prophet (peace be upon him) we write that God states in the holy Qur'an Verse: **"I and all the angles Saluting the Prophet, Thus Thee Believers Salute him"**. We send congratulations to all the world's Muslims and especially Kurdistan ones.

Q. Apart from both occasions, are there any others you compose?

A. We have **Mia'raj occasion**<sup>65</sup> which happens in a night but I don't compose banners, though some people do.

Q. Will people write banners and hang them on the mosques?

A. I have seen them in previous years but this year I have rarely seen them.

Q. And don't the mall shops owners collectively compose them?

A. Once I wrote them for the neighbourhood [...] but I noticed that there were people who liked them while there were some who disliked them and disbelieved, that's why I decided not to write them any more.

Q. So did any people respond that they did not believe in it [Islam]?

A. People won't tell you directly, but in their heart some are non believers. Some criticised me writing the banners for my own intention. I have made the banners because God says so and not for commercial purposes.

Q. Can the banners be seen for national occasions? For example have the jewelry shop owners ordered any banners to protest against Da'ash, and what about here in this mall?

A. I haven't seen that but in the central local market people have done so.

There is a point I want to tell you: nowadays each restaurant hangs a banner in which it says: **"with the occasion of the holy Ramadan month our restaurant is open"**. I believe it's disrespectful to Ramadan. If you want to fix a banner for this occasion then write something else. In the sixties a few restaurants were opened only for tourists otherwise if one dared to open a restaurant people would have commented that it is a **"Russian inn"**, that is to say Russian culture as they have another religion.

Q. People are now divided on the colors of green, yellow, red ....etc. Was this phenomena present during Saddam's reign or before?

A. No, this appeared after the uprising<sup>66</sup>.

Q. Does it have social effects?

A. Yes of course, for example if you were a KDP supporter whilst your brother was for the PUK then you disliked each other because each wants his party to win the case. Almighty God says in the holy Qu'ran Verse that: **"all the parties are satisfied with its own"** this has inflicted restlessness among people because sometimes people dragged through the street and hit as punishment because of a simple speech that insulted someone in the opposite party.

Q. How was color used during the internal civil war<sup>67</sup>?

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<sup>65</sup> Mia'raj is the occasion when Muhammad met God he showed Muhammad part of heaven and part of hell

<sup>66</sup> 1991

<sup>67</sup> 1994-1998

A. Originally the colors were not identified with the parties so that you could not say 'this is mine and that is yours'. But now the case is different, if you had a green rosary in your hand you would be known as PUK proponent or if you'd got a yellow one then you were named as a KDP supported. There was a period<sup>68</sup> during which if someone had a formal issue in a governmental directorate department he/she would have taken his/her papers in a green file envelope in case the person in charge was a PUK man and used a yellow one for the KDP manager so that his/ her papers would soon be dealt with.

Q. Which party was dominant in Sulaymaniyah?

A. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

Q. Even now?

A. Certainly yes, and Kurdistan Democratic Party is dominant Erbil and Duhok. During the civil war if someone belonged to the KDP then he/ she had to move his/her residence to Erbil and those who were PUKs had come from Erbil to Sulaymaniyah. Even now the PUK have their power [in Sulaymaniyah] and in addition to that the **Change movement party** has recently established and they also have their own members in parliament.

جبار فارس خوشنوس ۲۰۱۵/۷/۸

پ. کە ی دەستت کردوه به کارکردن وهک خوشنوس؟ ج. له سالی ۱۹۸۳ له فولکه ی کاوه ی ئاسنگەر له گه ل براده ریک ئیعلاناتی سامان مان دانا. پ. ئەو سهرده مه چ شتیکتان دهنوسی؟ لافیته ی پرسه و ریکلام و نوسینی سهر جامخانه ی دوکان و قطعه کان بوو. پ. لافیته ی سیاسی ئەنوسرا؟ ج. به ئی وهک ئەو لافیتانه ی بۆ ئینتیخاباتی مه جلیسی تنفیزی تشریحی دهنوسرا. پ. به چ رهنگیک دهنوسرا؟ ج. به هه موو رهنگیک حزبی بعث دیکتاتور بوو له عیراقددا به تهنه خۆی هه بوو هیچ رکا به رو منافسیکی نه بوو، تهنه خۆی بوو ههر رهنگیکی بویستایه به کاری دههینا. پ. ئە ی به چ زمانیک ئەنوسرا؟ ج. هه مووی به عه ره بی ئەنوسرا. پ. ئە ی کوردی تیا نه بوو؟ ج. نا هه مووی عه ره بی بوو. پ. له کوی هه ئنه واسرا؟ ج. له ناو شار له شه قام و فولکه کان هه ئنه واسرا ئەوسا سلیمانی فولکه ی زۆر بوو. پ. جۆری قوماشه که چی بوو که بۆ لافیته به کار دههات؟ ج. ئەوسا قوماشی سیرا به کار دههات ئیستا کوده ری به کار دیت. پ. ئەوسه رده مه رهنکه کان هه رچه ک بوایه کیشنه نه بوو؟ ج. تۆ ئە بی حسابی کۆنتراست بکه ی له خه تدا ئە گه ر تۆخ بیت قوماشه که ئەبیت به کال له سه ری بنوسیت وه به پیچه وانه وه هه ر راسته.

پ. ئە ی نوسینی پینشمه رگه نه دههاته لاتان؟ ج. نه خیز به هیچ شیوه یه ک، ئەوشتانه نه پنی بوو ده چوه لای ئەوکه سانه ی متمانه یان پیبوو. پ. له که یه که وه ئیش بۆ یه کیتی ده که یه ت؟ ج. من به ر له وه ی خه تاتی بکه م کاری سیاسیم کردوه، له ریزه کانی کۆمه له ی رهنجده ران ئیشم کردوه و ئیشی خۆش نوسیشم بۆ کردون. پ. سه ردمی حزبی بعث لافیته نوسین زۆر بوو؟ ج. لافیته ی پرسه و ریکلام که م دهنوسرا به تایبه ت هی پرسه چونکه شار بچوک بوو ئە گه ر شتیکی وی بدایه هه موو شار ده یزانی. پ. ئە ی لافیته ی حزبی بعث خۆی چۆن بوو؟ ج. له یادی دامه زرانندی حزبی بعث له ۷ نیسان وه بۆ شۆرش ۱۷ تموز و ئینتیخابات و مناسه به حزبه کان لافیته دهنوسرا.

پ. له سه رده می بعث دا لافیته ت بۆ شۆرش نه نوسیوه؟ ج. تهنه یه ک جار نوسیومه، ئەویش بۆ چله ی شه هید جمال تاهیر ئەندامی سه رکرده یه تی یه کیتی بوو، چله که له مزگه وتی بالیسان بوو، له گه ل برابیه کی دا چووین، من لافیته یه کم بۆ

<sup>68</sup> 1994-2003. After this period (when Saddam fell) there was an agreement to form one unity government between PUK and KDP.

نوسی لهسه ر قوماشی زهر د به بویه رهش نوسینه کهم لهسه ر نوسی بوو، نوسینه کان دروشمه کانی کومه لهی رهنجده ران بوون.

پ. نه گهر بکریت باسی کارکردنی دواى ربه رینمان بۆ بکه ی چون کارت کردوو؟ ج. له دواى راپه رین له به شی راکه یاندى مه لبه ند ده ستم کرد به ئیش کردن، له سه ره تاي هه لئزاردنی سالی ۱۹۹۲ له وانیه چه ند ۱۰۰ لافیتیه کم به زمانى کوردی و عه ره ی و ئینگیزی نوسیبیت. رهنکه سه وزه که ی یه کیتی که ی دیاری کرا؟ پ. ج. له دواى کونگره ی یه ک، نه وکاته بوو په ره و پروگرامی یه کیتی گۆرا بۆ سۆسیال دیموکرات، وه هه موو حزبه سۆسیال دیموکراته کان ره نگی سه وز به کارده هینن. کونگره که له ۱۹۹۲/۱/۲۷ کرا، هه لئزاردنی په رله مانى کوردستان له ۱۹۹۲/۵/۱۹ کرا. پ. له و کونگره یه دا ده نگ به و رهنکه سه وزه درا؟ ج. پيش هه لئزاردن هه موو حزبه کان که له به ره ی کوردستانی دابوون، ئیتر بریاریان دا که رهنگ بۆخویان دیاری بکه ن، به لام له کونگره ی ۱/۲۷ هیشتا رهنگ دیاری نه کرا بوو ته نانته لۆگۆکه ش باکگراونده که ی زهر د بوو.

پ. پيش دیاری کردنی رهنکه سه وزه که لافیتیه کانتان به چ رهنگیک دروست ده کرد؟ ج. بۆ پرسه هه ر رهش به کار دههات، به لام بۆ شته کانی تر هه موو رهنگیک به کار دههات، هیشتا رهنگ نه ببو به سیمبولی هه چ حزبی، که هه لئزاردن کرا نه وره نکه بوو به سیمبولی یه کیتی.

پ. ئیتر له وه به دواوه ئیوه قوماشی سه وز به کارده هینن؟ به چ رهنگیک نوسینه کان ده نوسن؟ ج. قوماشی سه وز به کارده هینن و به بویه یی سپی له سه ری ده نوسین. پ. چ بۆنه یه ک زۆرتین لافیتیه تان بۆ ده نوسی؟ ج. پيش نه وه ی وه لای پرسیاره که ته بده مه وه ده مه وئ باسی شتیک بۆ بگپرمه وه، وه ختی خۆی نه وه ی ده مانچه ی یی بوايه په رۆیه کی زهر دی پتوه ده پچا، له حانوقی عه سکهری هه بوو نه فرۆشرا بۆ پاکردنه وه به کاردههات، دوا راپه رین یه کیتییه کان په رۆیه کان گۆری به سه وز، چه نده ها جار خه نک دههاته لام داواى پارچه یه ک قوماشی سوزی ده کرد بیپچیت له سیلاحه که یه وه. بۆ جواى پرسیاره که ته یه کیتی گرنگی داوه به راکه یانندن وه لافیتیه ی بۆ هه موو بۆنه حزبی و نه توابیه تیه کان ده نوسی، بۆ هه لئزاردنه کان بۆ یادی دامه زراندنی یه کیتی لافیتیه ی زۆرمان ده نوسی به تابهت له یادی ۲۵ ساله ی ی.ن.ک له یۆبیلی زپین دا گرنگی تابهتی یی درا.

پ. ئیوه هه ر له ناو ته م مه لبه نده یا ئیشه کانتان ده کرد؟ ج. به لئ به س ئیستا ژوره کان گۆراوه. پ. گه وره ترین حه جمی لافیتیه یان ژماره بۆ کام بۆنه یه ده نوسرا/ ج. هه ر بۆ یادی یه کیتی بوو، به لام بۆنه ی تریش هه بوو بۆ نمونه دژی ماده ی ۲۴ ی سالی ۲۰۱۰ بریارینی حکومه تی عیراق که بۆ که رکوک ده رجوو، نزیکه ی ۲۵۰۰ لافیتیه مان نوسی و درایه ده ست خه لک و خۆپیشاندانی پتوه کرا. پ. به چ رهنگیک لافیتیه کان دروست کران؟ به قوماشی سپی و به رهنگی رهش له سه ری نوسیمان، له بهر نه وه ی په یمانی هه موو حزبه کان بوو بۆ درایه تی نه و ماده یه. پ. بیره وه ریت چیه له و بۆنه یه دا؟ ژماره ی لافیتیه کان زۆر بوون زه غتیکی گه وره مان له سه ر بوو خۆم و ۱۶ که س ئیشمان ده کرد تا به ره به یان که رۆژ بوه وه ته واو بوین سه عات ۱۰ ته سلیمان کرد دلم خۆش بوو، به لام به داخه وه له دوانیوه رۆ دا ته قینه وه یه ک له ناو خۆپیشاندانه که دا روى دا، من له رپی ته له فزیونه وه وینه ی ته قینه وه که م بیخی، لافیتیه کانی خۆم ده بیخی به ده ست خه لکه وه خۆینی پتوه بوو خه لکیکی زۆر شه هیدو بریندار بوون نه وه زۆر یادگاریه کی ناخۆشه بۆ من.

پ. گه وره ترین لافیتیه که نوسیبیتت؟ لافیتیه یه ک بوو بۆ هه لئزاردنی شاره ونیه کان، یه کیتیش به شداربوو، لافیتیه که ۶م به ۲۷م بوو، نوسی بووم ده نگ بده به لیستی یه کیتی. هه چ حزبیکی نیه له سلیمانی به قه ده ر ئیمه لافیتیه ی نوسیبیت. پ. قهت لافیتیه کانتان درپتراهه یان لیکراهه ته وه؟ ج. ئیمه معانایه تان هه بوو به تابهت له ۱/۱ ی هه موو سالتیک ره شه با نه بوو لافیتیه کانی نه دراندین، کاک عومه ری سه ید علی نه و کاته ده یووت ده بیت که سیک دابنپین به س لافیتیه کان هه لئواسیتته وه. پ. بیره وه ریت چیه له سه رده می شه ری ناوخۆ له نیوان سه وز و زه ردا؟ ج. نه وسه رده مه شه ره په رۆیان یی ده وت، له کاتی روداوه سیاسیه کاندایه ئامازه نه درا به شه ری ناوخۆ. وه نه و سه رده مه هیشتا حزبی بعث مابوو زۆریه ی شته کان ده به ستراهه وه به حزبی بعث و به شه ری ناوخۆ وه. وه له بۆنه کاندایه نمونه یادی یه کیتی، یادی راپه رین و نه ورۆز ته نانته جه ژنی کرێکارانیش، دروشمه کانمان نه به سه ته وه به ئازادی و سه ره خۆی و ئاشتی و پیکه وه ژیا نی میلیه ته که مان.

پ. نه ی بۆ شه هیده کان لافیتیه تان ده نوسی؟ ج. بۆ شه هیده کان له پرسه کانیان و له چله کانیاندا لافیتیه مان ده نوسی. پ. وه ک بیرت مابایت قوربانیه کان زۆر بوون؟ ج. رۆژانه شه ره هه بوو حه قته هه بوو ۳ مناسه به ی چله ی شه هیدی تیا بوو،

مانگ نه بوو ۱۰ مناسه بهی چلهی شههیده کانمان نه بیت، ئەمه جگه له مناسه بهی شههیده کانی سهردهمی شاخ، له سهر قوماشی رهش ئەمان نوسی ههر له مه له بنده دهنوسرا. پ. ئەی لافیته کان له کوی هه لنده واسرا؟ ج. له بهردهم هۆله کان، له بهر دهرکی سهر، له مزگهوت و له سهر قه برانیش.

پ. جیاوازی هه بوو له نیوان کهسه کان بۆ یه کیک زۆرتر بنوسریت یان که متر؟ ج. وهک مه له بند جیاوازی نه ده کرا، مه گهر کهس و کاریان زیاتریان نوسی بێت، بۆ نمونه بۆ کوچی دوابی ئیبراهیم ئەحمده مه له بند وهک ئەرکی خوی لافیته ی بۆ نوسی به لام هاو لاتیان و دامو دهرگاگانی حکومه تیش وهک ئەرکی خویان لافیته ی زۆریان بۆ نوسی بوو. پ. ئەی له کاتی شه رپی ناو خۆدا لافیته ی حزبه کانی تر ده بینرا له سلیمانی؟ ج. به دلناییه وه ته نانهت قسه له سهر ئەوهش ده کرا وتیان با ئیمه به سهوز نه نوسین و ئیوهش به زهر نه نوسن بهس من له گه ل ئەوه نه بووم ئەموت به سهوز دهنوسین باشته کانمان بناسریته وه. پ. ئەی بۆ لافیته ی مردوه کان ناوی مردوه که به سهوز دهنوسن؟ ج. به لئ هه موو نوسینه کان به سپی و ناوی کهسه که به سهوز دهنوسریت. بۆ یادی هه له بجه هه موی به سهوز دهنوسین بهس هه له بجه که به سور دهنوسین و دلۆپی خوی بۆ دروست ده کهین.

پ. ئەو دروشمانه ی دهنوسن به پێی زه من و بارودۆخه کان گۆرانکاری به سهرداها تووه؟ ج. به دلناییه وه گۆرانکاری به سهر دروشمه کاندایت به پێی ئە هه لو مه رجه ی دیته پێشه وه، بۆ نمونه ئەمسال مه سه له ی شه ری داعش و قه یران له گه ل به غداد هه یه دروشمه کان به وانه وه ده به سهر ته وه. پ. چ بیر وه ره یه کت هه یه له زه مه نی ئیش کردندا؟ ج. بیر وه ره یه کم هه یه که دواتر سو پاس نامه شم له سهر وه رگرت، سالی ۱۹۹۳ بۆ ۱۹۹۴ بوو، مستر ستیوارده هه بوو له منضمه ی کیری ئوسترالی ئیشی ئە کرد، ئەو ریکخوا وه نه وتی دابهش ئە کرد له سلیمانی، منضمه یه کی خیرخواز بوو، مستر ستیوارده له چه مچه مال کوشتیان ئیواره بوو، بۆ ئەوه ی ته رمه که ی بنه رنه وه بۆ ولاتی خوی، شه و به رپر سیک له مه له بنده وه به تۆپیک قوماشی ره شه وه هاتن بۆ ماله وه، کاره با نه بوو، له یه ک ژوردابووم تازه ژنم هینابوو، هاتن داوایان لیکردم که لافیته بنوسم بۆ مستر ستیوارده بۆ ئەوه ی بیبه ن له گه ل ته رمه که دا. دوو لافیته م له بهر چرا بۆ نوسین له سهر قوماشی رهش و به بۆیه ی سپی به نوسی ئینگلیزی و کوردی، هه یچ حزبی که نه ی نوسی بوو جگه له یه کیتی.

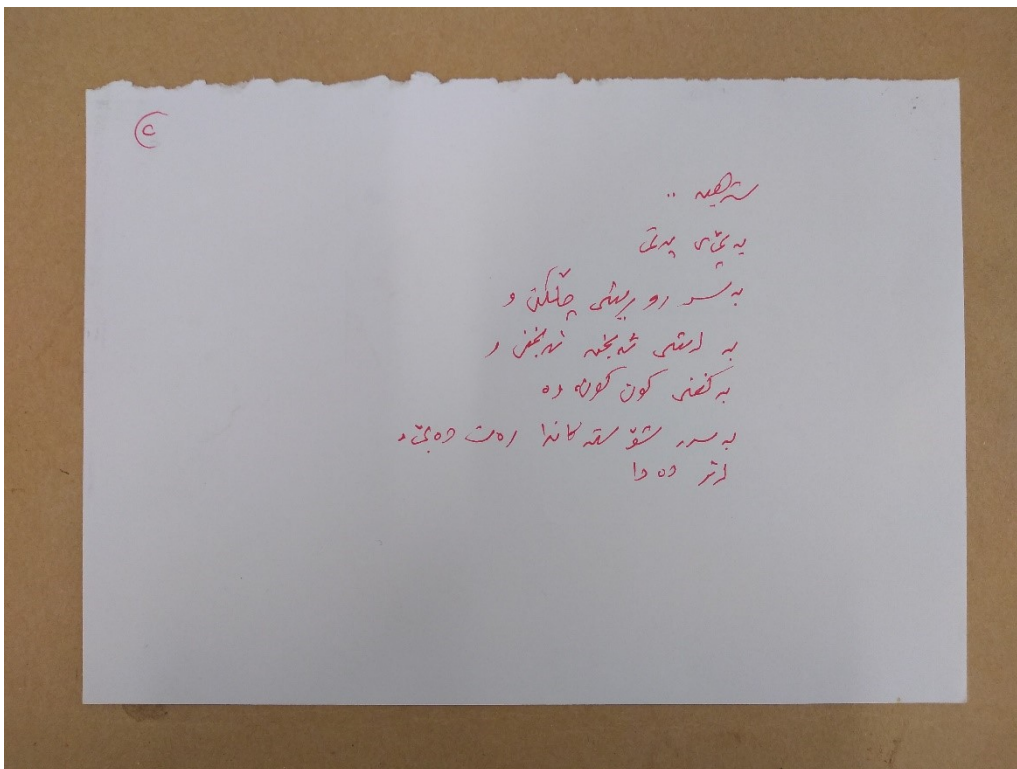
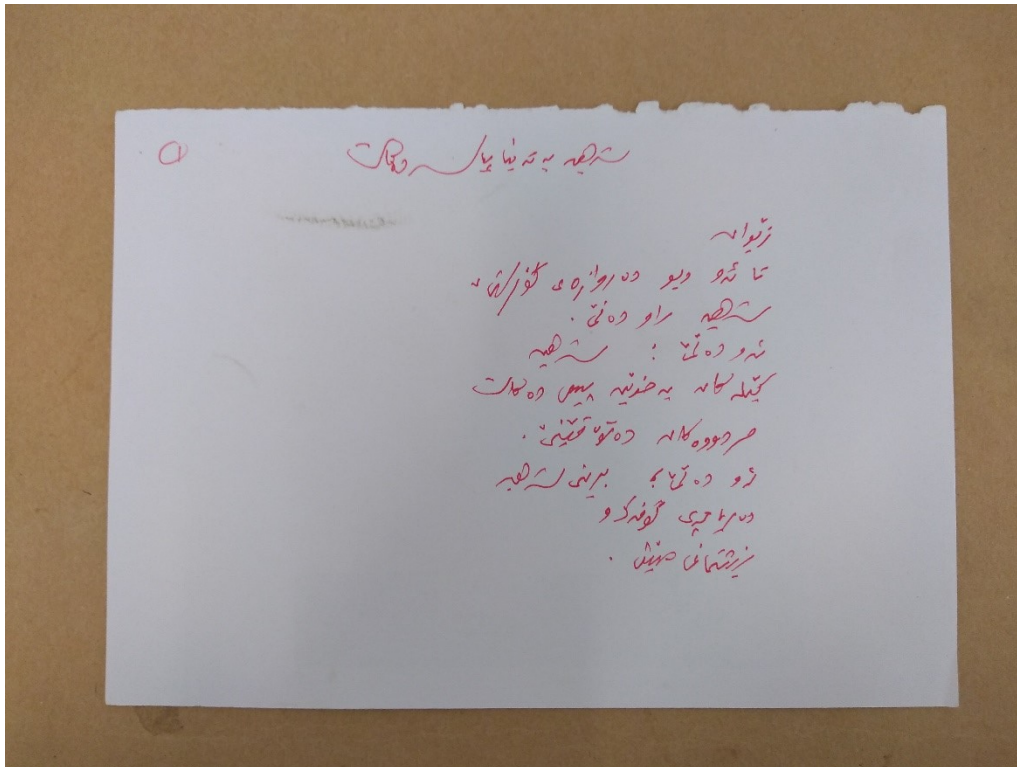
پ. په یوه ندیتان هه بووه له گه ل خۆشنوسه کانی ناو شار؟ ج. ئیمه ئیش و کاری ناو مه له بندمان ده کرد هه ندی جار یارمه تی کۆمیته کانی ناو شارمان ئە دا، به لام کۆمیته کانی گهره که کانی شار زۆر بوون، ئەوان ئیشه کانیان ئە برد بۆ خۆشنوسه کانی ناو شار یان ئیمه جار هه بوو ئیشمان زۆر بوو ئەمان دا به ئەوان بینوسن چونکه خۆمان فریا نه ده که وتین. پ. ئەو رهنگانه ی وهک پاشماوه ده مانه وه له سهر ربه ری پشته وه ی لافیته کان چی بوون؟ ج. رهنگه سه وزه که به زه قی دیار بوو له گه ل رهش و سپی، رهنگه تۆخه کان دیار نه ده ما چونکه ئیمه له سهر رهش به سپی دهنوسین له سهر سهوز به سپی و جار جار سوریش به کار ده هینین. پ. سور بۆچی به کار دیت؟ ج. بۆ جوانکاری و بۆ ئاوت لاین. پ. ئەی ئەو رهنگه سوره په یوه ندی نیه به کاره ساته کانه وه؟ ج. با چۆن په یوه ندی هه یه رهنگی سور ره می شه هیده کانمانه. پ. ئەی باسی رهنگی سور ده کریت که له شاخ به کار هاتووه؟ ج. به لئ کاتی خوی ئیمه کۆمه له ی ره نجه ران بوین ئە ستره یه کی سور هیمامان بوو چوار هیل به ده ور په وه بوو، ئەوه ره می زۆر یک له حزبه کۆمه نیسته کان بوو، له دوا ی کۆنگره ی یه ک ئەو رهنگه وجودی نه ما، هه مووان بر وایان وابوو که ئیمه هه لگری بیرو باوه ری سۆسیال دیموکراتین.

پ. ئیوه لافیته ته تان به زمانه کانی تر نوسیوه بۆ نمونه به عه ره بی یان ئینگلیزی؟ ج. به لئ بۆ نمونه بۆ هاتنی مه سئولتی عه ره ب بۆ ئەم شاره به عه ره بی نوسیومانه، یان بۆ نمونه کاتیک جیگانه ر و پۆل بریمه ر هاتن بۆ سلیمانی لافیته ی زۆرمان نوسی، لافیته کان سهوز بوون، له بهر ئەوه ی لافیته کان زۆر بوون، ههر ۲۰ لافیته و درا به خه تاتیک.

محسین پیرو ۱۹۴۴

له سالانی ۱۹۵۷ له مه کته بی غازی بووم من له پۆل دابووم سه ید محسن هاتبوو بۆ مه کته به که له ۵۰ سهره تای بووم. سه ید محسن هات بوو لافیته یه کی نوسی بوو ئەو کاته نه ورۆز مه منوع بوو زه مانی مه له کی بوو، جه ژنی دارو درهخت هه بوو به عه ره بیش ئە نوسرا. نوسی بووی یوم الشجرة. چه ند لافیته یه کی نوسی بوو مدیر ناردی به شین منا چووم، من نه م ده ناسی چووم بینیم. ووتی ئەزانی فلجه بگری ووتم نه وه لا حه رفیکی له بهر چاوم پر کرده وه ووتی ئەوها پری بکه ره وه

منیش لافیتە کەم بۆ پرکردەو. ئە سەردەمە بەس ئە ھەبوو کە من بیناسم. مامۆستا محمد علی ھەبوو لە ئەوقاف بوو کرکۆکی بوو معاوونی شرطە بوو خطاطی ئە کرد خەتی ئلثی ئەنووسی، لە پێش منا بوو. من نووسینە کانیم بینووە خۆیم نەبینووە لەو ئەچێ مردبێت ئەو کاتە کە من فامم کردەو. لە سالی ۱۹۵۴-۱۹۵۵ قطعە ی ماموریە ئەوقافی ئەوکاتە ی نووسیوو من بیرم نایەت. لە شەستە کاندای لەتیف ھەمدی مامۆستای سەناعەبوو لە گەل عەلی عومەر تازەھاتبوو نوووسینەو لافیتە ی سلیمانی ئەمانە ئەیان نووسی. شیخ لەتیفی دانساز زۆر کۆنە لە بیست و سێھە کاندای خەتاتی کردو. لەوحات و شتەکانی نووسیو. لەسەرەتای شەستە کاندای لە ۱۹۶۱ شۆرش ھەلگیرسا من ئەکاتە لە قوتابیاندا بووم. پێشمەرگە لە شاخ بوو ئیمە نھێنی بووین لە ناو شار. لافیتەمان بۆ دانرابوو بینووسینەو لە لافیتە کاندای کۆمەلیک دەمووچاوم بینی طە بابان محامی بوو، بۆ یە کەم جار من مامۆستا جمال ئەبدوولم ناسی ئەویش لە قوتابیاندا بوو ئەمە سالی ۱۹۶۲ لافیتە کانمان نووسی من جەمال ئەبدول لافیتە کان سپی بوو. کاک نەوشیروان ناردی بردیان. کاک نەوشیروان مەسولی ھەموو قوتابیان بوو. بابەتەکان ھی شۆرش بوو شەست شیعار بوو کۆتای شیعارە کە برۆن بۆ پێشەو بەرابەراییەتی بەرزانی و پارتی دیموکراتی کوردستان، سالی دواتر بەرابەراییەتی بەرزانی نەما لە شیعارە کەندا، ئیتر بە کاک طە م ووت گۆرانکاری رودەدات پار ناوی بەرزانی ئەھات بەرابەراییەتی بەرزانی ئیستا ووشە ی بەرزانی نەماو. نھایەتی ۱۹۶۲ سەرەتای ۶۳ دوا ی ئەو بە ھەفتە یە ک شیعارەکانی ئیمەیان برد ھەلیان واسی لە بەردەرکی سەرا، مام جەلال ھات، کۆشکی نوری عەلی ھەبوو. سەیدەلیەھە ی نووری عەلی دوا ی بوو بە ئوتیل بچوک بوو بەرزترین بالەخانە ی سلیمانی بوو، مام جەلال چوہ ئەوی خوتبە ی یا. لە گەل حکومەتدا رێک کەوتبوو ئەگینا چۆن ئەتوانیت قسە بکات، ووتی ئیمە لە گەل احمد حسن بە کەر رێکەوتوین لەسەرلامەرکەزی بەمەرچی ناوەرۆکە کە ی ئۆتۆنومی بیت ی کەم جارم بوو ووشە ی ئۆتۆنومی بەرگویم بکەویت نەم ئەزانی ئۆتۆنومی یە عنی چی. لەھیواردابوون. لافیتە کانمان لەوئ ھەلواسرابوون. بەی ناوی بەرزانی، قسە تەواو بوو بە چەپلەریزان. ئیتر قسەکانی من بوادرەکانی دەرکەوت. ئەوہنە ی پێنەچوو پێشمەرگە بەرو شار ھاتن مام جەلال لە بەکرەجۆ بارەگای دانا. ئیتر من ئیستیقالەم کرد لە قوتابیان. من عەریزە یە کەم دانی لەبەر ئەوہی پارتی بوو بە دوو کەرتەوہ من ئامادەنیم تەئیدی ھیچ لایە ک بکەم. ئیمە دووکانمان نەبوو بۆ قوتابیان شتمان ئەنووسی مامۆستا جەمال لە ۲ .





۱۰

سوره

له رالقه سه قافیه (س) اردا  
بیاکه دکامت ..

تدینا  
تدینا  
تدینا

تدینا خوی و خسته نیت  
تدینا خوی و نیت اوست  
تدینا خوی و خسته نیت

۱

سوره

سوری بیاکه ده نیت  
دانه جرم کانی له سکو نیتک نرزه کمر دیکه  
به نیتو ده نیتو  
در وین تدینا  
کو وین جادی تاریکی  
ارزون و کوه نرزه ای باده نرزه



۵  
سَهْبَه  
بِهْتَنِيَه بِهَلَه وَهَات  
مَهَاتِيَه جِهِيَه كُوِيَه مَهَاتِيَه  
اِهْتَنِيَه بِِهْتَنِيَه جِهِيَه مَهَاتِيَه  
مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه

۶  
سَهْبَه  
اِهْتَنِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه  
مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه  
مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه مَهَاتِيَه

شکوه

ماوروش دهکا به تار تیلی تارین و  
دیروانته بازاری زمانه .

« درینا بو کواندی پیرایه تیک

خدا ، شو پیرایه بارکانهی به من پریشی بوو

تینا بز گوسیتی دی تار تیلون ، خدا

شو شو لایه زبانهی به من به خستی بوو .

تینا بو سورا کردی سرتگر او خیر

خدا ،

شو چتور او خستیهی به من به خستی بوو .»

شکوه

سوری بایی ده تیت

دایته چره کانی له سته تیک شریو کیم ده کانی

به بینه ده کانی .

له بون نه نیایی

کو بون حادی تار تیلی

له زبون واکو شریوی باده لهرزه .

۶  
 سٺه  
 پسر گزشتہ آیتکرا لار دیتیند  
 سٺه قاف  
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 کوریدانه قاف  
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۱.  
 سٺه  
 لکڑی سٺه  
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 تا فریبکی سٺه سٺه  
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ماں  
چوّل  
چوّل

چوّل ورنہ تاجردا نیلے میں پنکھو  
چوّل ورنہ کھڑکی کے پاس رہا  
چوّل ورنہ سرکاری ہسپتال میں چھوڑا  
جاتا تھا تو کھل ہی رہی رہتی ہے  
انہ کوئی شادی کر ڈالتوں میں خائفی  
یکدم اس دور میں ہوا کو بھرت کر لوگوں

سے لے کر  
تا لے کر وہ ہی  
یہ کتنی کھڑکیوں پہلے رہا ہے  
کھینچا  
شادی وہی اسے بنا ہی  
شادی وہی اسے لیا ہی  
شادی وہی اسے لیا ہی

**Rostam Hakeem**

**Performance proposal to: Red Jail gallery, Sulaymaniyah**

**Sumerian cylinder seal.**

The inspiration for this project comes from Sumerian cylinder seals, invented in the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium BCE in contemporary Iran, southern Mesopotamia. They are linked to the invention of cuneiform writing, although most subjects carved in relief were from a mythological source. The cylinders were typically used as seals for signing commercial and trade documents and most of cylinders subjects.

I intend to appropriate this Sumerian form to create new method of painting, using an oil barrel to represent the cylinder seal.

I am from a country which is rich with oil, but it could be argued that same oil has become a disaster for the Kurdish nation. Although Iraq's oil output capacity is nearing 5 million barrels per day, people continue to suffer from lack of heating oil during the cold winter. When the government distribute oil in the cities, people run to get it, and if successful push their barrels home with their feet. The noise of all the barrels moving in this way is deafening.

The performance will involve me writing my memories onto the oil barrel in white paint, and then pushing it with my feet across the canvas surface, in order to print off the writing (imperfectly) and, by continuing the process build up layers of writing. It might be that oil (black oil paint) leaks from the barrel as well. This project is therefore both a performance and painting (which will be documented). After the performance, I intend to display the barrel on the wall beside the resulting painting, in the manner of Middle East museum displays.

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## **List of Illustrations**

### **Illustrations to Chapter 2:**

Figure (1) Hakeem, S. (2011) *Backing boards collected from different calligraphers' workshops. Sulaymaniyah Sabunkaran* (Photograph Sheelan Hakeem).

Figure (2) Uzire, A. (2014-2015) *The beginning of studio experiments* (Photograph Ala Uzire).

Figure (3) Brooks, M. (2015) *Making banners from layers of texts* (Photograph Martin Brooks).

Figure (4) (2015) *Sample interview*.

Figure (5) Lano, H. (2015) *Omer Salim's calligraphy workshop* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (6) Brooks, M. (2016) *Appropriating calligraphers' methods of making the banners and gathering traces* (Photograph Martin Brooks).

Figure (7) Hakeem, R. (2016) *Sampling a different scale of painting with a different background* (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Figure (8) Hakeem, R. (2016-2017) *photograph showing the two different works produced from a single process: the banner itself, and its trace that has leached through the fabric onto the backing board* (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Figure (9) Lano, H. (2015) *A calligraphy workshop in Nawadar, Sulaymaniyah, showing the backing board with the accumulated traces from bannermaking. These are ordinarily discarded by the calligrapher when they are deemed too thickly layered with paint to work on top of* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (10) Hakeem, R. (2016) *Photograph showing appropriated traces to begin making a new painting* (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Figure (11) Uzire, A. (2017) *Building up layers of text to obtain traces* (Photograph Ala Uzire).

Figure (12) Hakeem, R. (2017) *Stories over stories - using diverse colours and fonts resulting in fragments of traces* (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Figure (13) Uzire, A. (2018) *Using stencils of political figures superimposed with political slogans* (Photograph Ala Uzire).

Figure (14) Hakeem, R. (2018) *Building up layers of text to obtain a body of traces* (Photograph Rostam Hakeem).

Figure (15) Uzire, A. (2018) *Building up layers of text to obtain a body of traces* (Photograph Ala Uzire).

Figure (16) Aziz, S. (2011) *A original backing board salvaged from a calligrapher's workshop* (Photograph Sherko Aziz).

Figure (17) Abdula, S. (2015) *A calligrapher's order book showing dates and details for commissions. Jwankar, Sulaymaniyah calligraphy workshop* (Photograph Sdiq Abdula).

Figure (18) Ahmed, B. (2018) *Large scale painting made from traces, using a variety of socio-political stories as source material* (Photograph Baz Ahmed).

Figure (19) Ahmed, B (2018) *Detail of the painting* (Photograph Baz Ahmed).

### **Illustrations to Chapter 3:**

Figure (1) NZ history (2014) *Map showing the main border area under the control of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of World War I.* [Online] on: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/map-ottoman-empire-1914>. (Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (2) Zheen Centre (2015) *A demonstration on September 06, 1930, showing banners in use at Sara square.* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (3) Zheen Centre (2015) *A protest in Baghdad 1948, showing a banner which reads: "The Kurdish people demand the release of Barzani, and demand food and shelter for their families".* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (4) Zheen Centre (2015) *Kurds travel from outlying towns and villages to congregate in Baghdad to celebrate the new government. Banners can be seen to read: "The delegations of the districts of Sheikhan, Zakho, Halabja, Shaqlawa, and Kalar, etc. salute the revolution".* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Center.

Figure (5) Zheen Centre (2015) *At the same celebration as above, this central banner declares: "The delegations of Kurdistan salute the revolution ... the delegation of Rawandouz".* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (6) Zheen Centre (2015) *The 21st of March 1959 celebration in Nawroz, Sulaymaniyah. The text on the banner reads: "The Kurdistan Democratic Party is the greatest leadership of the Kurdish people".* [Fatah Saeed Shaly's]. Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (7) Zheen Centre (2015) *A gathering showing an image of Abdul al-Karim Qasim above the door, along with three banners. Kurdistan, 1959.* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (8) Zheen Centre (2015) *The banners say: "The group of performers and singers of the KDP". 1060, Mawat Shorshi Ailul.* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (9) Zheen Centre (2015) *Photograph showing the banners written with the same text as above.* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen centre.

Figure (10) Zheen Centre (2015) *Burials at the Sulaymaniyah Cemetery, 1963.* Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (11) Zheen Centre (2015) *Sulaymaniyah Cemetery, 1963*. Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (12) رهشید، س. (۲۰۱۹) *کۆبونەوهی کۆیه ۱/۱ ماری ۱۹۷۳*. سلیمانی ناوهند روۆشنیری ئەدیبان.

رهشید، س. (۲۰۱۹) *مام جهلال له یاد کردنه وهه کدا له گهل مامۆستا برایم*. سلیمانی ناوهند روۆشنیری ئەدیبان.  
Figure (13)

Figure (14) Barzinji, M. (2013) *The celebration of the autonomy agreement, Baghdad, 11th March 1970*. Available at: <https://kurdipedia.org/default.aspx?lng=8&q=%D9%A1%D9%A1%20%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%20%D9%A1%D9%A9%D9%A7%D9%A0> .. (Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (15) Barzinji, M. (2013) *The celebration of the autonomy agreement, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 11th March 1970*. Available at: <https://kurdipedia.org/default.aspx?lng=8&q=%D9%A1%D9%A1%20%D8%A6%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%20%D9%A1%D9%A9%D9%A7%D9%A0> .. (Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (16) Zheen Centre (2015) *The anniversary of the autonomy agreement, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 11th of March 1971*. Sulaymaniyah: Zheen Centre.

Figure (17) kurdistanland.wordpress.com (2015) *The 8th KDP congress, left to right: Nouri Shawess, Mustafa Barzani, Kamuran Bedir Khan, and his wife, Natacha. Nawpurdan Kurdistanland, Iraq, 1970*. Available at: <https://kurdistanland.wordpress.com/kurdish-political-parties/southern-kurdistan-basur-iraq/>. (Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (18) AP Archive (2015) *Hundreds of thousands of people celebrate Saddam's birthday, Moseil*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baqGWG9u66g> .(Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (19) Khalid Zamdar (2016) *Khalid Zamdar, standing in front of his banner-making wall. Sabunkaran Street, Sulaymaniyah, 1983*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Khalid-Zamdar-1870680419819065/>. (Accessed in 07 September 2019).

Figure (20) Hassan, R. (2016) *Hemin Calligraphy and Painting workshop, Sabunkaran Street, Sulaymaniyah*. Rauf Hassan Archive 2016.

Figure (21) رهشید، س. (۲۰۱۹) *کۆنفرانسی سیی کۆمهله له میزگه پان ۲۰/۷/۱۹۸۳*. سلیمانی ناوهند روۆشنیری ئەدیبان.  
(21)

Figure (22) Al Jazeera Arabic (2016) *Ali Hassan al-Majid, nicknamed Chemical-Ali or Ali al-Kaimawi*. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ingid1pGB\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ingid1pGB_8) . (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (23) kamarantv (2011) *Schools marching with their banners, Sulaymaniyah Province Day, 1980s*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2fWBVjExwQ> .(Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (24) Omer, S. (2019) *Duvet made from Saddam's banner, 1980s*. Omar Saeed.

Figure (25) Algardenia (2015) *Saddam Hussein honours Adnan Khairallah*. Available at: <https://www.algardenia.com/ayamwathekreat/17704-2015-07-09-19-53-09.html>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (26) BBC News (2016) *The uprising, or intifada of March 1991*. Richard Wayman. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-35967389>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (27) Mylroie, L. (2016) *The uprising, or intifada and the gathering for the Halabja anniversary at Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 16th of March 1991*. Fayaq Hamasalih. Available at: <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/a743433f-3bb4-481d-b6b2-0e653fad5860/the-kurdish-uprising--part-iii--25th-anniversary>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (28) Munzir, B. (2015) *Communist (Shuara's) processions in Sulaymaniyah, 16th of March,1991*. Bahar Munzir's Archive.

Figure (29) Munzir, B. (2015) *Communist (Shuara's) protest in Sulaymaniyah in front of KF office, 18th of March 1991*. Bahar Munzir's Archive.

Figure (30) Halabjaiy, D. (2016) *Anniversary of Halabja, Halabja Taza, 16th of March 1991*. Dana Halabjaiy. Available at: <https://www.kurdistanpost.nu/?mod=news&id=80836&authorid=10112>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (31) Jian archive (2014) *Women protest in Sulaymaniyah against killing women on the 28th of May 2014*. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/ks/%DA%98%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86/%D8%B3%D9%84%DB%8E%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AE%DB%86%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%DA%98%DB%8C-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7/155938>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (32) Barzinji, M. (2016) *Families of victims of the internal war gather*. Fayaq Hamasalih. Available at: <https://www.kurdipedia.org/?q=20160113215243129066>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (33) Cpj.org 2011) *A protest about the murder of Sardasht Osman in Sulaymaniyah.* AP/Yahya Ahmed. Available at: <https://cpj.org/reports/2011/06/2011-impunity-index-getting-away-murder.php>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (34) RT Arabic (2013) *Protest for Kawa Ghermiani, who was assassinated on the 6th of December, 2013.* Shwan Mohammed. Available at: <https://arabic.rt.com/news/636403-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%82%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A8%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82/#>. (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

Figure (35) Hakeem, R. (2015) *Haji Mohammed Rostam sets up a religious banner for Ramadan every year in Naly street, Sulaymaniyah, 14th of July 2015.* Rostam Hakeem.

Figure (36) Hakeem, R. (2015) *Commercial banners, Sara Square, Sulaymaniyah, 23rd of June 2015.* Rostam Hakeem.

Figure (37) Hakeem, R. (2015) *A demonstration against corruption, Sulaymaniyah. 18th of July 2015.* Rostam Hakeem.

Figure (38) Hamid, A. (2016) *Large demonstration involving many teachers, employees and activists, Sulaymaniyah 13th of November 2017.* Avar Hamid.

Figure (39) Hamid, A. (2017) *A demonstration against corruption, Sulaymaniyah, 03rd of October 2016.* Avar Hamid.

Figure (40) Jeremydeller.org (2016) *A banner designed by David Hockney, made by Ed Hall the banner reads: "The Unrepentant Smokers, DH 09" 2009.* Available at: [http://www.jeremydeller.org/Procession/Procession\\_Video.php](http://www.jeremydeller.org/Procession/Procession_Video.php). (Accessed in 09 September 2019).

#### **Illustrations to Chapter 4:**

Figure (1) (2017) *A martyr registration sheet.*

Figure (2) Rasoul, Z. (2017) *The martyr archive department* (Photograph Zana Rasoul).

Figure (3) Rasoul, Z. (2017) *The martyr archive department* (Photograph Zana Rasoul).

Figure (4) Lano, H. (2017) *Entrance view of the Shaheed cube* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (5) (2017) *Diagram of entrance side.*

Figure (6) Lano, H. (2017) *Side of the cube opposite the Sumerian Cylinder* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (7) (2017) *Diagram of Sumerian Cylinder side.*

Figure (8) Lano, H. (2017) *View of the Jar side of the cube* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (9) (2017) *Diagram of the Jar side.*

Figure (10) Lano, H. (2017) *View of the Gilgamesh side of the cube* (Photograph Halo Lano).

Figure (11) (2017) *Diagram of Gilgamesh side*.