

Science-based truth as news: Knowledge production and media in Iraqi Kurdistan

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Abstract

This article examines aspects of the entanglement of (social) science, politics and media in Iraqi Kurdistan and investigates their representation in Kurdish newspapers, taking a quantitative study on genocidal persecution published by a Kurdistan government ministry as an example. It demonstrates how one and the same corpus of science-based ideas is appropriated and operationalised according to very different political agendas, and how the media itself conveys certain beliefs on the measurability of social experience and the truth value of science-based knowledge. Drawing on the broad debate in social science and the humanities on knowledge and the capitalist society, this article discusses aspects of the scientification of media and the politicisation of academic knowledge production.

Keywords: Kurdistan Region, media, Anfal Campaign, knowledge production, media anthropology.

Berpêşkirina rastiyên li ser bingehên zanistiyê wekî nûçe: hilberana zanyariyê û medya li Kurdistanê Iraqê

Ev gotar astengên li ber zanyariya civakî, siyasî û medyayê li Kurdistanê Iraqê û pêşkeşkirina wan di rojnemeyên Kurdî da vedikole. Ev lêkolîn xwe dispêre xebateka çendaniyê/quantitatîv ya nimûneyê li ser çespandina komkujîni ku ji layê Wezaretê Hikûmeta Kurdistanê ve hatiye weşandin. Ev xebat nîşan dide bê di medyayê da fikrên zanistî çawan hatine guhertin û bikarînan li gor berjewendiyên siyasî yên ji hev gelek cuda. Ew herwisa destnîşan dike bê medya bi çi rengî baweriyên pûç hildiberîne li ser pîvandariya serboriyên civakî û li ser rastiya zanyariyên zanistî. Bi bikarînan nîqaşên fereh di qada zanistiyê civakî û beşerî da li ser zanyarî û civaka sermayedar, mijara vê gotarê nîqaşkirina wan nêrînan e ku medyayê wekî çavkaniyek zanyariyên zanistî dihesibînin û wisan pêşkêş dikin. Ev gotar herwisa nîqaş dike li ser zanyariya akademîk ya ku di bin bandora siyasê da tê hilberandin.

حقیقەتی بە زانستی کراو و دموو نووچە: زانین بەرھەم ھێنان و میدیا لە کوردستانی ئێراق

ئەم کاغەزە لە سەر ھیندیک لایەنی زانستی (کۆمەلایەتی)، سیاسەت و میدیا لە کوردستانی ئێراق لیکۆلینۆھە دیکات و ھەروەھا شێوازی بەرجستەکردنۆھە و نوێنەرۆھێ ئێوان لە رۆژنامە کوردییەکان دا دیکاتە بەر تیشکی لیکدانۆھە، و دموو نمونە، لیکۆلینۆھێکی چەندییەتی (کوانتیتاتیف) لە سەر ستەمکاتی پەيوەندیدار بە ژینۆسیدۆھە کە لە لایان وەزارەتخانەیەکی حکوومەتی ھەریمی کوردستانۆھە بلۆ کراوئۆھە. نەمە نیشانی داو، چۆناوچۆن ھەر ھەمان کۆبیرۆکە لە سەر زانست دارژترو، بە ناجێندانەکی سیاسی تەواو جیاواز وەرگیراوە و بە کارھێنراوە و ھەروەھا دھیندرنێت کە چۆناوچۆن خودی میدیا دھینە سەرچاوەی چەشنە باوەرییەکان لە سەر بە پێوانکردنی ئەزموونی کۆمەلایەتی و نرخی حقیقەتی زانینی بە زانستی کراو. بە رێگای راوھستەکردن لە سەر گەنجەشەکانی ئێو زانستی کۆمەلایەتی و جیھانی زانین و کۆمەلگای سەرمایەداری، ئەم نووسراوێ، لایەنی بە زانستی کردنی میدیا و بە سیاسی کردنی زانستی ناکادییک دیکاتە بەر باس و لیکۆلینۆھە.

وشە سەرکێیەکان: ھەریمی کوردستان، میدیا، شالۆی ئەنفال، بەرھەمھێنانی زانین، ناوترۆپۆلۆژی میدیا

Introduction

On the 14th of April 2009, the official Anfal Day, 187 bodies of Anfal victims found in a mass grave in Najaf were buried in a cemetery in the Kurdish district of Germiyan,¹ the original site of the so-called third Anfal Campaign car-

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¹ Geographic names and names of Kurdish politicians, artists or writers well known to the international public are written in the form commonly used in literature and media in the English language. The transliteration of other Kurdish names follows the Kurdish-Latin Bedr Khan alphabet.



ried out between the 7th and 20th of April, 1988. On the occasion of this twenty-first anniversary, several Kurdish newspapers covered the commemoration of this genocidal persecution. Pictures of the reception of the bodies and of mourning women in black appeared on the front page of *Kurdistan-ê Nwê* (New Kurdistan), the daily newspaper of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The headline read:

*“Remains of 187 anfalised persons to be buried in Germiyan today. – [PUK vice-prime minister] ‘Imad Ehmed: 1 000 additional houses to be built for Anfal families.’”*²

The daily *Xebat* (Struggle) issued by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), on the other hand, headlined a news report on the same day with:

*“More than 93% of Anfal family members suffered not only human but also material loss.”*³

Last but not least, the private-owned weekly *Awêne* (Mirror) came out with a special report headlined:

*“Youth largest group of Anfal victims. – 17.92% of Anfal villages have not been rebuilt.”*⁴

The first example above, which refers to the PUK and its journalists, associates acts of mourning with promises of material safeguarding; the past is linked to the present, the memory of the collective experience of violence is exploited in the interests of legitimising PUK dominance. This corresponds to established patterns of Anfal victim and survivor representation in Iraqi Kurdish political discourse (cf. Hardi, 2011; Mlodoč, 2012; Fischer-Tahir, 2012a) and also relates to a more general policy of justifying political rule with reference to martyrs of the armed liberation struggle and of genocidal persecution (Laizer, 1996; Fischer-Tahir, 2003, 2012b; Watts, 2012).

As in the first part of the *Kurdistan-ê Nwê* headline, the headlines in *Xebat* and *Awêne* both contain statements referring to the victims and thus to the human catastrophe of genocidal persecution. Similar to the report in the PUK newspaper, the examples from *Xebat* and *Awêne* clearly allude to the economic dimensions of the Anfal Campaign and its lasting impact. In contrast to the first example, the second and third ones clearly refer to social facts in terms of numerical relations systems. Where does this data come from? A reading of the respective media report reveals that these “percentage”-based statements were taken from a study published in 2008 by the Kurdistan Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs. The study in question contains the results of quantitative research on various dimensions of Anfal and other genocidal persecution

² The transliteration read: “Emþo rufat-î (187) Enfal-kraw le Germiyan bexak destpêdrên. ‘Imad Ehmed: (1000) xanû-î dike bo kesukar-î Enfal-kirawekan drustdekrên.”

³ The transliteration read: “Ziyatir le 93% kesukar-î Enfal-kirawekan cige le ziyar-î giyanî, ziyar-î maddeyan pêgeyştuwe.”

⁴ The transliteration read: “Gencan zortirîn rêje-î qurbanîyan-î Enfal-in. 17.92%-î ew gundane-y ber karesat-î Enfal kewtun awedan nekrawnetewe.”

in Iraqi Kurdistan (hereafter: Genocide Report, GR, 2008). The following questions arise: who are the producers of this particular knowledge about Anfal and its impact? What is the purpose of this research and its subsequent publication? How does science-based knowledge move from the field of politics to that of media and to what extent are knowledge producers interlinked with politics and media?

This article deals with the entanglement of media, (social) science and politics in Iraqi Kurdistan. By exploring representations of the Genocide Report in *Xebat* (KDP) and *Awêne*, it sheds light on processes of scientifying politics and politicising science. In doing so, it chooses examples from two very different newspapers, one of which is the official organ of a ruling party in the Kurdistan Region, while the other, although claiming to be unbiased, is widely perceived among the Kurdish readership as oppositional to the government in Erbil. Hence, representations of the Genocide Report in these newspapers could be expected to pursue contrary aims and be shaped by different strands of political discourses on the past, present and future of Kurdish society. Does this imply that the representation in the private weekly is less influenced by nationalist sentiment or is less an expression of political functionalisation?

The Kurdish media landscape in Iraq has undoubtedly undergone a radical transformation since the uprising of 1991 (cf. Sheyholislami, 2011). The semi-stateness established with the first elected Kurdish Parliament in May 1992 and the ensuing processes of political pluralisation broadened the scope of action for those involved in Kurdish media production. At the same time, multiple flows of knowledge on journalism as a profession and the appropriation of respective techniques have resulted in changes in modes of representation and in a diversification of images of journalism. Apart from radio, television and the Internet, which matter more and more as sources of information and as a basis for negotiating political agendas, social norms and values, it is the newspaper as the “classic mass media” form that still seeks to influence public discourse. Newspapers do so by selecting and prioritising topics, the language and the structuration of news reports, interviews, columns and features, and the many design options. The process of transforming “occurrences in the everyday world [...] into stories” highly depends on the institutional, organisational and personal interests of the media producers (Tuchman, 1978: 2). As Pierre Bourdieu (2005: 37) suggests, journalists have something in common with other actors who “deal professionally in making things explicit and producing discourse” – such as politicians, sociologists or historians: “On the one hand, they strive to set out explicitly practical principles of vision and division. On the other hand, they struggle [...] to impose these principles of vision and division and to have them recognised as legitimate categories of construction of the social world.” With this practice, actors make use in various ways of knowledge based on social science, conceiving of it as itself a principle of vision and division. The Kurdish press, for example, is teeming with questionnaires and their representation in multiple diagrams. Selected

academic knowledge serves to render stories and arguments more “true”, especially when journalists touch on issues of Kurdish history, energy politics and economic development, or of genocidal persecution. Expert knowledge is not only embedded in journalistic narrations, in many newspapers it is the scholars themselves who write essays and regular columns.

This article draws on my previous work on Anfal and knowledge production (Fischer-Tahir, 2012a) and is, at the same time, a by-product of my research on media and politics in Iraq conducted between 2009 and 2011. The media research involved quantitative and qualitative analysis of Arabic and Kurdish newspapers, interviews with journalists and group discussions with newspaper readers in the Kurdistan Region.⁵ The research made use of media analysis approaches developed in cultural studies (Fiske, 1994; Hepp, 2004), in particular of Stuart Hall’s model of encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) that sharpens the view at relations of media production, frameworks and structures of knowledge and meaning. The article furthermore avails of approaches in media anthropology that understand journalism as a “professional intellectual activity” (Boyer and Hannerz, 2006: 6) and the newspaper as a “widely diffused idea” referring both to a “globally practiced model” and a localised cultural practice (Ståhlberg, 2006: 65). In addressing the scientification of political discourse and the media, this article seeks to make a contribution to those strands in the diverse debates on knowledge and capitalist society (Bell, 1973; Stehr, 2000) that examine the manifold relations between knowledge production and other social processes (Gibbons et al., 1994; Jasanoff et al., 1995; Reid and Traweek, 2000; Corsani et al., 2001), notably the interlinking effect of resource exchange between science, politics and media (Weingart, 2001). The first section of this article introduces the Genocide Report compiled by the Kurdish Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs, contextualising it in the realm of academic knowledge production on Anfal as conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan. The article then turns to the representation of the ministerial report in *Xebat* and compares it to the text that appeared on the subject in *Awêne*. It will be argued that despite significant differences between these discourse fragments, both indicate one and the same principle of vision and division, that is, science-based knowledge as “truth”.

Anfal as academic discourse

⁵ Issues of *Kurdistan-î Nûê*, *Xebat* and *Awêne* considered: 24 February 2009, 14 April 2009, 20 April 2009, 12 May 2009, 6 October 2009; 14 April 2010. In addition, issues of *Kurdistan-î Nûê* between 4-10 October 2010, *Xebat* 23-28 May 2010, and of the weekly *Awêne* 27 April, 5 May, 11 May, 18 May, 25 May, 1 June 2010. The research is also based on structured and narrative interviews with journalists and on *focus group* discussions in Erbil, Rania and Sulaimaniya in September/October 2009 and September/October 2010. In addition, I draw on long-standing field research and usage of Kurdish media as well as on participant observation carried out in 2005/2006 when I worked for a Kurdish weekly based in Sulaimaniya.

Revealing of information diagrams on the genocide of the Kurdish people [Xistinerû-y bêlkar-ê zanîyêkan-ê cînosayd-ê gel-ê kurd] – is the title of the study issued by the Research and Statistics Department of the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs in Erbil. The text appeared within the framework of a broader “archiving project on the genocide of the Kurdish people”. Dated 2008, it complimentary copies were distributed to the media, local and international NGOs and foreign lobbyists, and offices of the state administration and the ruling parties.

The purpose of the report was:

to construct a database on the fate of those killed in the genocide as well as on the current lives of their remaining family members [...] that can be availed of by the Ministry for a strategy to improve the life of the affected and to make the genocide known to the international public (GR, 2008: 9).

The term *cînosayd* in the report refers to a series of campaigns of persecution and mass killing, such as the deportation and killing of Faili Kurds in 1980/1983, the disappearance of 8 000 Barzani tribe members in 1983, the poisonous attacks on villages in the liberated areas in 1987, and the Anfal Campaign and Halabja massacre in 1988 (GR, 2008: 5-6). The research is based on a quantitative survey conducted in the governorates of Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Kirkuk⁶ in 2007; Halabja and the Germiyan district received special attention. Published in high gloss paper, the report contains coloured bar and pie charts with data on age, gender, education and local origin firstly of the victims and secondly of the survivors. It thirdly represents data on the current social situation of survivors in terms of their housing, education, income, health and psychological condition. The Report also provides data on the material loss that people suffered during particular campaigns in terms of housing, production equipment and livestock. The chart data is additionally summarised in short paragraphs. The final section of the Report, which is headed “pictures speak for themselves”, includes photographs of memorials dedicated to the Barzanis in Qushtepa, the Anfal Campaign and the Halabja massacre, and of (mostly elderly female) survivors in collective towns or reconstructed villages.

As stated in the publication, the working process involved approximately five hundred people, including several researchers from Kurdish and foreign universities, all of whom are listed and several of them are additionally shown in the photographs. However, the Genocide Report fails to quantify the sample; information graphics with data on human loss or injury as a result of chemical attacks, for example, make no reference whatsoever to core values. One of the responsible researchers at the ministry explained that the committee had dispensed with exact figures, since “these numbers could easily be misinterpreted and misused [...] especially when people who don’t love the Kurds claim that the number of victims wasn’t all that high and therefore it

⁶ Teams were also active in Baghdad, Karbala and Kut.

wasn't a genocide." Moreover, "it is impossible to give exact data on the Faily Kurds because they were deported to Iran."⁷

The Genocide Report is not the first empirical study on the Anfal Campaign. Since the end of the 1990s, a growing number of researchers have published work on the events of 1988. They did so from the perspectives of historiography (Mehmud, 2002-2003, 2007; Qurbanî, 2002-2007; Salih, 2005), sociology and political science (Dizeyî, 2001; Resûl, 2002) and philosophy ('Abdullah, 2005). In addition, a wide range of authors have written about the social consequences of Anfal for the survivors, focusing on the *bêwejinan-î Enfal*, the Anfal widows (Silêman, 1999; Salih, 2008; 'Ezîz, 2005; Mihemmed, 2009). Others turn the focus to the *jasb*⁸ and seek to analyse their role from a socio-psychological perspective (Qeredaxî, 2008). Kurdish authors, among them senior lecturers, master's and Ph.D. students, and former Peshmerga, journalists and writers, tend to follow the narration of Anfal as standardised by the Middle East Watch report *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (1993), which was translated into Kurdish in 1999/2000⁹; its chronological line and the reference to Raul Hilberg's Holocaust paradigm are taken over (cf. Middle East Watch, 1993: 7-8; Hilberg, 1985), as are maps and documents (see also Human Rights Watch, 1994; Hiltermann, 2007). Several of the Kurdish authors mentioned earlier present data based on quantitative surveys and conclude with recommendations to the respective government department responsible for improving the lives of Anfal survivors. Hence the Genocide Report issued by the Ministry complies with established modes of narrating the Anfal Campaign and other forms of genocidal persecution in Kurdistan. In contrast to the majority of work on Anfal conducted in the area controlled by the PUK, however, the Genocide Report clearly reflects a KDP position towards Anfal: the persecutions of 1988 are represented as equivalent to the mass killing of the Barzanis and the persecution of the Faily Kurds. Examining other discourses in Kurdistan, for example the discourse on women's rights (Koste, 2005; WADI 2010), the strong reliance on statistical data as a basis for political demands is likewise in line with established ways of conceiving the social world. Within this context, the preference for numerical relations systems could be explained by the interrelation of different circumstances. The first reason is that university students of various disciplines are instructed in quantitative methods of empirical research and representation rather than those of qualitative social research. Secondly, international donor organisations and their specific rules of documentation and analysis of aid programs accelerated the trend towards quantitative surveys and their repre-

⁷ Interview with Goran Mihemmed Mistefa, Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs. Erbil, 12 October 2009.

⁸ *Jas* (Kurdish: *cas*, from Arabic *jahš*) is a Kurdish word literally meaning a donkey's foal, but is widely used to mean collaborator or traitor.

⁹ The Middle East Watch report was translated into Kurdish Sorani two times; by Siyamend Muftizade (published in 1999 by the PUK media company Xak, Sulaimaniya) and by Cemal Mîrza 'Elî (published in 2000 by the Kurdish Diaspora Centre Havîbûn, Berlin).

sentation in diagrams and tables. Thirdly, political discourse on the ethnic constitution of Iraq and the proportional distribution of power at the legislative and executive level is rife with “percentage statements”, as are the media. It can therefore be said that the survey is perceived as a political technique, to be applied by any political actor for any political agenda. Remaining in the media field, in recent years it has become a widespread practice to conduct surveys on the circulation and consequently the market value and political influence of newspapers; these surveys are carried out by media research agencies or the newspapers themselves. The fourth reason for the trend in quantitative data seems to be rooted in a sense of justification. Returning to the statement by the researcher from the ministry quoted above: the notion of genocide is related to a (vague but certain) number of victims, a belief that most probably comes from the experience of denial statements made by former supporters of the Baath regime or by competing victim groups in Iraq (cf. Mlodoč, 2012: 84). Against this background the social power of numerical data could be considered an example of the interlinking effect between science, politics and media. Moreover, the recommendation aspect of social science-based knowledge production refers to the exchange of resources between politics and science.

The argument in *Xebat*: the Maliki government should pay

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The first issue of *Xebat* appeared in Cairo in 1959 as an organ of the KDP. Clandestine in Kurdistan from the beginning of the September Revolution in 1961, *Xebat* was “the most popular daily” (Hassanpour, 1992: 245). In 2009, the newspaper with headquarter in Erbil, appeared as a sixteen-page daily, with the exception of Saturdays, and had a circulation of 8000.¹⁰ Similarly to PUK newspapers, *Xebat* was mainly distributed free of charge, notably in party organisations and the state administration.¹¹ Nejad Surmê, editor-in-chief since 2006, is a long-standing party intellectual trained in archaeology and has published several books of poetry and booklets on media policies. From his perspective, “journalism serves to constitute public opinion”, and with *Xebat* he seeks to spread “information that serves my party and my people, because I serve my party and my people”.¹² The language of *Xebat* is predominantly Sorani. A strong regional-based nationalist identity is reflected in the structure of the newspaper and the language of the texts. Thus, the “domestic news” (*hewalêkan-ê naxo*) section refers exclusively to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The prescribed terminology mirrors the claim to federalism stipulated in the Iraqi constitution of 2005: the Iraqi government is primarily represented as a “federal government” (*hukûmet-ê fîdralî*) as distinct from the “regional govern-

¹⁰ Interview with editor-in-chief Nejad Surmê. Erbil, 12 October 2009.

¹¹ Interview with Zuhair al-Jezairy, editor-in-chief *Aswat al-Iraq*. Sulaimaniya, 7 October 2009. In his opinion the state-owned *al-Sabah* (The Morning) was the Iraqi newspaper with the highest circulation (20 000).

¹² Interview with editor-in-chief Nejad Surmê, *ibid*.

ment” (*hukumet-î herêî*) in Erbil. The sections that regularly provide social science-based knowledge are, for example, “ideas and philosophy”, “opinion”, “woman”, “culture” and “history”. Surmê explained with reference to the latter that the vast amount of space devoted to “the history of the people and the party” serves to “preserve the past”. He furthermore sees the newspaper as a “document for use by historians in the future”.¹³ The past, the present and the future are also linked at the bottom of pages 4/5 dedicated to “domestic news”, where a permanent text by Surmê himself reads: “Since you now work under the protection of a liberated Kurdistan, you should always remember the blood and the struggle of the martyrs”.¹⁴

The article referring to the ministerial Genocide Report appeared in the “special” (*taybet*, p. 9) section on the 14th April, 2009. The most important news of the day, positioned at the top of the front page, was the meeting between Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government Masud Barzani in Erbil, and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani’s reception for representatives of the Marja’iyya.¹⁵ Anfal was addressed in the second half of page 1 under the heading “Commemoration of the 21st anniversary of Anfal in Germiyan launched under the slogan ‘Although they were anfalised the Kurds still remain’”. Anfal also featured in reports on pages 5, 6 and 9, alternating with Qushtepe in 1983 and the deportation of the Faili Kurds. However, there is no explicit link made on page 1 to the texts on the other pages. Here we take a closer look at the news report from page 9, which read as follows:

More than 93% of Anfal family members suffered not only human but also material loss. *Based on a survey of the persecution of the Faili [Kurds] and the Barzanis, the chemical attacks as well as the Anfal Campaign, the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs published the study “Revealing of information diagrams on the genocide of the Kurdish people”. In this regard, the director of the ministerial department of research and statistics, Nadir Rustî, explained to Xebat: the Faili [Kurds], the Barzanis and the Anfal make up 83% of the victims, of which 17% were victims of chemical attacks. 48% of the genocide victims were between 1 and 18 years old. 67.23% of the survivors claim that it was the soldiers and the jash who carried out the genocide. More than 93% of Anfal family members suffered not only human but also material losses. This involved houses and farms, equipment, cars, gold and money, and livestock, including 684 521 sheep and 338 365 chickens. In my opinion it is time to force the Baghdad government (hukumet-î Bexda) to take over the responsibility for Anfal survivors, since the Iraqi Tribunal recognised Anfal as genocide on the 4th of June 2007, and has begun to hang the perpetrators. The report by the Ministry comprises seventy pages and was handed over to the Maliki government (hukumet-î Malîkî). We should not, however, forget the fact that the survey did not represent all of the victims. In-*

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Marja’iyya (Arabic/Persian: from *marja’-i taqlid*, literally: “source to follow/to imitate”, refers to the Shia authority of religious knowledge and practice.

stead it included only 25% of the Faili [Kurds], and with regard to the chemical attacks and Anfal, it was the case with many families that there weren't any survivors. Despite the absence of an exact number of victims, there is sufficient proof that the Baath regime carried out genocide against the Kurds. Therefore one hundred victims are the same as one million victims. We should not forget what Ali Kimyawi [Ali Hassan al-Majid] said during the trial: I did not kill 182 000 people, only 100.

[Graphic: pie chart]: Diagram 4-1, Percentage of families stating they had suffered losses during the Anfal Campaign and the chemical attacks. [Legend]: Yes-93.04, No: 6.85, No answer: 0.11.

The narrative, approximately four hundred words in Kurdish, is placed between a second text on genocidal persecution and a list of public service emergency phone numbers. It consists of one single paragraph without sub-heading. Not unlike countless other news reports in *Xebat*, the text lacks specification of author and place, a practice that distinguishes it from several other newspapers. Although the graphic is a reprint from the Genocide Report, the source is not cited (cf. GR, 2008: 64). It remains unclear who is speaking in the news report, as the narrative perspective and that of the “source Nadir Rustî” overlap. Tracking this act of knowledge transfer revealed that it was the director of the ministerial department of research and statistics who had originally made contact with the newspaper and asked for coverage of the Genocide Report.

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The line of argument in the news report can be summarised as follows: *Anfal (and other campaigns, including chemical attacks) caused not only human loss but also material loss. In recognition, the Iraqi government, i.e., its highest Arab representative, Nuri al-Maliki, must take action and provide compensation.* The Genocide Report is in fact one of the first texts to emerge from politico-academic knowledge production, turning attention to the economic dimension of genocidal persecution. The news report also carries a number of sub-arguments. Firstly, *Anfal in Germiyan was only one genocidal act among many and should always be remembered in combination with the events of Qushtepê and other genocidal acts.* This is tantamount to a subliminal rebuke to the Anfal discourse established in the PUK-dominated areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, where the district of Germiyan is perceived as having been particularly affected by genocidal persecution; leading PUK politicians to coin the term “Anfalistan” for Germiyan. This sub-argument undoubtedly can be taken as an expression of continued rivalry between the KDP and the PUK. A second sub-argument is that *Anfal and the chemical attacks are recognised genocide, independent of the actual number of victims*, an argument against the denial strategies in post-Baathist Iraqi political discourse. A third sub-argument highlights that although the Kurds form a part of the federal government in today's Iraq, the *Baghdad government and especially Maliki's government typifies the continuation of Arab rule and Arab dominance.* This last interpretation is established in political discourse on the restructuration of the Iraqi state, including issues such as the future of Kirkuk, federalism in Iraq, the control and distribution of oil and gas revenues, and how to deal with Iraq's violent past. What is of

interest here is the distinction between “them” and “us”, emphasised by the terms “Baghdad government” and “Maliki’s government”, as though the KDP were not part of the government in office.

The argument in *Awêne*: the Regional Government should take more responsibility

The first issue of *Awêne* was published in January 2006. This private-owned newspaper broke away from the weekly *Hawlatî* (Citizen), which was founded in 2000. *Awêne* is collectively administered by a corporation, whose emergence was the result of private investments by two dozen journalists, intellectuals and businessmen and women. With twenty pages, *Awêne* had a circulation of 9 000 in 2009/2010 and was sold primarily in the governorates of Sulaimaniya and Erbil but also in Kirkuk. It employs no more than fifteen reporters, most of whom are freelancers. The two senior editors are Şiwan Mihemmed and Asos Herdî, the former of Sulaimaniya working-class origin and a one-time Peshmerga of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), the latter a secular intellectual from Sulaimaniya’s established social elite. For Şiwan Mihemmed journalism means “information and news; that is the truth, just the truth.”¹⁶ *Awêne* focuses on issues of maladministration, corruption, political repression and resistance inside the Kurdistan Region. As a result, the newspaper has been the target of repression several times (Reporters without Borders, 2010). Analysing the newspaper in 2009, the Kurdish nationalist attitude of the editorial board persisted on the “Kirkuk” feature page, which has since been abandoned. *Awêne* differs from most other Kurdish newspapers in its method of knowledge transfer in the context of politics in Iraq; one regular theme the newspaper attempts to introduce the Kurdish reader to is basic information on political actors and debates at the national Iraqi level, narrated to a great extent with the aid of information graphics. Several regular columns and essays in the “politics”, “social affairs”, “economy” and “culture” sections serve to provide social science-based knowledge; among the authors are such well-known Kurdish writers and academics as Bakhtiyar Ali and Mariwan Wuriya Kanie. But editor-in-chief Şiwan Mihemmed disapproves of the extent to which “opinion and philosophy keeps us busy [...] because newspaper means news, and not [what] Foucault says ... or Derrida writes”¹⁷ Readers, however, especially middle-class, well-educated young men and women in the urban centres, tend to see the numerous columns and essays dealing with academic ideas, theories and debates as “useful”, “interesting” and at least “worth reading”. Thus, readers claim, for example, that “since we lack proper aca-

¹⁶ Interviews with Şiwan Mihemmed, editor-in-chief of *Awêne*. 19 September 2009 and 21 October 2010.

¹⁷ Ibid.

democratic journals in Kurdistan, the newspaper still provides the space for intellectual and academic ideas and debates”.¹⁸

In sharp contrast to *Xebat*, journalistic representational practice in *Awêne* has changed greatly over time due to the influence of international media organisations such as Dutch Press Now and the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). As of 2003, these and other organisations installed infrastructure in Iraq and Kurdistan to transfer knowledge on how journalism works from their perspective. They offer courses on the basic skills of coverage, story writing, television and radio production, on the “ethics of journalism”, and on how to structure media agencies to meet the needs of the market economy. *Awêne* also benefited from long-term supervision of work by individual journalists and the editorial board, and over the years *Awêne* journalists themselves have acted as instructors in training courses provided by these international organisations.¹⁹ In contrast to most other print media in the Kurdistan region, *Awêne* is not biased towards one particular political camp. But the journalists who contribute to the newspaper tend to sympathise with different political parties, such as the Goran Platform (Change) led by Nawshirwan Mustafa Amin, the PUK, or the Islamic Union in Kurdistan-Iraq.²⁰ As editor-in-chief Şiwan Mihemmed, who has himself voiced harsh criticism of Goran in his column on numerous occasions, remarks:

*“We want different pens to write the news – one in opposition to and the other in support of the ruling parties, one secular and the other religious, one nationalist and the other left wing. Because we make news, and in doing so the journalist must perform professionally”*²¹.

So, what do they mean by “professional”? Let us examine the issue that appeared on the 14th April 2009. As the top story, the front page brought a detailed report on the PUK preparations for the upcoming elections to the Kurdistan Parliament (July 2009); it was argued that decisions on the PUK list of candidates may have affected the relationship between the PUK and the breakaway movement, the Goran Platform. Anfal became a topic on page 3 in the regular “mirror of events” (*awêne-î rudawekan*) column. Here the columnist condemned the notion of “playing with the feelings of those whose relatives had been killed” in the Anfal Campaign: for their own purposes the PUK and the KDP have allowed the *jaş* to be re-integrated into Kurdish society, whereas Anfal survivors still live in poverty. In addition, the KDP and the PUK

¹⁸ Focus group discussions with students at the university of Koye/Rania (18 October 2010), with lecturers at the university of Sulaimaniya (11 October 2010), and with students and journalists in Erbil (12 October 2010).

¹⁹ Interviews with Şiwan Mihemmed, *ibid.* Interview with Aso Serawî, chief designer at *Awêne*. Sulaimaniya, 5 October 2010. Interview with Judit Neurink, Independent Media Center Kurdistan. Sulaimaniya, 12 October 2010.

²⁰ Interviews with editors, reporters and columnists of *Awêne*: Awat Ahmed Sultan, 19 September 2009; Yahya Berzinci, 2 October 2009; Yasin Teha, 16 October 2010; Sara Qadir, 4 October 2010.

²¹ Interviews with Şiwan Mihemmed, *ibid.*

have transformed the “catastrophe and illegal killing of the people into symbolic capital for themselves”. The other space devoted to Anfal was the “social affairs” section (p. 16) with approx. 1000 words and a photograph captioned “The mortal remains of an anfalised person”. The text was entitled “Youth the largest group of Anfal victims, 17.92% of Anfal villages have not been rebuilt.” Prepared by one of the editors, Baram Subhî, the report starts with a lead to introduce the Genocide Report:

A survey by the directorate of research and statistics at the Ministry of Martyrs, conducted within the frame of an archiving project on the genocidation of the Kurdish people, including Anfal, the chemical attack on Halabja, the Anfal of the Barzanis and the Faili Kurds, a copy of which was received by Awêne, states: ...

This is followed by thirteen paragraphs containing data from the Genocide Report under the headings:

“Highest number of victims in Sulaimaniya”

“Victims according to gender”

“Age of the victims”

“Marital status of the victims”

“Level of education of the victims”

“Modalities of becoming a martyr”

“Family members of the genocide victims”

“Social status of the remaining members”

“Type and degree of illness”

“Gaps in service infrastructure”

“Reconstruction of Anfal villages”

“The perpetrators of the [genocide] process”

“Material losses”

Each paragraph closely follows the structure of the Genocide Report, more or less taking over the summaries of the respective charts. The most detailed paragraphs in *Awêne* are those on the age of the victims and on the deficits in reconstruction and infrastructure in terms of public services. These two priorities correspond to the title and subheading of the newspaper report. In contrast to the critical approach adopted in the column on page 3, the text dealing with the Genocide Report refrains from judgment. Nevertheless, the journalistic narration of this news report clearly reveals *Awêne's* political agenda, not least in addressing issues pertaining to the economic and social safeguarding of Anfal survivors. In contrast to the report on the front page of

Kurdistan-ê Nwê, in which the PUK and its government representatives in Erbil are conceived of as taking care of Anfal survivors, and in contrast to the report in *Xebat*, which delegates material responsibility for the survivors to “Maliki’s government”, *Awêne* voices criticism of the Kurdistan Regional Government. In so doing, it displays a form of watchdog journalism.

At the same time, however, the report in *Awêne* contains a strong local reference: as a politically influential newspaper in the city of Sulaimaniya, it is no coincidence that the first paragraph after the lead is headed “highest number of victims in Sulaimaniya”. In this sense, *Awêne* and *Xebat* pursue a similar pattern. *Awêne* highlights the aspects of genocidal persecution seen as referring to the past of a certain imagined group of belonging. Conspicuous here is that the aspect of “material loss due to Anfal” so prominently addressed in the report published in *Xebat* is mentioned only marginally in *Awêne* in a comparatively short paragraph. Conversely, *Awêne*’s heavy focus on the age structure of victim groups is merely addressed in a single sentence in *Xebat*. Thus, the report in *Awêne* underlines the cruelty of Anfal as demonstrated by the headline referring to youth as the largest victim group and by the photograph depicting the remains of a body.

Another difference between *Awêne* and the example from *Xebat* is the notion of Anfal conceived in the text, e.g., in *Awêne* the lead phrase: “the Anfal of the Barzanis and the Faili Kurds”. The ministerial Genocide Report clearly identifies the deportation of the Faili Kurds, the events of Qushtepê, Anfal and Halabja, and the chemical attacks of 1987 as “cînosayd” or “cînosayd kirdin-ê gel-ê kurd” (*genocidation of the Kurdish people*). In so far, the Genocide Report follows a narration of genocidal persecution as established by the KDP. The *Awêne* text, however, echoes the politico-academic Anfal discourse in the PUK-dominated areas of the Kurdistan Region; several authors argue that the events of 1988 constitute only one of the many phases of Anfal as a process that initially began in the 1960s, or indeed with the formation of the Iraqi state in the 1920s (Mela Şaxî, 2001: 6; Mehmed, 2002: 5-7; Salih, 2005: 77; Şîwanî, 2002: 9). Thus the mass killing of the Barzanis and the persecution of the Faili Kurds is subsumed under Anfal, a genocide that culminated in the Anfal Campaign of Germiyan. Subordinating the deportation and disappearance of the Barzanis in 1983 under “Anfal” questions, for example, the singularity of the events of Qushtepê, an act that, similar to the text in *Xebat*, must be interpreted as a continuation of the PUK-KDP rivalry and the respective territorialised antagonisms. Although the texts in *Xebat* and *Awêne* differ greatly in terms of argument, formal story line, design, and the use and transparency of sources, both are teeming with statistical statements and in some instances even rounded off to two decimal places. This is evidence that numerical data serves in each case to describe social relations, while the data producers are rendered authorities of knowledge.

Conclusion

This article exemplified the ways in which a particular corpus of science-based knowledge produced within the context of a specific political agenda was appropriated by actors in the media field to make political statements. Both the *Xebat* and the *Awêne* texts are shaped by powerful discourses on Iraqi Kurdistan's violent past and, at the same time, contribute to the spreading of particular notions of Anfal and of genocide. In the first example the aspect of material loss caused by Anfal and other persecutions is utilised to articulate claims on the Iraqi government and to recall the conflictual constellations of *Arabs versus Kurds*, *centre versus (Kurdistan) region*, *perpetrators versus victims*, as constructed in Kurdish nationalist discourse. The text in *Awêne* uses the topic of Anfal to address the responsibility of the Kurdistan government for Anfal survivors in particular and to voice criticism of the ruling parties in Iraqi Kurdistan in general. Both texts, however, also reflect as well as constitute a belief in the measurability of social experience and the truth value of science-based knowledge. Quantitative data and its representation in diagrams become principles of vision and division. But sometimes "numbers do [not] speak for themselves". The journalists made a conscious decision about the selection of data from the Genocide Report and about its representation. In this regard journalists as symbol handlers attached social meaning to statistical data, which in turn emerged in a specific social environment. However, the Genocide Report and its silence on the total number of voices represented by the sample, a silence continued in the text examples from *Xebat* and *Awêne*, indicates the ambivalence associated with numbers in the context of knowledge production on genocidal persecution, one that results from the uncertainty of how to narrate genocidal persecution.

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