

## **The Politics of Genocide Recognition:**

### **Kurdish Nation-building and Commemoration in the Post-Saddam Era**

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#### **Abstract**

This article explores the genocide recognition politics (GRP) with a specific focus on Saddam Hussein's Anfal Campaigns (1986-1989) against the Kurdish population in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In the context of a pending referendum on independence in the KRI, this study investigates the evolution of GRP in relation to secession, nation-building and commemoration as well as the social, political and economic drivers in the process. In addition, the study zeroes in on the internationalization of genocide recognition claims via diaspora lobbying and the KRG's bureaux of representation in Europe. The results are based on extensive fieldwork conducted with KRG representatives, diaspora entrepreneurs and other stakeholders between 2012 and 2016 in Europe and Iraqi Kurdistan. The KRG's genocide recognition claims are not explicitly associated with secession, but instead are employed to legitimize local rule by referencing collective trauma and shared victimhood. In this way, Anfal – as the 'chosen trauma' – has become a component of (local) nation-building mechanisms. Nevertheless, recognition claims can become instrumentalized for succession so long as the political circumstances in the region become favourable to Kurdish independence. In the diaspora context, the GRP serve to

establish a link to homeland through commemoration practices, but they also provide greater space for lobbying and transnational advocacy networking.

**Keywords:** genocide recognition, diaspora, politics, Kurdish Regional Government, Anfal

## **Introduction**

The issue of genocide definition and recognition takes place in a thorny terrain of politics and power; recognition not only entails questions of justice, forgiveness and eventual reconciliation in cases of conflictual inter-ethnic relations but also those of liability, remunerations and political claims-making. Actors engaging in genocide recognition (hereafter GRP) can be ethnic or religious groups who make claims to national or host society parliaments, or to supra-national institutions' assemblies and courts (such as the European Court of Human Rights). At times, secessionist groups have become actors in GRP, as has been the case with the Tamils in Sri Lanka.<sup>1</sup> States have also pursued such initiatives, as Azerbaijan has in demanding recognition of the Khodjali massacre.<sup>2</sup> In addition, diaspora organizations have used a range of (political) strategies to secure acknowledgement of a particular massacre or a set of massacres as genocide and to some extent have contributed to the internationalization of genocide recognition claims.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the lobbying of the Armenian government and intense mobilization within its diaspora has kept the issue of recognition at the forefront of parliamentary agendas in European countries, United States and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, we examine the politics of genocide recognition engaged in by members of the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq (KRG), including members of the KRG bureaux of representation in Europe, and of the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in Europe. The focus of the GRP we explore is the campaign to achieve recognition of the Anfal campaigns (1987-89) orchestrated by Saddam Hussein's regime as genocide. While it has long featured high on the KRG's political agenda and mobilized diaspora organizations across Europe, the issue has drawn little scholarly

interest. Both the KRG and Kurdish diaspora organizations have appealed to governments as well as supranational institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union to have Anfal campaigns recognized as genocide. Furthermore, the diaspora's active lobbying efforts, coordinated to some extent with the KRG representation offices, have contributed to the internationalization of such genocide recognition claims. As a result, Sweden, Norway and the United Kingdom recognized Anfal as genocide in 2012–2013. On the other hand, considering that the KRG has expressed its intention to hold an independence referendum in the near future<sup>5</sup>, examining the role genocide recognition efforts play as part of 'earned sovereignty' claims has now become more topical than ever. As the KRG's official Kurdish narrative concerning the Anfal campaigns has significant political dimensions in terms of the disputed areas within Iraq<sup>6</sup>, it becomes all the more important to scrutinise the formulation of such claims and the eventual political ramifications they might have. How are the claims for genocide recognition of the Anfal campaigns formulated? What economic, political and social drivers fuel the formulation of such politics? How do they relate to the question of secession, nation-building processes and commemoration?

The material for this study consists of more than a hundred semi-structured interviews conducted in Germany, France, Sweden, United Kingdom, the Netherlands as well as in the KRI with actors that have lobbied for the recognition of Anfal as a genocide.<sup>7</sup> These include members of parliament in the KRG and officials in their bureaux of representation, members of diaspora organizations affiliated with the ruling parties, and other stakeholders in host countries. The interviewees included, among others, the KRG Head of Foreign Relations, Chief of Staff of the Parliament in KRG, Kurdish Democratic Party's (KDP<sup>8</sup>) Head of Foreign Relations Office as well as KRG representatives to France and the United Kingdom. The empirical data also includes rich observation material collected at political and cultural events, demonstrations, and during parliamentary discussions and debates. KRG's official documents and declarations have also been analyzed as part of the research material. In the following sections, we will first discuss the

phenomenon of genocide recognition politics, then provide a contextualization of the Anfal campaigns, and finally discuss how the GRP were formulated in the research material.

### **Politics of Genocide Recognition: Drivers and Motivating Factors**

The topic of GRP is a relatively understudied. Although several academic studies refer to ethnic communities lobbying to achieve genocide recognition, it is rarely the subject of focused research. The few cases that explicitly focus on lobbying strategies and practices towards genocide recognition include those of Maja Catic<sup>9</sup>, who examines genocide recognition initiatives in the case of massive deportations and massacres of Circassians by Tsarist Russia in late nineteenth century. A little-known issue prior to the twenty-first century, the Circassians managed to bring their genocide recognition initiatives to the forefront after the 2007 decision by the International Olympic Committee to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Catic shows that the timing of the Games, which ensured maximum visibility for recognition claims concerning massacres that had taken place more than a century prior.

It has been shown that the political context shapes the formulation of GRP, most notably in questions of diplomatic relations, liability and reconciliation. For instance, genocide recognition by the perpetrating side can have significant consequences for inter-ethnic relations, as became evident in the Rwandan case.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, genocide recognition demands can create friction in diplomatic relations and consequently become a contested political issue in geopolitical power relations. When made towards a foreign state they can also raise questions of liability in case the foreign state in question has conducted arms deals with the perpetrating actor. Whereas the KRG's claims for recognition of Anfal as genocide have not destabilized inter-ethnic relations within Iraq, they have raised questions on liability and diplomatic relations outside the country.

The attitudes of the international community or the perpetrators towards genocide recognition claims shape the dynamics and repertoires of mobilization for actors engaging in the GRP. This is, for instance, visible in the case of the Armenian genocide that has become a highly

politicized issue. It has been widely recognised internationally, partially due to Armenian diaspora groups' lobbying efforts, but remains a highly contested issue in Turkey to this day.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is plausible that in cases when genocide recognition claims have been to some extent successful and acknowledged by both international as well as domestic actors, (diaspora) activities focus more on remembrance and commemoration practices. In case of partial or no recognition by the international community and homeland actors, recognition claims can become quickly politicized. This does not rule out commemoration practices, which can in some cases even provide opportunities to take part in increased strategic activism. Commemoration events can provide means to foster networks with political actors and to engage in transnational advocacy that enables to exercise leverage both in home and host country politics.

This is closely related to the nexus between self-determination (and secession) and genocide recognition. For instance, Grodsky<sup>12</sup> argues that secessionist groups might engage in 'global sympathy campaigns' and employ genocide claims to push further any self-determination claims. He finds evidence demonstrating that genocide recognition claims can be instrumentalized for the purposes of self-determination: claims for genocide recognition can have a broader effect, and be employed as 'a strategic weapon in the quest of independence demands' long after the fighting has ended. Catic<sup>13</sup> suggests that 'genocide discourses represent the most authoritative moral claims a group can make', whereas according to Grodsky<sup>14</sup>, the leverage of the term helps ethnic or religious groups to transform victimhood to an advantage that can be used to bargain. Similarly, in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, Hadji<sup>15</sup> argues that 'self-determination trumps territorial integrity when a country has; (1) violated the "economic, social and cultural development" of a people [...] In the case of genocide, territorial integrity yields to self-determination'. Indeed, 'genocide' is a powerful term that can both serve the purposes of nation(-state) building as well as enhance self-determination rights.<sup>16</sup>

GRP can also have a more symbolic and identity-based dimension.. For instance, Catic<sup>17</sup> argues that 'the genocide recognition initiative is an identity-driven project, resulting from a fear of

extinction that grows out of the experience of being a vulnerable ethno-national group, living with memories of deportations, exile and fragmentation.’ GRP can become a component of the narrative of collective identity, building on collective memory and experience. Anderson Paul<sup>18</sup> has studied the grassroot mobilizations of Armenian-Americans towards genocide recognition in the United States. She suggests that in the case of the lobbying efforts of the Armenian diaspora, *genocidal memory* provides a potent cohesive group ideology for Armenian-Americans, whereas religious organizations have provided an important organizational basis for mobilization. Genocide recognition claims and how they are formulated draw from identity narratives and collective memory, and the representation of particular traumatic events as emblematic are often highly politically contested.

In this paper, we define GRP broadly to include the lobbying of governments, inter-parliamentary groups and policy-makers at the local and international arena; mobilising diaspora organizations, NGOs and governmental institutions towards the recognition of particular massacre(s) as genocide: as well as actions that aim to raise awareness through commemoration events, performances, artefacts and demonstrations in the host and homeland context. Diaspora and homeland actors often coordinate efforts in genocide recognition initiatives, although the distinction between the host and home society, and between state actors and diaspora is not clear-cut, particularly concerning overseas bureaux of representation and diaspora organizations that are affiliated with the homeland ruling parties. Lobbying practices and commemoration of past massacres are often closely intertwined and to some extent overlapping. However, we suggest making an analytical distinction between the two types of activities. On the one hand, GRP can focus on political strategies and committed lobbying practices that are linked to secessionist claims or claims for restorative justice, and that aim to establish strong contacts in host country political circles and transnational advocacy networks. On the other hand, GRP can emphasize commemoration practices and aim at cultural production or have more of a social function that, for instance in the diaspora context, creates a symbolic connection between the diaspora community

and the homeland. Whereas in both cases GRP draw from collective memory and can provide means for identity construction, in the latter this does not require involvement in local political systems. Although they could be investigated under the same umbrella term of genocide recognition politics, we argue that they require closer scrutiny if the underlying political, economic and social drivers are to be understood.

### **Kurds, the Anfal Campaigns and the Issue of Recognition**

The Kurdish-speaking population – estimated between 25-40 million people in the Middle East – is spread across four states (Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria) as well as dispersed in diaspora communities mainly across Europe and North America.<sup>19</sup> In the course of the twentieth century, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran adopted differing approaches to minority relations, from diverse assimilation policies to genocidal measures, namely in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime.<sup>20</sup> Great numbers of Kurdish refugees and asylum seekers migrated to Europe and elsewhere from the mid 1980s as a result of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). Although small waves of Kurdish migration occurred in the 1970s with Kurdish intellectuals fleeing Iran and Iraq, the most significant wave of migration occurred during the mid 1980s and onwards<sup>21</sup>, namely in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991. When one examines particular political events, it is noticeable that the Kurdish diaspora movements toward Europe were fuelled particularly by the Iraqi state's destruction of thousands of Kurdish villages between 1975 and 1991. These included Saddam Hussein's notorious Anfal campaigns, with gas bombings specifically targeting Kurdish villages. In 1991, the failed revolt against the Iraqi state in the aftermath of the Gulf War resulted in two million Kurds fleeing to the mountains and toward Iran and Turkey. The 1994-1997 civil war between the main Kurdish parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) created instability in region, and by the late 1990s thousands of refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan had fled to neighbouring countries, Europe and the United States.<sup>22</sup> Current estimates of the Kurdish population in Europe place the number of Kurdish-speakers at between roughly 850,000 and 1.3 million, with the great

majority residing in Germany. Sizeable Kurdish communities also live in the United Kingdom, France and the Nordic countries.<sup>23</sup>

During the Iran-Iraq war, the military operations against the Kurds that came to be known as the Anfal campaigns took place between 1987 and 1988. After 1980, Iraqi garrisons were transferred to the Iranian front, which allowed the Kurdish *peshmerga* military forces, to gain influence in the region. In 1983, the KDP – led by Masoud Barzani – allied with Tehheran, followed by a swift operation by Iraqi troops to abduct between 5–8,000 men belonging to the Barzani tribe. As the Middle East Watch report puts it: ‘the 1983 Barzani operation foreshadowed the techniques that would be used on a much larger scale during the Anfal campaign.’<sup>24</sup> For instance, the first campaign in February 1988 began with attacks on the PUK’s headquarters and the villages nearby, and the massacre of Halabja is often references as a reaction of the Hussein’s regime to the *peshmerga*’s attempt to take control of the city in March 1988.<sup>25</sup> Hassan al-Majid (Saddam Hussein’s cousin, also known as ‘Chemical Ali’) organized forced deportations as well as systematic chemical attacks on Kurdish villages located in Northern Iraq, under the commands of his cousin, resulting in some 1.5 million Kurds being ‘resettled’. The campaigns are said to have destroyed ‘the entire social and economic texture of the affected regions’<sup>26</sup> with effects of the atrocities still visible today. Altogether, the eight military offensives, seven of which targeted regions controlled by the PUK, physically destroyed 3,000 villages, killing approximately 150,000–180,000 people and leaving more than 180,000 missing.<sup>27</sup> The Anfal campaigns took place in three consecutive phases, the last of which included a chemical attack on the city of Halabja in 1988, where approximately 7,000–8,000 people perished in a single day.<sup>28</sup> The most horrific event of the Anfal campaigns, Halabja became profoundly emblematic in the collective memory of Kurds and an important memorial site.<sup>29</sup> Local policy-makers quickly placed Halabja in the centre of the framing of the Anfal campaigns as genocide. Right after the Halabja massacre during a visit to the United States, Jalal Talabani (then Iraqi Kurdish leader and now current president of Iraq), referred to Halabja to ground claims for Kurdish self-rule.<sup>30</sup> A no-fly zone to protect the civilian population

in the KRI was established in 1991 and a year later the KRG was founded with the first democratically elected parliament. Under pressure from the United States, the Iraqi Government withdrew its political and military presence from the KRI. After the invasion of Iraq in spring 2003, the massacre of Halabja was used by then Secretary of State, Colin Powell, as evidence that Saddam Hussein had used weapons of mass destruction.<sup>31</sup>

In 2006, Saddam Hussein's trial started in the Iraqi High Tribunal.<sup>32</sup> Besides war crimes, he was charged for genocide against Kurds (with a special reference to Halabja), but the prosecution had only presented half of the case by the time he was executed. 'Chemical Ali' was also condemned to death in 2006 after he was found guilty of having orchestrated the Halabja bombing, yet the two were never officially found guilty of genocide by the Iraqi High Tribunal, which dropped the charges following the executions. In 2010, the Iraqi High Criminal Court recognized the Halabja massacre as an act of genocide. However, the tribunal has since then become a highly politicized, being criticized for proceeding in a *fait accompli* manner without taking international human rights norms into consideration and without turning the case over to an international court.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, while the Iraqi National Assembly has recognized Anfal as genocide, the Kurds have received no official apology, which has led to further disappointment for victims.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, the Iraqi Kurdish region has gained international recognition and has experienced rapid economic growth, partially in form of foreign investments. Compared to the rest of the country, it has been thus highly political stable and relatively prosperous. As Hautaniemi and colleagues<sup>35</sup> observe, the last decade has seen 'Kurdish society ... transformed extremely rapidly from a largely agrarian-based, highly regulated, and state owned economy to a market economy'. More recently, however, the neoliberal transformation of the Iraqi Kurdish economy and the related investment boom has weakened due to endemic corruption and the on-going war against ISIS. The 2005 constitution paved the way for guaranteed federalism for Iraqi Kurdistan and the following year PUK and KDP signed an accord to reunify the Kurdish provinces under one administration.<sup>36</sup>

However, disputes between the parties continue to simmer, and the relations with Baghdad

government remain fragile. At the same time, KRI is clearly in the process of nation-building after a long period of experiencing contested sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> Despite the ongoing crises and the permanent state of emergency in the region, the battle against ISIS and conflicts with the central government of Iraq, the commitment of the KRG to nation-building has not diminished. In early 2016, it announced its intention to hold an independence referendum soon.<sup>38</sup> Not only does it have a national anthem and a Kurdish-speaking majority with a common history, it has also managed to gain significant autonomy from the central government. In short, the KRG is in the process of constructing a national myth of rebirth from the ashes.

### **Legitimization of Rule and Remembering in the Context of Nation-Building**

The GRP undertaken in a post-genocide context by the targeted group can become a barrier to peaceful inter-ethnic relations and lead to sectarian violence.<sup>39</sup> For instance, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the national court system as well as the Gacaca courts were put in place with the latter seeking to distribute justice, foster reconciliation at the grassroots level and to prevent further division.<sup>40</sup> Ihsan<sup>41</sup> suggests that in the case of Anfal, the international recognition of genocide would mean officially recognizing the link between chemical weapons and genocide. He suggests that political calculations have actually deprived the victims of Anfal of compensation and restorative justice, and that the absence of a Yugoslav- or Rwandan-style international tribunal has meant Iraqi society has not been able to heal its divides.

Besides inter-ethnic relations, GRP can be a highly contentious issue at the international level. For instance, in the case of Armenian genocide, Turkey has refused to recognize the atrocities and denied all demands regarding territorial or monetary compensation, which has also created friction in its diplomatic relations. This is, however, where the Iraqi Kurdish case differs from the Armenian and Rwandan examples. Most of the perpetrators have been tried and punished by the Iraqi High Tribunal, the Iraqi central government has acknowledged these atrocities as genocide and

both Iraqi politicians and diplomatic staff attend annual Halabja commemoration events. Therefore, the question of genocide does not play a major role in creating sectarian divisions within Iraq, as it might outside its borders. The Iraqi central government was even one of the main stakeholders of the erection of the Halabja Monument at The Hague.<sup>42</sup> However, ethno-national groups can use GRP to demonstrate the impossibility of peaceful co-existence and to seek separation based on a supposed existential threat to their group.<sup>43</sup> The question therefore emerges; to what extent are GRP in the case of Anfal campaigns linked to aspirations for greater self-determination? And how are GRP related to nation-building mechanisms in the KRI?

The memory of Halabja and Anfal campaigns remains highly salient in the Kurdish region.<sup>44</sup> As Mlodoch claims, it is ‘suspended over the people and the region like a big cloud’ to the extent that people continue to divide their lives into two periods: before and after Anfal.<sup>45</sup> However, the interpretations of the Anfal campaigns points toward contesting narratives and fragmented memories. The official narratives have shifted from referencing the Anfal as catastrophe in the 1990s to principally employing the concept of ‘genocide’ in the post-2003 period.<sup>46</sup> Fischer-Tahir discusses the ‘scientification of Anfal’ and suggests that ‘Anfal was reduced to a symbol and a dense narrative in the 1990s nationalist discourse dominated by the ruling party’.<sup>47</sup> This echoes Tejel’s observations of the post-2003 KRI: ‘Following the establishment of the autonomous region in Iraqi Kurdistan, numerous studies, as well as political actors have tried to prove that the Kurds have been the victims of a systematic genocidal policy since the creation of the Iraqi state.’<sup>48</sup>

According to various authors, this has caused two major problems. The first is the creation of a hegemonic political discourse that narrates a story of ‘national suffering’ but in the end has overlooked the narratives of Anfal victims and survivors at the local level. Emphasizing the victimhood of the entire Iraqi-Kurdish nation it has also foregrounded the martyrdom of the *peshmergas* (while obscuring their defeat and undermined masculinity) in a way that does not fit the official narrative. The martyred *peshmerga* have thus become powerful symbols of the Kurdish liberation movement, and have been used to legitimize the local government.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the

civil war between the main Kurdish parties in the 1990s has been downplayed in official statements, as it could have the potential to deconstruct the hegemonic Kurdish nationalist victim narratives. Second, this official political discourse has neglected the role played by the Kurdish paramilitary groups (*jash*) that participated in Ba'ath regime's efforts to suppress Kurdish dissent.<sup>50</sup> More recent accounts of Kurdish militia collaboration with the Ba'ath regime, however, have focused attention on Anfal survivors' claims and have seen collaborators' amnesties withdrawn.<sup>51</sup> How the collective memory has been instrumentalized has become more evident particularly in the post-2003 period. For instance, as Tejel shows, even the 'textbooks produced by the KRG were modified, if not reconstructed, after the fall of the regime to reflect the Kurds' vision of nation-building'. The Anfal campaign has become a highly salient milestone in Kurdish nationalist narrative.<sup>52</sup>

In 2006, the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs was established by the Kurdish Regional Government.<sup>53</sup> According to one of its former ministers, Aram Ahmed Mohamed<sup>54</sup>, the ministry's key tasks are to cooperate with other authorities to provide care for the families of the victims and the disappeared and those who were political prisoners during the Saddam regime, to search for the disappeared and return bodies found in mass graves to family members, as well as to hold commemorative events.<sup>55</sup> Such activities are locally orientated in the sense that they emphasize the provision of care for the victims of Anfal and aim to keep the memory of it alive.<sup>56</sup> However, Mlodoch argues that victim narratives have been excluded from the official narratives on Anfal and Halabja, and that the victims' and survivors' immediate needs have been largely ignored. As she further elaborates: 'Since their claims and needs remain unaddressed and their voices are excluded from public discourse, they feel increasingly disappointed and alienated from both the Iraqi national and the Kurdish regional political process.' This disappointment in return has deepened the psychological suffering of the Anfal survivors.<sup>57</sup>

Disputes surfaced when the monument of Halabja martyrs was established in 2003.<sup>58</sup> It received fierce criticism from the local population, and ended up being destroyed by a group of citizens, who criticized the KRG for having made political hay out of the memory of the massacre,

while declining to provide meaningful support to the local population. Indeed, Watts suggests that ‘Halabja was the centrepiece of the broader institutionalization of Kurdish martyrdom embodied in the Ministry of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs’ and further continues that: ‘all constituted authorities’ efforts to control how Halabja would be remembered and represented in the public sphere and to ensure that it could be used to reinforce the notion of Kurdish rule as the only appropriate form of government’.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Mlodoch argues that ‘the current political debate is characterized by competing and conflicting memories and narratives of the past and present with victimhood of past and current violence being a significant argument to legitimate power claims on the national level’.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, scholars also suggest that genocide recognition and secession are intertwined. For instance, Ihsan<sup>61</sup> argues that: ‘The Kurds realized that if they wanted to build a new country and break the cycle of violence in which they lived, they had to deal with their past; further, they needed to investigate the genocides committed against them in the awareness that recognition would smooth the road to self-determination and independence that the Kurds have always travelled.’ Fischer-Tahir also observes that she finds more and more references to the Jewish and Armenian cases in Kurdish documents. They follow the argument that the Jewish population suffered genocide, which then became internationally recognized, and which led to the creation of the Jewish nation-state.<sup>62</sup> However, the opposite argument has also been made, for instance by Gavriel Mairone an attorney representing nearly 4,000 Anfal victims. He argues that it is not genocide recognition that will enable self-determination, but rather Kurdish independence that will enable the Kurds to bring Anfal to international courts for compensation when an eventual Kurdish state joins the United Nations.<sup>63</sup> The accounts of interviewed members of diaspora organizations also resonate with this observation, whereas KRG officials avoided referring to any secessionist claims.

The legitimization of rule takes place at the KRG level, and does not for the moment being extend to secessionist claims, contrary to other cases of GRP in Akhbazia, South Ossetia or Kosovo, where the circumstances for such claims have been favourable.<sup>64</sup> A close examination of

the official statements shows that the KRG emphasizes the need to raise awareness and increase the visibility of Kurds and the Kurdish cause in the international arena, also evident in its efforts to lobby for the recognition of Anfal as genocide via its offices in European countries. A KRG minister, Sabah Ahmed Mohamed, lists seven desired objectives tied to genocide recognition, including among others raising awareness<sup>65</sup>, prevention of similar crimes in future, and – most interestingly – ‘enforcing the move from the concept of absolute sovereignty to conditional sovereignty’. By conditional sovereignty it is meant that ‘states must accept the responsibility to protect their people or face intervention by the international community.’<sup>66</sup>

Interviews with the KDP’s head of Foreign Office, Hemin Hawrami, and the Head of the Department of Foreign Relations, Falah Mustafa Bakir, also confirm these aims. For instance, Hemin Hawrami, accounts that they seek international recognition because the Anfal campaigns were also a crime against humanity, thus resonating with the KRG’s framing of the politics of genocide recognition as a way of preventing of further genocides. He further suggests that had Halabja been recognized as an act of genocide a decade ago, no party would have dared to use poison gas in Syria today.<sup>67</sup> Falah Mustafa Bakir also states that any effort to commemorate events creates awareness of the plight of Kurds and contributes to prevention of future atrocities in the region. Calling for justice and awareness, the KRG’s official website states: ‘It is imperative that the world recognizes that genocide was perpetrated over decades, culminating in the Anfal operation of February to September 1988, and that we send out a clear message that genocide should never happen again.’<sup>68</sup> Indeed according to scholars such as Tejel and Fischer-Tahir, this is exactly the message that the KRG aims to convey. The genocide happened while the world was watching and thus without further effort the risk of recurrence will remain.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, as Mlodoch<sup>70</sup> suggests: ‘The Anfal and the memory of [it] has a high importance for the Kurdish political elite and society in the process of legitimating their claims for autonomy, for power-sharing on a national level and for international guarantees of Kurdish rights’.

The KRG’s official documents formulate demands for genocide recognition within the

framework of human rights, restorative justice, and genocide prevention instead of referring to an eventual secession. Although the official statements mention that the Iraqi High Tribunal as well as the Iraqi Parliament have already recognized these atrocities as genocide, the reason why further official recognition is needed remains unarticulated. The reasoning behind the recognition demands are articulated in the frame of human rights and genocide prevention that speaks to a certain caution in terms of international relations, visible in the formulation of Anfal in the websites of KRG representation bureaux. For instance, the section ‘Why the need for recognition’” on the website of the KRG representation in the United Kingdom makes no reference to secession, but concludes with the following sentence: ‘the people of Kurdistan are forward-looking and want to build their lives and their country. But they cannot forget what befell their people. Help their voice to be heard.’<sup>71</sup> However, this is not to say that the current discourses of the Anfal campaign and the call for its recognition as genocide could not be instrumentalized at some particular moment and employed as a justification for secession at the international arena.

We argue that the official statements of the KRG that deal with Anfal campaigns and genocide recognition need to be understood within the frame of the ongoing nation-building processes that are domestically orientated. For the time being the initiatives neither evoke secession nor explicitly link the genocide recognition to aspirations towards independence. For instance, none of the interviewed politicians mentioned a link between genocide recognition and secession, although President Masoud Barzani’s speech on the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Barzani killings<sup>72</sup> point out to a potential emerging link between the genocide and independence: ‘independence is the truest loyalty to the blood of Anfal martyrs’.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the formulation of GRP and the related discourses in the case of Anfal can be considered a part of the nation-building mechanisms and a part of a repertoire of tools to ascertain the legitimacy of KRG rule. Furthermore, such discourse on Anfal enhances the sense of belonging to an ethnic community that has experienced a ‘collective trauma’. With the relative economic wealth and societal stability that the region has experienced in the post-2003 period until very recently, the fact of contrasting the situation in the late 2000s to late

1980s and the oppressive measures by Hussein's regime allow constructing a 'rise from the ashes'-kind of success story. This can then galvanize nationalist feelings and enable the political actors to rekindle calls for unity. Employing Anfal as the common reference point for a traumatic history also allows the bridging of the diaspora and the KRG bureaux of representation via coordinated commemoration practices and provides platforms for political claims-making aimed at salient actors in host societies' political circles.

### *Anfal as the 'Chosen Trauma'*

The KRG's official statements and the interviewees' accounts on Anfal not only emphasized increasing awareness, prevention of further massacres and reconciliation as central reasons for recognition, but they also put forth the significance of remembering. Indeed, the formulation of genocide recognition initiatives and the evoking of the Anfal campaigns focuses on commemorative practices that evoke past injustices, and to local-level rehabilitation practices for victims, although their impact can be contested.<sup>74</sup> In this respect, we contend that Vamik Volkan's theory of *chosen trauma* is valid for the Iraqi Kurdish case. It refers to 'a shared mental representation of a traumatic past event during which the large group suffered loss and/or experienced helplessness, shame and humiliation in a conflict with another group'.<sup>75</sup> According to Volkan, the chosen trauma changes function and becomes more than a memory over generations — it unites and becomes a significant group marker of ethnic identity that can then be reactivated by political leaders to reconfirm such identity. In his words, 'chosen traumas are recalled during the anniversary of the original event, and the ritualistic commemoration helps to bind the members of the large group together.'<sup>76</sup> The Iraqi Kurds' chosen trauma is, in this view, the Anfal campaigns, as these constitute a crucial part of the nation-building narrative. More importantly, contrary to other cases where the trauma and suffering of mass atrocities have become a 'chosen amnesia'<sup>77</sup> used to move forward and facilitate reconciliation, the interviewees' considered international recognition as fundamental to reconciliation. The politics of genocide recognition are thus articulated and formulated in relation to

traumatic events that structure collective memory both in the homeland context as well as in the diaspora. Yet the interpretations of such traumatic events and how they are employed to make political claims can vary between homeland political actors and diaspora members.

Anderson Paul<sup>78</sup> argues that genocidal memory is important in providing a cohesive group ideology, both in the homeland and in diaspora. Catic<sup>79</sup> also refers to Volkan's 'chosen trauma' to show how the collective memory of genocide can be used as a mechanism to keep the diaspora and homeland connection intact. A shared experience of collective suffering and its legacy can help to maintain and even strengthen a link between the diaspora and the national identity as constructed in homeland context. On the other hand, the interpretation of the genocidal persecution between the local population and the diaspora can vary significantly. For instance, the massacres that form the focal point of GRP may have led to mass migration from the homeland and to the formation of a diaspora community in exile that now actively engages in genocide recognition politics. The diaspora members might have first-hand experience of the massacre and it can become narrated as part of the exiled condition and reasons that led to it. As Khayati suggests: 'By regularly evoking a number of salient utterances relating to discrimination, the politics of denial, assimilation, persecution, maltreatment, massacre, destruction, *Anfal*, gas attacks, forced displacement, and so on, the mainstream Kurdish diaspora discourse is a way not only of recalling those experiences of trauma and oppression in Kurdistan but also of legitimizing escaping from them.'<sup>80</sup> In this way, the commemoration practices have a social and possibly a psychological function in the sense that they can provide legitimization for the exiled condition.

Commemoration practices as part of genocide recognition initiatives ought to be understood in the context of collective identity narratives and dominant diaspora discourses that stem from experiences of denial, injustice and resistance. As Khayati<sup>81</sup> suggests the 'dominant discourse of victim diaspora' can be found in 'all Kurdish political organizations and socio-cultural institutions and networks in Western societies'. Narratives on traumatic events, namely of *Anfal*, have become an integral component of how (Iraqi) Kurdish diaspora organizations formulate collective identity

narratives and employ them in representations of collective histories. In this case, the KRG representative to France makes an interesting remark, which shows how the discourses of Anfal take shape in the transnational space: 'Have you ever seen a Kurd who is not politicized? It is not possible. It is not a choice. So they are all in a way are politicized. They did not choose that. We talk about the Kurds in France, they all arrived because of the Anfal operation.'<sup>82</sup> Such conflation of the Anfal campaigns with the exiled condition allows the construction of an emotionally powerful narrative for diaspora members to contextualize their exiled condition, but also to take part in genocide recognition politics and via such practices to maintain a symbolic connection to the imagined homeland.

The commemoration practices around the Anfal campaigns and particularly the Halabja massacre take place annually, and illustrate the extent to which Anfal has become the 'chosen trauma' both in the homeland as well as within the diaspora. In the former, exile has led to the creation of politically active diaspora organizations, parties and groups that operate transnationally, while cultural and social events as well as political seminars have paved the way for diaspora gatherings, and genocide recognition initiatives. Besides commemoration practices, participating in recognition initiatives has enabled diaspora members to contribute to the homeland's nation-building efforts and to strengthen the ties between the diaspora organizations and homeland actors.

### **Internationalization of the Genocide Recognition Claims for Anfal**

The Iraqi National Assembly recognized the Anfal campaign as a genocide in 2008. However, the KRG as well as the victims have been dissatisfied with the tribunal process. Survivors especially continue to demand that the Anfal campaigns be recognized internationally as genocide. Genocide recognition in European parliaments and the official governmental approvals that follow can thus represent what Mlodoch calls 'a symbolic closure' for the Kurds.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, survivors have demanded that international companies that supplied chemical gas to Saddam's regime be

brought to justice. Mlodoch argues that reconstructing these traumatic memories and making them part of one's identity can pave the way for reaching closure with past events. While impunity of the perpetrators may inhibit this process and prolong suffering, punishing the perpetrators may facilitate healing and moving on from the past.<sup>84</sup>

Besides the KRG and its bureaux of representation, diaspora organizations also play a role in the process of pushing these claims further. Diaspora Kurds — mainly from Iraq, but also from elsewhere — have mobilized (with some success) in different host countries to lobby for the recognition of Anfal as genocide.<sup>85</sup> Wide-scale protests were organized against the Saddam Hussein regime and to contest the situation of Kurds fleeing massacres right after the Gulf War. During and immediately after the Anfal campaign, diaspora Kurds organized protests including marches, petitions, sit-ins, hunger strikes and take-overs of embassies, and highlighted the responsibilities of the international community to recognize the Anfal campaigns as genocide. However, the Kurdish diaspora is far from being a homogenous and the pre-existing fragmentations within it are reflected in diaspora lobbying activities. Such efforts have mainly taken place in collaboration between the ruling parties in KRG and diaspora organizations that are affiliated with them.

The diaspora lobbying and the coordinated efforts with the KRG bureaux of representation in different European countries have led to the internationalization of genocide recognition claims for the Anfal campaigns. KRG politicians frequently organize visits to diaspora members and organizations to encourage more active lobbying to host country governments and parliaments.<sup>86</sup> These activities have not only provided means to raise awareness of the Kurds' situation in Iraq, but they have also enabled the KRG and its bureaux all around the world to create platforms of solidarity with host-country policy-makers. For instance, in 2012, several diaspora organizations, including the Confederation of Kurdish Association in Europe (KON-KURD), Kurdocide Watch (CHAK), and the Kurdistan National Congress organized a high-profile conference, 'The Halabja Genocide and Anfal Campaigns', at the European Parliament.<sup>87</sup> A year later, a three-day exhibition commemorating the massacre was opened in the parliament.<sup>88</sup> In early 2016, the Center for Kurdish

Progress organized an event to commemorate the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the massacre at the British Parliament.<sup>89</sup>

As far as the international recognition is concerned, the Norwegian<sup>90</sup> and Swedish parliaments formally recognised Anfal as genocide in 2012. In the case of Sweden, the passing of the vote was attributed to the efforts of diaspora Kurds in the country, who organized awareness raising campaigns and lobbied Swedish members of parliament. Kurdish diaspora in Sweden has been very active since the formation of the diaspora in the 1970s. There are many Kurdish-origin MPs in the Swedish Parliament, and in the case of the genocide recognition, Jabbar Amin from the Green Party and Amineh Kakkaveh from the Leftist Party were extremely influential in creating massive support in their political parties despite a few rejections.<sup>91</sup> Swedish MPs, including Fredrik Malm from the People's Party (*Folkpartiet*) also gave support to the motion, which passed unanimously in the Parliament.<sup>92</sup> Malm was also present at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Anfal Genocide Conference in London alongside British, French and Norwegian politicians.

The interviewees' accounts foregrounded the translocal circulation of political techniques and discourses between homeland actors and diaspora organizations via bureaux of representation. They also showcased how the recognition initiatives enabled the establishment of political networks with local political actors, including Swedish, Norwegian or British MPs, some of them having a diaspora background themselves. For instance, the UK KRG representation together with Kurdish umbrella and student organizations coordinated their efforts to push for recognition. Furthermore, the KRG office has been working closely with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Iraqi Kurdistan towards achieving international recognition of the Kurdish genocide. A Kurdish-origin MP from the Conservative Party, Nadhim Zahawi started a petition, which received more than 27,000 signatures from British citizens and residents.<sup>93</sup> The petition referred to the UK's role as the 'promoter of international values', while at the same time calling for recognition:

We urge the Government to recognise formally the Genocide against the people of Iraqi Kurdistan and to encourage the EU and UN to do likewise.

This will enable Kurdish people, many in the UK, to achieve justice for their considerable loss. It would also enable Britain, the home of democracy and freedom, to send out a message of support for international conventions and human rights.

After the petition exceeded 10,000 signatures, the British Parliament voted to formally recognise Anfal as a genocide in 2013.<sup>94</sup> However, to date the government has not recognized this decision, and it has remained in the House of Commons with Government taking the following position: 'It remains the Government's view that it is not for governments to decide whether genocide has been committed in this case, as this is a complex legal question.' Parliament was very hesitant even when discussing the recognition of the Armenian genocide, finally deciding upon the current policy of non-recognition despite the Armenian diaspora's lobbying efforts.<sup>95</sup> The petition and its passing to the House of Commons can still be considered a success although the KRG representative to London states that parliamentary recognitions are not the ultimate aim because the real aim is to get the genocide bills recognized by governments, which is yet to take place.<sup>96</sup> The KRG also has a genuine interest in contributing to genocide prevention efforts by raising awareness of the atrocities and their consequences against civil populations, especially in the region that is prone to spiralling violence. Therefore, even if the KRG cannot receive an official recognition as desired, they can still use the visibility gained and parliamentary acknowledgements in negotiations for military support from international community, as they have done with Germany, while pursuing a self-defence war against the ISIS.

At times, political interests and aims have become favourable to recognition claims. Emphasizing Saddam Hussein's crimes was in the interests of both Iraqi Kurds and the British political circles, who wished to portray the invasion of Iraq in a positive light. The (partial) recognition enabled British political parties to provide an alternative story about the invasion of Iraq. For instance, the former KRG representative to the UK, Bayan Sami Abdulrahman refers to the invasion as 'Kurdish liberation', while the Kurdish-origin parliamentarian Nadhim Zahawi

endorses Tony Blair as the ‘liberator of the Kurds’.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, Gary Kent, the director of the APPG on Iraqi Kurdistan writes: ‘The UK is seen by the KRG as a partner of choice and now more and more Brits realize that this has to be a two-way street’.<sup>98</sup> In this way, lobbying activities also strengthen diplomatic relations between the two parties and open channels for paradiplomacy, particularly in cases the political interests happen to coincide.

On the other hand, in the Netherlands, where the KRG does not have official representation, the political parties such as the KDP, PUK and the Gorran Party have mobilized separately via affiliated diaspora organizations. This fragmentation among the political parties is also reflected in diaspora intra-group relations, which can eventually hinder strong mobilization as a united front. The lack of the KRG representation in the Netherlands has also made it harder for the diaspora organizations to come together for lobbying activities. Despite these constraints, a Kurdish initiative in the Hague — with the help of the Socialist Party — gained momentum in 2012-2013 and managed to collect 2,000 signatures for Halabja commemoration monument to be erected in the Hague. With the involvement of the Iraqi Embassy and several Kurdish diaspora organizations, the project was organized as a citizens’ initiative. Finally, the monument saw the daylight in the garden of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons building, the location surely being symbolically significant. The monument gathers Dutch politicians from different parties, Iraqi diplomats, journalists, activists and Kurdish diaspora members in an annual commemoration event for Halabja victims. It has brought visibility to Halabja and sustained interest in the plight of the Kurds in the city, where the international court and organizations are centered. This is significant in the sense that the transnational advocacy networks that have been created via Anfal-related lobbying activities (among others) have also enabled discussing other politically pertinent issues. Notably, the existing contacts between political parties and networks have enabled discussing convoys of military support to the KRG in its combat against ISIS.

However, when asked about the possibility of genocide recognition, members of the KDP affiliated diaspora organization in the Netherlands did not seem optimistic about the near future.

According to the president of the Kurdish-Dutch Business Club (KDBC), Bakir Lashkari, Kurds need to take the Jewish diaspora as a role model and strive for unity despite political differences when lobbying for Anfal's recognition, arguing that it is more of a human rights issue than a political one. He points to the fragmentations within the diaspora as a barrier for further collaboration.<sup>99</sup> Interviewed KDP representatives in the Netherlands also seconded this view.<sup>100</sup> An MP from the Socialist Party, Harry van Bommel, who is usually referred to as 'the friend of the Kurds'<sup>101</sup>, recounted how the fragmentation between the Kurdish political groups in the Netherlands surfaced in the case of the Halabja monument. He tells how the project was kept as a 'citizen's initiative' till the end, which paved the way for successful lobbying, even though each Kurdish political party tried to hijack the initiative.<sup>102</sup> This also points towards the political struggles and divisions that exist among diaspora organizations that are affiliated with the ruling parties, and to the fact that the political stakes are high, as these initiatives might eventually pave the way for the official recognition in the Netherlands, as argued by van Bommel. When asked about the impact of a potential recognition, he said:

first of all, it would be an important step towards recognising the Kurdish entity. It would mean a lot to other European countries because they are all looking at each other ... It would improve the diplomatic relations between the KRG and the Netherlands. It would strengthen the position of the Kurdish community in the Netherlands.<sup>103</sup>

Interviewees from KDP-affiliated diaspora organization in the Netherlands, business associations and KOMKAR<sup>104</sup> also mentioned that no political party would bring Kurdish-related issues to the parliament without the agreement of Turkey as they have a very large Turkish-origin voter base. This was especially the case for the Labour Party that has several MPs of Turkish origin. There was a strong belief that Turkey would protest any decision that would benefit the Kurds. Another factor that was mentioned for the delay of even having a parliamentary debate on the recognition was the eventual liability of Dutch companies and the risk of having to pay

compensations. Indeed, in 2005, a Dutch citizen, Frans Van Anraat, was prosecuted by the Dutch Court for selling chemicals that were used to produce poison gas, then later employed in Halabja. Van Anraat was found guilty of genocide charges, but the charges were dropped in the Court of Appeals in the Hague. Instead he was charged ‘for complicity in the participation of violations of the laws and customs of war for selling chemicals to Saddam Hussein’s regime’ and sentenced to seventeen years of imprisonment.<sup>105</sup> Interviewees underlined that he was not the only Dutch businessman, who was involved in selling chemicals to the Iraqi Regime and that there were more, who were yet to be prosecuted.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the fact that a well-known Dutch oil company had greater invested interests in Baghdad than the Iraqi Kurdish Region was mentioned by interviewees from the KDP representation as a possible reason for the Netherlands’ reluctance to recognize Anfal as a genocide.

The Netherlands is not the only country, where the question of liability for the Anfal massacres has been raised. In 2013, Iraqi Kurds in France sued French companies for their involvement in the chemical attack; namely, having supplied Saddam Hussein with poison gas in 1988.<sup>107</sup> Also the complicity of German corporations in providing chemicals to Saddam has been debated and questioned.<sup>108</sup> Secret government documents that were revealed in 2011 in Britain showed the extent to which the British government was reluctant to take action against Hussein due to the involvement of a British firm in a trade agreement.<sup>109</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) also reports the following:

The extent to which Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Britain was responsible for arming Saddam’s Iraq was revealed in 2011, when secret government files from 1981 were made public. The documents show Thatcher's approval of large military contracts with Iraq and her turning a blind eye to ongoing private sales of allegedly “non-lethal” military equipment. According to the documents, she sought to “exploit Iraq's potentialities as a promising market for the sale of defence equipment”.<sup>110</sup>

In this regard, diaspora Kurds have also criticized the involvement and responsibility of their host countries (and companies operating within such countries) in the massacre in question, thus at times pushing towards genocide recognition while asserting the responsibility of their host societies. According to Kendal Nezan, the head of the Kurdish Institute in Paris, it was France that brought the issue of Anfal to the international attention. He posits that once Iraqi authorities recognized it as genocide, it should not have been too challenging to have it recognized elsewhere as well. Also a member of the KRG representation to France considers the official recognition of genocide unlikely in near future due to political reasons, although France was involved in the creation of a no-fly zone. The KRG representation in France has managed to bring visibility to Anfal by soliciting MPs from different political parties and raising media visibility via *Le monde* and *Herald Tribune*.<sup>111</sup> However, pushing for the recognition, according to Kendal, remains the KRG's duty more than the diaspora's.<sup>112</sup>

Coinciding with the interviews mentioned above, four victims of Halabja came to France to sue two French companies due to their supply of poison gas to Saddam Hussein in 1988. According to the victims' lawyer, who was representing more than seven hundred victims at the time, more than twenty French companies were involved in trade with Hussein's regime.<sup>113</sup> Nezan mentions the Holocaust victims as an example citing that they even managed to sue railways companies for the damages and this could be exemplary for the Kurdish demands. More cases are reported to have been opened in Germany and the Netherlands<sup>114</sup>, which can also partially explain Germany's reluctance to take steps towards recognition. The German parliament has condemned the atrocities against Kurds, but has not to this date officially referred to Anfal as a genocide. The Kurdish interviewees considered this unlikely as German companies have been accused to sell poison gas to the Saddam's regime.<sup>115</sup> Simultaneously, various NGOs, such as WADI, have attempted to push Germany for recognition of responsibility, but no considerable progress has been made so far.<sup>116</sup>

As discussed above, many European companies have supplied chemical gas or other weapons that enabled the Iraqi regime to pursue a genocidal attack against the Kurds, which raises

serious questions of liability. Simultaneously, the international community's approach often seems to consist of taking the position that instead of governments, only a judicial body can make such decisions on the recognition claims.<sup>117</sup> The lobbying efforts have only turned out to be successful when there has been visible leadership by the KRG or when the diaspora members and organizations have acted in a unified manner ignoring the underlying ideological differences, and when the political interests have coincided. Nevertheless, it can be said that the genocide recognition efforts have been internationalized due to active diaspora lobbying. More importantly, the politics of genocide recognition have enhanced the KRG's paradiplomacy ability and enabled Kurdish political actors to establish strong contacts in host country political circles and transnational advocacy networks.

### **Conclusions**

In this paper, we have examined the framework in which the politics of genocide recognition emerged and diffused in the case of the Anfal campaigns and how they relate to issues of secession, legitimization of Kurdish self-rule in the KRI, and commemoration. We have argued that the KRG's claims for recognition of Anfal as a genocide need to be situated in the context of the current nation-building processes, as this is very likely to move towards a quest for self-determination. We suggest that the Anfal campaigns have become the 'chosen trauma' that serve domestically to underwrite a sense of shared history and a collective belonging to a nation that has fallen victim to genocidal persecution. The interviewed KRG politicians articulated claims for genocide recognition without alluding to secession, yet the official discourse on Anfal has been used to legitimize KRG self-rule in the context of Iraq's post-2005 structure of political federalism. This does not rule out the scenario that provided the political circumstances in the region become favourable to Kurdish independence, Anfal-related narratives can be instrumentalized and employed to justify secessionist claims.

Second, we have shown how the claims for Anfal being recognized as a genocide have been internationalized via the efforts of KRG bureaux of representation and diaspora organizations. They are articulated through human rights and justice-based arguments, yet they also need to be understood in the context of the ongoing nation-building processes in the KRI, to be able to assess the underlying political drivers. Indeed, it can be argued that genocide recognition politics are not only being used to legitimize local rule in the KRI, but they bring legitimacy to Kurdish actors and strengthen their diplomatic relations outside the Kurdish region. Commemoration events serve to raise awareness of past atrocities in host societies, and more importantly operate as platforms to create and foster transnational advocacy networks between the triad of homeland, host society and diaspora organizations affiliated with the homeland political parties. Efforts for recognition enable the government to contribute to nation-building initiatives while at the same time keeping the diaspora-homeland bonds intact. Furthermore, a genocidal memory of Anfal as a ‘chosen trauma’ is nurtured in the homeland context, as well as in the diaspora, thus providing an emotionally powerful narrative to take part in GRP.

The recognition of Anfal as a genocide is highly complex and politically sensitive in Europe, where large Kurdish diaspora communities reside. The issues of liability and indirect involvement in Anfal campaigns by several host societies hinder host states’ willingness to recognize the massacres as genocide. Whereas the host societies provide political liberties to mobilize and to engage in GRP, the actual recognition of certain massacres as genocide can be further complicated or predicated upon the (in)direct involvement of host countries in the massacre in question. Although successful at the parliamentary level, with few exceptions genocide bills have yet to pass the governmental level, mostly for reasons related to avoiding legal liability for arming the Saddam regime. Therefore, the success of recognition in a few parliaments remains largely symbolic rather than a development that would bring justice and material reparations to the victims. It appears that genocide recognition is treated as a political matter that involves strategic calculations and the dangerous terrain of liability — rather than solely as an issue of human rights.

The recognition by the international community could surely be instrumentalized towards demands for earned sovereignty in the near future. However, what seems to be more crucial for the KRG at this stage is the process of consolidating their institutionalized status via genocide recognition initiatives, which allows creating better relations with European politicians, human rights activists and parliaments, enhancing the KRG's paradiplomacy ability, and forming channels to better economic, political and social relations with the above-mentioned actors. The diaspora as a transnational non-state entity provides a significant extension to the lobbying practices at the international arena and is able to make more direct claims for recognition by host societies compared to the KRG, which holds a semi-state status. In addition to commemoration practices, skilfully executed GRP can create waves of solidarity with wider segments of host societies' politicians, civil society organizations and human rights activists. These (transnational) networks and how they are contextually configured also determine whether actors engaging in GRP, be they diaspora organizations, members or homeland actors, are successful in their claims for recognition. Due to the lack of international recognition of Anfal as a genocide (and consequently the absence of compensation), the extent to which the symbolic support and transnational advocacy networks can become instrumentalized if the political circumstances become favourable for Kurdish independence remains to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Walton, 'Framing disputes and organizational legitimation: UK-based Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora groups' use of the "genocide" frame since 2009', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 6, 2014, pp. 959-975.

<sup>2</sup> Bahar Baser, 'The awakening of a latent diaspora: the political mobilization of first and second generation Turkish migrants in Sweden', *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2014, pp. 355-376.

<sup>3</sup> Francois Adriaan Wolvaardt, 'Genocide, diasporic identity and activism: the narratives, identity and activism of Armenian-Australians and Turkish-Australians regarding the recognition of the deaths of Armenians during the First World War as genocide' (PhD Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2007); Rachel Paul Anderson, 'Grassroots mobilization and diaspora politics: Armenian interest groups and the role of collective memory', *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics* Vol. 6, No. 1, 2000, pp. 24-47; Maja Catic, 'Circassians and the politics of genocide recognition', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 10, 2015, pp. 1685-1708.

<sup>4</sup> Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, 'Diasporas and international relations theory', *International Organization*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 2003, pp. 449-479.

<sup>5</sup> While the KRG President Masoud Barzani has made such declarations on several occasions, the referendum has been postponed for years. For more information, see Jordi Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks and curriculum reform in Iraqi Kurdistan within a conflict transformation frame: Dealing with the past from a processual and dynamic perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 14, 2015, p. 2569.

<sup>6</sup> Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', p. 2577.

<sup>7</sup> The interviews are conducted by the first author as a part of a larger project funded by the European Research Council under Grant no: XXX.

<sup>8</sup> The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) is currently the largest political party in the KRG.

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- <sup>9</sup> Catic, 'Circassians and the politics of genocide recognition'.
- <sup>10</sup> See Eugenia Zorbas, 'Reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda', *African Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, pp. 29-52.
- <sup>11</sup> See Jennifer M. Dixon, 'Defending the nation? Maintaining Turkey's narrative of the Armenian genocide', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2010, pp. 467-485.
- <sup>12</sup> Brian Grodsky, 'When two ambiguities collide: the use of genocide in self-determination drives', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2012, p. 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Catic, 'Circassians and the politics of genocide recognition', p. 1706.
- <sup>14</sup> Grodsky, 'When two ambiguities collide', p. 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Philip S. Hadji, 'The case for Kurdish statehood in Iraq', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2009, p. 521.
- <sup>16</sup> However, not all groups seek international recognition to advance separation claims, but they can be motivated by claims for restorative justice, as was shown by the Assyrian diaspora's successful lobbying to Swedish Parliament that passed a bill on the Assyrian genocide.
- <sup>17</sup> Catic, 'Circassians and the politics of genocide recognition', p. 1686.
- <sup>18</sup> Anderson Paul, 'Grassroots mobilization and diaspora politics'.
- <sup>19</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 5-6.
- <sup>20</sup> For a critical account on the evolution of Kurdish movements and their situation in Iraq, see Tejel, 'The potential of history text books', pp. 2572-2574.
- <sup>21</sup> Lisa Pelling, *Post-remittances? On transnational ties and migration between the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and Sweden*. PhD Thesis, (University of Vienna, 2013).
- <sup>22</sup> McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 372-373, 387-388.
- <sup>23</sup> Institut kurde de Paris (Kurdish Institute of Paris), 'Diaspora kurde', (2016).
- <sup>24</sup> Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq. The Anfal campaign against the Kurds*. (New York: Middle East Watch, 1993), p. 6-7.
- <sup>25</sup> Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq*, p. 26-27.

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<sup>26</sup> Karin Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory, competing narratives: The perspective of women survivors of the Anfal operations in Iraqi Kurdistan', in Jordi Tejel, Peter Sluglett, Riccardo Bocco and Hamit Bozarslan (eds) *Writing the modern history of Iraq. Historiographical and political challenges*. (London: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2012) p. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq. The Anfal campaign against the Kurds*. (New York: Middle East Watch, 1993). See also Tejel, 'The potential of history text books', p. 2574 and Fischer-Tahir, 'Searching for sense: The concept of genocide as part of knowledge production in Iraqi Kurdistan' in Jordi Tejel et al. *Writing the Modern History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*.

<sup>28</sup> Middle East Watch, *Genocide in Iraq*, p. 102-108.

<sup>29</sup> Khalid Khayati, *From victim diaspora to transborder citizenship. Diaspora formation and transnational relations among Kurds in France and Sweden*. PhD Thesis, (Linköping University, Sweden, 2008), p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> Elaine Sciolino, 'Kurdish chief gains support in U.S. visit', *New York Times*, 22 June 1988.

<sup>31</sup> Rajiv Ch, 'Powell says gas attack on Kurds Justified War"', *The Washington Post*, 16 September 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Kelly, *Ghosts of Halabja: Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish genocide*. (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008). Michael Kelly, 'The Anfal trial against Saddam Hussein', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, pp. 235-242. Michael Kelly, 'Genocide: the power of a label', *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 2007, pp. 147-162.

<sup>33</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 224.

<sup>34</sup> Mlodoch. 'Fragmented memory', p. 224.

<sup>35</sup> Petri Hautaniemi, Marko Juntunen and Mariko Sato, *Return migration and vulnerability: Case studies from Somaliland and Iraqi Kurdistan*. (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2013), p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> Hardy Mohammed, 'L'invention d'un Parlement. Genèse et autonomisation de l'institution

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parlementaire de la Région du Kurdistan irakien 1992-2009. Contribution à une sociologie des institutions politiques'. PhD Thesis, (EHESS, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Hardy Mohammed, 'L'invention d'un Parlement. Genèse et autonomisation de l'institution parlementaire de la Région du Kurdistan irakien 1992-2009. Contribution à une sociologie des institutions politiques'. PhD Thesis, (EHESS, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> The referendum is a sensitive topic in the Kurdish Region and not all Kurds, who reside in the Kurdish Region of Iraq find the declaration of independence timely in the midst of the current crisis. See Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', pp. 2569-2570.

<sup>39</sup> Grodsky, 'When two ambiguities collide', p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Hollie Nyseth Brehm, Christopher Uggen and Jean-Damascène Gasanabo, 'Genocide, justice and Rwanda's Gacaca courts', *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2014, pp. 333-352.

<sup>41</sup> Ihsan, 'Nation building in Kurdistan'.

<sup>42</sup> First author's fieldwork observations in The Hague, October 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Grodsky, 'When two ambiguities collide', p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> One of the main reasons for accepting Halabja as a seminal part of Anfal Campaigns was that it was filmed and photographed by Iranian journalists and others, which proved that the Saddam regime used chemical gas in order to massacre the Kurdish population. We thank the reviewer for highlighting this point.

<sup>45</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory'. P. 211.

<sup>46</sup> Andrea Fischer-Tahir, 'Gendered memories and masculinities: Kurdish peshmerga on the Anfal campaign in Iraq', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2012, p. 108.

<sup>47</sup> Andrea Fischer-Tahir, 'Gendered memories and masculinities', p. 107.

<sup>48</sup> Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', p. 2577.

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<sup>49</sup> Andrea Fischer-Tahir, 'Gendered memories and masculinities', p. 92-114; Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory'; see also Choman Hardi, *Gendered experiences of genocide. Anfal survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*. (Routledge: London/New York, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory'; Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', p. 2577; Fischer-Tahir, 'Searching for sense', p. 243.

<sup>51</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 218. For a critical account on the Kurdish militias collaborating with the Saddam regime see Fischer-Tahir, 'Searching for sense', p. 241.

<sup>52</sup> Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', p. 2576.

<sup>53</sup> 'Halabja in perspective: International recognition of the massacre of Iraq's Kurds as genocide is slowly gaining momentum', KRG Representation to the United Kingdom, 16 March 2014, available at: <http://www.uk.gov.krd/articles/print.aspx?anr=36930&lngnr=12>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>54</sup> 'The untold story: The Kurdish genocide in Iraq' booklet, International conference 17 January 2013, available at: <http://www.justice4genocide.com/downloads/Genocide%20conference%20programme%20FINAL.pdf>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Many people are 'still waiting for the opening of the mass graves found after the fall of the regime, and for evidence, justice and compensation', Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 205.

<sup>56</sup> The KRG also invested in the infrastructure in the region and raised the pensions for Anfal survivors. In 2008, the government gave funds to those affected so that they could rebuild their houses. See Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 216.

<sup>57</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 206.

<sup>58</sup> Nicole F. Watts, 'The role of symbolic capital in protest: state-society relations and the destruction of the Halabja martyrs' monument in the Kurdish region of Iraq', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2012, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Watts, 'The role of symbolic capital in protest', p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', p. 205.

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<sup>61</sup> Mohammed Ihsan, *Nation building in Kurdistan: Memory, genocide and human rights*. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> Fisher-Tahir, 'Searching for sense', p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> 'Independence allows Kurds to officially file genocide', *Kurdistan 24*, March 20. 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Grodsky, 'When two ambiguities collide'.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Falah Mustafa Bakir, Erbil, April 2013.

<sup>66</sup> The official website uses as an official declaration the excerpt from a speech by Sabah Ahmed Mohamed, KRG Minister of Martyrs and Anfal Affairs, at the Mass Graves Conference in London in January 2012, available at: <http://uk.gov.krd/genocide/pages/page.aspx?lngnr=12&smap=140000&pnr=40>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Hamin Hawrami, Erbil, April 2013.

<sup>68</sup> 'Why the need for recognition', the KRG Representation to the United Kingdom, accessed at: <http://uk.gov.krd/genocide/pages/page.aspx?lngnr=12&smap=140000&pnr=39>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Tejel, 'The potential of history textbooks', p. 2577; Fischer-Tahir, 'Searching for sense'.

<sup>70</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', pp. 218-219.

<sup>71</sup> See endnote 57.

<sup>72</sup> 'In 1983, over 8,000 Kurdish men and boys of the Barzani tribe, some as young as 13, were killed by the previous regime in a deliberate attempt to rid the Kurdish communities of adult males of military service age. This ruling comes after a two-year investigation involving 40 sessions led by Judge Asso Mohammed.' See for more information: 'Iraqi Tribunal rules Barzani killings were genocide', 9 May 2011, available at: <http://www.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?a=39925&l=12&r=223&s=010000>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>73</sup> 'Barzani: Independence is the truest loyalty to the blood of Anfal Martyrs', *Rudaw*, 31 July 2016, available at: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/310720166>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

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- <sup>74</sup> Watts, 'The role of symbolic capital in protest'.
- <sup>75</sup> Vamik D. Volkan, 'Transgenerational transmissions and chosen traumas: an aspect of large-group identity', *Group Analysis*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2001, p. 87.
- <sup>76</sup> Volkan, 'Transgenerational transmissions and chosen traumas' p. 88.
- <sup>77</sup> In her article, Buckley-Zistel (2006) demonstrates how Rwandans chose to downplay the traumas of genocide for reconciliation and moving forward. Susanne Buckley-Zistel, 'Remembering to forget: chosen amnesia as a strategy for local co-existence in post-genocide Rwanda', *Africa*, Vol. 76, No. 2, 2006, pp. 131-150.
- <sup>78</sup> Anderson Paul, 'Grassroots mobilization and diaspora politics'.
- <sup>79</sup> Catic, 'Circassians and the politics of genocide recognition', p. 1686.
- <sup>80</sup> Khayati, *From victim diaspora to transborder citizenship*, p. 3. Italics in the original text.
- <sup>81</sup> Khayati, *From victim diaspora to transborder citizenship*, p. 4.
- <sup>82</sup> Interview with KRG Representation, Paris, November 2013.
- <sup>83</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented Memory', p. 209.
- <sup>84</sup> Mlodoch, 'Fragmented memory', pp. 208-209.
- <sup>85</sup> 'Sofia Barbarani, Iraq Kurds press states to recognise genocide', *AlJazeera*, 14 April, 2014, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/04/iraq-kurds-press-states-recognise-genocide-anfal-201441371637191288.html>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.
- <sup>86</sup> For instance, Hemin Hawrami, a Halabja-born politician, who is currently the head of KDP's Foreign Relations Office, mentioned during an interview that he had visited and given talks on the need to have Anfal recognized as genocide in more than twenty-three diaspora organizations within the past eighteen months. Erbil, April 2013.
- <sup>87</sup> 'The Kurdish Genocide: Achieving Justice through EU Recognition', available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/03\\_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja\\_/03\\_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_/03_kurdishgenocidesofanfalandhalabja_en.pdf). Retrieved March 29 2017.

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<sup>88</sup> ‘MEPs remember Halabja chemical attack at exhibition in European Parliament’, 28 March 2013, available at: <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?l=12&a=47051>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Bahar Baser, ‘Remembering Halabja after 28 years’, *Independent Turkey*, 5 April 2016, available at: <http://independentturkey.org/remembering-halabja-after-twenty-eight-years/>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Norwegian Government recognises Saddam Hussein’s genocide’, KRG Official Website, 21 November 2012, available at: <http://uk.gov.krd/articles/detail.aspx?lngnr=12&anr=36740>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Jabbar Amin and Amine Kakbaveh, Stockholm, November, 2012.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Fredrik Malm, Stockholm, November 2012.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Recognition of genocide against the Kurds in Iraq’, available at: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/31014As>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>94</sup> For a detailed discussion on the issue, see the Parliamentary debates at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130228/debtext/130228-0003.htm>.

<sup>95</sup> See the official website, available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/359566/FOI\\_ref\\_0298-14\\_Attachment\\_42.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359566/FOI_ref_0298-14_Attachment_42.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Jamal Tahir, KRG Representative to London, December 2015.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Campaigners in UK win a Parliamentary debate on the Kurdish genocide in Iraq’, 14 February 2013, available at: <https://kurdistancommentary.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/campaigners-in-uk-win-a-parliamentary-debate-on-the-kurdish-genocide-in-iraq/>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>98</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group on Kurdistan, available at: <http://www.appgkurdistan.org.uk/?p=350>.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Bakir Lashkari, Amsterdam, October 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with KDP Representatives, Amsterdam, October 2013.

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<sup>101</sup> “Political friends” is a term coined by one of the interviewees in the Netherlands. Politicians such as Harry van Bommel (Socialist Party- The Netherlands) or Fredrik Malm (Folkpartiet-Sweden) are considered as friends of Kurds, who support Kurdish rights and bring their plight to the parliamentary debates in their respective countries.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with MP Harry von Bommel in The Hague, October 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with MP Harry von Bommel in The Hague, October 2013.

<sup>104</sup> A Kurdish organization that is affiliated to the Socialist Party of Kurdistan. It is founded by Kurds from Turkey but it also appeals to Kurds from Iraq.

<sup>105</sup> ‘The Frans Van Anraat trial’, KRG Website, available at: <http://uk.gov.krd/genocide/pages/page.aspx?lngnr=12&smap=170000&pnr=49>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with the KDP Representatives in Amsterdam, October 2013.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Iraqi Kurds sue French companies for Halabja chemical attack’, 11 June 2013, available at: <http://en.rfi.fr/france/20130611-iraqi-kurds-sue-french-companies-halabja-chemical-attack>.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Kelly, ‘Never again? – Complicity of German chemical corporations in the Kurdish genocide’, *Berkeley Journal of International Law*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2007, p. 364.

<sup>109</sup> Cahal Milmo, ‘Why Britain backed down on banning Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons during Iran war’, *The Independent*, 3 July 2015, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/why-britain-backed-down-on-banning-saddam-husseins-chemical-weapons-during-iran-war-10361917.html>. Retrieved 29 March 2017.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Iraqi Kurdistan: Turning a blind eye to the Anfal genocide’, *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, 17 April 2014.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with KRG Representation, Paris, November 2013.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Kendal Nezan, Paris, November 2013.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Iraqi Kurds sue French companies for Halabja chemical attack’, 11 June 2013, available at: <http://en.rfi.fr/france/20130611-iraqi-kurds-sue-french-companies-halabja-chemical-attack>.

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Iraqi Kurds sue French companies for Halabja chemical attack’, 11 June 2013, available at: <http://en.rfi.fr/france/20130611-iraqi-kurds-sue-french-companies-halabja-chemical-attack>.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with BUN Verein (Gorran Movement), Berlin, May 2013.

<sup>116</sup> WADI is based in Frankfurt, but also has a branch in the KRI. It urges the German parliament to take responsibility and bring German companies to justice.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Iraqi Kurdistan: Turning a blind eye to the Anfal genocide’, *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, 17 April 2014.