

Choman Hardi, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington Vermont: Ashgate, 2011, xii + 217 pp., (ISBN: 978-0-7546-7715-4).

This is a very, very important book. It is important for Kurds and Kurdistan, but not merely. In Choman Hardi's book on the Anfal genocidal attacks and their survivors, we have the most systematic and sympathetic social science study of one of the most brutal and depraved acts of humanity in the late 20th century. And yet this book is not situated or marketed as such. It is part of a series blandly called, "Voices in Development Management." It is only available (in hardcover and e-book) at prices too high for the average consumer (USD 92.47 and 95.96 respectively). By specifying that the experiences she gives voice to are "gendered", it might seem that this book belongs to a subset of the field of Anfal studies. However, Anfal's survivors were disproportionately women, because the Saddam Hussein regime systematically killed men and terrorised women. Anfal itself, not only this book, was highly gendered, and this aspect of it must feature prominently in any analysis of it. The women who speak from Hardi's pages recount incredible horrors. Many of the men associated with them were killed before experiencing further horrors about which they could have spoken. So this is a "gendered" account, true, but more importantly it is an account, and to my knowledge the richest and most detailed available. I hope it is soon re-released at a more affordable price, and marketed appropriately.

Anfal, "The Spoils", was highly-organised and systematic. As Hardi vividly describes, it was a campaign of killing, torturing, displacing, detaining, terrorising, raping, starving, humiliating, and disappearing waged against Kurds and other minorities by the mainly-Sunni Arab government of Saddam Hussein in the late 1980s. Like this book, Anfal should be much better-known. Yet, many members of global publics believe that Saddam Hussein's government did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMD). In so believing, they confuse assertions made about the early 2000s with the late 1980s, for which there is incontrovertible evidence that the Iraqi government not only had WMD, but used them to kill, injure, traumatise and displace hundreds of thousands of people in Kurdistan. The world must continue to learn about and recognise the outrageous fact of both the use of WMD and the campaign of which it was a part, and I believe this book will prove to be a very important resource toward that end. Anfal has received only limited recognition as a genocide from the world's governments (p. 30). One notable recognition came after this book was published, in the form of the British House of Commons' official recognition in 2013 (for which I had the privilege of lobbying during a 2010 parliamentary seminar).

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For this book, Hardi interviewed 71 women and 23 men, and also obtained data from other conversations and meetings between 2005 and 2010 (p. 7). She interviewed most subjects “on camera” (p. 64). She found survivors both eager to talk about their ordeals, but sometimes insistent on telling the story in their own way, rather than with precise responses to the researcher’s questions (p. 9). The book contains seven chapters, which range from a basic introduction to Anfal, to chapters rich with content from the interviews, to reflective and contextual material at the end of the book. Some of the content of the women’s narratives was highly embarrassing or difficult for them to recount, but many pressed ahead despite this. Hardi’s descriptions are unflinching, affording the reader important glimpses into the unfolding of events as experienced during the Anfal campaigns. For example: “Topzawa was buzzing with the people, the shouting soldiers and the various transports that brought some people and took others away. Every day, convoys of vehicles came to take people away, some to mass graves, some to Nugra Salaman in the south of Iraq and others to Dibs. The moment of departure was as chaotic as the moment of arrival. People were brought into the courtyard, pushed into full vehicles and driven away. Topzawa was the last place where most of the women last saw their men” (pp. 51–52).

Hardi makes frequent and useful comparisons to the Holocaust, arguing that many of the techniques and outcomes of Anfal were similar. For example, she notes that both Holocaust and Anfal victims’ suffering was exacerbated if they were pregnant or had children (p. 68). They faced acute danger when giving birth, and their children died in great numbers. Some women even discarded or killed their children when they could not care for them or when they thought the children would be killed by other means anyway. Hardi also points out important differences from the Holocaust, such as the length of time that men spent in detention. In Anfal, men typically spent very little time in detention before being taken to execution sites. Many Anfal detainees were thus held in detention facilities populated by women and children. These comparisons do more than to simply aid in the analysis of the two genocides; they contribute valuably to genocide studies generally.

Not only does this book provide evocative and excruciating testimony of the actual events of Anfal, but it deals equally as strongly with the survivors’ lives and difficulties afterward. Survivors’ struggles range from the psychological to the political. Many struggled to provide for themselves and their children in the early years, and many still struggle as they age. Although the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has paid increasing attention to the Anfal survivors, both in acknowledging their suffering and in the form of cash and other assistance, many survivors have felt that it should have done more.

Many struggle with survivor's guilt. Many struggle with rejection in the wider Kurdish community. The author reports that once, while giving a presentation on Anfal, a young man stood up and said, "We are fed up with hearing about Anfal, we should try to forget it" (p. 160). Perhaps the most vicious type of rejection is reserved for rape victims, or women perceived to have been victims of rape: "How many have been forced to marry and then killed because they were not virgins? Those women's stories will never be told ... Women who were raped live with the burden of silence and the fear of being found out. It is no wonder that during the Anfal trials the Kurdish community managed to convince no woman to talk about being raped ... They cannot admit to having been raped because to do so would damage their reputation and jeopardize their lives" (p. 67).

I wish this book included more-lengthy interview excerpts. The author's technique is to include short quotes of one to a few sentences, and then to summarise the rest of the data in her own words, which is appropriate for an academic text such as this. However, I think there would be great value in readers having access to the full, or nearly full, content of the interviews. So, I hope Hardi will publish another book with this material, or make her notes and interview files available to an archive for long-term preservation. They could be embargoed and thoroughly anonymised (to the extent that this is possible in the case of video) to honour confidentiality promised to the participants.

As I write this, the world is again grappling with genocide in Iraq – relatively small-scale genocides perpetrated by the Islamic State against Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities that may go unrecognised as "official" genocides much as Anfal did in many jurisdictions and as it does in many still. Very likely, some of the perpetrators are the same people, who were once Ba'thists and who now operate under an extremist Islamic banner. I will close with one last hope for this book: that it is translated into Arabic. Iraq is today home to thousands of people who have perpetrated horrific violence on their fellow countrymen. Most have not faced justice, and, sadly, many may never face it. But I hold out hope that, like other perpetrating populations such as that of Germany, at some point wide-spread reflection and soul-searching will commence that leads to contrition and revulsion at what was done. Books like this one can assist in that endeavor. That is among one of the things the victims, both living and dead, deserve. They of course deserve much more still, but bravo to Choman Hardi for doing this courageous research and giving us this detailed account of Anfal's horrors.

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