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COUNTERING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN IRAQI KURDISTAN: STATE-BUILDING AND TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY

Abstract

The struggle against gender-based violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region has witnessed some significant achievements since the late 1990s. A subject long excluded from public discourse in the region, it has now moved increasingly into the mainstream, compelling the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to take legal and practical measures against such practices as honor killings, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence. This article traces the sources of these shifts in the KRG's stance, looking especially at the role of transnational women's rights networks in the region. It highlights these networks' successful strategy of binding their cause to the KRG's endeavor to legitimize and consolidate its contested sovereignty over the Kurdistan Region. In doing so, the paper addresses an underexplored subject in the literature on women's rights campaigns in the Kurdistan Region and contributes to the study of transnational advocacy as a source of normative change.

The formation of de facto Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq in 1991 was a momentous event in contemporary Kurdish history.¹ For the first time the Kurds of Iraq obtained nearly full control over parts of the territory they had historically claimed. A new peak in the long and bloody Kurdish nationalist campaign for self-determination in Iraq, the emergence of this Kurdish de facto state served as a platform for another struggle, that of Kurdish women. From the foundation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Kurdish women's rights activists lobbied it to integrate women into public life and protect their rights.

A central theme in this campaign has been to push for government action against gender-based violence, especially honor killings of women by relatives for alleged extramarital relations and female genital mutilation (FGM). Women's rights networks in Kurdistan have invested tremendous efforts in lobbying the KRG to counter and eliminate such practices, and have made some important gains, particularly since the early 2000s. While in the early 1990s the subject of gender-based violence was rarely discussed openly in the region, during the second decade of Kurdish de facto autonomy in the 2000s, the subject emerged in the forefront of public debates in the region.

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Furthermore, during this period the Kurdish leadership began taking steps to counter violence against women, first with legislation and then gradually through action on the ground.

The interest of social scientists in gender-based violence in the Kurdistan Region has increased in recent years. Some have documented the changing patterns of gender discrimination and of the exclusion of women from the Kurdish public sphere, as well as the evolution of women's participation in the political field.² Others have addressed the relationship between feminist activism and Kurdish nationalism, in both the Kurdistan Region and the diaspora. Nadjé al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, in their examination of feminist activism in the Kurdistan Region, have refuted the tendency to view feminism as necessarily incompatible with nationalism.³ Works by Andrea Fischer-Tahir and Karin Mlodoch have analyzed the relationship between gender and political violence in the Kurdistan region, exploring events such as the Anfal, the genocidal campaign launched by the Ba'ath regime against the Kurdish population during the late 1980s.⁴

Finally, recent studies have highlighted the transnational nature of the campaign against gender-based violence in the Kurdistan Region. Particularly notable has been the work of Shahrzad Mojab on the emerging transnationalism of women's rights activism in the region and its impact. Mojab has documented the influence of cyberspace and new communication technologies in fostering the exchange of information and consequently new forms of activism. Drawing on her own experience, she notes that online forums have become important tools for feminist activists and scholars in the Middle East, especially those who face censorship in their countries, enabling them to communicate with each other and with activists and scholars elsewhere.⁵ Mojab has also highlighted the role played by the Kurdish diaspora in the increasingly transnational Kurdish women's rights networks.⁶ Diaspora activism, as both Mojab and Rachel Gorman have observed, is the product of the construction of Kurdish identity in the diaspora. Kurdish feminist activism has been closely associated with these activists' participation in the state-building process in the Kurdistan Region since 1991.⁷

These studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of gender, politics, and society in the Kurdistan Region. They not only have brought our attention to the reality of gender discrimination and the scale of gender-based violence but have also revealed that Kurdish women are by no means passive victims of this violence. And they have underscored the increasingly transnational nature of women's rights activism in Kurdistan, as well as efforts by conservative elements among the Kurdish elites and the broader society to counter such campaigns.

Yet, this literature leaves some questions unexplored. Most important, few studies have addressed the relationship between the KRG's evolution as a *de facto* state and the success of women's rights activism in pushing for government action. Scholars have not explored the manner in which the development of the KRG as a *de facto* state, struggling to maintain its autonomy in the face of ongoing contestation, has affected sociopolitical progress within the Kurdistan Region or the way in which women's rights activism has shaped and been shaped by it. Recognizing the KRG's status as a *de facto* state is crucial for understanding not only its security policies and (mostly informal) diplomacy but also domestic sociopolitical developments, including those related to civil society activists.

Examining the sources and effects of this activism, I argue here that the successes of the women's rights advocacy network are to a great extent a product of the activists'

ability to adjust their strategies to the KRG's position as a de facto state and their practical reliance on international norms of good governance. In order to understand the achievements of women's rights advocates in persuading the KRG to take action against such practices as honor-based violence and FGM we have to take three factors into account. The first is the KRG's position as a de facto state, which drives its pursuit of international legitimacy. The most effective advocacy groups are those that have been able to link their cause to this pursuit of legitimacy. The second factor is that the women's rights movement has gradually developed into what is known in International Relations (IR) literature as a transnational advocacy network, formed through a coalition of local activists, nongovernmental organizations, diaspora activists, and international organizations. The final, related, factor is the global emergence, toward the end of the Cold War, of government action against gender-based violence as a standard of good governance. The first part of the article elaborates on these factors and demonstrates how they are relevant for understanding the relationship between the KRG and transnational women's rights advocacy. The following sections analyze the development of these networks in the Kurdistan Region and the shifts in the KRG's policies on this issue.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that women's rights activism and the struggle for women's equality in the Kurdistan Region are by no means limited to violence but also include other forms of discrimination, such as polygamy. I have chosen to focus on violence for three reasons. First, the struggle against different forms of gender-based violence has been key for Kurdish feminist activists. As Tanyel Taysi and Sherizaan Minwalla note, "The inseparable issues of women's human rights and manifestations of violence against women are considered to be pressing areas of concern by international and local human rights actors present in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq."⁸ Second, since the 1990s gender-based violence has become an important issue for the global women's rights movement. Many international treaties and conventions have dealt with the subject.⁹ The integration of gender-based violence into human rights discourse and the growing prominence of the struggle against it within the global women's rights movement have facilitated transnational advocacy around the issue in various contexts, including the Kurdistan Region. Finally, the struggle against gender-based violence epitomizes the tension between the desire to secure domestic support among the mostly conservative Kurdish population and the crucial need to satisfy international opinion, which the KRG has faced as a de facto state. Government action against gender-based violence has required the KRG to intervene in the private sphere of society, which has provoked some powerful resistance. This has meant alienating conservative supporters in favor of achieving a foreign policy aim.

DE FACTO STATEHOOD, THE PURSUIT OF LEGITIMACY, AND TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY

The Kurdistan Region emerged as a de facto state in 1991. Under United Nations Security Council Resolution 688, the Iraqi army, following its defeat in the Gulf War, was forced to evacuate the three predominantly Kurdish governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniya, and Dohuk. This was followed by the withdrawal of the Iraqi state apparatus and the imposition of a blockade by the central government. While this situation generated severe economic difficulties in the region, it also served as an opportunity for the

Kurdish nationalist movement to establish its sovereignty over northern Iraq. In 1992 the Kurdistan Front, a loose umbrella organization of the Kurdish guerrilla movements, conducted elections for a regional parliament and presidency. The elections, described by international monitors as relatively free and fair,¹⁰ resulted in a near tie between the two leading Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The two parties formed a coalition government, the KRG, along with a regional parliament (the Kurdistan National Assembly), a judiciary system, and other rudimentary state institutions.

During the mid-1990s, the region was torn by a civil war between the KDP and the PUK that hindered the Kurdish state-building process. However, after the overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 by the U.S.-led coalition, the regional administration was reunified. Based on agreements between the KRG and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), and later the new Iraqi government, the Kurdistan Region was reintegrated into Iraq as a federal region. Yet the KRG achieved a measure of authority over the area that greatly exceeded Baghdad's plans. Since 2003 the KRG has implemented its own foreign and domestic policies almost without intervention from the central Iraqi government. The region experienced an economic boom and, partly due to the KRG's well-trained armed forces (the Peshmerga) and partly to the region's long isolation, was spared the political and sectarian violence that tore up the rest of Iraq and paralyzed the federal government. The KRG was able to conduct regional election campaigns again in 2005 and 2009.

Although the KRG has never declared secession from Iraq, its *de facto* autonomy has triggered fear and opposition in surrounding states. At least until the late 2000s, Iran and Turkey were the most aggressive, fearing the implications of Kurdish autonomy, not to mention secession, for relations with their own Kurdish minority communities. The U.S. and western European governments, although generally sympathetic to the suffering of the Kurdish people, viewed Kurdish secession as a potential cause of instability in this key region.

This position of *de facto* statehood is crucial for understanding the KRG and its decision-making processes. Studies on other nationalist movements that have become *de facto* states, such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Somaliland, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, have underlined the centrality of the pursuit of legitimacy for these actors. Due to the international community's adherence to the principle of territorial integrity, secession is generally understood as a threat to global order. States and international organizations have tended to object not only to secessionist aspirations but also to the right of regional entities to act autonomously. *De facto* states thus face chronic crises of legitimacy.¹¹ For these actors, as Barry Bartmann writes in his study of *de facto* states, "self-justification becomes a foreign-policy priority."¹² Nina Caspersen has argued that *de facto* states often come to rely on what she defined as "earned" sovereignty in their pursuit of legitimacy, that is, on proving their long-term autonomous existence, success in state-building, and ability to meet standards of good governance.¹³ During the post-Cold War era, as democratization, protection of human rights, and political liberalization have become the international norms of good governance and theoretical criteria of the recognition of new states,¹⁴ *de facto* states have made great efforts to prove they have met these standards. Particularly important in this respect has been the 2003 "standards before status" (SBS) policy for Kosovo.

This policy, initiated by the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, introduced democratization and the protection of human and minority rights as explicit criteria of state recognition, in spite of fierce objection by the parent state and other members of the international community.¹⁵

In its effort to offset such attacks, the KRG has embraced two strategies. The first has been the denial of any plans of short-term secession. The second has been to embrace the discourse of earned sovereignty, constantly justifying the Kurdistan Region's sovereignty by pointing to its long-term autonomy, stability, and prosperity. A major aspect of this campaign has been the KRG's claimed success in democratizing and liberalizing its political system and modernizing the Kurdistan Region. Based on the 1992 regional election campaign, the first in Iraq in many decades, Kurdish speakers began referring to the KRG as the "democratic experiment" in their interaction with the international community, an expression that was supplemented by the term "the other Iraq" in the post-2003 era.¹⁶ Throughout the first two decades of its existence, the KRG used public forums to convey its image as a modernizing democracy committed to the protection of the human rights and freedoms of its population, including those of minorities, especially Christians who fled sectarian violence in southern Iraq and found refuge in the Kurdistan Region.¹⁷ In short, then, the KRG came to associate democratization and modernization with its entitlement to sovereignty.

The importance of this legitimation campaign is linked to the second factor that should be taken into account when assessing the successes (as well as the failures) of the women's rights advocacy networks in the Kurdistan Region, namely their transnationalism. Observers contend that democratic legitimation campaigns by separatist entities are often no more than lip service to achieve recognition or assistance from aid providers.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the pursuit of legitimacy opens space for genuine reforms. Committing to a certain normative cause, argues Olga Avdeyeva, indicates a process of acculturation. Based on their perceptions of self and others, states develop imagined and real pressures from the community of states they aspire to be part of. And this may drive them to make certain commitments, for instance by ratifying an international treaty on a certain subject, even if no real pressure to do so exists. Through such acts of commitment, states "acquire a new social status associated with their formal recognition of norms included in the treaty." These commitments can also serve advocates.¹⁹ Through the intensification of transnational activism and networking, advocates have gained new capacities in promoting international norms and monitoring their implementation.

Transnationalism is a key term here. It refers to the willingness and ability of actors to collaborate with other actors across borders, advocating causes "above" and "below" the level of national governments.²⁰ Transnational advocacy networks, described as a "family of political change organizations operating above and across national borders,"²¹ have played a pivotal role as drivers of policy changes in many countries that initially rebuffed international norms.²² As a consequence, transnational advocacy has attracted great interest among social scientists, and especially political scientists.²³ An increasing focus of such interest is on the emergence of transnational feminist networks dedicated to promoting women's rights within the wider framework of human rights and to pressing for government action against gender-based violence. This is due to the influence such networks have had on changing attitudes toward violence against women among international organizations, states, and societies.²⁴

Of particular relevance here are the strategies employed by these networks. Lacking any coercive means, transnational advocacy networks rely on lobbying and other forms of persuasion. Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink have identified strategies such as putting norm-violating states on the international agenda, that is, “shaming” both states and international society into taking action; empowering, protecting, and hence mobilizing domestic opposition, social movements, and NGOs; challenging governments from above and below; and exposing governments to new ideas and norms.²⁵ The prospects of a transnational advocacy network’s success, in turn, rely heavily on two factors: its ability to build coalitions with members of the political elite in the state in which it operates (or “target state”); and the domestic structure of this target state, namely the nature of governance and the relationship between the government and the population. With regard to the latter factor, studies have suggested that the more centralized a government is, the easier it is for advocates to instigate sociopolitical changes. Centralized governments are hard to approach or infiltrate, but when lobbyists or advocates do manage to gain access to decision makers in such structures, they stand a better chance of accomplishing their goal than do advocates working with less centralized states. This is because centralized governments may face fewer challenges in implementing new policies or reforms.²⁶ The ability to gain access to decision makers depends on the first factor, namely the success in building coalitions within the target actor. This essentially means an effective adjustment of advocates to their environment.²⁷

Diaspora activism is a recurring theme in transnational advocacy. For diaspora communities, operating simultaneously in the homeland and the “host country” has become central to their national identity. As Ruba Salih notes, “rather than simply assimilating into their countries of residence or birth, Middle Eastern and North African diasporas in Europe are increasingly articulating their lives through transnational social, cultural, religious and political spheres.”²⁸ Diaspora activists, at least those living in Europe and the United States, often have better access to education and communication technologies than do their compatriots in the homeland. They also often enjoy greater freedom of action, organization, and mobilization.²⁹ These opportunities have made diaspora activists useful to leaders in their countries of origin, either as lobbyists on their behalf in the host country or as a potential pool of skilled returnees.³⁰ In many cases diaspora activists have played a leading role in women’s rights advocacy efforts, both in their homelands and their host countries.³¹ Some are motivated by the concern that the same forms of discrimination found in the homeland may exist within diaspora communities.³²

While providing detailed accounts of the formation of transnational networks, studies of transnationalism do not always pay sufficient attention to the target state and the manner in which its own interests and strategies may affect transnational activism. Transnational networks may be “structures organized above the national level . . . around a common agenda.”³³ But they do not operate independently of this national level. One cannot understand the strategies employed by the feminist network in the Kurdistan Region without recognizing the interests driving the KRG to take certain actions or appreciating the way activists utilize international norms, practices, and treaties.

The final factor that should be taken into account to understand the success of women’s rights advocacy networks is the emergence of government action against gender-based violence as an international standard of good governance. The first signs of this shift became apparent during the 1980s, when domestic and honor-based violence, FGM,

and wartime sexual violence were incorporated into the wider human rights discourse. This was the result of growing interaction between feminist activists from Europe and North America and those from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, mostly in major conferences and conventions.³⁴ The 1990s witnessed the signing of several conventions and resolutions positioning violence against women as an integral aspect of the general human rights agenda. The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVW) and the Vienna Declarations and Program of Action the same year were important in this regard,³⁵ as was the 1995 Beijing Fourth Conference on Women. During this conference, participant governments consulted with NGOs to develop positions on the issue and came to embrace NGO discourses. Although the final document of the Beijing Conference was a policy statement with no legal binding power, women's rights networks were effective in generating a gradual discursive change, which was "reflected in the positions governments took condemning violence against women at the UN conferences at Nairobi, Vienna, and Beijing."³⁶

Another milestone was the 2001 UN General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 55/66, entitled "Working towards the Elimination of Crimes against Women Committed in the Name of Honour," ratified and extended in 2003 as Resolution 57/179. By declaring that "[s]tates have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish the perpetrators of such crimes and to provide protection to the victims, and that the failure to do so constitutes a human rights violation," and by calling upon states to "implement their relevant obligations under international human rights law and to implement specific international commitments," the UNGA both associated opposition to honor crimes with the wider human rights discourse and enhanced its status as a standard of good governance.³⁷ In 2003 the UNGA took another measure to affirm the normative status of government action against gender-based violence, when it included in the Kosovo SBS an article calling for "effective action to eliminate violence against women and children . . . including preventative education and provision of legal and social services to victims."³⁸ Conventions at the regional level, such as the African Union's 2003 Rights of Women in Africa, have gone even further in associating gendered violence with the wider framework of human rights.³⁹

All of these factors came into play when the movement calling for government action against gender-based violence emerged in the Kurdistan Region at the beginning of the 1990s. As the following sections demonstrate, the transnational women's rights movement has achieved some dramatic successes by utilizing both the KRG's crisis of legitimacy and the growing influence of transnational women's rights activism across the globe.

THE FORMATION OF THE KRG AND THE RESURGENCE OF ADVOCACY

The so-called "liberation" of the Kurdistan Region and its fledgling democratic process were embraced enthusiastically by many Kurdish women, who participated in the elections in spite of hurdles such as distance and illiteracy.⁴⁰ This period witnessed the emergence of organized, regionally based women's rights activism. Initially it focused mainly on the integration of women in politics and the economy and on financial support for the widows of the Anfal campaign.⁴¹ In 1992 around 15,000 women, some affiliated

with the KDP and PUK and others independent, signed a petition to ban polygamy.⁴² The petition was rejected by the parliament, but it marked Kurdish women's willingness to challenge the main Kurdish parties. This activism was particularly significant amid continuous efforts by both the PUK and the KDP to co-opt women's organizations and confine their activity to charity work.⁴³

The intensification of gender-based violence in the region in the aftermath of the Iraqi withdrawal led to more activism against it. The first wave of violence was perpetrated by members of the Peshmerga against women suspected of "shaming" Kurdish honor by having relations with Ba'athist officials.⁴⁴ While this form of violence was mostly abolished by orders from the Kurdish leadership, the region witnessed a surge in domestic violence, mainly in the form of honor killings. This was not confined to what were often portrayed by KRG representatives as "backward" rural areas. The early 1990s witnessed major social changes in the Kurdistan Region. The Iran–Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, and even more so the Anfal campaign, had resulted in the destruction of villages, forms of livelihood, and the Kurdish social fabric.⁴⁵ The period following the formation of the KRG witnessed the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people to the region.⁴⁶ Many of them migrated to the cities in search of work, carrying with them traditions and practices that had been less prevalent in the cities. With these socioeconomic shifts, practices of gender-based violence became more prevalent. The more highly educated classes were not immune, as these practices also became common among civil servants, teachers, and members of the Peshmerga, as one survey reveals.⁴⁷

In 1993, in response to this surge in violence, the Independent Women's Organization (IWO), affiliated with the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq, established the first shelter for women at risk in the region.⁴⁸ In coalition with other activists, the IWO intensified the pressure on the KRG to revoke Article 111 of the Iraqi Penal Code, which had been adopted by the KRG. This article—introduced by Saddam Husayn in 1990 as part of his effort to recuperate public support amid Iraq's growing international isolation—exempted killers of women in the name of family honor from punishment.⁴⁹

The KRG was willing to embrace, to some extent, the idea of integrating women into politics and public life. Almost from its inception, the KRG enacted "gender quotas," compelling political parties to meet a minimum 25 percent female membership. When the new Iraqi government set the same threshold of 25 percent for women's representation in the Iraqi Council of Representatives in 2005, the KRG raised its regional threshold to 30 percent. The Kurdish parties were also the only ones, aside from the Iraqi National Accord party, to appoint women as ministers in the Iraqi Interim Government of 2004.⁵⁰ In this sense the KRG followed a wider trend in the Middle East (and other parts of the world), where authoritarian governments implemented cosmetic measures to appease international public opinion.⁵¹ And as in many of these other cases, gender quotas often had no practical significance, as decision making occurred mainly in very narrow circles outside the parliament. During the 1990s, in the KRG these circles were the parties' politburos, which had no female members.⁵²

Countering gender-based violence raised issues different from those of political integration: it meant intervention in the intimate aspects of family life. Such a move risked the KRG's relations with many of its supporters, including soldiers and civil servants. But the KRG also realized the potential damage that the wave of gendered violence

could do to its image in international public opinion.⁵³ Some of its own members certainly objected to this form of violence. But initially the fear of alienating conservative supporters and potential recruits was more powerful, and the KRG refused to engage in any public discussion of domestic and other forms of gender-based violence in an effort to avoid the dilemma.

In the face of this reality, women's rights activists became aware of the need to establish contacts with activists outside the region. Members of the IWO, for example, began to "collect petitions and mobilize international women's and human rights groups in support of Kurdish women."⁵⁴ As one activist recalls,

The most immediate task of the IWO was to prevent 'honour killings', by documenting and exposing such crimes in Kurdistan and abroad, and by insisting that the perpetrators be brought to justice. The other primary task was to raise people's awareness and to campaign for the repeal or amendment of laws that discriminate against women . . . In the future IWO . . . hopes to address contraception, health and education by visiting women in schools, as well as open more shelters to protect women. To do all this, the organisation needs support from the international community.⁵⁵

As this brief description suggests, the post-1991 movement against gendered violence in the Kurdistan Region turned transnational rather rapidly. Both the expressed desire to build contacts with other activists and the strategies employed by the activists point to that. As noted above, the documentation of misconduct and the shaming of governments for it are quintessential tactics of transnational networks. This period constituted an important stage in the transition of women's rights activism in the region from an engagement with a regional network to the creation of a transnational one.

The Kurdish diaspora came to play a pivotal part in the emerging advocacy network. Members of diaspora communities across western Europe have participated in the state-building process in the Kurdistan Region since its inception in 1991. Through their activism they have "transformed the emerging Kurdish nation into a transnational entity."⁵⁶ For many Kurds in the diaspora, the formation of the KRG was seen as a milestone toward the materialization of the aspiration for a Kurdish state.⁵⁷ The Kurdish guerrillas lacked the training and skills necessary to run the civilian affairs of the Kurdistan Region, and both members of the diaspora and returnees—familiar with Western education, technology, and languages—became crucial for regional state-building efforts.⁵⁸

As in other cases of diaspora activism, those in the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora were particularly important in transnational activism because of their greater access to education and technology and their relative freedom of organization and movement.⁵⁹ Members of the diaspora have been able to communicate with activists in all parts of Kurdistan and to disseminate the latter's causes, findings, and ideas.⁶⁰ Compared to the residents of the besieged Kurdistan Region, many Kurds in the diaspora had greater freedom and means to travel. This exposed them to activists from different parts of the world and provided them with some leverage over the KRG, as they became the representatives of the Kurdish cause abroad. In this manner, the only Kurdish representatives to the 1995 Beijing Conference, significant for institutionalizing gender-based violence as part of the wider framework of human rights, actually came from the diaspora. One attendant, Pary Karadaghi, the executive of the California-based Kurdish Human Rights Organization, recounted in an interview to the KDP's Arabic-language journal that:

Only five Kurdish women participated in the conference, which is a small number considering its massive size and the number of participating missions. This is due to two reasons: first, the Chinese government set obstacles to popular missions, particularly those of persecuted people . . . and second, Kurdistan is divided [between Turkey, Iraq, etc.] and the governments that divide our nation do not allow Kurdistan women to participate in such conferences and congresses, unless it serves their purpose, which Kurdish women reject . . . In fact, the forum for the popular women's organizations in China serves as a model for women everywhere and is particular and influential, considering the participation of missions from all over the world.⁶¹

This position enabled the diaspora activists to openly criticize the Kurdish leadership. Replying to a question about the actions required by the government with regard to women's rights, Karadaghi commented that

When we call for the elimination of injustice and the illegal conduct against women it does not mean a rebellion against religion and morals. We demand that the parliament and the government formulate laws that would protect women's rights and give them a decent role in building society . . . setting limits to polygamy . . . [as well as] the protection of women from rape and forced marriage.⁶²

Many of these young activists were also motivated by the increase in the number of incidents of honor killings in their own communities, which negatively affected their image in the host countries.⁶³ Grasping this, the IWO established a branch in London, operated by members of the Kurdish community there, which advanced the transnational nature of its advocacy campaign. It built links with other groups and began to petition international organizations; for example, a petition in 2000 urged UN General Secretary Kofi Anan to take action on the matter of violence against Kurdish women.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq had important implications for the struggle against gender-based violence in the region. Both the CPA and subsequent Iraqi governments claimed to have put women's participation in public life and the protection of their civil rights at the top of their agendas. Feminist historians have criticized these claims on several grounds. First, they have argued that the Western-backed governments in Iraq turned the subject of women's liberation into an arena of struggle against the occupation, in which Islamists and ultranationalists have employed patriarchal traditions as anti-imperialist symbols. In addition, feminist critics have pointed out that the coalition and its Iraqi allies were quick to sacrifice women's rights in favor of alliances with conservative elements of society in their counterinsurgency efforts. At the end of day, such scholars have argued, in most parts of Iraq the situation of women worsened after the invasion.⁶⁴

It is true that the CPA failed to achieve many of its own stated policy goals, and these certainly include gender equality. Still, these policies did contribute to the women's rights campaign in the Kurdistan Region. The legalization of the KRG's status as a federal entity within Iraq immediately increased its interaction with transnational actors. The removal of the Ba'ath regime facilitated the entry of more NGOs into Iraq. Initially, much of the assistance was directed toward the south and center of Iraq, where the series of crises increased the need for aid. But with the rapid deterioration of security and stability in those areas, NGOs and aid-relief agencies found the Kurdistan Region to be a safe haven for their work.⁶⁵ While in the 1990s most aid had focused on relief operations and rehabilitation, in the post-2003 period it concentrated more on democratization and the introduction of good standards of governance into both Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.⁶⁶

The main actors in this campaign were international NGOs committed to democratization and UN agencies, led by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The changing nature of intervention also meant greater interaction between these organizations and domestic activists. These organizations should not be viewed as “external” to activism. Their impact cannot be understood without recognizing both their interaction with local activists and their ability to gain access to the KRG.

During the 2000s, the transnational nature of the women’s rights network took a clear shape. Domestic activists and NGOs gained access to training and funding provided by international NGOs and aid agencies. This allowed them to intensify their own initiatives that, it should be stressed again, they had launched during the 1990s. Moreover, the presence of so-called external actors in the region assisted activists in amplifying their discontent. Initially confined to the Kurdistan Region, the struggle now became part of a global movement against gender-based violence. This integration in turn assisted the women’s rights network in advocating its cause and encouraging changes in the KRG’s policies.

A vivid example of this is the campaign against FGM in the Kurdistan Region, whose roots date back to the late 1990s. The KRG avoided publicly discussing this subject and other aspects of gendered violence. However, activists began to work against FGM, initially through data collection. During this period, local activists Runak Faraj Rahim and Hana Shwan conducted a survey of the practice in the Sulaymaniya governorate. They then proceeded to disseminate their findings globally, publishing their data in English and Kurdish.⁶⁷ During the post-2003 era, the issue became a focus of transnational activism. From 2002 to 2004, a German NGO, WADI (Association for Crisis Assistance and Solidary Development Co-Operation), conducted a study into the practice of FGM in the Germian district of Sulaymaniya. WADI’s teams—often comprised of local doctors, social workers, and activists—promoted public health in rural areas of Kurdistan, and used the connections they built with local women to collect data. Their initial investigation revealed that 60 percent of the women in the region were circumcised.⁶⁸ After documenting the phenomenon, WADI disseminated its findings through various media, including its website, to intensify pressure on the PUK-dominated KRG in Sulaymaniya. WADI then expanded its research to cover wider parts of the Kurdistan Region. It published its findings in 2010 in a comprehensive report.⁶⁹

The 2010 WADI report erroneously claimed that it was the first to investigate FGM and that knowledge of the subject only reached the KRG in 2004.⁷⁰ The report also lacked any reference to the internal debate over FGM among Kurds, and it marginalized the detrimental impact that conflict usually has on women’s security and health. But WADI’s activism epitomizes the transnational nature of the women’s rights advocacy campaign. Its research projects were conducted by local activists, in cooperation with foreign volunteers, and were funded by international development organizations. WADI’s researchers relied on the organization’s established presence in the region and its positive image among the local population and the government to launch studies on a subject rarely discussed in public. The research findings have stirred public debate in the region and outside of it. And as I demonstrate below, the KRG has acknowledged the contribution of WADI and other members of the advocacy network to these discussions and the shift in its policies.

In other cases, external aid allowed domestic actors to expand their infrastructure and intensify their activism. The Sulaymaniya-based women's rights organization Asuda, self-described as "the only non-affiliated [i.e. non-partisan] NGO working on women issues,"⁷¹ used funding by international NGOs to establish research and awareness departments. The awareness department aimed to "promote the consciousness of the society with regard to the consequences of violence against women," by building networks with local institutions (media, universities, etc.), while the research department aimed to conduct studies on different aspects of gender-based violence in the region.⁷² Asuda also became the largest operator of shelters for women at risk of domestic violence in the Kurdistan Region.

An important tool used by transnational networks of activism has been their ability to associate the campaign against gender-based violence with the idea of Kurdish sovereignty and statehood, by asserting that protecting women from violence is a necessary component of international legitimacy. In addition to highlighting the KRG's incompetence in preventing acts of violence, activists have also utilized the KRG's sense of crisis and its legitimization efforts. They have done so mainly by emphasizing that the struggle against gender-based violence is inseparable from democratization and modernization, two main themes in the KRG's discourse of earned sovereignty.

One early example of this is the Charter for the Rights and Freedoms of Women in the Kurdish Regions and Diaspora. Published in 2004 in English, Kurdish (both Sorani and Kurmanji dialects), Arabic, Turkish, and French, the charter relies on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the DEVW.⁷³ The charter targeted the KRG specifically but was an initiative of Kurdish activists from all parts of Kurdistan and the diaspora, and it was endorsed by foreign politicians. Thus, Mojab argues, it was "truly a transnational project."⁷⁴

Secularist feminists were particularly keen on lobbying for the KRG's adherence to international conventions on women's and human rights.⁷⁵ In 2010, civil rights activists and lawyers gathered in Sulaymaniya for a conference titled "Fighting Violence against Women through Law's Supremacy," which was funded by the International Human Rights Law Institute based at DePaul University in Chicago. At this conference, the speakers, including local activists as well as representatives of the U.S. embassy stationed in the Kurdistan Region, demanded adherence to the CEDAW, reminding the Iraqi and regional authorities that Iraq is a signatory of the convention and that failing to meet its demands is "a crime."⁷⁶

In 2006, Tahir Hasso Zebari, head of the Media Department at Salahuddin University, published a book in Arabic titled *Dawr al-Mar'a al-Kurdiyya fi al-Musharaka al-Siyasiyya* (The Role of Kurdish Women in Political Participation). In the introduction, Zebari stressed that gender equality and addressing issues related to gender-based violence are inseparable aspects of political progress, thus identifying the KRG's sensitivity to the latter issue. Discussing international conventions on women's rights, such as the 1995 Beijing Conference, Zebari notes that the issue of gender equality "represents an important element in the characteristics of the democratic transition which the society is undergoing . . . Our political position requires the promotion of our possibilities and achievements within the framework of changing the status of women. And this framework [in turn] falls within the framework of real political development."⁷⁷ Elsewhere Zebari has associated the government's promotion of women's rights with

democratization in the Kurdistan Region, another theme of the KRG's strategy of survival:

At a time in which the subject of democracy occupies a central position in the Kurdish renaissance which began in the early 1990s . . . the importance of the question of Kurdish women constitutes the backbone of this program. In light of the organic connection between the democratic transformation and women's liberation . . . the liberation of women and their participation in the productive political process, on an equal basis with men, constitutes a fundamental principle in a true democratic transition.⁷⁸

A similar initiative that stirred debate in Kurdistan came from Shahbal Ma'rif Dizayi, a jurist and consultant to the regional Ministry of Human Rights.⁷⁹ In a book entitled *Violence against Women: A Comparative Legal Study of International and Domestic Law*, she stressed the growing correlation between women's rights and human rights. After reviewing the historical evolution of global action against gendered violence, she notes that the authorities' failure to counter endemic violence against women is a failure to meet the international standards of governance.⁸⁰ Unlike Zebari, Dizayi refrained from addressing the KRG specifically. Instead, she directed her claims against the Iraqi authorities. Nevertheless, the arguments she used and the fact that Dizayi was acting within the Kurdistan Region and was loosely affiliated with the KRG meant that her argument implicitly targeted the KRG as well.

Another example appears in a report on honor killings in the Kurdistan Region. The research for the study was led by a diaspora-based activist, Nazand Begikhani. It was hosted by two British universities, Bristol and Roehampton, and conducted jointly with the London-based Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP). The research team justified the need to conduct the research and publish the report, in both English and Kurdish, based upon the aforementioned UNGA Resolution 55/66.⁸¹ This was a significant statement; the resolution referred first and foremost to UN member states, that is, recognized and legitimate governments. By applying it to the KRG, the writers of the report bound the KRG with recognized states. The report also linked government action against gender-based violence with modernization and democratization, two core dimensions of earned sovereignty. Noting the modernization of the Kurdistan Region under the KRG, the report emphasizes that "initiatives to change harmful cultural practices are part of this modernization and democratization effort, to which this research is committed."⁸² It also added that "an important underlying issue is the need for wide-ranging addressing of gender-equality, and the development of a gender equality scheme, as a strong government modernizing commitment."⁸³ One may question the independence of a report funded by the KRG. Nevertheless, the fact that the research was conducted outside of the region and was headed by a member of the diaspora gave researchers the necessary freedom to actually publish a report that was as critical as those circulated by other activists. By funding the report the KRG may have tried to co-opt the researchers, but ultimately it was exposed to further critique and a reinforcement of the link between women's rights and governance.

Asuda, too, used UNGA Resolution 55/66 in its effort to lobby the KRG to take action against honor killings, in a report sponsored by UNAMI and conducted for Asuda by Tanyel Taysi, a U.S. citizen and a lecturer at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler (Erbil).⁸⁴ It was even more explicit in correlating its cause with statehood, as it contained a section

dedicated to the subject of “States’ Obligation to Prevent and Protect under International Law.”⁸⁵ Elsewhere Taysi joined forces with Sherizaan Minwalla, an American attorney active in the Kurdistan Region. In a report sponsored by the London-based KHRP, the two also pointed to the KRG’s failures to protect women from raging violence in the region. Violence against women, they asserted, is a “violation of basic human rights,” the result of the lack of the rule of law.⁸⁶

Employing similar strategies, the Khatuzin Centre of Social Action, a KDP-affiliated NGO dedicated to the promotion of women’s rights, used the summer 2005 meeting of the Constitutional Committee, a group of regional parliamentarians assembled to write a regional constitution, to submit a bill that would ban FGM and other forms of discrimination. This bill was partially based on the CEDAW, as well as on the African Union’s 2003 Rights of Women in Africa, though it excluded the sections on homosexuality and abortion appearing in the latter two.⁸⁷ Khatuzin’s choice to use the meeting of the Constitutional Committee was not coincidental; the writing of a regional constitution was yet another Kurdish step toward consolidating its autonomy. By intervening in this process Khatuzin turned women’s rights and the campaign against gender-based violence into elements of the state-building process.

Since the early 1990s, then, women’s rights activism in the region has grown into a transnational network, encompassing a diverse range of actors. NGOs and international aid agencies have provided the local activists who spearhead the campaign with resources, guidance, and opportunities to voice their grievances outside the Kurdistan Region. Diaspora activists, operating simultaneously within and outside the region, have helped to amplify the protest of Kurdish women, bridging activists in the region with international organizations. This activism has not been free of flaws and hindrances: occasionally, actions such as reports and fact-finding missions have served to promote their authors; some activists have sometimes settled for minor reforms; and advocacy, especially at the international level, has not been forceful enough. Moreover, the campaign has encountered difficulties that go beyond the KRG’s initial antagonism toward its activities. Perhaps the greatest difficulty has been the socioeconomic gap between activists and rural women, who have expressed indifference or even hostility toward feminist activists who often advocate a secularist agenda.⁸⁸ Similar challenges have been present even in major cities, though processes of urbanization have driven some social changes, such as declining rates of FGM among younger urban Kurdish women.⁸⁹ Undoubtedly, socioeconomic structures and local traditions have impeded wider changes.

Yet the authorities are often the key to changing social structures. For that reason, activism against gendered violence has targeted mainly the KRG. Faced with this constant advocacy, the KRG gradually came to change its rejectionist position.

THE KRG’S RESPONSE TO THE CAMPAIGN: ENGAGEMENT AND THE LIMITATIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The KRG has continuously engaged with the women’s rights network, as with other transnational networks, in the Kurdistan Region. On some occasions, KRG representatives have publicly credited this network with shaping its policies. For example, when declaring the passing of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law in the regional parliament, the KRG’s prime minister, Barham Salih, thanked “civil society organizations active

in this field and all those who protect women and their rights.”⁹⁰ For the most part, however, KRG representatives have publicly confronted the transnational advocates, rejecting their findings or denouncing their arguments about the KRG’s failure to protect women’s rights. Thus, the KRG frequently rebuffed UNAMI’s negative reports of the KRG’s records on human rights and women rights.⁹¹ But even when officially declining to embrace the arguments and recommendations made by advocates, the KRG in fact has communicated and interacted with the women’s rights network. It is impossible to separate the KRG’s reforms from the advocacy campaigns of the women’s network.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the women’s rights network has been to bring the subject of gender-based violence to the forefront of public debate in the Kurdistan Region. Advocacy has compelled the KRG to acknowledge the prevalence of gender-based violence in the region and also to accept some responsibility for the problem. Moreover, the changes are not only discursive. Especially during the second decade of its existence, the KRG began taking more concrete steps against gender-based violence, including through legislation. A turning point occurred in April 2000, when the Sulaymaniya-based PUK-controlled administration issued Decree No. 59, which gave regional courts the discretion to ignore the articles in the Penal Code exempting killers in the name of family honor from punishment, declaring that “[t]he killing or abuse of women with the pretext of cleansing the shame is not considered to be a mitigating excuse.” The Erbil-based KDP administration followed in 2002, issuing a similar resolution, Law No. 14.⁹² The process that led to this decision serves as an excellent example of the power of transnational advocacy. In the years preceding the decrees, the KDP and PUK objected to any change in the Iraqi legislation. Both the male leadership and the parties’ women’s organization followed the official line, which denied the KRG’s responsibility for such acts and blamed it on local or Islamic traditions.⁹³ But by 2000 general attitudes were changing. Pressures mounted, first on the PUK and then on the KDP, from the IWO, active both within and outside Kurdistan, and from other local and diaspora organizations, which were eventually joined by the party-affiliated women’s organizations.⁹⁴

This legislation has had mixed results. One report noted a decline in the number of murder cases associated with honor in the period following the legislation.⁹⁵ On the other hand, some families now chose to force victims to commit suicide, or reported the murders as suicide cases. This proves that while the KRG’s authority in the region had increased—as perpetrators did seek not to violate the new legislation openly—it was not enough to uproot such practices. Nevertheless, the act of legislation in itself marked a change in the KRG’s attitude toward gendered violence in the Kurdistan Region, a change that would not have been achieved without advocacy. Furthermore, the KRG gradually became more willing to discuss the subject. Fawzi al-‘Atroushi, a veteran journalist and campaigner for the Kurdish cause, and the deputy minister of culture in Baghdad since 2005, openly criticized the Kurdish authorities on the KRG’s official website for failing to take action on the so-called suicides among women:

there is a ‘masculine’ conspiracy, which has nothing to do with manhood, which stands behind these false claims. It involves the victim’s husband or relative as well as elements in the medico-legal [profession] and the judiciary system that try to cover the incidents of intentional killing and

the sexual, mental and social crimes that the Kurdistan women are subjected to, in light of the laziness and incompetence of the Union of Jurists in Kurdistan.⁹⁶

Sensing the risk of further cosmetic action to appease donor states and international public opinion, Atroushi warned that treatment of the subject

should happen willingly and gradually, through hard and prolonged endeavours from all concerning sides . . . so that the subject would not turn into temporary bubbles and a reflection of internal and external voices that condemn this serious and frightening phenomenon, or an effort to appease the worries of European civil society organisations which have put Iraqi Kurdistan under scrutiny and have issued negative reports which do not portray the KRG well.⁹⁷

These statements, made by a member of the Kurdish elite, alert us to the changing trends within the KRG. In themselves they do not indicate serious action against gendered violence. But such polemic could not have taken place if not for the KRG's acknowledgement of the urgency of the matter.

Further developments took place in 2007, when the KRG undertook an official investigation into the subject of violence against women in the Sulaymaniya governorate during the years 2005–07. The ensuing report encompassed all practices targeted by women's rights activists: honor killings and attempted killings, cases of suicide, forced marriage, prevention of education, and defamation. According to the report, whose findings were published on the KRG's website, 1,108 women were subjected to various forms of violence and oppression in 2006, including murder or attempted murder. The report also stated that in 2006 suicide accounted for 88 percent of deaths of women in Kurdistan, reaching a total of 533. This is in comparison to 22 percent and 289 cases of suicide in 2005.⁹⁸ The fact that the Human Rights Ministry sponsored this study indicates that the KRG had internalized the idea that women's rights are part of the wider framework of human rights and not merely an internal affair. The study itself served to promote the debate in the KRG about women's rights. One columnist, for example, argued on the KRG website that

Societies now view [opposition to honor killings] through laws and legislation which help to protect . . . human rights . . . If we want to elevate the Kurdistan Region and turn it into a model for the governments and states of the region, then we should push and demand our government in the region, and first and foremost President [Mas'ud] Barzani, to undertake urgent legislation to protect women; otherwise, the number of these crimes will increase.⁹⁹

The practice of FGM was excluded from the 2007 report, but the regional Human Rights Ministry carried out research into the practice in the Chamchamal region in 2009,¹⁰⁰ and the KRG funded the 2007 report conducted by the Kurdish Women's Rights Watch in London.¹⁰¹ In the same year the KRG's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, established the Honor Killing Monitoring Commission to monitor the implementation of legislation with regard to honor crimes.¹⁰² Directories were established in Erbil, Sulaymaniya, and Dohuk to enhance the commission's work. Nazand Begikhani was appointed as advisor to the commission. Pakhshan Zangan, then an MP for the Communist Party and a women's rights activist, argued that "Their existence is a message to men that the government is beginning to pay attention to women's issues. At the same time, it gives women more confidence when they see that the government is serious in defending their rights."¹⁰³ Also in 2007, the KRG tried to demonstrate further its commitment to

countering honor killings when it excluded convicts charged with honor-based crimes from a general amnesty given to other convicts in the region.¹⁰⁴ In 2008 the KRG publicly acknowledged that the increase in suicide rates in the region indicated the prevalence of honor-based violence. Noting the “increase in the rates of suicide among women and the spread of the phenomenon of violence against women, whether for honor-related or other socially-related reasons,” the KRG declared the establishment of a Center for Monitoring Violence against Women.¹⁰⁵ Finally, in the same year, the regional parliament passed a bill prohibiting the practice of FGM and imposing prison sentences on perpetrators.¹⁰⁶ The bill was finally passed in 2011 as part of a regional Anti-Domestic Violence Law.¹⁰⁷

The KRG’s measures against gender-based violence in the region were vigorously integrated into its effort to demonstrate to the international community its earned sovereignty and adherence to international norms of good governance. When taking action on this matter, the KRG often presented its policy as a symbol of its ability to manage its own affairs. This point is crucial, because it demonstrates that the KRG has been paying attention to advocacy, and has internalized the notion that protection of women’s right in particular, and of human rights in general, is associated with democratization and modernization. One platform serving the KRG in this task has been its semi-official English-language newspaper, *The Kurdish Globe*. A 2008 article on the KRG’s effort to counter honor killings in 2008 stated:

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is creating a mechanism to ensure the Region’s laws to protect women from violence are implemented at all levels . . . Following the commission’s meeting, Prime Minister Barzani said, “The changes agreed today will further strengthen the rule of law in the Kurdistan Region when it comes to prosecuting those who commit crimes against women. It is essential that our courts investigate and prosecute crimes against women in the most efficient way possible.”¹⁰⁸

Reports in the same spirit were published when the KRG passed its Anti-Domestic Violence Law,¹⁰⁹ and in relation to the KRG’s success in countering the practice of FGM.¹¹⁰

It is evident that the KRG has yet to meet international standards, or even its own rhetorical commitments. As the KRG enters the third decade of its existence, FGM, honor killings, and other forms of violence against women are still prevalent.¹¹¹ However, this should not undermine the importance of transnational activism or render it irrelevant. As Taysi and Minwalla have reported from the region, since the late 1990s “[p]ositive developments have occurred, opening the space for women to continue to advocate for greater freedoms and improved government responses.” Change has been slow, but “[d]espite this, to the credit of key persons among the government, security and law enforcement, [and] legal community including the judiciary, tribal and religious leaders and of course women’s rights activists, prevention of harm and protection for victims is increasing.”¹¹²

The KRG, then, can be said to have gone through an acculturation process. While not signing any formal treaty (as it has been prevented from doing so), the KRG has committed to the principles of statehood, as it has interpreted them. As protection of women’s rights has become integral to these, it has become easier for advocates to monitor the KRG’s actions, advise it on matters relevant to violence against women, and

shame it for failing to protect women's rights and thus to meet its pledges. Long-term, deep-rooted reforms require socioeconomic transformation, and the Kurdistan Region is still undergoing major shifts. Successfully introducing action against gender-based violence as a norm of good governance may prove to facilitate these transformations.

CONCLUSION

Studying women's rights advocacy and the struggle against gender-based violence in the Kurdistan Region provides important insights that go well beyond this subject area. It teaches us about the development of the Kurdistan Regional Government, its policies, and the role of transnational advocacy in processes of reforms and in shaping policy. The change in the KRG's attitude and policies toward gendered violence can help us to better grasp similar developments related to the promotion of human and civil rights in the Kurdistan Region. The KRG's status as a *de facto* state and the potential opportunity that this has afforded for advocacy networks to promote their cause can be applied to other instances, such as the campaign for freedom of media in the region, the fight against corruption, and reforms to the political system.

The struggle of the women's rights network in Kurdistan is a quintessential example of a transnational advocacy campaign. As part of its effort to transform domestic reality, it has relied on norms, ideas, and practices that have been developed at the international level. Its impact on the KRG's policy has derived from its success in associating these ideas with statehood, sovereignty, and good governance. This points to a well-calculated strategy, tuned in to the interests and aspirations of the KRG. Key to this success has been the competence of the women's rights network in utilizing the KRG's pursuit of international legitimacy, a derivative of the latter's contested status. Another key has been the maximization of its own transnational nature and access to media and other resources.

The possibilities for network-building and the opportunities for advocacy that can lead to genuine sociopolitical changes across the globe continue to expand. The transnational struggle against gender-based violence has been widening and gaining influence in different parts of the globe. As such it has attracted growing scholarly interest, and this article has sought to contribute to this endeavor, as well as to provide tools for those seeking to better understand the constantly evolving nature of transnational advocacy. There is a range of other issue-areas that have either become or are bound to become subjects of transnational advocacy: education, public health, and workers' rights in various countries and regions are only a few examples. We now face the mission of following the course of advocacy in these areas, while taking all of the relevant factors that shape advocacy into account.

NOTES

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¹The term *de facto*, or unrecognized, state is used in the IR literature to denote a separatist entity that has obtained some of the basic features of statehood, including a functioning government, a bounded territory, a permanent population, and the capacity to interact with other actors in the global system, but is not legally

recognized as a state by most other states and international organizations. The use of the term has served to distinguish such actors from other forms of statelessness. In addition to the KRG, the term has been applied to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Somaliland, Taiwan, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and others. The de facto state was first introduced as a theoretical concept by Scott Pegg, *International Society and the De Facto State* (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1998), 13, 30–42. The most recent comprehensive study of de facto states, including the KRG, is Nina Caspersen and Gareth Stansfield, eds., *Unrecognized States in the International System* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011).

²On the former, see Karin Mlodoč, “‘We Want to Be Remembered as Strong Women, Not as Shepherds’: Women Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan–Iraq Struggling for Agency and Acknowledgement,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 8 (2012): 63–91; Tanyel B. Taysi and Sherizaan Minwalla, “Structural Violence against Women in Kurdistan, Iraq,” *KHRP: Legal Review*, ed. Kerim Yıldız and Mark Muller (2009): 87–120; and Shahrzad Mojab, “Kurdish Women in the Zone of Genocide and Gendercide,” *al-Raida* XXI, no. 103 (Fall 2003): 20–25. On the latter, see Andrea Fischer-Tahir, “Competition, Cooperation and Resistance: Women in the Political Field in Iraq,” *International Affairs* 86 (2010): 1381–94.

³Nadje al-Ali and Nicolla Pratt, “Between Nationalism and Women’s Rights: The Kurdish Women’s Movement in Iraq,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 4 (2011): 337–53.

⁴Andrea Fischer-Tahir, “Gendered Memories and Masculinity: Kurdish Peshmerga on the Anfal Campaign in Iraq,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 8 (2012): 92–114; Mlodoč, “‘We Want to Be Remembered.’”

⁵Shahrzad Mojab, “The Politics of ‘Cyberfeminism’ in the Middle East: The Case of Kurdish Women,” *Race, Gender & Class* 8 (2001): 42–61.

⁶Shahrzad Mojab, “Gender, Nation and Diaspora: Kurdish Women in Feminist Transnational Struggles,” in *Muslim Diaspora*, ed. Haideh Moghissi (Abingdon, N.Y.: Routledge, 2006), 116–32.

⁷Shahrzad Mojab and Rachel Gorman, “Dispersed Nationalism: War, Diaspora and Kurdish Women Organizing,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 3 (2007): 58–85.

⁸Taysi and Minwalla, “Structural Violence against Women,” 87.

⁹Jennifer J. Rasmussen, “Innocence Lost: The Evolution of a Successful Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Program,” *41 Valparaiso University Law Review* 919 (2007): 929–31.

¹⁰Michael Meadowcroft, *Kurdistan Elections for Iraqi Kurdish National Assembly and Leader of the Kurdistan Liberation Movement, 19 May 1992, Monitoring Report* (London: Electoral Reform Consultancy Services, 1992), 4.

¹¹Deon Geldenhuys, *Contested States in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹²Barry Bartmann, “Political Realities and Legal Anomalies,” in *De Facto States: The Quest for Sovereignty*, ed. Tozun Bahçelli, Barry Bartmann, and Henry Srebnik (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 15–16.

¹³Nina Caspersen, *Unrecognized States: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

¹⁴Ian Clark, *The Post-Cold War Order: The Spoils of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rick Fawn and James Mayall, “Recognition, Self-Determination and Secession in Post-Cold War International Society,” in *International Society after the Cold War*, ed. Fawn and Jeremy Larkins (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 193–220.

¹⁵Rick Fawn has described this as the “Kosovo effect,” in “The Kosovo—and Montenegro—Effect,” *International Affairs* 84 (2008): 269–94.

¹⁶An example of this campaign is a booklet published by the KRG for the purpose of encouraging foreign investment in Kurdistan. See KRG, *Kurdistan: The Other Iraq*, 2006, <http://www.theotheriraq.com> (accessed 22 December 2010).

¹⁷See, for example, a report issued by the KRG’s representative body in the United Kingdom, *The Status of Christians in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*, December 2009, http://www.krg.org/uploads/documents/Status_Christians_Kurdistan_Region_Dec_09_2009_12_22_h16m26s16.pdf (accessed 12 March 2010). It should be noted that although the situation of Christians in the Kurdistan Region is much more secure than in other parts of Iraq, some Christian communities have been subjected to harassment by Islamist elements and, at least in the disputed territories, by the KRG’s security forces. See Human Rights Watch (hereafter HRW), *On Vulnerable Grounds: Violence against Minority Communities in Ninewa Province’s Disputed Territories* (New York: HRW, 2009).

¹⁸See, for example, Donald Horowitz, “A Right to Secede?,” in *Secession and Self-Determination*, ed. Stephen Macedo and Allen Buchanan (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 50–76.

¹⁹Olga Avdeyeva, "When Do States Comply with International Treaties? Policies on Violence against Women in Post-Communist States," *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007): 881–82.

²⁰Ruba Salih, "Transnational Public Spheres from 'Above' and from 'Below,'" *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5 (2010): 53–70.

²¹Valentine Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2005), 4.

²²Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

²³*Ibid.*; Avdeyeva, "When Do States?"; Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds., *The Power of Human Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Risse-Kappen, ed., *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁴Moghadam, *Globalizing Women*; Salih, "Transnational Public Spheres"; Mojab, "Gender, Nation and Diaspora."

²⁵Thomas Risse and Kathryn Sikkink, "The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction," in Risse et al., *The Power of Human Rights*, 5.

²⁶Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

²⁷Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Introduction," in Risse-Kappen, *Bringing Transnational Relations*, 23–26.

²⁸Salih, "Transnational Public Spheres," 54.

²⁹Mojab, "The Politics of 'Cyberfeminism,'" 50.

³⁰Laurie Brand, *Citizens Abroad: Emigration and the State in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 7–8, 17–18.

³¹Moghadam, *Globalizing Women*.

³²Salih, "Transnational Public Spheres," 56.

³³Moghadam, *Globalizing Women*, 4

³⁴*Ibid.*, 5–7.

³⁵Rasmussen, "Innocence Lost," 934–35.

³⁶Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*, 192–93.

³⁷UNGA, A/RES/55/66: "Working towards the Elimination of Crimes against Women Committed in the Name of Honour," 31 January 2001, <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/b617b62bcb39ea6ec1256610002eb7a6/d71daccfe833c9a3c1256a7700542307?OpenDocument>; UNGA, A/RES/57/179: "Working towards the Elimination of Crimes against Women Committed in the Name of Honour," 30 January 2003, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/57/179&Lang=E.

³⁸A copy of the SBS is available at <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2003/12/20031212173802osnhojac0.1666071.html#axzz2RqgTEAoE> (accessed 21 September 2009).

³⁹Rasmussen, "Innocence Lost," 940.

⁴⁰Fran Hazelton, "Land of Hope and Glitter: Fran Hazelton Examines the Fledgling Feminist Movement in Iraqi Kurdistan," *The Guardian*, 25 June 1992, 21.

⁴¹Mlodoč, "'We Want to Be Remembered,'" 73–74.

⁴²Mojab, "The Politics of 'Cyberfeminism,'" 47.

⁴³Fischer-Tahir, "Competition, Cooperation and Resistance," 1383.

⁴⁴This also included rape victims. Shahrzad Mojab, "No 'Safe Haven': Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan," in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004), 120.

⁴⁵The destruction of agriculture affected women even more negatively than men. Women in rural Kurdistan were integral to the workforce in the agricultural sector. In the towns and cities, working women were deprived of access to most occupations and were stigmatized and sometimes even attacked. The most extreme example is that of Anfal wives, who were often compelled to find jobs due to the absence of male providers and government support. See Mlodoč, "'We Want to Be Remembered,'" 73–75.

⁴⁶Denise Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 24–25.

⁴⁷WADI Foundation, *Female Genital Mutilation in Iraqi Kurdistan: An Empirical Study by WADI* (Frankfurt: WADI, 2010), 12–17.

⁴⁸Mojab and Gorman, "Dispersed Nationalism," 74.

⁴⁹After taking power in 1968, the Ba'ath government retained the 1958 constitution, which criminalized, at least nominally, honor killings. Lucy Brown and David Romano, "Women in Post-Saddam Iraq: One Step Forward or Two Steps Back?," *NWSA Journal* 18 (2006): 54.

⁵⁰These were Narmin Othman and Nesreen Berwari, who held the women's affairs and public works portfolios, respectively. The Iraqi National Accord nominated Leila 'Abd al-Latif as minister of labor.

⁵¹Egypt is also a notable example of this. See Kathleen Howard-Merriam, "Guaranteed Seats for Political Representation of Women: The Egyptian Example," *Women and Politics* 10 (1990): 17–42. See also Aili Mari Tripp and Alice Kang, "The Global Impact of Quotas: On the Fast Track to Increased Female Legislative Representation," *Comparative Political Studies* 41 (2008): 338–61.

⁵²Fischer-Tahir, "Competition, Cooperation and Resistance," 1385.

⁵³Rasmussen offers Egypt as another example in which public pressure has hindered the government from taking steps against FGM on the grounds of religion and tradition. See "Innocence Lost," 943, 960.

⁵⁴Mojab, "No 'Safe Haven,'" 124.

⁵⁵Surma Hamid, "The Moon Rises After Sunset," in *Fire, Snow and Honey: Voices from Kurdistan*, ed. Ginna Lennox (Rushcutters Bay, Australia: Halstead Press, 2001).

⁵⁶Mojab, "Gender, Nation and Diaspora," 122.

⁵⁷Khalid Khayati, "From Victim Diaspora to Transnational Citizenship" (PhD diss., Linköping University, 2008).

⁵⁸Gareth Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 122–23.

⁵⁹Mojab, "Gender, Nation and Diaspora," 124. See also Mojab and Gorman, "Dispersed Nationalism."

⁶⁰Mojab, "The Politics of 'Cyberfeminism.'"

⁶¹*Khabat*, "al-Mar'a al-Kurdiyya fi al-Mu'tamar al-'Alami al-Rabi' li-Huquq al-Mar'a fi Bekin," 5 November 1995, no page number.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson, "Shall We Return, Stay or Circulate? Political Changes in Kurdistan and Transnational Dynamics in Kurdish Refugee Families in Sweden," *Journal of Migration and Refugee Issues* 4 (2008): 148–49.

⁶⁴Nadje al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009), 55–120.

⁶⁵Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State*, 76–79.

⁶⁶Ibid., 77.

⁶⁷See, for example, Runak Faraj Rahim and Hana Shwan, *Statistics on Violence Used against Women*, trans. from Kurdish into English by Tanea Abdulkhadir (Sulaymaniya: Women's Media and Education Center, 2004).

⁶⁸Nicholas Birch, "Ancient Practice Still a Threat to Iraqi Women," *Washington Times*, 22 August 2005, A15.

⁶⁹WADI, *Female Genital Mutilation*.

⁷⁰Fischer-Tahir, "Competition, Cooperation and Resistance," 1383.

⁷¹Asuda, "Profile of Asuda," 3 July 2006, <http://www.asuda.org>.

⁷²Ibid., 5.

⁷³KHRP, *Charter for the Rights and Freedoms of Women in the Kurdish Regions and Diaspora* (London, KHRP, 2004), 11.

⁷⁴Mojab, "Gender, Nation and Diaspora," 126.

⁷⁵Tahir-Fischer, "Competition, Cooperation and Resistance," 1390.

⁷⁶Azeez Mahmood, "Call to Strengthen Laws Protecting Women," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 22 April 2010, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/call-strengthen-laws-protecting-women>.

⁷⁷Tahir Hasso Mir Zebari, *Dawr al-Mar'a al-Kurdiyya fi al-Musharaka al-Siyasiyya* (Erbil: Dar Aras li-l-Tabi'a wa-l-Nashr, 2006), 18.

⁷⁸Ibid., 65.

⁷⁹This is how she is described in Samira Kanun, "Akhbar wa-Nishatat Ittihad al-Nisa' al-Ashuri," *Zahrira News Network*, <http://www.zahrira.net/?p=1299> (accessed 10 November 2009).

⁸⁰Shahbal Ma'ruf Dizayi, *al-'Unf didd al-Mar'a: Dirasa Qanuniyya Muqarina fi al-Qanun al-Duwali al-'Amm wa-l-Qanun al-'Amm al-Dakhili* (Erbil: Aras, 2007).

⁸¹Nazand Begikhani, Aisha Gil, Gill Hague, and Kathwer Ibraheem, *Final Report: Honour-Based Violence (HBV) and Honour-Based Killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish Diaspora in the UK* (Centre for Gender Violence Research, University of Bristol, Roehampton University, in partnership with Kurdish Women Rights' Watch, London, November 2010), 18 (p. 13 in the Kurdish version).

⁸²Ibid., 19.

⁸³Ibid., 98.

⁸⁴Tanyel B. Taysi, *Eliminating Violence against Women: Perspectives on Honor-Related Violence in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Sulaymaniya Governorate* (Sulaymaniya: UNAMI and Asuda, 2009), 8–9.

⁸⁵Ibid., 9–10.

⁸⁶Taysi and Minwalla, "Structural Violence against Women," 87–88.

⁸⁷Cyrille Cartier, "Iraqi Kurdish Women Voice Hopes for Constitution," *Women's eNews*, 25 April 2006, www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2717.

⁸⁸Fischer-Tahir, "Competition, Cooperation and Resistance," 1391; Al-Ali and Pratt, "Between Nationalism," 341.

⁸⁹WADI, "Female Genital Mutilation."

⁹⁰Quoted on the KRG's official website [hereafter KRG], "Kalimat Ra'is Hukumat al-Iqlim fi al-Yawm al-'Alami li-Munahadat al-'Unf didd al-Mar'a," 25 November 2010, <http://www.krg.org/articles/detail.asp?lngnr=14&smap=01020100&rnr=274&anr=37912>.

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⁹²Taysi, *Eliminating Violence*, 44.

⁹³Al-Ali and Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation*, 142–44.

⁹⁴Mojab and Gorman, "Dispersed Nationalism," 74–75.

⁹⁵Joshua Kucera, "Political Changes Reduce Kurdistan Honor Killings," *Women's eNews*, 7 July 2002, <http://oldsite.womensenews.org/oldsite/article.cfm/dyn/aid/964/context/archive>.

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¹⁰³Interview with Zangana, in Begikhani et al., *Final Report*, 63.

¹⁰⁴See Qassim Khidir, "Prisoners in Kurdistan Given a Second Chance," *The Kurdish Globe*, 21 June 2007.

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¹⁰⁷Salih Waladbagi, "Anti-Domestic Violence Law in Kurdistan," *The Kurdish Globe*, 3 April 2012.

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