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**The Aftermath of the Halabja Genocide
through its Photographs: Post-Memory and
Commemoration**

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Abstract (English)

This research investigates the post-memory of the Halabja Genocide that occurred on March 16, 1988. Through analyzing photographs of the Halabja genocide the work looks into the importance of visual documents in shaping the post-memory of this genocide. We focus on the post-memory of the affiliative kind, as these photographs have become a part of Kurdish identity through poetry, artwork, and cinema. Semiotic analysis is the main method and photo thematic analysis is employed as a submethod in analyzing the photographs of the Halabja chemical attack.

Keywords: Halabja, Kurd, Kurdistan, Genocide, memory studies, post-memory, photography study

Abstrakt (Český)

Tento výzkum se zabývá postpamětí genocidy v Halabdže, ke které došlo 16. března 1988. Prostřednictvím analýzy fotografií z genocidy v Halabdže se práce zabývá významem vizuálních dokumentů při utváření postpaměti na této genocidy. Zaměřujeme se na postpaměť afilačního typu, neboť tyto fotografie se staly součástí kurdské identity prostřednictvím poezie, výtvarných děl a kinematografie. Sémiotická analýza a fototematická analýza jsou hlavními metodami použitými při analýze fotografií z chemického útoku v Halabdže

Klíčová slova: Halabdža, Kurdové, Kurdistan, genocida, paměťová studia, postpaměť, fotografická studie

Range of thesis: 104365 characters, 86 pages

Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague, 30th of July

Lazha Barznji

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Figure 1: Map of Iraq and Kurdistan Region. This map illustrates the Kurdish region in Iraq, depicting the location of Halabja city and the neighboring countries.

1 Introduction

For many Kurds, including myself, the awareness of the Halabja Genocide was revealed through visual representations, often encountered in commemorations broadcast on television. As a child, these images served as an emotional introduction to the tragic history of my people, fostering a sense of Kurdish identity and nationality. I was first made aware of what happened in Halabja through its visual representations. It was not until years later that I discovered the Halabja Genocide was not an isolated event. Instead, it was part of a larger campaign planned by the Baathist regime in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign, consisting of eight stages in total, aimed mainly to defeat the Kurdish opposition and solidify Baathist authority.

The first documented usage of chemical weapons was during the First World War. The act was internationally condemned and banned by the Geneva Convention in 1925 (Bretislav Friedrich et al.). However, in 1988 the chemical weapon was used by the Baathist regime in the Kurdish city of Halabja and killed up to five thousand people. The Halabja Genocide took place on March 16, 1988, as one of the early stages of the Anfal campaign, a systematic campaign for Kurdish cleansing in Iraq that claimed the lives of 182,000 Kurds in total (Gareth Stansfield & Mohammed Shareef, 2017). The city of Halabja, back then considered a town, is situated in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a region where the Kurdish population settle and rule autonomously today. This instance emerged as a symbol of Kurdish resistance and solidarity, contributing significantly to the *collective memory* of the Kurdish people (Ofra Bengio, 2014).

Unlike Halabja, which is documented through excruciatingly detailed photographs, the Anfal Campaign lacks visual records, relying solely on written accounts and the discoveries of mass graves following the regime's downfall. The photographs we have of the Halabja Genocide have served as an inspiration for many artworks about the Halabja Genocide to expand the narration of the genocide through other cultural means. As a result, a post-memory of the Halabja Genocide has been steadily constructed and its cultural materializations will be the focus of this research.

We will analyze the photographs of the Halabja Genocide and reflect upon the question of how the post-memory of the Halabja Genocide is currently influenced by its photographic representations. In particular, affiliative post-memory – which is when people from the same generation connect over shared past experiences (Hirsch, 2008) – is explored. This affiliated nature is transparent in the visual material, i.e., photographs, and artworks, that have been

created using the original photographs of the attack as a source of inspiration (besides poetry). We undertake a detailed classic semiotic analysis of the photographs along with a thematic photo analysis. It is important to note that the intention is not to “over-victimize” the work of the Kurdish artist’s post-Halabja Genocide by analyzing its photographs and we do not want to overshadow other sufferings of Kurds by emphasizing only Halabja. Due to the time limitation and the scope of the research, we can only focus on this event.

The question professor Mariana Hirsch asks in one of her writings exploring post-memory is similar to what this thesis research questions are about in the case of Halabja “How do photographic images shape the work of post-memory?” (Hirsch, 1996, p. 667). Drawing from this question, this work explores these two research questions:

Main research question: What is the contemporary meaning of the cultural memory of the Halabja Genocide as revealed in its photographs?

Sub Research question: How have the photographs of the Halabja Genocide been employed in various forms of cultural production to form and transmit the post-memory of this violent past across generations?

The first chapter of this thesis provides a general yet detailed historical background of Kurds and the Halabja Genocide, with a list of related works on Halabja in the English language. The second chapter, Theoretical Frameworks, introduces collective memory and the development of the concept of post-memory, and a section reflects on photography as a powerful medium shaping our perceptions of genocide. The third chapter discusses the methodology, where the research design, data collection approaches, and photo analysis method are revealed alongside limitations and future recommendations in this area of research. The fourth chapter is one of the main chapters of the research where the photographs are analyzed, followed by the fifth chapter where the post-memory of Halabja is discussed through poetry, artworks, and cinema. The last section addresses my concluding thoughts and the bibliography. Finally, we have included additional photographs in the appendix.

2 Historical Background and Related Works

Before analyzing the photographs and exploring the post-memory of the Halabja Genocide, it is important to establish the historical background regarding the Kurds and their political circumstances. This broader context is essential in order to understand the Halabja Genocide in its entire context and its connection to the photographic medium and post-memory formation. This chapter will provide a short historical overview of Halabja, paving the way for deeper insights into the subject.

2.1 Kurds

2.1.1 Kurds and the Kurdish Question

One sentence that one could find in reading an account of the Kurds is that they are the “largest nation in the world without its independent state” (Michael Gunter, 2013, p. 159), making them “the fourth largest ethnic and linguistic minority in the Middle East” (Maria T. O’Shea, 2004, p. 1). Kurdistan, a Kurdish term meaning the land of Kurds, has gone through ongoing struggles for independence against its neighboring countries and also internally. Kurds, with their distinctive culture, language, and identity to set them apart from Arabs, Persians, and Turks, believed that they could preserve their distinction mostly due to their geographical location (Maria T. O’Shea, 2000). The first division of the Kurdish land dates back to the sixteenth century when the Ottoman Empire expanded to most of the Kurdish-inhabited land and only a smaller part remained within the new Safavid Dynasty in Persia (*THE KURDS History-Religion-Language-Politics*, 2015). After the First World War, Kurdistan was once again divided, this time between the four countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria as part of the “re-mapping of the Middle East ” by the victorious powers, Britain and France (Jaffer Sheyholislami, 2011, p. 3). Although neglected by some sources, it should be mentioned that a minor part was taken by the Soviet Union later on after they became part of the re-mapping process, consequently “Kurds becoming separated into five states” (Marianna Charountaki, 2011, p. 4). The era after this division in the region was chaotic for all the parts of divided Kurdistan, followed by many rebellion acts from the Kurds in the new hosting countries, and

it is trusted that “much of the present unrest in the area has its roots in that period.” (Maria T.O’Shea, 2004, p. 10).

The Kurdish writer and historian, Maruf Khaznadar, believes that Kurdistan is an independent unit in terms of its natural geography, but it is not a political entity as it is divided by political and diplomatic decisions of the great powers by force and these borders are man-made (Maruf Khaznadar, 2001: 14). This statement has been reinforced by the historian David McDowall when he writes: “While regional states may deny its existence, Kurdistan exists within relatively well-defined limits in the minds of most Kurdish political groups.” (David McDowall, 2005: 3). To this day, this is also the case for many Kurdish populations, who continue to refuse the division of Kurdistan and regard Kurdistan as one country that will one day be united again under one Kurdish political power.

2.1.2 Iran-Iraq War (the 8-year war)

The 1980-1988 war between Iran and Iraq is generally portrayed as “the longest conventional warfare of this [twentieth] century,” (Dilip Hiro, 1990, p. 1) that in total took eight years. It was followed by severe brutality and cruel methods from both sides that impacted the whole region. The death toll is estimated to be more than a million soldiers on both sides. During this time Kurds took the chance to rebuild their rebellion forces against the Baathist Iraqi regime by becoming an alliance with Iran and rising against it. (Bretislav Friedrich et al., 2017).

2.1.3 Anfal Campaign

By the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi government decided to put an end to its internal war with Kurds. For this purpose, they launched the Anfal Campaign; “Anfal” meaning “the spoils”, which is the title of a chapter in the Koran (Hulme, 2004: p. 205). The choice of name for this deadly campaign has many indications; the Baathist regime regarded Kurds as spoils and willingly intended to cleanse them from Iraq. Through the horror of this campaign, the Baathist government hoped to prevent all circumstances that might lead to rebellion by the Kurds (Gülistan Gürbey et al., 2017) The campaign started from 1986 to 1988, coinciding with the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War. (Hulme, 2004). Anfal was done in eight stages in different parts of the Kurdish-inhabited areas. It included the use of chemical weapons against civilian Kurds in more than one place. The most noticeable uses of this deadly weapon were in the city

of Halabja, along with the destruction of rural infrastructure and the traditional economy, the forced relocation of rural Kurdish communities, as well as brief assassinations and enforced disappearances. In total, approximately 182,000 people were killed, and 4,000 villages and Kurdish settlements were destroyed (Bozarslan et al., 2021). The numbers are expected to be higher, as there is no accurate and official census of the Kurdish population from around that time. Trees and farms in the rural areas were destroyed by fire, and springs and fountainheads were filled up with concrete throughout the campaign, while “up to 40 percent of Kurdish land was declared to be a prohibited zone.” (Gülistan Gürbey et al., 2017, p. 31). Furthermore, it was forbidden for the Kurds to visit or go through those prohibited zones that were turned into Iraqi military bases. In short, the genocide was not only an ethnic cleansing campaign to erase the Kurdish population in Iraq, but it was also equally a cultural, historical, and natural destruction and cleansing of the Kurds and their areas that changed the total structure of urban life, culture and memory of the Kurds in the years to come. In summary, it had eight stages, and the Halabja Genocide was only one stage of the campaign. Nevertheless, some sources argue that the Halabja Genocide was not officially a part of the eight stages of the Anfal campaign, but more like a foreshadowing of what was to come later on.

2.1.4 The Halabja Genocide and Beyond

On 15 March 1988 the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Iranian forces took over Halabja, causing heavy casualties to Iraqi forces. In retaliation, Iraqi forces bombarded the town for several days (David McDowall, 2005). It concluded as “the most brutal campaign against the Kurds in the history of Iraq” (Gülistan Gürbey et al., 2017, p. 18). The chemical bombarding continued for 45 minutes (Bretislav Friedrich et al., 2017). The report estimates that 5,000 people were killed and 10,000 were wounded (Moradi et al., 2017). When the news of the Halabja chemical bombardment spread to the Kurdish population, it threatened the Kurds in all the other cities and made it clear that this could happen against any other rebellious act from the Kurds. Saddam Hussein's regime had received support from various Western and regional powers during the Iran-Iraq War because they were also enemies of Iran. This made it difficult for the international community to acknowledge the atrocities of the Anfal campaign and the chemical attack on Halabja as “the industrialized world” did not want to use the international convention to undermine its goal of Iraq defeating Iran; Instead, they were eager for Iraq to win. (David McDowall, 2005, p 361).

Those who survived in Halabja and the surrounding areas in the days after the chemical bombardment fled to Iran to seek medical help and shelter, where “many survivors died in the following years, handicapped children were born, and orphans sought their identity.” (Bretislav Friedrich et al., 2017, p. 7). In the years after the Halabja chemical bombardment the fate of Kurds in Iraq changed, especially when the Baathist regime shortly after its war with Iran launched another war in the region in 1990, known as the First Gulf War, this time invading its neighboring country, Kuwait (Majid Khadduri & Edmund Ghareeb, 1997). Unlike the Iraq-Iraq war, this war raised international concern and was condemned. The Kurdish military forces, known as the Peshmerga, seized this chance and in March 1991, the national Kurdish uprising against the Baathist government began and escalated rapidly through most of the Kurdish towns and cities, and the Iraqi army was forced out of most Kurdish areas in a matter of few weeks. (Gülistan Gürbey et al., 2017)

Soon after the uprising Iraqi forces took back most of the Kurdish areas and overpowered the Kurdish rebellion and people, this “resulted in a massive exodus of Kurds in March/April 1991” (Hamit Bozarslan et al., 2021, p. 9) Kurds in massive numbers fled to the borders which are maintained areas, from fear of reoccurring what happened to Halabja in 1988. This forced the United States to create a “no-fly zone” area in which a de facto Kurdish state began to develop in northern Iraq. (Michael Gunter, 2013, p. 170).

It is important to note that the Halabja atrocity is regarded as a genocide by the Kurds. “Halabja was for the Kurds what the Warsaw ghetto is to the Jews, or Guernica to the Basques, or Wounded Knee to the Sioux” (Hardi 2011, p. 109). Genocide is a comprehensive crime. It can be practiced in one form, such as physical extermination, or various forms, such as ethnic, cultural, biological, and economic genocide (Maruf Omer Gul, 2022). These forms of genocide were implemented during the Anfal Campaign and Halabja chemical bombing, as the civilians were targeted in various mass killing methods, especially with the use of weapons of mass destruction, villages and farms were burned down to the ground, it was forbidden to do farming or any human living activities in ‘prohibited areas’, Kurdish archives and historical documents were burned, besides destroying historical places and cultural markers, the and the Arabization process was also part it, (Maruf Omer Gul, 2022). Gul’s book was a master’s thesis defended at Kyiv University, Ukraine, in 1990. First published as a book in 1995 when the authors collected the reports and proof of the Halabja chemical bombing within the Anfal Campaign became a foundation for further works on Kurdish genocides and was a part of the inspiration of this research.

2.2 Previous Research on Halabja

As already mentioned, the first systematic works about the Kurdish genocide in northern Iraq was reported by Human Rights Watch in 1993 in *Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds*, where they write at length about all stages of the Anfal in detail, and estimated the whole destruction and damages made against the Kurdish people during the eight stages of Anfal. This report became the foundation for the literature and research on the Anfal Campaign.

In her book, *Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan- Iraq*, published in 2011, Choman Hardi gives an overview of Kurdish women's role during Anfal and its aftermath, exploring the social and psychological impacts of violence, displacement, illness, poverty, and loss. Additionally, it serves as the voice of those marginalized women whose stories have been exploited by various segments of Kurdish society. The book also pays great attention to these women's survival strategies after the genocide. One of its main aims is to challenge the victim narrative, highlighting women's resilience, addressing justice claims, and discussing difficulties in mourning and finding closure. It underlines the importance of a 'gendered approach to Anfal' especially because gender norms influence the ways individuals remember and interpret their experiences and calls for more research in this area.

A study conducted by Andrea Fischer-Tahir and published in 2012 titled “Gendered memories and masculinities: Kurdish Peshmerga on the Anfal Campaign in Iraq”, explores the accounts and memories of the Peshmerga decades after the events, examining how they remember and reconstruct their identities after the defeat and genocide. Fischer-Tahir critically reviews several books, articles, and memoirs that were written after the genocide by male peshmerga fighters who fought for Kurdish freedom. She also interviewed a former peshmerga and compared it to a memoir written by a former peshmerga to inspect how they “symbolically re-establish the harmed masculinity” (Fischer-Tahir, 2012, p. 106) based on their personal experiences. The emotional impact of war on the peshmerga fighters adds depth to the discussion on gendered experiences in post-conflict environments, inspiring a broader discourse on memory studies and gender in war zones.

Baser and Toivanen's 2017 article "The Politics of Genocide Recognition: Kurdish Nation-Building and Commemoration in the Post-Saddam Era" examines the politics of genocide recognition in the case of the Anfal Campaign. This study highlights the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Kurdish diaspora organizations in lobbying to

acknowledge the Anfal Campaign as a genocide internationally. The authors emphasize Anfal as the “chosen trauma” for the Kurds in which recognition as genocide would increase KRG's diplomatic relations and nation-building efforts in the future. The study also explains that in Europe where many Kurds live, recognizing Anfal as genocide presents complex political challenges. Some host countries hesitate to recognize it due to concerns about accountability and their potential involvement in the campaign, despite acknowledging and supporting political freedoms for the Kurdish movement. However, recognizing these massacres as genocide would prove complicated by way of their indirect involvement in those atrocities.

Edith Szanto's article "Mourning Halabja on Screen: Reading Kurdish Politics through Anfal Films" published in 2018, examines how cinematic representations of historical events can impact cultural identity, political discourse, and the construction of national narratives. This is achieved through analyzing how Kurdish filmmakers use cinematic narratives to memorialize the Halabja massacre and shape political discourse. Szanto's analysis of three stages in Kurdish films referencing Halabja provides a framework for understanding evolving attitudes toward Kurdish society, history, and the independence movement. Incorporating Szanto's work enriches discussions on the intersection of memory, politics, and visuals through cinematic representations.

In Rebeen Hamarafiq's study “Cultural Responses to the Anfal and Halabja Massacres” published in 2019, three stages of memory production are explored in relation to the Kurdish genocide, first: the “pre-image” period between 1988 and 1991 where he analyzes the songs and regards it as “early efforts among Kurds to cope with trauma, displacement and loss” (Hamarafiq, 2019, p. 133). Secondly, the introduction of the “image” around 1991 with broadcasting TV in the region that was under the control of Kurdish political parties. During this stage, images of the Kurdish genocide were broadcast to the public for the first time. The last stage is the establishment of physical monuments of the genocide. Hamarafiq argues that the memory of the Kurdish genocide under Saddam Hussein is not shaped by personal or historical connections, but rather, by a standardized public memory imposed by various authorities through mass media, stereotypical images, and culturally tailored resources. The author highlights and finds out that the Anfal and Halabja genocides have been one of the main focuses of Kurdish memory for years, determining how Kurds see themselves as a group. However, Kurdish culture and media have not addressed the emotional needs of the people. Instead, they have only shared a perspective that is mostly influenced by political agendas. This has hurt victims and made Kurds feel disconnected from the memory of this genocide as it

became a political tool used for the interests of the dominant parties. Lately, Kurds are beginning to think more deeply about how their experiences are displayed in their culture and media.

In the article "Memory and Trauma in the Kurdistan Genocide" by Kurdistan Omar Muhammad, Hawre Hasan Hama, and Hersh Abdallah Hama Karim. published in 2022, the authors conducted a study on the ongoing effect of the Anfal Genocide on the Kurdish community in Iraqi Kurdistan by focusing on genocide memory and trauma. Through employing a mix of historical research and a recent survey targeting young people, the researchers explored the evolving social meaning of the genocide. They questioned whether its aftermath is understood more as a social memory or a cultural trauma. The findings of this research explained the extended impact of the memory of this genocide that still influences behaviors and perceptions within Kurdish society. This finding highlights the complex relationship between historical events, collective memory, and individual trauma in post-conflict environments. This study adds new insights to our understanding of how past traumas can outline how people see themselves and their community.

In an article by Karim and Baser published in 2023, titled "Collective Memory in Post-Genocide Societies: Rethinking Enduring Trauma and Resilience in Halabja", a new insight is offered, challenging official accounts of historical events. This study explores survivor and descendant narratives from the Halabja genocide, providing a bottom-up approach that contrasts with top-down narratives constructed by elite groups (Karim & Baser, 2023). This article emphasizes the importance of justice, shared commemoration practices, and the transmission of memory to future generations, also highlighting the complexities of memory formation in post-genocide contexts (Karim & Baser, 2023). The authors contribute to a deeper comprehension of resilience and trauma in post-genocide societies, offering new insights for future research on the Halabja Genocide.

The research article "Anfal and Halabja Genocide: Lessons Not Learned" by Ofra Bengio published in 2023 refers to the Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Genocide as a 'major trauma in modern Kurdish history' and critically examines its aftermath. The author stresses the urge for accountability and justice for the victims and addresses several shortcomings and lessons that have not yet been learned from this genocide in Kurdish society, among them being the failure to recognize this atrocity by the post-Baathist Iraqi government completely, external dependence of the Kurdistan Region, and unsustainable unity among Kurdish political parties and society. By integrating Bengio's insights with existing research on genocide, this literature

review aims to provide a full understanding of the complexities surrounding the Anfal Campaign and the Halabja Genocide and their suggestions for future peace-building actions.

3 Theoretical Framework

The primary method employed in this research is an in-depth classical semiotic analysis for seven photographs of the Halabja Genocide. These photos were purposefully selected by the author due to their high circulation in Kurdish media and their transformation to other medium in order to narrate the genocide in a different form. We aim to figure out the content and meaning of the post-memory of this genocide among the Kurds in Iraq, through analyzing these photographs. Furthermore, we employ a general photo-thematic analysis for photos to point out the common theme throughout the photographs that form the collective memory of the attack. Before that, we need to understand the concept of collective memory, post-memory, the power of photographs in a genocide and the ways in which photographs can be seen through them.

3.1 Collective Memory and Post-Memory

The French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is regarded as one of the first social scientists who contributed to the field of collective memory. He introduced the concepts of individual and collective memory around the 1920s. Halbwachs argues that individual memory is heavily influenced by its surroundings and is only “a part or aspect of group memory” (Halbwachs 1992, p. 53). He deliberates that individuals are very dependent on other members of the group in the construction of their memory; it is among others that people usually develop memory and, in this way, construct their past collectively as a group (Halbwachs 1992). This notion of collective memory suggests that individuals build their memory of the past under both direct and indirect influence of the society they belong to. Building upon Halbwachs's ideas, Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist known for his work on cultural memory, breaks down the concept of ‘collective memory’ into “communicative” and “cultural memory” (Assmann, 2011, p. 37). Communicative memory, rooted in everyday interactions is ‘non-institutional’ and fades within three interacting generations, while cultural memory, anchored in fixed points from the past, endures institutionally (Assmann, 2008: 111, 113). According to Assmann, the interaction between these forms of memories at different levels of society is important to the formation of a commemorative culture.

Pierre Nora, a French historian, introduced the concept of *lieux de memoire* “sights of memory,” and argues that sights of memory exist because we do not have “the real environment

of memory” (Pierre Nora, 1989, p. 7). Therefore, due to this decline of memory, we require practicing memory through other means such as ritual, museum, commemoration and so on (Pierre Nora, 1989). Nora explains the relationship and differences between memory and history and describes them as follows: “the quest for memory is the search for one's history.” (Pierre Nora, 1989, p. 13). He highlighted the dynamic nature of memory, shaped by social, political, and cultural contexts over time, emphasizing its subjective and evolving nature (Pierre Nora, 1989). Nora understood the role of collective memory in its changeable nature, which constructs shared identities that shape historical narration within nations through sites of memory.

American sociologist Barry Schwartz defines collective memory as “a representation of the past embodied in both historical and commemorative symbolism.” (Barry Schwartz, 2003, p. 9). Schwartz identifies two functions of collective memory in a society. First, it serves as “a model of society” reflecting the issues and mindsets of the time. Second, collective memory serves as a program that defines moral principles, acceptable behavior, and emotion, serving as “a model for society” (Barry Schwartz, 2018, p. 639). Both ways are means for preserving cultural forms. He highlights the role of commemoration in shaping collective memory and immortalizing certain events (Schwartz, 2016). Schwartz focuses on the concept of redundancy, in that there might be varieties of accounts for one single event, but the fragments of all the accounts together will create the memory of an incident whole. And once the memory is established in collectivity it cannot be ignored (Schwartz, 2016). According to Schwartz’s point of view, it is the commemoration that gives importance to a certain memory and makes it immortal or completely unrecognizable.

Marianne Hirsch is most famous for her exploration of post-memory and intergenerational trauma. She defines post-memory as a memory that is not directly one’s own but profoundly shapes one’s life. In her own words: “post-memory, in my reading, has certainly not taken us beyond memory, but is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection” (Hirsch, 1992, p. 8). She characterizes post-memory as “secondary or second-generation memory” and describes photography as a medium bridging memory and post-memory (Hirsch, 1996, p. 659; Hirsch, 1992, p. 9). While memory has more of an uninterrupted link to the past (Hirsch, 1996: 662), post-memory keeps a framework for understanding how memories are passed down across generations. It prompted contemplation on generational structures of memory transmission. The concept also facilitated reflection on how memories are transmitted over time and space influencing individuals even if they didn't

directly experience the events that shaped them, meaning generations carry on visions that are not their own through family stories, photographs, other media, museums, and other different sorts of 'transmissions'. She distinguishes between familial post-memory and affiliative post-memory (Hirsch, 2012: 5). Familial post-memory is where individuals remember events through their parents, while affiliative post-memory is when people from the same generation connect over shared past experiences (Hirsch, 2008). Hirsch provides rich literature on the aftermath of a massacre which contributes to the intergenerational connection through memory. Here we need to be cautious not to fall into the critiques of other academic works on generational memory, as Hirsch states, regarding the work of second-generation survivors of the Holocaust (Hirsch, 2012) since we are not working on a more distant generational relationship of an affiliative kind.

3.2 Genocide and Power of Photographs

Photographs are tools to revisit the past. Photography's promise to offer access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, make it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable (Hirsch, 2008). Photography has power to generate a different knowledge about what is happening in the world "the act of looking is made problematic, and the act of photographing active in its power to change the terms of perception. As a new instrument of vision, the camera allows access to a new awareness and programmatic of seeing." (Clarke, 1997, p.109). These ways of seeing shape our perception of those historical events that predate our birth and have impacted our lives and societies. Since cameras capture the details of everyday life, photographs can draw attention to a wide range of signs, social interactions, cultural norms, political styles, artistic themes, and other elements that come together in any given moment. Consequently, photographs can mediate political identity in ways that go beyond mere ideological influence. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003).

This is particularly evident in instances of atrocities. Symbols within these images, as seen in Holocaust photographs, serve to mark the atrocities committed. The widespread circulation and use of Holocaust images have contributed to a "genocidal imaginary," influencing how we understand and interpret other instances of genocide, such as the Armenian atrocities. Despite the risk of oversimplification, relying on these universal symbols provides a practical framework for highlighting other genocide cases and promoting awareness and

action against atrocities (Guerin & Hallas, 2007, p. 91). Active remembrance and commemoration of atrocities are essential ethical acts, ensuring the imperative of "never again" (Guerin & Hallas, 2007, p. 82). 'Real-time images' of genocides can serve as evidence. They also can provoke emotions and become a tool to reimagine and understand what happened. These images enable the exploration of the various perspectives and mental states of both victims and perpetrators. (Zylberman & Sánchez-Biosca, 2018). War photography serves as an influential medium for conveying emotions, both those experienced by the subjects within the photo and the viewers who engage with them (Gillani et al., 2024). On the power of the Holocaust photographs, Barbie Zelizer (2001) writes "For one of the few times in history, the pictures became the main event of the record. And for many on the home front, these photographs became the crowning proof of Nazi atrocity." (Zelizer, 2001, p. 249). Because the way photographs documented atrocities is unfiltered and realistic, it captures the disturbing details and leave no room for the "nuances of evil". (Zelizer, 2001, p. 248)

Having a set of photographs significant to a group of people creates a shared sense of community, the "imagined community" that Benedict Anderson (1991) writes about, and Spratt (2005) further expand on the idea by applying these patterns to photographs, arguing that sharing our feelings about a particular image can assist us to feel more connected to one another as a community (Spratt et al., 2005). In the case of this research, through semiotic analysis of the war photographs, we tend to realize more clearly that these photographs share a common theme of suffering, death, helplessness, and victimhood of the subject photographed, distraction, and many more. War scenes generate emotional moments that construct a complex psychological state combining fascination and disgust which is usually only associated with war (Wells, 2004). These images summarize the human experience amidst conflict, offering viewers a hint into the traumatic realities of war, therefore, the photographs of tragedy "have to stand in for what they represent," unlike other types of photographs (Buettner, 2016, p. 10). From there, by confronting viewers with the raw emotions depicted in these photographs, war photography prompts reflection on the profound impact of violence and the human cost of armed conflict, fostering an affiliative post-memory among those who bear witness to the images. In particular, photographs of genocide can act as a universal context and nuanced perspective for sharing the collective memory of a group (Wolfe et al., 2023).

3.2.1 The Myth of Photographic Truth

Roland Barthes in his collection of works *Camera Lucida*, (1980) subjectively writes about the back-and-forth reality and the representation of a photograph. Barthes marks the existence of a relationship between the photograph and the reality of the photographed object "every photograph is a certificate of presence" (Barthes, 1980, p. 87). Barthes writes about two concepts, *studium*, is the cultural, historical, and political context while a certain photograph is interpreted. Secondly, the concept of *punctum* is the detail that punctures the viewer's consciousness and evokes a certain emotional response in a viewer, each unique to them (Barthes, 1981). He argues that the meaning of any photograph is influenced by the viewer's personal experience, memory, and social context. (Barthes, 1981).

John Tagg in his book *The Burden of Representation*, first published in 1988, emphasizes how a photograph is made and used within a specific social context and institutional framework, from these points he delves into the myth of photographic truth. Tagg writes that "the photograph is not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined purposes." (Tagg, 1988, p. 3). Tagg highlights the complex relation of the photographed object to reality and questions the social context in which photography takes place, besides the subjective decisions it requires in the creation of a certain photograph. Tagg uses the term 'currency' (Tagg, 1988) to describe photographs, and emphasizes their power over us, especially the value of the 'realism' of photographs and the system behind it that flows into other mediums especially due to their ability to draw us into their 'ideological space' which portray reality "we seem to experience a loss of our reality; a flow of light from the picture to us and from ourselves into the picture." (Tagg, 1988, p. 183). Nevertheless, an image cannot fully capture or replicate the reality it is supposed to represent, rather the functions and meanings of photographs are shaped by technical, cultural, and historical influences. (Tagg, 1988). Tagg disapprove of the use of photographs as evidence and proof of what happened at a certain point in the past, in his book he also emphasizes the use of photographs in surveillance as a means of power to maintain the ideological structure.

In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (1977) describes the act of photographing people as "it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (Sontag, 1977, p. 14). This is the image of people through the photographer's perspective that can cause misrepresentation, there is room for staging the objects and manipulation which is a reason

why we cannot regard photographs as the true representation of reality. Sontag also writes about the duty of viewers to doubt what they see in a photograph and their awareness of questioning what is beyond the photographed object and its cultural context. (Sontag, 1977). "A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture" (Sontag, 1977, p. 5). Regardless, Sontag trusts that the interpretations of photographs and their truth are based on viewers' cultural and social context. Sontag encourages a critical approach in creating and viewing photographs and the potential memories photographs can create for a person as photographs have power over constructing a limited and superficial vision of the past, from here granting the illusion of being part of the reality shown through a camera.

To conclude, arguments around the myth of photographic truth are essential to critically look at whether photographs represent objective and unbiased reality, or whether it is the cultural and political context that determines the subjective meaning of photographs. In general, Barthes focuses on the emotional and semiotic aspects of the meaning that a photograph might indicate, Tagg emphasizes on the role of photography in the sociological and historical context, while Sontag centers ethical consideration of photographs and their cultural implications. All three of them have a critical perspective on the myth of photographic truth, together they criticize the objectivity of photographs.

3.2.2 Iconic Photography

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites in their book *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (2011), write about iconic images as photographs that are widely circulated across a social group and become symbolic representations of a certain event, impacts shaping public memory around the historical events and reinforcing cultural identity. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2011). In this book, the authors analyze nine iconic photographs, and they specifically point out the impact and inspiration of these photographs on other mediums, in other words, they analyze how these images have impacted circulation in other forms which is the public memory the image has created among the people. They argue that the circulation of iconic photographs across other media and means in society indicate power in directing public opinion. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2011). In another work, they describe iconic photos and their position in public life "these images are moments of visual

eloquence that acquire exceptional importance within public life.” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 38).

David D. Perlmutter (2005) about the power of iconic images writes “they drive public opinion, they overturn government agendas, they force policy, they make history-they change the world.” (Perlmutter, 2005, p. 110). He has several criteria to categorize iconic photographs, among them, iconic photographs are recognized immediately, it is about a historical event, become widespread quickly and it mostly creates a strong emotional response among the viewers. These photos also narrate a human experience that is relevant internationally regardless of cultural and national barriers. Due to these symbolic complexity, iconic photograph allows for numbers of interpretations. (Perlmutter, 1998).

Reusing iconic photograph suggests the common belief that “photographs have a direct and powerful effect on public consciousness.” (Spratt et al., 2005, p. 117). Iconic photographs can deeply bear stories of nationalism, unity, and resilience after tragedy. Nonetheless, photographs power has more than one layer that construct its meaning and effectiveness, meaning is constructed by personal memories, experiences, emotions and background. People interpret these images through their own beliefs, using them to form cultural identities or challenge mainstream narratives. (Spratt et al., 2005, p. 133).

In general, for a photograph to become iconic, it must be recognizable, have the extensive circulation and the ability to influence public opinion by creating emotional responses that is relevance regardless of time and geographical borders. Besides, the power of iconic photographs exists through its multilayered values, because it narrates human experience, and this power must continue to impact shared memory and social narratives of certain events.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research takes a qualitative approach, which is particularly suitable for studying the complex and multilayered nature of post-memory especially with using visual data, such as photographs, as the primary data source for the Halabja Genocide. The qualitative method has a rich descriptive nature that is essential for our research as it allows us to explore the emotional and cultural aspects of the photographs. Unlike the quantitative method which is more driven towards numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative method provides the required depth and context (Langmann & Pick, 2018).

For example, if we take quantitative visual content analysis as possibility for this research, it becomes challenging because pictures are often ambiguous and have various interpretations. This makes it difficult to predict their impact easily without considering the context and cultural narrative of the photographs. Simply counting what is shown in a photo is not enough, rather background knowledge about the photo is necessary to fully analyze its meaning. (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011).

The qualitative approach facilitates this research to consider subjective experiences and meanings that a Kurdish individual attach to the photographs of the Halabja Genocide. This is crucial for understanding how these images evoke emotions, convey cultural narratives, and contribute to the construction of post-memory. By focusing on the interpretations of the photographs, we can uncover the layers of significance that go beyond the visual content, revealing the broader social and historical contexts in which these images are rooted. (Langmann & Pick, 2018).

4.2 Data Collection

Our primary data source used in this research is the collection of photographs by ten photographers mainly from Iran, most of which are displayed in the Halabja Monument in the city of Halabja, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Several photos with unidentified owners, particularly from Jamal Lolo's archive, were excluded from our analysis due to ethical considerations. Photos used in this research are by these photographers: Ahmed Nateghi, Saeed Sadeqi, Saeed

Jan-Bozorg, Mehdi Jamshid, Sasan Moayedi, Gholamerza ShIr-Mohammad-Pur, Ehsan Rajabi, Jassem Ghazbanpur, Abasalt Bayat, Jihan Baxshi Taher Xan, and Ramazan Ozturk.

Most of the photos used in this research can be found online. Nevertheless, we obtained permission from several places to use them. We gained access to a collection of the Halabja Genocide photographs through following means:

1. Zheen Archive Center in Kurdistan: This archival center in Sulaimani city provided a collection of the Halabja photo archive.

2. Halabja Monument: inside the first hall of the Halabja monument, they display photographic exhibition of the chemical attack, they permitted us to have a digital copy of their exhibition and their archive.

3. Personal Archive of Jamal Lolo: Through the personal connections of the author, we accessed Jamal Lolo's extensive collection of Halabja genocide photographs, which he has been collecting from various sources, including the photographers themselves.

4. Interviews Conducted by Ebrahim Hawramani: In his book *Those Pictures that Provoked the World* (2011), Hawramani provides valuable insights and interviews with the photographers.

5. A Photo Report on the Chemical Massacre in Halabja by Iranian Photographers (1988): This report helped us identify and cite the photographers who were included in this report.

In addition to photographs, information about the figures, the history of the city and its people were collected through many conversations and phone calls with Khasraw Hamakarim, who himself is from the Halabja city and was living there until the attack where his family moved to the city of Sulaimani and never returned to Halabja.

Furthermore, several artworks and poems that are written in memory of the Halabja Genocide - which we claim are inspired by the original photograph - serve as the post-memory cultural products of the Halabja Genocide. They also stand for "the aesthetic of post-memory" (Hirsch, 1992, p. 27). The artistic works used in this research were all collected directly from the artist of the works, Osman Ahmed. We were also granted permission to translate and analyze Rafiq Sabir's poem on Halabja from the poet himself.

Due to the lack of a centralized Kurdish national archive, most of the artistic works alongside the photo archive of the atrocity were sought through personal contacts with the artists and collectors. This was our main challenge in gathering visual and cultural records of the Halabja Genocide which took a very long time.

4.3 Sampling Procedure

Collectively we own a collection of 622 photos of the Halabja Genocide. This collection includes photos of the attack and the aftermath, as well as images to the civilian who were transported to hospitals in several cities in Iran and those people who were settled in camps. There are many repetitive photos in the collection, or same instance captured by several photographers. The quality of the photographs is rarely decent, and none of the collection we were granted by the organization or personal connection were categorized or organized. It was through our own research, in searching between journalistic reports and the few books we had on the Halabja Genocide that contained some of the photographs, we could find the photographer of each photo shown in this research. Especially because we did not want to use photographs with unknown owner. This made the sampling procedure more complex and time consuming.

Among the 622 photos that we have collected of the Halabja Genocide, we have used only 11 of them in our semiotic and thematic analysis. It is important to note that 5 of these photographs are of the same figure, who is the icon of Halabja Martyr City, taken by different photographers from different angles. These photos were purposefully selected by the author, due to their high circulation in Kurdish media and their transformation to other medium to narrate the genocide in a different form. This purposive sampling was considered appropriate for selecting among wide and unorganized set of photos without prior study or categorization.

Due to the challenging nature of our photo collection, we planned to work on the photos that are either iconic or well known among the Kurdish community and have been transferred to other art forms. In hope that the analyzing of these selected number of photographs offer a glimpse into how the post-memory of Halabja Genocide if formed under the influences of its photographs.

4.4 Photo Analysis

In his book *The Photograph*, Graham Clarke (1997) emphasizes the need to read photographs as a text (Graham Clarke, 1997). For him, photography is a language that has its grammar and syntax, making it an “international language” containing messages that reflect the cultural codes and values in question (Graham Clarke, 1997, p. 28). For Clarke, reading a

photograph is, in a way, no different from exploring a series of hidden relationships or an “active play” of sorts, going beyond what can merely be seen (Graham Clarke, 1997, p. 29).

In this research, semiotic photo analysis and photo-thematic analysis are used on photos by ten photographers who took photos during and after the chemical bombing of the city of Halabja. We found this approach suitable for studying the multi-dimensional nature of the visual content we have in hand in order to better understand the post-memory of the Halabja Genocide and to explore what can be understood through its photographic archive.

Semiotic analysis is used to decipher the layers of hidden meaning within photographs in this research. This approach was pioneered by figures such as Swiss linguists Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, and others to understand the signs and symbols in photographs. Saussure's structural linguistics laid the basis for semiotic analysis, introducing the concept of signs containing a signifier (the physical form) and a signified (the underlying meaning) (Sanders, 2004). Charles Peirce expanded on this idea by introducing the model of signs (the icon, index, and symbol), further emphasizing the dynamic of meaning-making (Hogan, 2022).

Barthes further developed semiotic analysis within photography through *Camera Lucida*. In this work, he introduces the concepts of the studium (the cultural and historical context of a photograph) and the punctum (the detail that punctures the viewer's consciousness) (Barthes, 1981). Although Barthes collection of work, *Camera Lucida*, is not a methodology of semiotic analysis, it provided a framework for how to interpret photographic images, especially his concept of myth, that we borrowed and used in this research. As Umberto Eco also explored semiotics in his work, defining it as that which concerns “everything that can be taken as a sign” (Eco, 1976, p. 7).

Daniel Chandler responds to the question of why semiotics is important and what it can offer by arguing that through semiotics we learn to interpret the world through signs organized by codes. In a visually dominated culture, it is important to recognize that even realistic images are shaped by these codes without realizing them. Analyzing these codes helps challenge our perceptions and further show that not all representations reflect reality equally (Chandler, 2007).

We applied classic semiotic analysis to seven photographs by identifying their signifier and signified. For example, the photograph taken by Ahmed Nateghi of a man named Omeri Khawer lying face down on the ground holding his newborn baby. Other than the obvious signs and signifier in the image, the photo shows two motionless figures on the ground, is shows Kurdish traditional clothes in an unusual urban environment captured in a black and white,

which can indicate historical context and a time when colored photographs were not yet common. The photograph is taken from a high angle, signifying the subjects as victims and powerless. Other than these apparent signs and their indication, from here we delve into the interpreting these signs in their cultural context, asking why Khawar became the icon of the Halabja despite all the other photographs. What was the story of Omari Khawar and his newborn?

Thematic analysis has long been used by researchers in qualitative research as a tool across diverse methodologies, but Braun and Clarke introduce it as an independent method establishing a flexible approach that applies different data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis identifies patterns, subthemes, and themes throughout the data sets and focuses on patterns related to a specific research question. These common themes are determined by the researcher and can include attributes, elements, descriptors, or concepts (Langmann & Pick, 2018). There are different themes across the selected photographs, and the significance of the themes is not based on their recurrence, but rather, on the depth of their connection with the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The relationship between the different photos became increasingly clear to us in the process of collecting the photographs. In this research we have noted the overall themes and patterns that connects the selected photograph together which is also very close to what was identified in the semiotic analysis.

By incorporating insights from the semiotic analysis of Saussure and Barthes, as well as thematic analysis, these two methods complement each other's through exploring how a selection of photographs of the Halabja Genocide can be understood by looking into the signs and symbols. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural contexts that shape visual representations, how visual representations influence collective memory and contribute to the ongoing commemoration and post-memory of the Halabja Genocide.

4.5 Contribution to the Field

This study seeks to academically contribute to the fields of memory studies, visual studies, and particularly Kurdish studies. Especially through filling the gap in exploring the role of visual documents in commemorating violent pasts and the literature gap in the context of Kurdish research in the field of visual and mnemonic culture, which hopefully would serve as new insights for Kurdish society and beyond. We hope that this research will provide the

first step in further analysis of the Halabja Genocide through its visual data sets and future studies on visual representation of genocides. Especially since there is not a centralized Kurdish national archive, this work can serve as the starting point for gathering visual and cultural records of the Halabja Genocide.

4.6 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Collecting the photographs was a journey that consisted of building connections and finding those who had a richer archive and better quality of photos. After the photos were collected, identifying the photographers proved to be the most challenging aspect of the data collection process because there is no national archive of Kurds where photo archives and metadata could be easily accessed. Instead, I undertook this through personal connection, collecting information on the photographs through people from the city of Halabja, as well as three photo books that were published, one in Kurdish and two in English. These books contained mostly the photographs of Iranian photographers. The quality of the photos varied, and each source was different, which is why we chose to categorize the photographs we analyzed by creator and not by theme.

There are countless unpublished photographs still to be analyzed. However, due to the same reason, the Kurdish library contained little online data, and even the physical data was not well organized in accessible places. Due to these reasons, most of the research work had to be conducted upon returning to Kurdistan after finishing classes at Charles University. These limitations impacted the research in several ways: it constrained the time available for analysis, added extra workload of building connection which through we gained the collection of photographs. As the result, the analysis part became shorter than planned, and the data collection became a major part of the research. Nevertheless, on a smaller scale we conducted the same work and tried to cover all aspects on analyzing seven photographs.

The Halabja Genocide in general is not studied enough to have rich body of literature or various insights on the event. Moreover, based on our research on this matter there has been no prior study on the photographs and visual materials of the massacre. This paper represents the first step toward the visual analysis of this tragic event, making it the foundational attempt to collect data for further research in this field of study.

Our recommendations for future research, in general we are in need for ways and deeper insights to interpret these photos by looking into their effect through different methods and

other data collection means. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to collect the photographs in high quality and create a reliable photo archive for the Halabja Genocide; one that can be accessible to the public and serve as research material for researchers. Lastly, we recommend the development of a centralized Kurdish photo archive, using newer technology to enhance photo analysis and enrich Kurdish visual archive.

5 Analysis and Findings

5.1 Understanding the Photographs of the Halabja Genocide

In this research, the photographs of ten photographers who took photos during and after the chemical bombing in Halabja city are used. Their names are ordered according to the date of their arrival to the city of Halabja by Ebrahim Hawramani in his photobook *Those Pictures that Provoked the World*, in which he collected the photographs and interviewed most of the photographers who took photographs of the Halabja Genocide and is one of the main resources for this research.

Photographers from Iran: Ahmed Nateghi, Saeed Sadeqi, Saeed Jan-Bozorg, Mehdi Jamshid, Sasan Moayedi, Gholamerza ShIr-Mohammad-Pur, Ehsan Rajabi, Jassem Ghazbanpur, Abasalt Bayat, Jihan Baxshi Taher Xan.

Photographers from: and Ramazan Ozturk (Kurdish photographer)

Having photos as evidence was a new concept for Kurds, these photos were treated in several ways, firstly these photos resemble a real experience, a mass killing that occurred in a small town, and because there are images it means it was 'real', as Barthes say. This removed the doubt, and the photos were treated as a proof and the depiction of a certain reality among Kurds. Secondly, another reality beyond the images were imagined or mere created, among the public, because at the end these were photos and not what might truly happened, this point was used by both sides, Kurds and Baathist regime, for political purposes, on one hand Kurdish politicians were claiming the event might have been much bigger but was not documented enough, was on the other hand Baathist regime despite having photographs were denying the massacre. An important question arises here, what was the real scale of the genocide? What are its impacts?

One of the unrecognized duties of these photographs of the Halabja Genocide for Kurds is that these photograph serves as an essential document for post-memory of the Kurds and supports the Kurds in having a shared sense of community, the "imagined community". Through them they feel closer to one another as a community despite the nationless body. It was through the photos the political forces were trying to prove what happened was real and were trying to create a collective public response to the Kurdish cause in Iraq and as the result to ask for their freedom of a regime that killed them.

Most of the reports were in Iranian. This is because access to the Halabja area was controlled by the Iranian forces, facilitating them by dominating early reporting (Hiltermann, 2007). Many of these photographs are displayed in the Halabja monument. Visitors enter and see these photographs that speak to them about an atrocity that happened not too long ago. Yet, even with knowing this fact, stepping into the exhibition which is the first display in the building of the monument, one still gets that glimpse of the cold while seeing an unexpected view of the city that once was bombed with chemical weapons. Accordingly, individuals find themselves confronting the exhibit with a sense of emotional vulnerability, and some may unconsciously skip certain images due to their graphic scenes. Nevertheless, it is important to pause and reflect on these photographs, to confront the discomfort and engage with the difficult questions they raise. Through this exploration, we can begin to understand these images and their role in shaping the post-memory across Kurdish generations after the genocide and the artistic expressions that emerged in response to the Halabja Genocide.

5.1.1 Semiotic Photo Analysis

The iconic photo of the Halabja Martyr. Man identified as Omeri Khawer and his newborn baby:



1) Photo by Ahmed Nateghi

Among all the photographs, this photo became the icon of the Halabja Genocide in the collective memory of the Kurds. There are multiple versions of the same two figures by different photographers, the one above is by the Iranian photographer Ahmed Nateghi. Nateghi. He took the first photo of Omer Khawer and his newborn baby. Nateghi said in an interview that it was only a few minutes after they were dead when he saw them and took the photo (Ebrahim Hawramani, 2011). The photo depicts Omari Khawar, the man lying face down to earth in Kurdish clothes and headband, embracing his newborn child. The infant is wrapped in white fabric, which is used in Kurdish tradition as a symbol of purity. The baby's face is clear and visible, eyes closed, and mouth is open as if in a silent cry for help.

Signifiers:

- Two figures on the ground, a man and an infant, both motionless.
- Clothing, especially the adult figure, wearing traditional clothes and the Kurdish turban '*camane*', which has regional significance and depicts the cultural identity of the subject.
- The urban environment, the concrete and the wall, and the waste around the figures tell a story of devastation.
- The black and white image and the angle from which the photo is taken indicate the historical period and vulnerability of the figures.

Signified:

- The lifeless bodies signify death. The position of the adult and the infant suggests a familial bond and evokes a profound sense of loss.
- The Kurdish clothing and the turban of the man signify a group identity which is Kurdish culture.
- The urban background signifies the aftermath of a conflict.
- The monochromatic scheme signifies a historical context and a time when colored photographs were not yet common. Furthermore, the photograph is taken from a high angle, portraying the subjects as victims and powerless.

In a conversation with one of Khawar's neighbor, Khasraw Hama Karim, before the attack, he mentioned that Omer was father of nine girls until a short period before the attack his twin boys were born. He was so grateful that after many years he had been granted two

boys, which is a sign of honor in the Kurdish culture, having male offspring is what believed to continue your origin and hold your family name. While the attack, to save on of his boy he tried to escape the strong smell of gas poison by leaving the house, but he cannot continue, and both his son and he die in front of their house. Omeri Khawar, his nine daughters, two boys and wife were killed all in the chemical attack. The main reason of why the photo of Omeri Khawar became iconic is because of the story behind it. Although the photo itself fills all the criteria's Perlmutter have for a photo to become iconic, but on a cultural level Omar is trying to save his root from being erased completely.

This photo became the iconic representation of the Halabja Genocide. There is a statue made by the artist Zahir Sdiq in front of the Halabja monument entrance, it has also merged into many other art forms and talked about more than any other photograph among the public. This is due to the familial bond between the father figure and the infant's innocent facial expression. It raises a deep emotional response among viewers, depicting the innocence and helplessness symbolized by the baby's white clothing and the desperate attempt of the father to shield his child. Looking into Barthes' concept of myth, through this image we can understand a deeper societal belief about a group of people living under oppression. It challenges us to reflect on the worth of individuals, the anonymity of urban life, and cultural narratives surrounding suffering and invisibility in public spaces.



2) Photo by Sasan Moayedi



3) Photo by Mehdi Jamshidi



4) Photo by Ramazan Ozturk



5) Majidi Karimian



6) Photo by Ahmed Nateghi

This photo by the Iranian photographer Ahmed Nateghi shows the start of the bombardment on Halabja (Ebrahim Hawramani, 2011). There are two figures in this black and white photograph: one is fully apparent, and the other is partly in the edge of the photo, both appear to be running while smoke has recently started rising from buildings not very far from them.

Signifiers:

- The human figures in motion indicated by the blur of movement signifies the urgency of fleeing.
- The subject is wearing traditional clothes.
- Smoke in the background caused by the bomb explosion signifies destruction.
- The unfruitful tree contributes to an atmosphere of desolation.
- The mountain behind the buildings indicates a geographical mark of the Halabja land area.

- The blurriness of the photo implies the hurried motion of the photographer and the subject and contributes to a sense of chaos and confusion in the atmosphere.

Signified:

- The human figure in motion represents the desperation and fear that arises in a sudden attack.
- The subject is wearing Kurdish clothes which indicates the national identity of the group attacked by the chemical weapon.
- The smoke symbolizes the occurrence of a violent act indicating harm and destruction.
- The landscape signifies loss and the end of normality. The mountain behind the buildings symbolizes the mountainous region of Kurdistan and its nature.
- The blurry image conveys the confusion and disorientation that accompanies such catastrophic events.

A narrative link is created between the smoke and the moving figures, implying a cause: smoke and an effect: the escape. The interpretation of Barthes' myth involves a broader social story that calls upon the instinct to survive and the universal experience of catastrophe. It also represents the speed of modern combat that disrupts everyday life leaving only the human instinct to flee for safety.



7) By Gholamerza ShIr-Mohammad-Pur

This colored photograph is one of the key pictures demonstrating the moment of bombardment, taken by the Iranian photographer Gholamerza ShIr-Mohammad-Pur.

Signifiers:

- Rising smoke from the ground to the sky is a representation of destruction.
- The empty streets and simple houses indicate everyday urban life.
- The colored photograph provides a realistic representation of the landscape.
- The city is surrounded by mountains.
- A clear sky can be seen beyond the smoke suggesting that the incident has not yet reached other parts of the city.

Signified:

- The smoke represents the attack that implies the existence of a catastrophic event.
- The empty street signifies evacuation indicating how sudden and severe the attack was.
- The color in the photograph represents the reality of the situation and the time of day, signifying that the attack occurred during a time when people might normally be out.

- The contrast between the clear sky and the smoke could symbolize the quick disruption of peace and normalcy.

The direction of the smoke with the wind hints at the spread of chemicals, and the sunlight's angle suggests morning time. Through Barthes' lens, the viewpoint of the street draws the eye toward the smoke, creating a visual path leading from normalcy to catastrophe, marking the image as both a testament to the vulnerability of peace and a simple historical record of what happened that day in Halabja.



8) Photo by Ahmed Nateghi

This is one of the images of the Halabja Genocide that serves as a strong visual statement about the impacts of the violence particularly on families and children. The combination of the characters in their different states forms a narrative of a single moment in the aftermath of the attack depicting the misery. There are six figures in the photo, one of the figures lying down in the middle seems lifeless, and others look alive but affected and terrified.

Signifiers:

- The suffering of the individuals on the ground, especially the two children, are signifiers of exposure to a deadly situation.
- The young boy embracing the body of the man who seems lifeless, is a signifier of refusal to let go of the man.
- The young child lying on the ground on the right side of the photo looking directly into the camera with a wet cloth in hand signifies using a protection tool to survive the chemical weapon.

- The older man leaning over the three figures on the ground is holding a child's shoe with a bag-like cloth which signifies an elder's attempt to provide comfort or assistance amidst the tragedy.
- The woman holding a child signifies a protective act, an attempt to shield the young from further harm.
- The messy style of clothing and state of the surrounding environment signifies the aftermath of a tragic event.
- The old man's hat and clothes signify a regional culture.

Signified:

- The physical expressions and body language convey a sense of urgency and mourning.
- The victims on the ground represent the direct human impact of the bombing and chemical warfare.
- The look of the boy in a red hoodie and the way he is holding the body of the lifeless man on the ground is a sign of separation, breaking family and society structure.
- The boy looking at the camera survived the chemical attack because he breathed through a wet cloth, which was one of the lifesaving measures that allowed him and others to endure the poisoned air from the chemical bombs.
- The older man's posture leaning down towards the figures on the ground signified a sign of resilience and humanity in moments of cruelty.
- The woman and child can be interpreted as a symbol of hope and the will to survive, as well as the instinct to protect the next generation.
- The framework of the image signifies the universality of the destruction created by the chemical attack.
- The attire and the hat signify the Kurdish identity of those in the photo.
-

The image narrates the atrocity of chemical warfare, the vulnerability of civilians in war, and the breakdown of the social fabric. According to Barthes' concept of myth, this photo depicts the universal narrative of war's impact on civilians. It captures the global horror of chemical weapons and the specific historical memory of the Halabja attack. Furthermore, the scene in this photo resonates with cultural narratives surrounding conflict, loss, and the human cost of political upheaval.



9) Photo by Saeed Jan-Bozorg

There are three figures in this black and white photograph, a man wearing Kurdish clothes lying on his back, a woman lying on her face, her upper part covered with a blanket, and a black cat in an urban setting.

Signifiers:

- The bodies on the ground are signifiers of death.
- The urban background implies a public area which is not a typical place for bodies to lay, signifying that something unusual.
- The absence of immediate help suggests isolation of the victims.
- The disordered clothing of the bodies indicates a violent or unexpected event.
- A travel pouch in the photo behind the woman signifies a willingness to escape death.
- The dead cat signifies the scale of the loss that not only affected humans but also animals.
- The black and white photograph gives a historical and documentary character to the scene.

Signified:

- The motionless bodies signify the human cost of chemical attacks, representing the fragility of life.
- The urban background can represent any city and the universality of suffering in conflict, suggesting that this could happen anywhere.
- The absence of help signifies neglect or the overwhelming nature of the event that prevents immediate aid.
- The clothing signifies the ordinary everyday life that was interrupted.
- The travel pouch is a symbol of resilience in the face of the unknown.
- The arrangement of the bodies in relation to each other, especially to the black cat, creates a narrative of the catastrophic destruction of all lived souls in the area.
- The composition of the photograph, leading from the foreground to the background suggests the widespread nature of the attack.

Beside the women, there is a 'têshu', a Kurdish word for something like a travel pouch. It is a cloth that can carry food and necessary items, easily warped, and carried on the go. It is a quick and simple way used in the Kurdish tradition and holds a deep cultural connotation that implies readiness to move in times of uncertainty. This is a symbolic sign that these people knew they must escape and be ready to go, as the woman had to take some necessary belongings. The *têshu*, then, is not just an object but a symbol of resilience and survival in the face of the unknown. Regarding Barthes' myth, this image conveys a powerful myth of inhumanity caused by chemical warfare. It reflects a collective understanding of such acts, and the myth also conveys the suddenness of mass tragedies and how they disrupt the flow of ordinary life, leaving only the dead as silent testimony to what occurred, and it can draw the failure of the international community to protect civilians. Furthermore, in the photos that are taken a few days after the attack, most of the faces of the crops are covered with some sort of fabric or blanket. This is a cultural 'code' of respect for the body of a dead person, especially of women, and it also has a religious connotation. This also means that the corpses were there for a few days.



10) Photo by Saeed Jan-Bozorg

This is a photograph of a dead cow and a living calf next to each other, the calf looking into the camera in a field during springtime. The photo is a narrative of life and death, resilience and vulnerability, and the realities of conflict as it impacts the living world, not just human life. This is one of the photographs that offer insight into of how the nature of Halabja was affected by this genocide and its consequences. It is noteworthy that the massacre took place during the spring season, a time of growth and renewal that has cultural significance for Kurds, who celebrate their new year on the 21st of March.

Signifiers:

- The dead cow indicates the end of life.
- The living calf next to the lifeless cow indicates survival and continued life.
- The season indicated by the grass signifies rebirth and growth and stands in contrast to the death of the cow.

- The black and white image during spring signifies the overshadowing of new life by the specter of death.

Signified:

- The dead cow represents the reach of chemical warfare to the animals and nature of the city, extending beyond human casualties.
- The living calf suggests resilience and the persistence of life amidst the devastation.
- The spring setting known for a new start and renewal of nature contrasts with death, intensifying the tragedy of the scene.
- The black and white in the photo represent a loss of life and a historical event.
- The visual relationship between the cow and the calf implies a natural familial bond broken by an unnatural cause.

Through the lenses of Barthes, the dead cow symbolizes the loss of nurture and sustenance, typically provided by a mother to her offspring. The living calf amidst a landscape of death and in the spring season that symbolizes life can be interpreted as a metaphor for survival against the odds and the continuation of life cycles despite man-made destruction.



11) Photo by Saeed Jan-Bozorg

This photo represents the death of a group of people, probably a family, around a spring just outside the city, as the water was thought to be one of the survival mechanisms, although the water in Halabja was poisoned as well as the air that day. There are seven figures, four of them appear to be children and three adults. The scene carries a failed attempt to escape that only leads to death, contrasting with the river's traditional connotations of life and purity.

Signifiers

- dead bodies are lying along a spring, some of them partially in the water.
- The spring and water which usually signify life and nourishment, is now a setting for a scene of death.
- The surrounding location is like a cave, a natural place that signifies a place of refuge.
- The photo is in black and white, making it feel ageless and adding to the seriousness of the scene.

Signified

- The bodies by the water signify an attempt to escape from the chemical attack, reflecting their desperation.
- The river is normally a symbol of life, here juxtaposes the finality of death, signifying the complete difference between nature's intended nurturing role and the harsh reality of this man-made event.
- The cave and rocks could be seen as the silent earth that witnessed the atrocity, showing that nature couldn't protect against such a man-made disaster.
- The black and white intensifies the mood of the tragedy, focusing the viewer on the textures and forms that tell the story of this catastrophe.

The layout of the bodies leading to the cave suggests a narrative path from life to death, with the river acting as a boundary between the two. On a mythic level, the image could be interpreted as a testament to the cruelty of chemical warfare, illustrating a moment where even nature's world could not protect itself from the unnatural horrors of war.

In summary, photographs are influenced by various technical choices, including framing, composition, viewpoint, and depth of field. These decisions, whether made consciously or randomly under the conditions at the time, follow certain photographic codes. These decisions are important to understand as photos taken in unstable situations, for instance, reflect the circumstances under which the photos were taken, such as times of danger and war (Zylberman & Sánchez-Biosca, 2018). Other than the photography techniques which are only one aspect of the general themes, there are patterns and concepts throughout the selection that build its narration.

Drawing some common themes from the Halabja photographs through the lenses of photo-thematic analysis, almost all the photographs are taken from above which indicates the powerlessness of the dead people. Children and women are the main figures in most of the photos, with many of them being corpses. The elderly were also in many of these photographs, as most of the young men were already soldiers in the Iran-Iraq War or among the Kurdish peshmerga forces. There is a clear identification of a group identity, indicated through Kurdish clothes and symbols of Kurdishness. Lastly, spring as a crucial season and symbol of renewal and for the Kurds has made the tragedy of Halabja even more historical as death took the life of 5000 people, animals and the greenness of the spring.

6 Post-Memory of Halabja

Rebecca Jinks (2016) uses the term 'genocidal imaginary' to describe the cultural understandings of genocide. According to her account, each new representation adds to a collective idea about genocide, some of these become widely shared, influencing future works, and different combinations will be seen by different members of the public. Together, they form a predominant and abstract concept called the 'genocidal imaginary,' which represents a general understanding of what genocide is and how it occurs. This is pieced together from movies, books, exhibitions, and public discussions. This concept and individual representations interact, influencing and shaping each other (Jones, 2017). For Jinks, it is the cultural production of a genocide that shapes the collective awareness and memory of the actual event (Jinks, 2016). This cultural representation is described by Hirsch as a work of post-memory, "post-memory encourages acknowledging the role of subjective elements in shaping the way we remember and understand the past" (Hirsch, 1992, p. 8). In this chapter, several products of post-memory are analyzed.

Below we will be presenting some examples of works of post-memory in poetry, artwork, and cinema. There is a rich body of work that has influenced the post-memory of Halabja among the Kurds who were influenced by the photographs of the Halabja Genocide. Due to the scope of this research, we will only focus on several examples. In poetry, we discuss Rafiq Sabir's piece of the genocide, *Lawkî Helebce* (Elegy for Halabja), in this long piece of the poem we only analyze an excerpt translated by Jiyar Homer and Mike Baynham. The analysis of the poem is done with the help of Dr. Bushra Kasnazani, lecturer at the University of Sulaimani's Department of Kurdish Language and Literature, who improved my understanding of the poem through her explanation of the language metaphors and decoding the meaning behind the words used in writing the poetry. Regarding the artistic works, we have Dr. Osman Ahmed's collection of paintings and sketches soon after the attack on Halabja in 1988 while in exile in Iran. In the last section, we list several feature films as cinematic works influenced by the Halabja Genocide photographs and explore one of the films through the analysis of scholar and filmmaker Hawraz Mohammed.

6.1 Poetry

Rafiq Sabir, the poet of one of the most renowned poems on the Halabja Genocide, which became a song and was also adapted into a play, reflects on his experiences in his memoir “*Eulogizing Life: Experiences of a Writer*” (2023). While he was exiled to Damascus shortly after the attack, he started writing *Lawkî Helebce (Elegy for Halabja)*, inspired upon seeing a documentary that was shot right after the chemical attack of Halabja. Sabir was deeply affected by the haunting images of children, women, and men dressed in vibrant Kurdish clothing spread across the streets, compelling him to finish writing this piece (Sabir, 2023). This poem has become an enduring symbol of the post-memory of Halabja among Kurds. Sabir's poem shows how art can help people remember and deal with difficult times. It is not just a poem; it is a means through which Kurds honor the memory of those who suffered in the Halabja attack. Below is an excerpt of the poem, translated to English exclusively for this thesis by Jiyar Homer and Mike Baynham with the permission of the poet:

لاوکی هه‌له‌بجه

بنوو کۆرپه شیرینه‌که‌م!
چیتێر ده‌نگی ده‌ستریژ و فرۆکه نایه‌ت
بنوو رو‌حه شه‌که‌ته‌که‌م!
بۆنی گاز و خۆین و جان‌ه‌وه‌ران نایه‌ت.

بنوو به‌ خاک
به‌ رووتیتیم،
به‌ مه‌رگی خۆم دانه‌پۆشم
ئهم سووتانه سه‌ره‌تایه‌.

بنوو به‌ په‌لکه‌ زیرینه
به‌ نیرگز و
جه‌مه‌دانی و
لاوکه‌سووره و
به‌ نامیزی داگیرساوم دانه‌پۆشم
ئهم تاوانه دوایی نایه‌

بنوو کۆرپه سه لاره کهم!
ئهم تاوانه سه مه تابه
بنوو روچه شه که ته کهم!
ئهم سووتانه سه مه تابه
بنوو
جگهر گۆشه کهم
بنوو!

Lawkî Helebce

Binû korpe şîrînekem!
Çîtir dengî destrêj û fîroke nayet
Binû ruhe şeketekem!
Bonî gaz û xwên û caneweran nayet.

Binû be xak
Be rûtêtîm,
Be mergî xom û
tînuwêtîm Datdepoşim
Em sûtane seretaye.

Binû be pelke zêrîne
Be nêrgiz û
Cemedanî û
Lawkesûre û
Be amêzî dagîrsawim datdepoşim
Em tawane dwayî nayet

Binû korpe selarekem!
Em tawane sereteye
Binû ruhe şeketekem!
Em sutane seretaye
Binû

Cigergoşekem

Binû !

Elegy for Halabja

(Excerpt)

By Rafiq Sabir

Translated from the Kurdish by Jiyar Homer with Mike Baynham.

Sleep, my darling baby!

There is no sound of gunfire and jets anymore.

Sleep, my exhausted soul!

There is no scent of gas or blood or livestock.

Sleep,

I will cover you

with the land

with my nakedness,

with my own death and

my thirst.

This burning is just the beginning.

Sleep,

I will cover you

with the rainbow

with daffodils and

turbans and

wounded elegies and

with my blazing embrace.

There is no end to this crime.

Sleep, my wilful baby!

This crime is just the beginning.

Sleep, my exhausted soul!

This burning is just the beginning.

Sleep,

my sweetheart.

Sleep!

6.1.1 Poem Analysis

This poem is written in response to the tragedy of the Halabja Genocide. There are clear elements in the poem that indicate inspiration from the images of the genocide. Rafiq Sabir in this poem writes as if he is one of the victims inside the photograph. The verses serve as a lullaby and an acknowledgment of the events that unfolded.

The poet uses the word ‘sleep’ repeatedly in this poem excerpt, as a metaphor for death. In the Kurdish language, there are many synonyms for the word death, but Sabir uses the word sleep for the victims of Halabja. This linguistic choice veils the horror of death in the gentle metaphor of rest, though this inevitably also stresses the extent of the atrocity depicted. The choice of words is understandable when looking at the photographs, as the typical words for a normal death do not seem right here. Here, the metaphor of sleep brings a calming touch to the reality of the loss. The corpses look peaceful as if they were sleeping, as though in eternal rest with one another and the natural world around them.

The poet recreates through language a poetic image with the realistic symbols and components of the photograph. For instance, the symbols and images Sabir created in one part of this poem relate to spring, which is significant to Kurds as the first day of spring marks the Kurdish new year, Newroz. The tragedy occurs just before spring. He combines the realistic image with more symbols of Kurdishness; *camane* or turbans, and the Kurdish art of singing; *lawk*, or elegy.

The poet speaks of covering them with daffodils as they sleep, the flowers symbolizing revival, and with turbans, a symbol of Kurdishness with all its struggles of the past. The “wounded elegies” is a reference to Kurdish history. He concludes with a “blazing embrace” as there is not more that can be done.

The cultural layers of the poem give a better understanding of the symbols behind the photographs. Sabir is bringing stories of the past to that of the photographs, which in turn produces a post-memory of the genocide.

6.2 Artistic Work

Artist Dr. Osman Ahmed

Osman Ahmed is a Kurdish artist who dedicated his artistic work to narrating the Kurdish genocide through sketches, paintings, and sculptures. Osman Ahmed was contacted for this research regarding his work for the Halabja chemical attack. According to his account, while Ahmed was exiled to Iran, he was made aware of the chemical bombing of Halabja through the photos of the genocide that were published and turned into posters in Iran. The artist himself had experienced a chemical bombardment as a Peshmarga in Sewsenan village earlier before fleeing to Iran and was blind for several days due to the chemical reactions (*Halabja Chemical Bombing, 1988* | *Peace News*, n.d.). Ahmed confirmed that he was touched by the photos of Halabja by the Iranian photographers which were widely published across Iran, and they pushed him to draw sketches and paintings of the figures captured in the photographs. Furthermore, he opened an exhibition in Iran for the artistic collages he made of the photographs of Halabja in the first commemoration year after the attack.



Chemical bombing of Halabja, 1988, Oil (120x100cm). Artwork by: Osman Ahmed



Chemical bombing of Halabja, 1988, Photocollage by Osman Ahmed



Chemical bombing of Halabja, 1988, pencil (30 x 42cm). Artwork by: Osman Ahmed

These works are essentially influenced by the photographs, as declared by the artist himself. Since he personally experienced the chemical attack, the artist keeps reproducing different images of that memory of himself and those who went through it, and in this way “every drawing has been a renewal of my pledge” (*Halabja Chemical Bombing, 1988 | Peace News*, n.d.). His collection of work showcased above is a direct reaction to the emotional and visual impact of the photographs.

His works convey the raw emotion and suffering depicted in the photographs and add layers of storytelling to the images through collages, sketches, and oil paintings. The theme of war and suffering is evident in the works, making them a part of the post-memory passed down

to the next generations, especially to Kurds without a familial tie to the memory of Halabja. This is crucial for the commemoration of the genocide and its mark on Kurdish identity. Ahmed's dedication to choosing the genocide as his artistic theme reinforces his belief that commemorating this genocide annually is not enough. As a Kurdish artist, he sees himself as responsible for transmitting the memory of this atrocity on a deeper level across generations. The paintings and drawings are rooted in the tragedy of Halabja and are the post-memory of Halabja inspired directly by the photographs. These artworks speak to a broader and universal human experience. Thus, the themes and messages resonate beyond the context of this single historical event.

Ahmed's first work shown here is an oil painting on canvas that depicts the aftermath of the chemical bombardment when people are gathered to see what has happened in the city and are collecting the corpse. The people staring at the corpses are wearing Kurdish clothes, some of them injured and without shoes. The dead bodies are piled over each other on a stretcher, indicating the large number of people who were killed in the attack. This not only shows the literal movement of the dead but also suggests the broader movement of a community into mourning. Together they depict the aftermath of the chemical attack through the imagination of the artist.

The second work is a photo collage merging photos of the dead children of Halabja with a photo of the Swedish-American actress, Greta Garbo, photographed by Edward Steichen. The artist merges beauty icons and famous figures of the West with his people's tragedy, as though seeking to illustrate that the world too is mourning for the children of Halabja. Garbo in a black dress, a color associated with grief and death, and her hand signal on her head expresses lamentation. A blood stain on the top similar to an eye watching from above the merged photos indicates the unjust killing of those children.

The third artwork is sketched with pencil. Using a chaotic line, the work depicts several corpses on the earth combined with the ground. The mountains are seen as often shown in most of the photographs of Halabja during the attack, along with the residential homes, and a standing figure amidst the dead bodies wearing Kurdish clothes, drawing a contrast between life and death and representing the isolation and helplessness of survivors.

The artistic works of Osman Ahmed show the emotional and visual impact of the photographs of the Halabja Genocide, transforming photographic evidence of the attack into a variety of expressive forms. This artistic work serves as a means to memorialize and pay tribute to the victims. Inspired by the photographs, artworks serve as memorials, offering spaces for

reflection and remembrance, and providing dignity to the subjects by capturing more than just their passing. This in turn extends the conversation and the memory of the event to a broader cultural context.

6.3 Cinema

In this section we present six feature films as cinematic works influenced by the photographs of Halabja. The information is gathered from the meeting of the author with the scholar and filmmaker Hawraz Mohammed, in addition to Mohammed's book, *Cinema and Identity: a Sociological Study on the Social Identity of Kurdish Cinema*.

Kurdish feature films about the Halabja Genocide:

- Jiyan (life) by Jano Rosebiani
- Hêlane Sutawekan (Burned Nests), 2012, by Shahram Maslakhi
- Bonî Sêw (the Smell of Apple): Refin Asaaf
- Berebeyanêkî zû by Anwar Sndi
- 1988 by Hezhwan Zandi
- Ew rojey Baba nwêl girya (the Day Santa Claus Cried) by Rahim Zabihi

We will shortly write about Burned Nests by Shahram Maslakhi and 1988 by Hezhwan Zandi:

Burned Nests by Shahram Maslakhi is our main example. This film narrates a personal and communal story of the aftermath of the Halabja Genocide. The film is about a lost child of Halabja who searches for his land and identity 22 years after the attack (Mohammed, 2024). It is based on a true story of a man, Ali, who grew up in Iran and finds out he is one of the lost children of Halabja only after his mother passes away, when he discovers that he was adopted after the attack on the city in 1988 (Mohammed, 2024). The film showcases what the families in Halabja went through at that time under Saddam's rule in Halabja and serves as an important educational resource and post-memory of the attack, offering insights into the human aspects of historical events, which are often lost in political discussions. Maslakhi's film is one of narration, recounting Ali's journey from Iran back to Kurdistan, reflecting the displacement Kurds experienced, in particular the lost children of Halabja. as the film uses a personal story as a lens to explore and explain a historical atrocity, linking deeply with both the photographic evidence of such events and the broader narrative of Kurdish suffering and resilience.

In a conversation regarding the importance and influence of the photographs of Halabja on Kurdish cinema, Mohammed declared that most of the movies recreate the images of the

attack on Halabja and that the photographs undoubtedly have a significant role in the memory of Kurds and the world regarding the Halabja Genocide. All related documentaries are to a large extent purely dependent on the photographs. *1988* by Hezhwan Zendi is an example of recreating stories of the figures of some of Halabja's photographs, Omari Khawar and his newborn baby as an example.

1988 film is named after the year when the chemical attack occurred on Halabja. The movie's narrative structure starts from a short period before the attack, everyday life in the city focusing on several figures whose photos became icons of the genocide, unfolding peshmerga's activity in the mountain, a love story of a peshmerga man and a girl from Halabja which later become the symbol of resilience, it also depicts the effect of Iran-Iraq war on the population besides the Iraqi government pressure on the people of the city of Halabja until it comes to the chemical attack on the March 16th, 1988.

The movie pays great attention to recreating scenes of the iconic photographs, in order to contribute to the emotional depth of real stories and realism of the narration. Here we can see how images continue to influence memory beyond their initial creation and viewing, it is again the photos in the *1988* film that draw the storyline and contribute to the post-memory of the genocide through another medium.

These Iconic photographs which most of them became media images have shaped the collective memory of Halabja among the Kurds and continue to inform public understanding and sentiment about this genocide long after they have occurred. Victims like Omari Khawar is still the center of the narration of Halabja genocide, which is also the case in the *1988* film, these images that have been recreated in the movie become symbols of broader experiences, capturing the essence of an event that impacted the Kurdish nation.

The act of recreating the photos in cinema ensures that the memories of the victims are preserved and they an evolving part of Kurdish identity and historical consciousness.

7 Discussion of Findings

The main objective of this research was to explore the contemporary meaning of the cultural memory of the Halabja Genocide as revealed in its photographs, in order to understand how these photographs have been employed in various forms of cultural production to form and transmit the post-memory of this violent past across generations.

The semiotic analysis of seven selected photographs from the Halabja Genocide featured several key visual elements that contribute to the cultural memory of the event. The representation of traditional Kurdish clothing, familial bonds, and scenes of devastations serve as powerful symbols of the collective trauma experienced by the Kurdish people. These visual elements besides documenting the atrocity also capture the resilience and identity of the Kurdish community.

The literature review supports the idea that visual representations are important in shaping collective memory and post-memory. The theoretical framework established through works on memory studies and visual culture emphasizes that photographs serve as visual proofs, securing the cultural memory within the Kurdish community and beyond. As the result, the photographs of the Halabja Genocide act as symbols of the violent past, evoking emotional and cultural responses that preserve the memory of the genocide across Kurdish generations.

The analysis of various cultural productions of poetry, artwork, and cinema, demonstrates how the photographs of the Halabja Genocide have been employed to form and transmit post-memory. Rafiq Sabir's poem "Elegy for Halabja" demonstrates how visual elements from the photographs are transformed into powerful poetic language. The poem reinterprets the emotional and symbolic content of the photographs, creating a bridge between visual and literary forms of memory. The repeated use of the word "sleep" as a metaphor for death and the incorporation of Kurdish cultural symbols such as daffodils and turbans illustrate the deep impact of the photographs on the poet's work, as he also mentions in his own memoir. This transformation highlights how poetry can encapsulate the essence of visual memory and transmit it to following generations.

Artworks of Dr. Osman Ahmed, inspired by the photographs of the Halabja Genocide, further illustrate the transformation of visual narratives into other art forms. Ahmed's paintings

and sketches reinterpret the photographs, adding layers of storytelling and emotional depth. These artworks honor the victims and contribute to the broader cultural understanding of the genocide. The artist's dedication to this theme emphasizes the importance of visual art in preserving and transmitting cultural memory. Films such as "Burned Nests" by Shahram Maslakhi and "1988" by Hezhwan Zandi recreate scenes from the photographs, using them to construct powerful narratives. The visual impact of the photographs is preserved and amplified through cinematic storytelling, ensuring that the memory of the genocide reaches a wider audience. The recreation of iconic images within these films demonstrates the enduring influence of the photographs on Kurdish cinema and their role in shaping the post-memory of the genocide.

Common themes identified across the poetry, artwork and cinema include resilience, suffering, identity, and memory. These themes reflect the influence of the photographs, this proves the photograph's role in shaping the post-memory of the Halabja Genocide. The cultural productions re-explain the visual narratives of the photographs, ensuring that the memory of the genocide is preserved and conveyed through multiple mediums. This thematic continuity highlights the photographs worth in transmitting the cultural memory of the Halabja Genocide across generations.

The findings of this research clearly demonstrate the contemporary meaning of the cultural memory of the Halabja Genocide as revealed in its photographs. These photographs serve as powerful visual testimonies that document the atrocity, evoke emotional responses, and strengthen the collective memory of the Kurdish people. Moreover, the employment of these photographs in various forms of cultural production as in poetry, artwork, and cinema, illustrates their fundamental role in forming and transmitting post-memory. By reinterpreting the visual narratives, these cultural productions ensure that the memory of the Halabja Genocide is preserved and conveyed across generations, contributing to the ongoing process of remembrance and commemoration.

8 Conclusion

Since cameras capture the details of everyday life, photographs can draw attention to a wide range of signs, social interactions, cultural norms, political styles, artistic themes, and other elements that come together in any given moment. Consequently, photographs can mediate political identity in ways that go beyond mere ideological influence. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003). The photographs of the Halabja Genocide documented the immediate aftermath of the attack, and they now most importantly serve as a reminder of the countless personal stories of loss and separation caused by the violence. This has in turn become a tool for inspiring many post-memory works of the attack through the cultural memory production of Halabja Genocide for Kurdish generations. While “Memory is always selective; we cannot represent every possible detail of an experience but must pick and choose among them—and these choices may be good or bad” (Behrendt, 2014, p. 53), in this research our focus was mainly on the meaning of the cultural memory of the Halabja Genocide through its photographs.

These photographs serve as a powerful testament to the atrocities committed in Kurdistan and play an important role in the formation of Kurdish collective memory and post-memory works of the event. The concept of post-memory provides a valuable framework for understanding how memories and traumas are transmitted across generations. This concept allows for an exploration of how the experiences of the past continue to shape the present and future work of post-memory, as the impact of the Halabja Genocide photographs on artistic expression is evident in various forms such as literature, film, visual art, and music. These photographs have not only preserved the memory of the victims but have helped create a deeper understanding of the historical, political, and humanitarian dimensions of the event. While these photographs involve the audience emotionally and are important for the collective memory of the Kurds, they are by no means complete historical records. In this research, we focused on the importance of photographs in changing the way the Halabja Genocide is perceived compared to other tragic events that are not as talked about in Kurdish history. Many aspects of the Halabja photographs touched upon a universal atrocity depicting human suffering, and that of the Kurdish struggle. Photographs of the Halabja Genocide have influenced many cultural productions and are employed in various forms, such as in poetry, artworks, and cinema. That transmits the violent past among Kurdish generations and forms an

affiliative post-memory among those without familial ties to the atrocity yet affected through their community.

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10 Appendix

10.1 Additional photographs:



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Halabja monument. Photo by the author, Lazha Barznji in her visit to the commemoration day, 2023.



Photo by: Ali Fereiduni



Photo by: Parviz Pajouhanda



Photo by: Sasan Moayedi



Photo by: Saeed Jan-Bozorg



Photo by: Saeed Jan-Bozorg



Photo by: Sasan Moayedi



Photo by: Saeed Jan-Bozorg

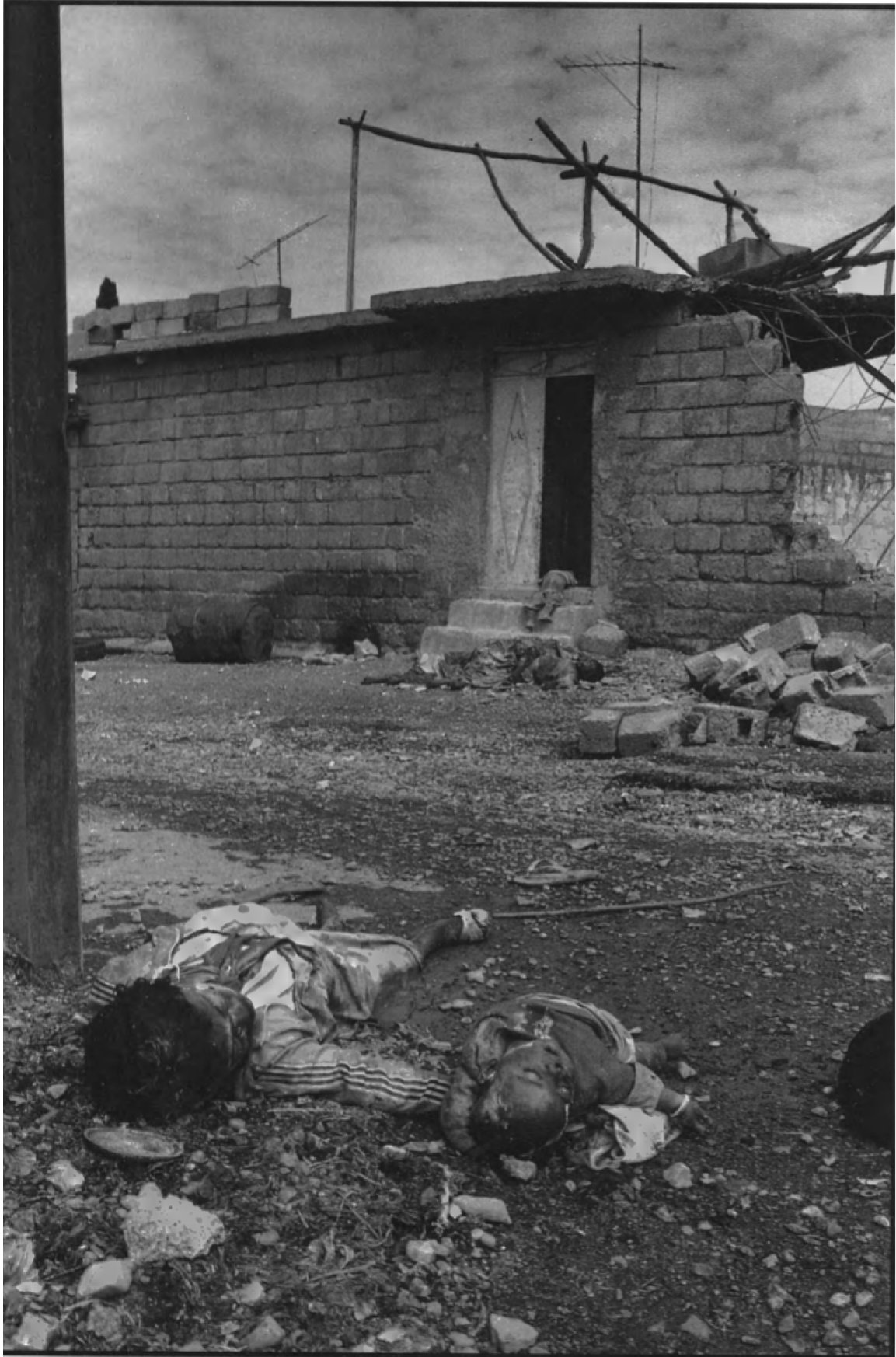


Photo by: Sasan Moayedi

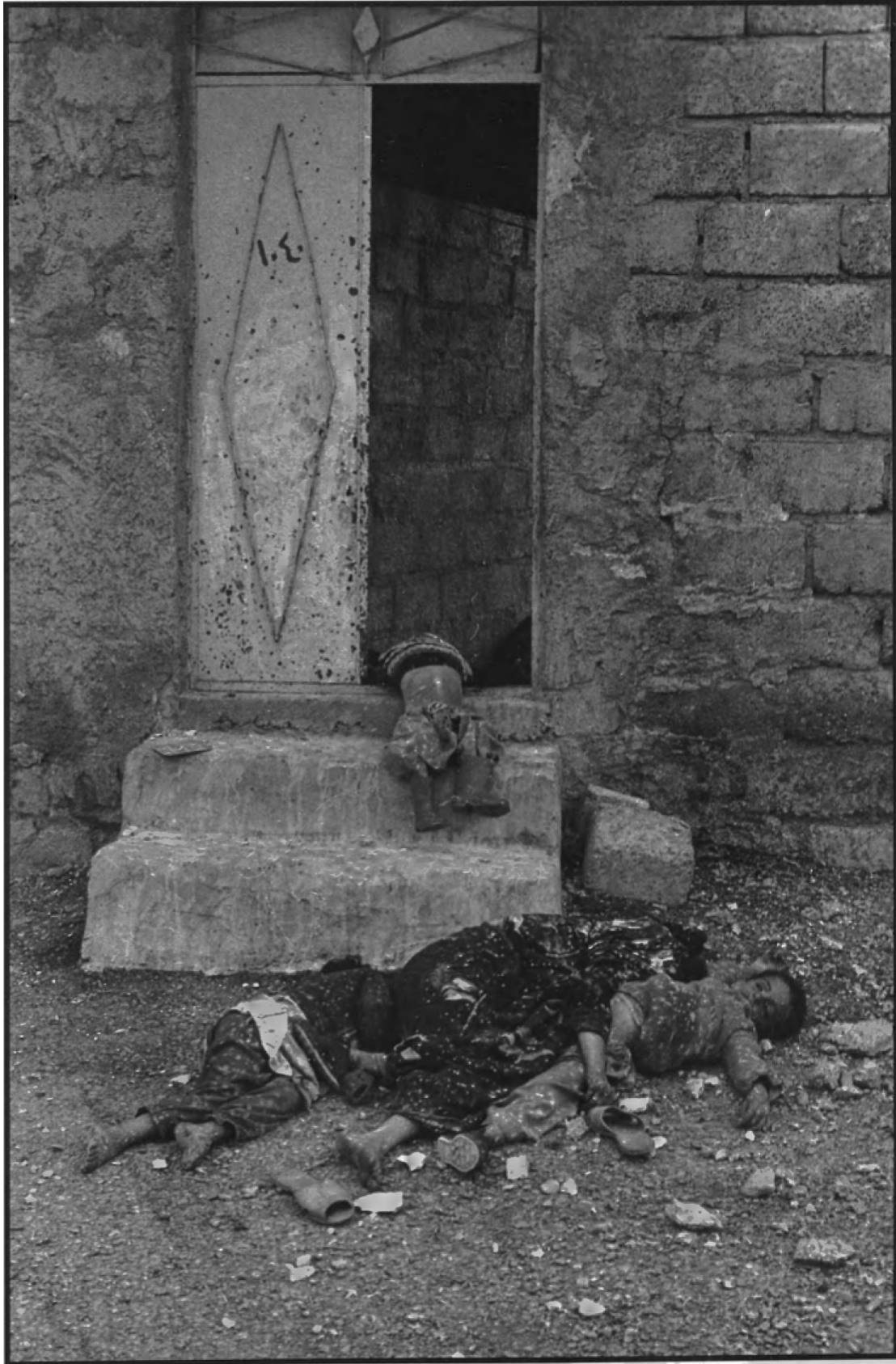


Photo by: Saeed Jan-Bozorg



Photo by: Ahmad Banakashan



Photo by: Saeed Sadeqi



Photo by: Ehsan Rajabi



Photographer unknown, photo from Jamal Lolo's archive



Photo by: Sasan Moayedi



Photo by: Sasan Moayedi



Photo by: Saeed Sadeqi



Photo by: Saeed Jan-Bozorg