

Trauma and Recovery: A Psychoanalytic Study of Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep*

Araz Ahmed Mohammed

Department of English, College of Languages, University of Human Development, Sulaimani, Kurdistan Regional of Iraq.

Abstract— This study investigates traumatic experiences of the main character in Gharbi M. Mustafa's novel *When Mountains Weep*, based on Judith Herman's conceptualization of trauma in her book *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Being on the road, Kurds are either internally displaced, migrating, or oppressed and assimilated politically. The prevention of language, confiscation of land, forced assimilation, and constant armed conflicts have made Kurds develop a traumatic cognitive and emotional response to the meaning of life, anguish, integration, and survival. Therefore, the paper studies the traumatic consequences on the main characters' psyches, in particular Hamko, based on three symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder which are hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction. Threatened by tumultuous circumstances and trapped on mountain peaks, the paper argues that generations of Kurds have lost sense of childhood and innocence growing up either as refugees or living in their own landlocked mountains.

Key Words: Gharbi, Herman, Kurdistan, Oppression, Recovery, Survival, Trauma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gharbi M. Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep* is driven by reminiscences of past traumas, which are reawakened by heightened emotional attachment to the sufferings of the 1970s and 1980s generations of Kurds. Fear, pain, insecurity, torture, and marginalization are integrated parts of a typical Kurd's psyche due to the socio-political policies in Iraq practiced by the Ba'ath Regime ruled by Saddam Hussein. Hence, Mustafa imagines a tale of contradiction filled with melancholy and hope, trauma and recovery, darkness and light, and shows a bit of sympathy but without substantive hyperbole. Since the novel seems to be influenced by Mustafa's experiences, it does not lack historical authenticity and narrative logic. The creation of infants dying and food shortage are carefully narrated and resonate with typical Kurds growing up in the latter part of the 20th century. Following the story of Hamko, who is humiliated, bullied, subjugated, and beaten, the novel touches upon distressing challenges faced by Kurds in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. According to BBC, the chemical bombardment of

Halabja in 1988 by Saddam Hussein's army caused the death of "3,200 to 5000 civilians". Based on Human Rights Watch report, in the Black Anfal Campaigns, "100,000 Kurds" were deliberately murdered. Also, in the 1991 Kurdish Uprising against Ba'ath military apparatus, Kurdish people were forced to migrate to the borders of Iran and Turkey. These traumatic everlasting memories are embedded in the psyche of the generations of displaced Kurds of the 1970s and 1980s.

Although the novel was published in 2013, there have been only **two** papers on it. First, investigating the novel based on the idea and practice of colonialism, Abdulakarim and Saeed analyze the historical, cultural, physical, and economical ramifications of the colonial forces' invasions. Their attempt delves into the repercussions of the establishment of certain "codes of law and order in vanquished territories" (374) that are meant to disrupt stability than to guarantee peaceful coexistence. Whereas their research concentrates on the notions of displacement, the significance of remaining loyal to homeland and preserving culture, and the necessity of telling stories in English to attract the attention of readers worldwide to the calamities Kurds experienced, it lacks any definitive major theoreticians to provide analytical background and profound details into the psychological implications of war. The study **claims** that it is, indeed, the narrative that serves Hamko and not the other way as he minimizes the hegemony of state psychology in exerting total control. The novel, essentially, validates Hamko's voice, his recovery, and impulses establishing a challenge against the powers of state apparatus.

Second, in his research on Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep*, Mehmet Recep Taş examines the application of Homi Bhabha's concept of unhomeliness. He proposes a study that focuses on lack of sense of belonging as a result of being stateless. "Mustafa rather than setting the discrimination on an economic or political basis, he depicts the feelings and longings of a whole people via his protagonist's lack of 'sense of belonging', which most likely might have been triggered from their "unhomely" conditions resulted from their statelessness" (183). Whereas Taş's approach is rather historical as he provides long details regarding Kurdish history, heritage, land, ethnic discrimination, and the causes of statelessness, this paper **claims** that Mustafa, in depicting Hamko's traumatic

childhood, prompts readers to think about their own fears if ever enforced to tolerate life under a fascist ideology.

The paper **argues** that while Hamko, his parents, and his grandfather are exposed to adversity and trauma beyond their control and that totalitarian governments dehumanize ‘the other’ by forcing political assimilation, social subjugation, and more perceptibly psychological suppression, fascists and dictators will never be able to reach the soul of a victim to destroy. Hamko is called a sissy, a brainless Kurd, and he has to endure the sound of gunfire and the smell of gunpowder in the schoolyard on Thursdays. Similarly, he is pressured to salute, glorify, memorize, and recite Ba’ath Party Anthems. He is beaten all over his body time and again and he is accused of helping the Communists because he wears a red shirt. As a child, he sees two men stabbing a seventeen-year-old girl in the chest which is excruciatingly atrocious. These events traumatize Hamko and scar his personality, but Hamko rejects being vengeful. Indeed, the story depicts how Hamko, through some acts of resistance, rejects defeat, refuses to be seen as a powerless victim, thus demonstrating his determination for survival and recovery.

To conclude, the **significance** of the research is although Kurds are confined by four domineering armies of the Middle East since 1920s, are trapped and traumatized, in their own lands, between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, and that the novel manifests how past traumas haunt Hamko and to an extent, his father and grandfather, Mustafa does not seem to lament but he rather allows Hamko to shine which could be inspiring for readers. Though the novel presents the formation of fragmented characters who suffer from symptoms of post-traumatic disorder, Hamko’s innocent mischievousness against his teachers at school, his individual fortitude against psychological exploitation, his passion for drawing as a child which permit him to imagine, his endeavors to reconnect with his family on the mountains after Duhok’s bombardment, his resilient to infiltrate Iraqi checkpoints to take medicine to his wounded uncle who is a Peshmerga are all acts of bravery against the dark forces and they eventually restore the reader’s hope in humanity.

II. TRAUMA AND RECOVERY: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF GHARBI MUSTAFA’S *WHEN MOUNTAINS WEEP*

‘no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.
You only run for the border
when you see the whole city
running as well.’ (Warsan Shire, British-Somali
poet, as quoted in E. Respini, pp. 28–29)

When Mountains Weep narrates a traumatic story of Hamko who is pressed to endure severe emotional and physical wounds in his youth. Hamko’s expulsion from school and brainwashing students through school textbooks are Ba’ath’s systematic policies to discipline and indoctrinate children from the onset. Depriving Hamko from learning his mother tongue in school, forcing him to join the army at fifteen and teachers telling students to draw tanks and piles of dead men are prevailing

occurrences which would expectedly shape traumatic perceptions and identity. The narrative is told from the perspective of the ‘grown up’ Hamko remembering the pain of his “untold stories,” the “black clouds,” “the faint sounds of the river,” “the traps of death,” and the “long-buried memories” (Mustafa 1). However, and more significantly, the fusion of solace and hope is found by watching the “blazing sunset from the mountain peak” (Mustafa 102). This scene restores his faith in his power and entrusts him with fortitude and responsibility to overrule his fears and terror and liberate himself from ethnic and political oppression or at least not to submit to compliance or passivity.

Hamko remembers being called a brainless Kurd at school, who is exposed to indignity in the name of brotherhood and nationhood. He recalls being taken with other classmates from school to a military camp while he was told he will be attending a football match. As a student, he was forced to watch soldiers bringing five blindfolded young men to be executed in front of his eyes. Those blindfolded young men apparently refused to fight in the “holy war with Iran” (Mustafa 47). As the firing squad shoot the captives down and pumped bullets in their heads specifically, Hamko and his classmates are commanded to stand and applaud the ‘heroic deed.’ Hamko and his classmates are treated as prisoners and they have to make their current condition less sufferable emotionally and physically because sometimes “the prisoner no longer thinks how to escape, but rather of how to stay alive, or how to make captivity more bearable” (Herman 90). The captives’ parents have to pay for the bullets the squad used to kill them, carving out a painful memory in Hamko’s psyche.

When Hamko, similarly, is shoved inside a police jeep, he thinks he is arrested for accosting girls. When he is handcuffed and blindfolded, he remembers being told that once one is taken inside, one “came out in only one of two ways—in a coffin or completely insane” (Mustafa 50). After this incident and as the Iraqi Regime bombards Duhok, he flees to the mountains. Seeking shelter to avoid the violent weather, he sleeps in a room of a mosque where bodies of dead people are wrapped in white shrouds for burial which is perturbing for an adolescent. “I passed groups of men digging holes just deep enough to contain the bodies of infants, children, and other people who hadn’t survived the long, harsh journey. Other bodies were left unburied” (Mustafa 120). The infliction of both physical and emotional pain on an adolescent’s life fundamentally results in long-lasting traumatic reminiscences causing the victim to suffer from cognitive losses.

Childhood memories and traumas are strident and deep and they have the power to re-emerge sporadically even if the victim has aged. Victims might get benefit from painkillers or temporary consolations, but the effect of traumatic events resurface and pass on from generation to generation. Lois Tyson substantiates the transference of memories of individual human beings across generations, “each (victim) with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behaviour that are direct result of early experience” (12). Although Hamko is subjugated, there is a deep-seated mistrust

caused by constant degradation in school and that the reader should anticipate some sort of retaliation as the abused develop feelings of rage, the narrator does not seem to be providing incidents in which Hamko would be interested in physical revenge. Mustafa does not provide details regarding the materialization of Hamko's traumatic memories when he grows up which is a sign of his healthy maturation. Hamko transcends the limitations of the pain which is a reconfirmation of his interest in what will come next and not what has happened in the past. Mustafa exposes Hamko to the brutalities of the Ba'ath regime only to let him grow and learn from the experience. Hamko cannot change his past. Herman argues that the survivor "comes to understand the issues of principle that transcend her personal grievance against the perpetrator. She recognizes that the trauma cannot be undone and that her wishes for compensation or revenge can never be truly fulfilled" (209). Hamko is not after vengeance as his desires are driven by what he needs more than by what he wants. He rather resists being dragged to hell by past traumas. He conducts small acts of benevolence and sometimes adventurous escapades such as taking medicine to his uncle in the mountains when he is fifteen years old. Hamko unconsciously needs to feel secure in his homeland. Hamko becomes a victim due to certain circumstances that are beyond his understanding. That is the reason Mustafa sympathizes with him. He focuses on Hamko's persistent by showing acts of rebellion (and not retribution) against those who want to suppress him.

Hamko's grandfather does not accomplish the freedom and respect every individual deserves no matter where they live, re-enacting a robust craving in Hamko to strive to achieve what he deserves. Reflecting on his traumatic life, his grandfather says, "I had changed so much over the past few years that I had lost all concept of who I was. A part of me was gone – perhaps forever – and my only option was to begin searching for my other half" (Mustafa 170). Additionally, the manifestation of unfulfilled needs and unresolved wishes are predictable when the victim is exposed to similar concurrences experienced in some definite stages of life in the past. Confronting a conflict does not necessarily mean overcoming the traumatic event or healing a wound completely because the attractiveness of the confrontation lies in its attachment to an incident or some events that cannot be put right. Although Hamko's grandfather's life is painful and conflictive, Mustafa plants the seed of hope in Hamko through his encouragement to further his education than to focus on weapons.

Psychological problems are so often referred to as conflicts: we unconsciously desire a particular experience because it fulfills a psychological need, but because that need is the result of a psychological wound, the experience is often painful." (Tyson 45)

Hamko's father's memories are reawakened in Hamko, but Hamko cannot go back to the past to cure his father's and his grandfather's injuries. "I've realized a gun may protect you from enemies and put a few coins in your pocket, but I've also learned that carrying a gun is not the way to a better life. So,

little Hamko, go to school tomorrow and learn how to read and write, even if it's in the language of your enemy" (Mustafa 9). His father remains emotionally distant from Hamko as their relationship is rigid and he has to provide "for seven sons and six daughters" (Mustafa 136). This aspect of his father's character serves as a reminder that typical Kurdish fathers think that emotional closeness delays the maturity of their children, particularly sons, which results in losing their innocence sooner.

Being exposed to prolonged, repetitive trauma, Hamko's father reawakens his experience in Hamko. "The more period of captivity is disavowed, however, the more disconnected fragment of the past remains fully alive, with the immediate and present characteristics of traumatic memory" (Herman 89). His father's fears of being caught and killed hence abandoning his family is revealed, though he does not divulge this, sustaining a feeling of security for the family. His father's unconscious knowledge of the Ba'ath apparatus' brutal treatments might be the reason for this emotional coldness (which is an unresolved conflict because some people, children in particular, think that their oppressors have absolute power -if not right- to abuse and that they can dominate their lives) urging Hamko to rely on himself in times of misery.

Hamko's great fits of laughter, the crisp morning, the snowy peaks of the mountains, the magical scent of fresh rain shower, the chirping of the partridges are all images from his stolen childhood resurfacing, mingling with, and penetrating his memories. The collision of these intersections and imaginings transform Hamko from a bullied, disposable child into a teenager who is determined to take medicine to his injured uncle in the mountains. He, also, becomes a successful translator for foreign journalists while fleeing Duhok to the Turkish border avoiding being bombarded with weapons of mass destruction by the Ba'ath Party. This narrative shift corresponds with the process of Hamko's maturation and his personal transition in life, but it does not necessarily mean Hamko will wipe out or remove the tainted memories of his childhood.

Many abused children cling to the hope that growing up will bring escape and freedom. But the personality formed in an environment of coercive control is not well adapted to adult life. The survivor is left with fundamental problems in basic trust-establishing independence and intimacy-burdened by major impairments in self-care, in cognition and memory, in identity, and in the capacity to form stable relationships. She is still a prisoner of her childhood; attempting to create a new life, she reencounters the trauma. (Herman 110)

Even though Hamko is presented as someone who holds the torch to light the way and advances into a promising adult helping people as well as showing acts of resilience against the forces of darkness, he never fully leaves his traumatic childhood behind because they have shaped his first encounters with 'the other'. "Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event

continues to reverberate throughout” (Herman 211). When he is taken to a military base at fifteen to serve, he no longer cries which is a sign of maturity. He takes part in picking up a snoring, overweight trainee’s bed outside to the training grounds, displaying his gradual evolvement into a stronger person. When the drill sergeant orders the shaving of his head and ties him to an iron flagpole for twenty-four hours, he smiles in defiance, exhibiting his sense of humanity through humour. Although Hamko’s memories are tarnished with images of the cemetery, poverty, death, discrimination, and he has been treated as a slave, he finds comfort remembering some moments in his childhood in which he listened to his mother’s lullaby. Kirby Farrell states that trauma narratives “are not the same thing as raw experience, though what we like to call raw experience is also an imaginative construction” (26). The mentioning of the lullaby is not only an act for discerning the possibility of recovering from the past traumas but also a longing for a lost past. “The past, like the future, becomes too painful to bear, for memory, like hope, brings back the yearning for all that has been lost” (Herman 89). *When Mountains Weep* is an imagination about trauma in an era where Kurds were exposed to every possible campaign of genocide and chemical bombardment. “Hundreds of fresh graves filled the cemetery. Most of the dead were children, elderly people, victims of typhoid, dehydration, and hunger” (Mustafa 152). The novel is an artistic attempt to draw the attention of the non-Kurds to read about a fascist system that Kurds endured and resisted for years as countless Kurds lost their lives blown to pieces in minefields across the borders and numerous families still wait for those who were missed in action- a wait that will most probably never materialize.

I thought about of all that waiting – waiting for the rain to stop, waiting for the Turks to finally show mercy, waiting for the Iraqi army to slaughter our people, waiting for slow death on the top of the mountain. It was surreal – and it all seemed so futile. (Mustafa 140)

The lullaby, additionally, echoes through the valleys and the mountains signifying a call for protection on one hand, and reiterating the significance of making Kurdish struggles for independent memorable. His mother’s smile and lullaby promise a better future, “tomorrow you will grow into a lad” (Mustafa 4). But his memory is disrupted by the fact that he has to know the whereabouts of his missing father. “Lull, my darling, lull. Tomorrow you will grow into a man in the mountains of Kurdistan, in a nation without a homeland” (Mustafa 4). Mothers, in addition, gave birth to dead babies and unhealthy infants due to chemicals released into water source. Furthermore, there is not a verified record of infants died from malnutrition, disease, and hunger or those who are missed in action. Houses were pillaged and looted. Kurds are still on the run with no independent country of their own suffering from larger racial, political, and social issues in their landlocked Kurdistan. Hamko is originally from Duhok, but he is displaced and coerced into accepting the harsh realities of life in the Arab-

dominated city of Mosul where confusion and fear entrap him.

My mother exchanged a few words (with the headmistress) in a language I couldn’t understand. The only word I could pick out from the conversation was Hamko, my name... I was surrounded by kids whose language sounded like the chattering of monkeys. I was confused and scurried. (Mustafa 5)

The teacher’s stinging treatment of Hamko’s classmates, additionally, does not only terrify him, but it also emotionally jettisons him from establishing a healthy connection with the teacher, as a powerful agent and the representative of an authoritarian voice, and the school as home. “When one of the boys failed to repeat the words correctly, she hit him twice on the palms of his hands... I trembled and shrank down in my seat, struggling to control my floodgate” (Mustafa 6). Hamko, a six-year old child, has to, at this age, tolerate being exposed to hardship beyond his understanding. His hesitation to ask questions, “why did we speak differently in our house, and what was the strange language I was hearing away from home?” (Mustafa 7) disconnects him both cognitively and physically to the land (Mosul, where he attends school) and turns him into an unwanted, forgotten being.

The brutality of the environment and the coldness of the school are indicators of educational exploitation and social injustice. This is quite ironic because teachers are supposed to nurture and educational institutions are expected to cultivate ethical values. Schools have become tools to exert power and instruments to propagate Ba’ath ideologies which glorified the picture of the “pure” Arab and demolished the other so-called inferior, minority races. Kalí Tal’s interdisciplinary study in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* explains the catastrophic ramifications of inheriting traumatic events such as the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, and sexual abuse of women and children:

In a social system that supports the systematic oppression and persecution of a particular minority group (such as Jews in Nazi Germany), the victims of persecution have a limited set of options. They may capitulate, which will result in continued suffering and perhaps the eventual death of all members of the targeted group if the intent of the oppressor is genocide. (Tal 8)

Traumatized parents transmit their disparity and adversity to their children particularly in the absence of ethical, medical, and legal foundations to protect their very existence. Reconstructing traumatic experiences through storytelling has the power to inject strains that could be everlasting, triggering hyperactive or frozen emotions when similar events are re-enacted. Besides, people naturally connect to stories. According to Herman, “the reconstruction of the trauma requires immersion in a past experience of frozen time; the descent into mourning feels like a surrender to tears that are endless” (195). The novel attempts to fictionalize the anxieties generations of Kurds underwent, to

identify and possibly evoke the readers' empathy without making the narration too sentimental as the narrator is critical of some retrograde traditions of Kurdish society. Hamko does not shy away from mentioning the internal disagreement of the Kurds and the tribal infightings that caused as many wounds as those penetrated by the non-Kurds. Further, Hamko has no hesitation mentioning that his father is illiterate and that he had trouble having a healthy relationship with him. This aspect of the novel, nevertheless, does not leave out unspeakable traumas which do not only show the narrator's vulnerability but also his proclivity for resistance in the face of physical and emotional scars.

Grandfather was an orphan boy with four younger sisters to take care of, which was a disaster in a Kurdish tribal village. A family needed a man to carry guns and defend property. Grandfather led a hard, lonely life, wandering among the mountains as an outcast due to his involvement in vendettas between the various Kurdish tribes. The only skill he had learned was how to use a gun. (Mustafa 7)

To establish a horizontal connection between the generations, Mustafa interweaves Hamko's grandfather's life conditions within the layers of the text which exemplify and testify conflicted traumatic memories. Furthermore, debunking the dual attitudes of the heads of tribes, chieftains, and sheikhs who misinform the villagers to discharge their children from schools while sending their own kids to the best institutions to be taught, Mustafa exposes, denounces, and criticizes Kurdish tribal mentality. These scenes from the novel reconfirm Hamko's tendency to confront fear.

Survivors recognize their own socialized assumptions that rendered them vulnerable to exploitation in the past, they may also identify sources of continued pressure that keep them confined in a victim role in the present. Just as they must overcome their own fears and inner conflicts, they must also overcome these external social pressures; otherwise, they will be continually subjected to symbolic repetitions of the trauma in everyday life. (Herman 200)

The village elite who used every sort of political deception and religious trick to maintain their power, to keep the villagers in darkness, and to force them to be shackled by ignorance, confirm a long, repeated traumatic indoctrination of intergenerational Kurds. The sources of trauma could be both internal persecution for political status and external oppression for financial gains. Herman points out that "the study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise because it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people" (237). The villagers conventionally have to give half of their harvest each year to the head of the tribe making them weak financially and always in need of their children to work in the fields; hence, depriving them of education. The passing down the image of suppression of villagers, from generation to

generation, by the tribal chiefs verifies an obnoxious truth about the internal disagreements that Kurds are known for. Embedding and recounting this dreadful fact from his memory about the Kurds in the story, Mustafa finds it necessary to reiterate, to raise awareness, and most crucially to provide access routes to prolonged traumatic remembrances generations went through without real reform. Piecing together the stories of survivors of atrocity across generations, Mustafa testifies to the hardship and develops an understanding of the pain aiming at encouraging people to read about little known tragedies brought upon Kurds by both internal fights and external subjugation. However, Mustafa's subconscious whispering and support for Hamko is essential for him to recover as trauma is bound to recur.

Hamko's grandfather realizes that the only way for Hamko to go forward in life is to attend school, but school becomes nightmarish for Hamko. He, nevertheless, manages to learn Arabic after a year and develops an interest in drawing pictures. Seeing himself powerless or not having means to resist his teacher physically, Hamko surrenders temporarily as he alters his state of consciousness, which is a sign of constriction trauma. Likewise, drawing helps Hamko dissociate himself from the pain inflicted upon him. When the victim is fully powerless and "any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense shuts down entirely" (Herman 42). Hamko's fight, correspondingly, for survival is two-sided. On one side, he has to challenge himself to succeed in order not to disappoint his grandfather as prolonged trauma "disrupts all human relationships and amplifies the dialectic of trauma" (Herman 93). On the other, he has to withstand the degradations imposed upon him by some of his classmates, his teachers, and his headmistress who treat him as an alien, outlandish object that needs to be disposed, sending a chill down the reader's spine. "While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others. The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor's mission" (Herman 207). Hamko's father's story is the archetype of the life of ordinary youth growing up in the second half of the twentieth century, who were deprived from education, displaced and lived in the epoch of the Ba'ath Regime.

People, children in particular, were exposed to an on-going processes of brainwashing to absorb Ba'ath's socialist propaganda and were compelled to join the Iraqi Army or rebel against the imposed ideologies and flee to the mountains to become Peshmerga. Subsequently, the narrator's voice is as much concerned with reliving the trauma as with recovering from it. Herman argues "reliving a trauma may offer an opportunity for mastery, but most survivors do not consciously seek or welcome the opportunity" (42). Plagued by constant ravishing wars, such as the Iraq-Iran War and the Persian Gulf War, in which Kurds were used as pawns and much of the fighting happened on the mountainous areas were Kurds live, intergenerational traumas of conflict and oppression have amalgamated and penetrated into the conscious and subconscious of Kurds.

When Hamko refuses to draw a picture of the Iraqi Army

attacking the enemy (Peshmerga), his teacher is infuriated and threatens him not to use such a “dangerous, disgusting” (Mustafa 10,11) word. He punishes him by pouring ice-cold water over his hands and hits his wet fingers brutally with a stick. Herman contends that the survivor frequently “resists mourning, not only out of fear but also out of pride. She may consciously refuse to grieve as a way of denying victory to the perpetrator” (188). Based on Herman’s observation, Mustafa rejects giving opportunity to Hamko’s captor/torturer to enjoy the infliction of pain on his captives/victims. “During captivity, the victim cannot express her humiliated rage at the perpetrator, for to do so would jeopardise her survival” (Herman 94). The headmistress warns Hamko’s mother not to talk about politics in his presence to avoid poisoning his innocent mind. These horrendous episodes and similar incidents such as instead of drawing flowers and birds, being forced to draw tanks and soldiers flashing V signs and waving flags over piles of dead men, deny him access to enjoy his childhood, his education, and rip his emotions apart.

What to remember!

The first stick, striking down on my shaking hand
From a teacher unable to make me understand.

The first ugly truth: I was born a slave in my own
land.

The first tears, for a football I saw in my cousin’s
hand.

The first shock, visiting the cemetery,

The first puzzle, losing my identity,

The first crime living in poverty. (Mustafa 2)

Although his teachers demote Hamko and the school becomes a prison restricting his freedom, he nevertheless does not seem to care much about his teachers’ punishments or at least he declines to look doubtful of his own abilities. This aspect of the narration is to a certain degree an overstretched expectation on Mustafa’s behalf as the novel has characteristic features of an autobiography. Mustafa’s voice can easily be felt as he experienced as a Kurd the viciousness of regime cruelty in the 1970s onwards. The novel asks for the reader’s empathy to feel the pain of the coming-of-age of a person whose life is so complicated that his mischievousness is often justified. Mustafa, moreover, idealizes Hamko who pushes the rock to a higher part of the mountain where it is heavy for him to hold on alone. His emotions, when he falls in love for instance, are not larger than life, which humanize him. However, Mustafa’s trauma is transferred to Hamko holding him responsible for accommodating the burden of being from a different nationality. Mustafa infuses ache into the narrative and tests Hamko’s utmost physical and emotional strength when he is treated as a prisoner.

Prisoners, even those who have successfully resisted, understand that under extreme duress anyone can be “broken.” They generally distinguish two stages in

this process. The first is reached when the victim relinquishes her inner autonomy, world view, moral principles, or connection with others for the sake of survival. There is a shutting down of feelings, thoughts, initiatives, and judgment. (Herman 84)

Mustafa’s mind is preoccupied with Hamko being equipped for the battle (the school, for example, looks like a battlefield). Mustafa does not focus on providing an environment where adults are around to safeguard Hamko. Mustafa uses words to fight back and establishes an imaginary medium for relief which are temporary returns to a psychological state called regression. Regression is defense against “a painful or pleasant experience,” (Tyson 15) which carries the opportunity to work through repressed emotions. It is this vital dimension of the text that makes Mustafa resort to imagination and narration as therapeutic techniques and tools. “The re-creation of an ideal self involves the active exercise of imagination and fantasy, capacities that have now being liberated” (Herman 202). Mustafa, nonetheless, depicts the harsh realities of Kurdish children growing up under the rule of the Ba’ath Party intruding Hamko’s life with a “fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter” (Herman 39). Furthermore, Mustafa, right from the onset of the novel, recalls stories from his childhood. Recalling traumatic memories is the second system of post-traumatic stress disorder which is called intrusion. “Traumatized people relive the events as though it were continually recurring in the present...The traumatic moment becomes encoded in abnormal form of memory, which breaks spontaneously into consciousness, both as flashback during awaking states and as traumatic nightmares during sleep” (Herman 37). Nevertheless, Hamko’s character is structured in such a way that does not need adult supervision to be eager to learn, whereas adolescents generally- Hamko’s age- are expected to be motivated and encouraged to become curious.

Witnessing gory scenes as an adolescent makes him stand shocked and “motionless,” (Mustafa 55) but not thoroughly submissive. The novel, therefore, hits at the possibility of recovery as Hamko becomes friends with Abo, a Kurd, and bonds with him instantly confirming the argument that the autocratic ideology has not reached his core and that Hamko does not betray basic human instincts or violate moral codes. Both, though, are mischievous in certain phases of school days by standing close to and following girls- acts which are prohibited in conservative societies. These mischievous yet innocent gestures are apparently to reconcile with the struggles of his formative years demonstrating Hamko’s desire to transition from mountains to city life and to go beyond the restriction forced upon him. Laurie Vickroy states that “trauma can close-off self-knowledge, but mourning and working through leads to reconciliation with pain that must be acknowledged if healing is to occur” (165). Hamko as adolescent is aware of his race and nationality and his surroundings constantly remind him of his origin by treating him with resentment. This makes Hamko not only internalize the conflict but also use it in his journey for self-development and that is exactly where hope springs in the novel.

In my country, spring brings us hope, the beauty of the land-and tragedy. People feel uncomfortable because it's the time of the year when trouble begins. With the melting snow and the blooming flowers come the Iraqi military campaigns. The green virgin meadows are raped by converging tanks and marching black boots. In the spring, the morning breeze can carry poison clouds of yellow smoke drifting across mountains. Our springs often start out green and end up blood-red. Over the years, the villagers have undergone the same tragic events so often that these attacks have become part of their lifestyle. (Mustafa 121)

The hardship Hamko goes through creates sympathy, but the sympathy does not lead to a mechanistic view. Also, the narrative voice does not seem to whine or lament the losses he has to endure which yields to a relatively factual picture of the pains Kurds experienced. The grown up Hamko/narrator feels empowered, which is an attempt to restore balance and re-establish his trust in humanity. However, Carl Gustav Jung in his *“Structure and Dynamics of the Psych”* argues we must always bear in mind “that despite the most beautiful agreement between the facts and our ideas, explanatory principles are only points of view, that is, manifestations of the psychological attitude and of a priori conditions under which all thinking takes place” (6). When Hamko is conditioned to stay in prison, he feels great physical pain. The physical pain dwindles as he thinks about his unknown destiny but not the principles he venerates. Thinking about the unknown and not knowing what will happen to him is even more painful but the pain does not transform him into a monster or a killer. Although the fear of the unknown is devouring and it can negatively impact the traumatized person to think they will be dead at any moment, Hamko remains intact and resilient. His resilience humanizes him further and creates some sort of empathy in the reader's psyche.

Hamko is a victim of torture and violence, but Mustafa rejects re-victimizing him by allowing him to grow up into a promising adult who assists people. Besides, the fictionalization of the pain, by the grown up Hamko, is an attempt to provide an imaginary space for safety, although as Herman argues “safety always begins with the body. If a person does not feel safe in her body, she does not feel safe anywhere. Body-oriented therapies, therefore, can be useful in early recovery” (269). For Hamko securing a place, be it fictional or tangible, is a primary stage to cultivate a tendency to preserve identity and a pushing factor to reconnect with one's origin and homeland, despite being marginalized, having almost no future prospect, and having to undergo the burdens of socio-political and most obviously personal and psychological pressures.

“Running to the mountains was such a part of our village lifestyle that I wonder if the caves aren't our real homes. They protect us, embrace us, and give us solace. However, there have been times when even the caves offered scant protection against bombs loaded with mustard gas or nerve gas” (Mustafa 123).

The mountainous areas will never be occupied thoroughly because even if the enemy reaches the mountain peak, they will never be able to bear the harsh conditions of life. Even though mountains could be symbols for freedom and exploration, Mustafa uses them as the main source of shelter and protection against threats. Persistent expectation of danger, threat and overprotectiveness are major hyperarousal symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Mustafa designed Hamko not to fail but to cope with traumatic experiences. Joelle Rabow Maletis argues that trauma “is not a personal failing; rather it is a treatable malfunction biological mechanisms” (TED-Ed 2018). Moreover, Hamko always expects threats particularly when he is at school or when Duhok is evacuated. The narrative as a whole is both an attempt to reveal the suffering and to avoid being re-traumatized, depicting the landlocked Kurdistan as a place that bleeds and has the potential to stop the bleeding.

III: RECOVERY THROUGH HARMLESS MISCHIEF

Hamko's favorite class is drawing, but his teacher asks him to draw pictures of the Iraqi Army attacking the “enemy-Kurdish outlaws in the mountains” (Mustafa 10). Obviously, Hamko refuses to follow her order, running the risk of being terminated from school. In the absence of a social, educational support system, he depends on his own individual strengths to survive because as Herman substantiates, the majority of trauma survivors who never get formal treatment are forced to “invent their own methods” (241) to fight back. This imaginative act of resilience, though adaptive, is a means of mental escape at the moment when no other means is possible, “it may be that this respite from terror is purchased at far too high a price” (Herman 239). Drawing reconnects Hamko with his surrounding and lowers his anxiety but it never cures the terror he experienced. Hamko is not insensitive to pain, which is a sign of dissociate trauma, and he desperately endeavors to reconnect with his family on the mountain. The drawing brings a bit of relief but the actual remedy to the pain is to bond with the family again.

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (Herman 214)

It is not only his passion for drawing that provides some sort of temporary relief but also disobeying his teacher's commands which assists Hamko in creating at least a fictional place, where

no one can reach. Herman states that the task of the first stage of recovery is rebuilding a safe place, “once this relational foundation is established, the numerous psychological scars that afflict the survivors of childhood trauma can be addressed” (267). Disobeying his teacher, moreover, boosts his confidence (to confront his classmates who abuse him) even though he realizes he has made a mistake. This realization is further invigorated once he is back in his city, Duhok. “It was a place I had never seen but had learned to love through my grandparent’s bedtime stories” (Mustafa 25). The stories about Duhok, narrated by his grandparents, stir a sense of belonging and a discovery of an essential part of family. Another noteworthy part of the recovery that is wired in his subconscious is a proclivity for a gradual shift and return to his city and to the mountains of Kurdistan. Similarly, when he and his friends are forcibly taken by the Ba’ath Party for protesting against the Americans, they shout and chant hilarious slogans since they do not understand Kurdish, which provides momentary recovery from the oppression.

There are numerous moments of relief for the reader and for Hamko to some extent such as kissing a girl, Miriam, when he is ten and threatening his uncle by revealing his night-time rendezvous with an Arab girl to grandfather if refuses to visit the school on behalf of her mother. Attending circus and indulging in sexual fantasies of the Egyptian belly dancers, thinking about putting mouse poison in a donkey’s watermelon to take revenge as the donkey kicked him, and his father’s trust in him to take medicine to his uncle penetrating Iraqi checkpoints when he is thirteen do not only humanize him but also reconfirm his playful mischievous behavior. These insubstantial proclivities for mischievous or (mis)adventures are small acts of resistance to not let the poison penetrate his fantasy in which the role of the tormenter and the victim might be reversed. “Reclaiming the ability to feel full range of emotions, including grief, must be understood as an act of resistance rather than submission to the perpetrator’s intent” (Herman 188). His (mis)adventures in the army when he is fifteen and his passion for Indian films and jumping over the cinema halls to watch movies connect him with his human instincts. A cognitive, if not physical, cure has to come within. “Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not care” (Herman 133). Also, his innocent love for Pari, which blends with his imagination, allows him to hover between the world of illusion and reality and to rediscover hope in humanity and recover from the wounds that were forced upon him.

CONCLUSION

Trauma is an exposure and a reaction to an emotional pain and a physical scar in which the human defense system breaks down, allowing anxiety and terror to take control over the conscious. *When Mountains Weep* offers implications that correspond to the trauma theories Judith Herman proposes. Mustafa puts Hamko through the ringer which demands physical and emotional prowess to confront, overcome, or at least to temporarily cure his wounds. The novel attempts to be

an arousing narrative of children empowerment as they undergone political torture, social discrimination, and most significantly psychological torture. Hamko is a normal child but he is entrapped in an abusive environment which causes an intensified sense of danger and threat. Although he manages to escape, the escape will not bring back a sense of normalcy. Added to that, the plot twists and the events that come as the story moves forward fit plausibly with what comes at the end. Hamko is in every frame of the narration as he is the victim of a corrupt political system, a society that experienced the most traumatic, vengeful techniques of annihilation, and emotional abuse. But he is the hero who has to save himself and those around him. He is well-intentioned and his fumbling adds flavor to the artistic value of the text. His mistakes and shortcomings are not necessarily distracting as his naivety is unpretentious. He does not, for example, bulldoze Pari into romance. Although violence penetrates every phase of Hamko’s life, he transcends the inhumane boundaries and survives the hardships placed upon him- albeit after experiencing excruciating anguish as he is separated from his beloved and marries somebody else. By not permitting readers to know his emotional involvement with Pari, Hamko prevents the resurfacing of his psychological, emotional scars, protecting or hiding the wounds of his past traumas to an extent. The childhood fissures taught him to endure the pain of living away from Pari. The romantic love is dramatized as well as repressed indicating a desire for returning to the past or reliving the emotional bond. His displacement from his city is cognitively and emotionally unbearable, but it is not unequivocally suffocating or deathly. The novel constructs an admirable journey in which Hamko has to move from an almost impassable path to a passable. Evidently, the story is packed with traumatized events such as tragic death of family members and other people in front of his eyes. Besides, the dialogues are not hard-pressed and the poems that are imbedded from the perspective of the grown up Hamko give a glimpse into the pains and aspirations of Kurds for their obvious and latent longings for independence. Even though not all the characters are detailed or given a voice to shine (particularly the females, including Pari), the gripping tapestry of the events keeps the reader enthralled. Hamko is photographed inspiringly sparkling in every page and his overwhelming journey of survival and self-discovery works because his emotions feel real. Besides, Hamko does not have a complex character, making his journey quite relevant at least for the Kurdish readership who know English. He is noble and kind-hearted as he helps people several times. It is both hardship and love that transform Hamko as he is vulnerable and strong at the same time when necessary and that is exactly what makes *When Mountains Weep* such a captivating novel to be studied based on Herman’s theories of trauma.

WORKS CITED

- Abdulkarim, Chiad & Saeed, Ismael. (2019). *Burden of Colonialism and Alienation in Modern Kurdish Novel*. International Journal of Kurdish Studies. 5. 373-392. 10.21600/ijoks.530519.
- Farrel, Kirby. *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1967.
- Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
- Jung, C. G. (Gerhard Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). *Collected works of C. G. Jung: Vol. 8. Structure and Dynamics of the Psych*. Princeton University Press, 1969. Print.
- Maletis, Joelle. *The Psychology of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. YouTube, uploaded by TED-Ed, 25 June 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_n9qegR7C4.
- Mustafa, G. M. *When Mountains Weep*. 3rd Ed. 2016.
- Respini E, Erickson R. *When Home Won't Let You Stay*. Yale University Press, 2019; pp. 28–29.
- Tal, Kalí. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading Literatures of Trauma*. Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Tas, M. (2016). The sense of belonging and unhomeliness in when mountains weep: coming of age in Kurdistan. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature And Culture (IJLLC)*, 2(4), 181-189. doi:10.21744/ijllc.v2i4.3241874.
- Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.
- Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002. Print.
- "1988: Thousands Die in Halabja Gas Attack." BBC, 18 Mar. 2022, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/16/newsid_4304000/4304853.stm
- "Q & A: The Anfal Trial." HRW, 18 Mar. 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2007/06/22/q-anfal-trial?msclkid=6a24ae0da6b711ecba545a2d10c3cfb1>