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Dr. Yadgar Ismail Said

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Soran University, 44008 Soran – Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq.

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How to Cite This Article

Yadgar, I.S., 2026. **Taruma and Identity in Gharbi Mustafa's When Mountains Weep**. Mitanni Journal, 6(2), Article 01.

DOI: [10.25156/ptjhss.v6n2y2025.pp1-14](https://doi.org/10.25156/ptjhss.v6n2y2025.pp1-14)

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Author contribution

The authors have contributed solely to all aspects of this research work.

Ethics information

Ethics approval was not required for this research.

Data availability statement

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Funding information

No specific funding was received for conducting this research.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.


Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Technology College, Surveying Department, Erbil Polytechnic University, and individuals who contributed to this study.

Declaration of Originality

The researcher's work focused on Trauma and Identity in Gharbi Mustafa's When Mountain Weep.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Trauma and Identity in Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep***

Dr. Yadgar Ismail Said 

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Soran University, 44008 Soran – Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq.

Abstract:

This paper explores the intricate interplay of trauma, identity, and otherness in Gharbi Mustafa's memoir novel *When Mountains Weep* (2013), situating it within the broader context of Kurdish literature and historical oppression. By examining Hamko's coming-of-age amidst Ba'athist persecution, forced assimilation, and the fracturing of Kurdish communities, the study highlights how trauma is both personal and collective, shaping selfhood, social relations, and cultural memory. Drawing on postcolonial theory, psychoanalytic trauma studies, and Kurdish socio-historical contexts, the paper argues that Mustafa's narrative transforms individual and generational suffering into a powerful testimony of resilience, resistance, and identity reconstruction. It foregrounds the dual dimensions of otherness, both externally imposed by dominant regimes and internally negotiated within Kurdish communities, demonstrating how literature functions as a medium for processing trauma, asserting belonging, and reclaiming cultural agency.

Keywords: Trauma, Kurdish literature, Identity, Otherness, Postcolonial theory, Collective.

Received 11 October 2025; accepted 03 February 2026.
Available online 07 Apr 2026

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: yadgar.said@soran.edu.iq

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Introduction

Trauma in literature is linked to the experiences of characters due to certain everlasting and haunting influences. (Caruth, 1996; Craps, 2013). This could be reflected in their self-knowledge, identity, behaviour, and treatment of others. Within postcolonial discourse, Trauma is commonplace, especially in both fiction and non-fiction, portraying the experience of the ruled or colonized by the ruler and the colonizer. (Buelens, Durrant, & Eaglestone, 2014; Craps & Buelens, 2014). Like fiction, memoir literature or narrative, memoirs serve as testimonies where narratives and stories are both blurred and fragmented. In other words, trauma is not only described but revisited as haunting experiences by the ruled or colonized. Trauma is a continuous struggle of both self-reclamation and identity. (Gilmore, 2001; Whitlock, 2007). The narratives undertake a mission uncovering two objectives, one unearthing hidden or kept pain and violence characters experienced, and the other is finding peace. Such narratives show how the treatment of the central colonial and post-colonial powers alters language, memory, and identity. Such narratives also transform the pain and suffering of individuals and memories into a political struggle and testimony through fragmented form, misplaced language, and fractured memories in protest and condemnation of the ruler or colonial power. As Gilmore (2001) asserts, these texts are "where the wound speaks," encouraging readers to partake in their painful endurance and to bear witness to unresolved and systematic historical violence.

Likewise, Kurdish literature, both fiction and non-fiction documents and covers the painful agony of statelessness, let alone the persecution, genocide, and chemical bombardment, which serve as a vital testament to collective and individual suffering as reflected in both memoirs and literature in general. The Anfal campaigns (1986-1989) and the Halabja chemical attack (1988), orchestrated by the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, resulted in the deaths of 180k Kurds, the destruction of 5,000 villages, and the displacement of approximately one million people. These events left indelible psychological scars, with studies revealing extraordinarily high rates of PTSD (87% in children, 86.2% in adults) and depression, also quite high among survivors. A 2007 study conducted by the University of Sulaimani found PTSD rates as high as 87% among children and 86.2% among adults exposed to the 1988 Halabja chemical attack. (Ahmad, 2007).

Within this context, literary expression becomes a crucial mechanism for processing trauma, preserving memory, and asserting cultural identity. Gharbi Mustafa's memoir novel *When Mountains Weep* (2013) stands as a seminal work in this tradition, chronicling the coming-of-age of Hamko amidst systematic oppression and displacement. This paper examines trauma representation in Kurdish literature through Mustafa's work, analyzing theoretical frameworks, exploring trauma-identity intersections, assessing the significance of Kurdish trauma memoirs, and proposing appropriate methodologies for studying *When Mountains Weep*.

Research Questions

1. How do Kurdish memoirs represent the experience of otherness imposed by Arab-majority institutions?
2. In what ways do Kurdish authors negotiate identity and selfhood within their narratives? How do historical and political contexts shape the portrayal of Kurdish cultural and linguistic marginalization in literature?
3. What literary strategies do Kurdish memoirists use to depict resistance, resilience, and agency?
4. How does narrative structure in Kurdish memoirs mediate the tension between exclusion and cultural memory?

Review of Literature

Gharbi Mustafa's memoir novel *When Mountains Weep*, stands as a deeply psychological and politically charged narrative where trauma emerges as both theme and method. While research on the novel's engagement with trauma remains limited, existing analyses reveal significant intersections between postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis, particularly the notion of the "unhomely" condition embodied by the protagonist, Hamko. The narrative exposes how Ba'athist policies, most notably through education and linguistic suppression, weaponized assimilation as a tool to erase Kurdish identity under the slogan "Long live the Arab nation."

Through Hamko's fragmented sense of belonging, the novel captures the psychological state of alienation within one's own homeland. He is derided as "the brainless Kurd" in Arab communities, yet upon returning north, he becomes "the Arab boy from the south", a figure displaced everywhere. Mustafa's work intricately traces identity through the scars of trauma, portraying it as both a site of struggle and a reactive force shaping the lives of Hamko and others who inhabit this borderless, fractured sense of self.

A very few studies on the memoir novel examine its psychological dimensions, while comparatively fewer address the postcolonial and neocolonial perspectives in *When Mountains Weep*. The study *Exploring the Literary Representation of Trauma in Contemporary Iraqi Fiction* (Ahmed & Salih, 2021) provides a socio-historical analysis of trauma in post-2003 Iraqi novels, highlighting the psychological and emotional consequences of political oppression, social marginalization, and minority persecution. The authors employ literary and socio-historical frameworks to examine how traumatic experiences are represented in fiction, focusing on characters affected by war, sectarian violence, and displacement. The study highlights narrative strategies employed to convey suffering and collective unrest, situating individual experiences within the context of Iraq's post-invasion period. However, despite its detailed analysis of trauma, identity is not a central concern; characters' sense of self, cultural continuity, or personal agency in response to trauma is only implied. This leaves a gap regarding how Iraqi fiction negotiates selfhood, belonging, and cultural memory alongside depictions of suffering. The study treats the novels as fiction, employing literary analysis to explore how historical and sociopolitical contexts shape narrative and character development (Ahmed & Salih, 2021).

In contrast, *The Sense of Belonging and Unhomeness in When Mountains Weep: Coming of Age in Kurdistan* (Shwani, 2021) foregrounds personal identity as a central theme while addressing trauma more indirectly. Using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely," the study analyzes Hamko's psychological dislocation, cultural estrangement, and difficulties in forming a coherent sense of self amidst Kurdistan's sociopolitical instability. Trauma is approached through alienation and the destabilizing effects of conflict, displacement, and linguistic suppression on the protagonist's emotional and cultural well-being. Identity is emphasized as pivotal to Hamko's coming-of-age journey. The article positions personal and collective identity as central to understanding the psychological and cultural dimensions of the memoir that the research deals with as a novel. The text is treated as fiction, with literary analysis used to interpret character development, narrative

structure, and thematic resonance (Shwani, 2021). Additionally, the identity is rather personal outside the realm of ethnic and national identities.

Trauma and Recovery: A Psychoanalytic Study of When Mountains Weep (Mohammed, 2022) integrates trauma and identity directly, applying Judith Herman's trauma theory to Hamko's experiences. The study examines the stages of trauma recovery, safety, remembrance/mourning, and reconnection, showing how prolonged sociopolitical oppression and personal loss shape emotional, psychological, and cultural development. Trauma is central, manifested in symptoms such as hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction, while identity emerges explicitly through reconstruction processes. Hamko's relationship with his grandfather mediates the transmission of Kurdish language, history, and culture, facilitating the rebuilding of personal and collective identity. The study emphasizes Mustafa's focus on "recovery over revenge," demonstrating how the narrative illustrates resilience and selfhood reconstruction.

All three studies treat their texts as fiction and explore trauma as central, but their engagement with identity varies. Ahmed and Salih (2021) focus on socio-historical trauma without explicitly analyzing identity, leaving questions of selfhood and cultural belonging underexplored. Shwani (2021) foregrounds identity, especially regarding estrangement and belonging, but offers limited psychoanalytic insight into trauma recovery. Mohammed (2022) provides the most integrated approach, examining trauma and identity concurrently and showing how relational and cultural factors facilitate resilience and reconstruction of selfhood. Together, these studies demonstrate the centrality of trauma in contemporary Iraqi and Kurdish fiction, while revealing differing levels of attention to identity, underscoring the need for combined literary, socio-historical, and psychoanalytic approaches to fully understand trauma and identity in fiction.

This study is grounded in postcolonial and subaltern theory, which illuminates how marginalized communities navigate systems of domination and exclusion. Concepts of otherness and cultural hegemony guide the analysis, emphasizing both externally imposed identities and internally negotiated selfhood. Kurdish memoirs are examined as sites where resistance, memory, and cultural agency intersect, revealing the complex interplay between marginalization and self-expression. This framework provides a lens to understand how historical, political, and social forces shape Kurdish identity and narratives of resilience.

Research Gaps

Significant gaps persist: There is no comprehensive, book-length trauma study of Mustafa's work. Research often lacks deep analysis, particularly concerning gender and class dimensions of trauma within the Kurdish context. Comparative studies linking *When Mountains Weep* to other Kurdish trauma narratives or to global Indigenous/genocide literatures are scarce. Furthermore, the role of aesthetic form, how Mustafa's use of poetic language, fragmentation, and imagery embodies traumatic experience, demands deeper exploration beyond thematic analysis.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and interpretive approach, aiming to explore the layers of narrative and theme in a coming-of-age memoir novel. It examines how the protagonist's personal growth, identity formation, and self-discovery unfold through narrative strategies, character development, and recurring motifs. Close reading is employed to uncover the memoir's language, metaphors, and structural choices that express maturation, cultural identity, and social realities. At the same time, contextual analysis places the memoir within its historical, social, and cultural settings, showing how external forces shape the protagonist's journey. Relevant literary and psychological frameworks guide the interpretation of how individual development intersects with broader societal influences. This approach allows a holistic understanding of the memoir, revealing how personal experience, culture, and history converge to shape a narrative of growth and self-awareness.

Trauma, Otherness, and Identity

Trauma is commonly categorized into three types: acute, chronic, and complex. Acute trauma results from a single, overwhelming event, such as a natural disaster or a violent assault. Chronic trauma arises from repeated and prolonged exposure to distressing events, like ongoing abuse or domestic violence. Complex trauma involves exposure to multiple, often interpersonal, traumatic events, which can have profound effects on an individual's psychological development and sense of identity (Herman, 1992). Understanding these distinctions provides a framework for analyzing how traumatic experiences shape the self, particularly in contexts of historical and sociopolitical upheaval.

In Kurdish literature, these trauma types are frequently depicted, reflecting the region's tumultuous history. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which divided the Ottoman Empire's territories into British and French spheres of influence, disregarded Kurdish ethnic and cultural ties and became a source of prolonged conflict and displacement (*The New Yorker*, 2023). This historical trauma is central to Kurdish identity formation, as individuals and communities negotiate a sense of belonging amid imposed borders and marginalization. Literary representations often show characters reconstructing their identities in response to these cumulative historical and social pressures, illustrating how trauma is inseparable from the ongoing formation of both personal and collective identity.

Kurdish writers frequently act as journalists and educators, using literature to illuminate the Kurdish experience. Through their narratives, they document trauma, raise awareness about the Kurdish plight, and critique the treatment of stateless peoples. These literary efforts contribute to preserving cultural memory while also asserting resilience and agency, demonstrating that identity is actively negotiated through the interplay of trauma, otherness, and cultural memory. The works not only convey the lived experience of marginalization but also highlight the processes through which individuals reclaim and reconstruct a sense of self within broader historical and political contexts (Amaye & Said, 2024).

By linking trauma directly to identity, Kurdish literature emphasizes that experiences of historical violence, sociopolitical marginalization, and displacement are not merely external events but deeply shape how individuals understand themselves and their communities. The depiction of these experiences in memoirs and fiction provides insight into the ways in which trauma informs self-perception, social belonging, and the negotiation of Kurdish identity, bridging the personal and collective dimensions of suffering and resilience.

As acute trauma stems from a single occurrence, chronic trauma is caused by recurrent, extended events like abuse or violence, or complex trauma is the result of exposure to several traumatic experiences that shape an individual's personality and sense of identity. The Kurdish research works, especially often show the influence of colonialism in the Greater Kurdistan region, particularly after the Sykes-Picot agreement. Also, most fiction writers write as journalists or teachers and attempt to convey a particular message to the world through their reporting on Kurdistan and the Kurdish problem. Their efforts work towards raising awareness about Kurds, on the one hand, and criticism of the world order and the way it treats non-state

actors.

The relationship between trauma, otherness, and identity is central to understanding how marginalized individuals experience and narrate their lives. Memoirs, in particular, offer a window into the personal and collective effects of violence, oppression, and cultural exclusion. In the Kurdish context, Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep* (2013) captures how trauma shapes the self while also highlighting the ways otherness, both imposed by the state and experienced within the community, affects belonging and identity. This section explores how these three elements, trauma, otherness, and identity, interact in Mustafa's work, showing how personal suffering, social marginalization, and cultural memory come together to influence the reconstruction of selfhood and resilience.

Otherness is not experienced uniformly across all geographical, cultural, or geopolitical contexts; it becomes particularly complex when multiple identity markers intersect, as is the case with the Kurds in the Middle East under four postcolonial or neocolonial regimes and beyond. The Kurds have repeatedly faced enforced identities within modern nation-states dominated by Persian, Turkish, or Arab majorities. At times, they are bothered by the state; at other times, by fellow Kurds living across borders in neighboring countries. In other words, Kurds are both subjects and agents of othering, participating, willingly or not, in the marginalization of their own community across state lines. This intra-Kurdish othering is rarely depicted in literature, often constrained by nationalist ideologies or other limiting factors, which this chapter will further explore. *The Mountains We Carry* foregrounds precisely this internal dimension of otherness, illustrating how Kurds experience exclusion not only from dominant nation-states but also in relation to one another, mediated by the specific nation-state, whether Iraqi, Iranian, Turkish, or Syrian, that they inhabit. (Said, 2024).

Trauma is defined as a psychological and emotional response to events that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, often resulting in long-term effects on mental, emotional, and social functioning (Herman, 1992). In memoirs, trauma is central because it shapes the narrator's perception of self and society, providing insight into both personal and collective experiences of suffering. In *When Mountains Weep* (Mustafa, 2013), the protagonist Hamko's experiences of sociopolitical oppression and familial loss illustrate the pervasive impact of trauma on identity formation. The narrative demonstrates how past violence and instability continue to affect Hamko's psychological state, showing that trauma operates both at a personal level and within broader cultural and historical contexts.

Otherness refers to the process through which individuals or groups are marked as different from a dominant social, cultural, or political norm, often leading to exclusion or marginalization (Said, 1978). In literature, otherness is frequently represented through characters whose behaviors, appearances, or experiences diverge from the majority, rendering them socially or psychologically alienated. In *When Mountains Weep*, Hamko's Kurdish identity positions him as 'other' within the nation-state and in relation to societal norms, highlighting both external marginalization and internalized feelings of difference. This dual process illustrates that otherness is not only imposed by dominant groups but can also occur within communities through intra-group distinctions.

Identity is the composite understanding of oneself, encompassing personal, cultural, ethnic, and social dimensions, often shaped in response to experiences of trauma and otherness (Erikson, 1968). Memoirs frequently foreground identity reconstruction as a means for narrators to negotiate their sense of self amid adversity. In Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep*, Hamko's identity is dynamically formed through his relationships with family and community. The memoir illustrates how trauma and otherness intersect to shape Hamko's sense of belonging, showing that identity in literature is both reactive and socially mediated, constructed through memory, narrative, and cultural engagement.

In *When Mountains Weep*, trauma, otherness, and identity are deeply intertwined, shaping Hamko's psychological and social world. Trauma, experienced through political oppression, familial loss, and cultural marginalization, disrupts Hamko's emotional stability and heightens his sense of otherness. This otherness is externally imposed by dominant nation-states and internally negotiated within intra-Kurdish social

dynamics, producing layers of exclusion and alienation. Identity is reconstructed in response to these pressures through memory, familial bonds, and cultural transmission. The memoir demonstrates that trauma catalyzes the negotiation of selfhood and collective belonging, revealing how Kurdish identity emerges through navigating marginalization, experiencing otherness, and actively recovering from past suffering. Mustafa's narrative emphasizes resilience and the reconstruction of identity amid historical and sociopolitical adversity.

It is clear from the term "postcolonial literature" that it refers to works that were published during and immediately after colonialism ended. But since its consequences are infinite, it is difficult to sustain in any clear-cut or uncomplicated way the sense of an end, of the close of one historical epoch and the beginning of another. The age of European colonial empires is effectively and overtly over, and this fact alone is of great significance. However, its effect is evident in the recently founded or manufactured post-colonial governments, which do not take into account their cultural and historical roots.

Colonialism has reshaped most of the world, which is enough to create a phenomenon like identity. The postcolonial context affected by colonialism resulted in various issues, like issues of identity, otherness, hybridity, and dual or multi-identity. In the chosen Kurdish novels and memoirs, identity has been both in the local, cultural, reactive form of otherness and less in the political form of identity. The political transformation during colonialism and throughout the post-colonial period brought about the concept of postcolonial consciousness, another concept to pinpoint the views of people in a diverse post-colonial society. In the researched texts, the characters have undergone experiences whereby they display a unique form of identity resisting assimilation and forced integration. However, the characters, specifically the protagonists, develop consciousness in reaction to assimilation, and they display two forms of otherness: the culturally unique form of identity and the traumatized form of otherness or othered identity.

Trauma and Identity: Traumatic Otherness in Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep*

The concept of otherness can be noticed in Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep* (2013). Kurdish individuals in the work feel like the "other" in post-colonial Iraq. Their otherness is used to mistreat the Kurdish individuals. The work tells the story of a displaced and mobilized Kurdish family in Iraq around the 1980s and 1990s and the obstacles they faced due to their Kurdish ethnicity. The text shows how the Kurds fight differentiation in Iraq. In terms of trauma, "*When Mountains Weep*" explores the concept of differentiation that Kurds experience as a result of oppression and how this trauma affects their sense of identity and self-recognition, and even affects their relationships with others. The trauma of the repression is used to turn the Kurds into "others" in Iraqi society and to justify their continued persecution. Through the experiences explored, one can understand how trauma results in indifference and alienation, in addition to the way the Kurds combat this difference through resilience and their determination. The work paints a vivid picture of the traumatic disparity and otherness in the real-life experiences of the Kurdish people under Saddam's regime. Nevertheless, one can argue that trauma remains active for decades, and based on some scientific research, including a research titled *The Effects of Trauma, with or without PTSD, on the Transgenerational DNA Methylation Alterations in Human Offsprings* (2018), it also affects the following generations. Trauma often leads to various individual and collective issues. Research on the effects of trauma on the next generation has found increasing evidence that the long-term effects of trauma exposure are transmitted to offspring through the epigenetic mechanism of alterations in DNA methylation and potentially modify the expression of genes and metabolic systems. (Youssef, Lockwood, Su, Hao, & Rutten, 2018).

Fanon, Bhabha, and Minh-ha, amongst other scholars, have explored the psychological, cultural, and social impact of colonialism on individuals and communities. They highlight how the legacy of colonization can lead

to trauma, including feelings of displacement, loss of cultural identity, and the internalization of oppressive narratives. These theorists offer valuable insights into understanding and addressing postcolonial trauma. *When Mountains Weep* by Gharbi Mustafa opens with the issues of acceptance and the traumatic experience of being away from their homeland, Kurdistan.

Often, language plays a major role in the development of the sense of otherness among minorities. As shown in the following quote, the main character was traumatized by the fact that he was neither comprehended by the Arabs nor comprehended what was happening. The extract captures the feeling of displacement and cultural difference. The protagonist's experience of not being able to communicate with or understand others is a poignant reflection of the challenges individuals face in a society where there is conflict between the ruling and the ruled, and post-colonial contexts as well.

When class was over, I went outside and wept bitterly, stammering in Kurdish, "I want to go home." My whole sense of happiness and excitement about attending school faded away as I realized that no one there spoke the way I did, and I couldn't understand anyone. Many things happened that day that made little sense to me, but like any six-year-old child, I was naturally curious and wondered about those things. Questions floated through my mind, but I had no one to answer them and was hesitant to ask. Among all my ponderings, two were most pressing. Why did we speak differently in our house, and what was the strange language I was hearing away from home? (p. 9).

The quote highlights power dynamics and the impact of language on a sense of belonging. The quote invites us to explore themes of identity, forceful assimilation, and the desire for acquaintance. It is a thought-provoking perspective on the complexities of cultural integration. Additionally, the protagonist's inability to communicate and understand others creates a sense of alienation and contributes to their experience of traumatic otherness. The quote highlights the emotional pain of cultural displacement and the challenges faced by individuals who are marginalized or excluded due to their language or cultural background. Here, one can also refer to the psychological impact of being perceived as different or "other" in a society, often resulting in feelings of isolation, confusion, and distress; traumatic otherness. Julia Kristeva's analogy of such traumatic experiences plays a major role in the comprehension of self and the other. In her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980), Kristeva explores the psychological and cultural aspects of abjection, which refers to the discomfort and repulsion humans experience when confronted with the breakdown of boundaries between the self and the other. While her work doesn't directly focus on "traumatic otherness," it provides valuable insights into how individuals navigate and respond to experiences of otherness and the unsettling aspects of the human condition.

Moreover, the perilous treatment of the teacher within the school parameters unveils certain problematic practices like denial and enforced assimilation of the 'other' minority. The following quote delves into the ill-treatment of a Kurdish schoolboy by a teacher:

The teacher turned and walked from the room, leaving me alone with the headmistress. The headmistress scowled at me, "Hamko, how dare you use such a disgusting word in my school?" She opened the small refrigerator by her desk and took out a bottle of water. I thought she was going to offer me a drink, which I really needed because I was sweating out of nervousness. Instead, she told me to stretch out my hands. Mustafa, Gharbi. *When Mountains Weep* (p. 12). Gharbi Mustafa. Kindle Edition. When I obeyed, she poured ice-cold water over my hands and hit my wet fingers fiercely and repeatedly with a stick. I started to cry and begged her to stop. When she had finally finished, she told me to leave school and not return unless I was accompanied by one of my parents. With my hands stinging and tears rolling down my face, I left the building and headed to the house where my parents had rented a room, a few hundred meters from my grandparents' home. (pp. 12-13).

Here, the beginning of the quote sets the stage for a power dynamic shift, with the teacher leaving the protagonist alone with the headmistress. It signifies a change in authority and control that continues in the second sentence; the headmistress's scowl and reprimand reflect her exercise of power and control over the

protagonist. It demonstrates the imposition of cultural norms and the suppression of the protagonist's voice. This action could symbolize the headmistress's position of privilege and access to resources, contrasting with the protagonist's vulnerability and lack of power. The protagonist's expectation of a kind gesture reveals their vulnerability and the power imbalance between them and the headmistress. It emphasizes the protagonist's need for support and understanding. Her continuous attempt to punish the pupil, Hamko, foreshadows the subsequent act of punishment, which she does not hesitate to do by pouring ice-cold water and physically punishing the protagonist, demonstrating the infliction of physical and emotional harm. It represents the oppressive nature of the headmistress's authority as part of the dominant group. On the other hand, the protagonist's emotional response of crying and pleading for the headmistress to stop highlights their vulnerability and the trauma they are experiencing. It underscores the power imbalance and the detrimental impact of the headmistress's actions. Nevertheless, the headmistress's command for Hamko to leave school and the condition of parental accompaniment further marginalize and exclude the protagonist. It reinforces the power dynamics and the protagonist's sense of otherness, which eventually leads to a traumatic form of otherness.

In the above quote and also throughout this memoir, there are traces of both self-victimization and the victimization of the other by the dominant group. This coincides with the first issue of self-victimization within the postcolonial paradigm. Fanon, in his work *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), examines the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized, including how internalized racism can lead to self-victimization. He highlights the importance of decolonization and reclaiming agency to break free from the cycle of self-victimization. On the other hand, the victimization of others by the dominant group is related to the power dynamics and oppressive practices imposed by the colonizers on the colonized. Scholars like Said in *Orientalism* (1978) and Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) have extensively examined this dynamic, highlighting how the dominant group perpetuates the victimization of marginalized communities through cultural, political, and economic means. This indicates a lack of challenging and dismantling these power structures lack of social justice and equality.

Power dynamics, forceful assimilation, exclusion, and marginalization of the minorities by the ruling majority within centralist post-colonial regimes of Iraq reflect serious issues related to both internal racism, superior mentality, and state-sponsored racism and prejudice. In the next quote, the text shows the psychological condition of the main character and how he undergoes traumatic experiences that reshape his identity and sense of belonging in a country where he is excluded and marginalized.

My childhood began with the sound of gunfire and the smell of gunpowder. On Thursdays, the students lined up in the schoolyard to salute the Iraqi flag and listen to a song glorifying the president and his Ba'ath Party. We also had to watch the armed soldier who had been assigned to our school as he fired thirty rounds into the sky, so young children could get used to the clatter of machine guns. Mr. President believed that soft music would turn boys into sissies who would be startled by a sudden honk of a car horn, whereas the pop of gunfire would turn them into great, fearless warriors to fight in his glorious wars. (pp. 13-14).

The quote paints a vivid picture of a childhood immersed in violence and indoctrination. The sounds of gunfire and the smell of gunpowder create a haunting backdrop for the narrator's experiences. The mandatory flag salute and the glorification of the president and his political party in school further reinforce the state's control and the normalization of its ideology. As seen in the quote, the soldier fires bullets into the air to both glorify his president and strip children of their childhood, and encourage them to join the military as obedient subjects to the dictator president. This coincides with Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in the same way that the West, from the position of power, the East perpetuates stereotypes and creates a sense of otherness among the ruled. In this case, the narrator's childhood experiences can be seen as a form of *Orientalism*, where the regime uses both violence and indoctrination to change the 'other (s)' and maintain power.

Moreover, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) sheds light on the psychological and social impact of

the invasion of a foreign group on another local group, as in the case of colonialism. The above quote shows a similar power dynamic where the narrator's childhood is spoiled by the tyrannic regime of Saddam due to violence and indoctrination. Such dehumanizing practices coincide with Fanon's ideas on the dehumanizing effects of colonialism, as can be seen in the quote, highlighting how oppressive systems can shape and marginalize individuals. Overall, the quote highlights how traumatic otherness can be imposed through violence, indoctrination, and the exercise of power. It reflects the influence of such problematic perspectives and the mechanisms of discipline and control, mainly promoted and enforced by the Ba'ath.

The main character, Hamko, undergoes critical conditions in the pursuit of adjustment in an alien environment. This is not all, the character not only goes through a difficult situation, but he also faces harsh criticism, abuse, and is often beaten up by Arab children. The reality represented here portrays similar experiences often reported by people. In the following quote from the text, Hamko feels both alienated and traumatized: At school, the other boys never called me by my real name. They called me "the Kurd," or sometimes "the brainless Kurd" if they wanted to start a fight. As I passed them, a group of boys would say, "Did you find your brain or are you still looking for it in the mountains?" Then they'd laugh and add, "He can't find his brain because Kurds don't have one!" (Mustafa, 2013, p. 14).

This quote is a powerful example of the experience of difference and trauma in a post-colonial context. It highlights the derogatory and discriminatory labels that the narrator, who is "Kurdish," faces and is ridiculed for his identity. This demonstrates how the dominant group can perpetuate stereotypes and exclude certain ruled groups, causing psychological and emotional harm. Arguably, this showcases the legacies of centralized and fascist regimes. As can be noticed, in the first sentence, one can explore how the act of not being called by the narrator's real name reflects the erasure of their identity. This coincides with Bhabha's (1994) work on hybridity and the negotiation of identities, in *The Location of Culture* in the third chapter titled "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation". Later in the quote, it is called "the Kurd" and "the brainless Kurd" perpetuates stereotypes and dehumanizes the narrator, which is in parallel with Fanon's focus on the psychological effects of colonization and the construction of racial identities.

The impact of the boys' mocking comments about finding the narrator's brain in the mountains and the assertion that Kurds don't have brains highlights the devaluation and othering of the Kurdish identity. Spivak matches this scenario in her work on subaltern studies and the representation of marginalized voices. The repeated mockery of the Arab children with the Kurdish children at the school, as noticed in the text, highlights problematic power relations and a lack of social harmony between the children coming from the two unique groups: one being the majority and the other the minority. This reflects controversial practices perpetuated by the regime promoting supremacy under the slogan of "One Chosen Arab Nation Under an Immortal Message". Devlin mentions in *The Ba'ath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis* (1991) that Arab nationalism was quite popular and promoted by the Ba'athists all over the "fertile crescent", especially in Iraq and Syria. This was a movement copied from Russian communism and inspired by the Fascist socialism of the German Nazis. This form of fascism started after WWI and matured in WWII, and then became the face of propagated development and progress by both the political elite and the so-called educated front. Ba'ath smoothly took over power through the 1960s and 1970s. Under the dictatorial regime of Saddam, the Ba'ath organizations of Syria and Iraq grew dramatically over two decades. By the mid-1980s, parties had 100,000 official members, 400,000 candidates in Syria, and 25,000 official members and 1.5 million candidates in Iraq. Neither leader, like Saddam, needs an organization that allows its members the freedom to propose new ideas, criticize the regime's policies, or suggest that the leader is imperfect.

Fanon explored the psychological effects of colonization and the trauma experienced by colonized individuals thoroughly. His work, especially *The Wretched of the Earth*, dives into the impact of violence and oppression on the psyche. Fanon's insights are crucial in understanding the intersection of trauma and postcolonialism or occupation. Bhabha discusses such traumatic experiences in various sections, particularly in chapters like *On Violence* and *Colonial War and Mental Disorders*. In his influential book *The Location of*

Culture, he explores the concept of trauma and its relationship to colonialism and postcolonial identity. In a section, within Chapter Four, titled *Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation*, Bhabha explores the traumatic experiences of colonialism and how they shape the construction of national identities. In the chapter titled "*The Commitment to Theory*," Bhabha explores the concept of trauma and its relationship to colonialism and postcolonial identity. He investigates how trauma shapes and influences the formation of cultural identities in postcolonial societies. Bhabha explores how trauma and the experience of otherness intersect in the context of colonialism and postcolonial societies. It's a thought-provoking exploration of the complex dynamics of identity and power.

Even though power dynamics and the ruling majority vs the ruled minority rhetoric can be noted throughout "*When Mountains Weep*", such practices, as apparent in the text, uncover various ways by which Kurds felt traumatized. In an incident, Hamko, who attempted a dishonorable yet innocent act as a child,

As she saw us, the headmistress said, "It's you again! You shameless Kurdish boys are a disgrace to our school." She turned toward another two teachers who were sitting in the room and scorned, "It's no wonder their mothers don't teach them manners. How can they have time to teach them anything when all they do is keep the rice cooking and the babies coming? They give birth to a child every nine months. They think it's their national duty, so Kurds will become a majority in this country. (p. 15).

The quote highlights a deeply hurtful and discriminatory encounter. This is a sorrowful example that reflects otherness and trauma conjoined in this context. The above quotation exhibits both dehumanization and stereotyping of the Kurdish people, especially targeting the children through the enforcement of power dynamics. This reveals the influence of the Iraqi post-colonial regime and dictatorship targeting the Kurdish ethnic nation. Such perpetuation of power leaves the Kurds both marginalized and othered. The trauma and otherness of the characters reflect the culminated impact of decades of Ba'athists' ethnocentric policies that led to both oppressing the Kurds and also leading to the creation of an unfriendly environment for them. Such policies incited hatred and prejudice towards 'othering' minorities.

As seen in the above quote, the headmistress's offensive statements on the Kurds through the boys highlight the "othering" of marginalized groups within the context of the regime's power dynamics. The trauma arises from the discrimination and dehumanization that the 'boys' face due to their ethnicity. This quote sheds light on the ongoing struggles of marginalized communities and the need to challenge oppressive narratives. The quote reflects the concept of traumatic otherness. In this case, Fanon's perspective would be particularly relevant as his work explores the psychological impact of colonialism and how it generates feelings of otherness and trauma among the ruled and the colonized individuals. As clearly shown in the above text, the headmistress also expresses prejudice towards Kurdish boys, calling them a disgrace and implying that their mothers do not teach them manners. Thus, she also perpetuates a stereotype about Kurdish women, suggesting that they prioritize having children over education. These statements reflect a discriminatory attitude and reinforce negative perceptions of the ruling Arabs towards the Kurds. The concept of traumatic otherness explores the psychological impact of being marginalized and treated as an outsider, as can be seen in the following quote, too, as Hamko is questioned and interrogated to reveal what might not even exist:

As I looked around, I saw a skinny, dark man sitting behind a table amid a haze of smoke from a noxious-smelling cigar. He stared at me fiercely and growled, "Let's not waste any time. Either you cooperate with us and confess everything, or you die under torture." Trembling with fear, I said in a quivering voice, "Alright, I'll confess everything, and I promise I'll never be involved with such acts in the future." The man smiled as he sat back in his large chair and said, "Good! Now give me the names of all the comrades who were with you." (pp. 41-42).

In this quote, there is an intense encounter between the narrator and an intimidating figure who threatens to torture the narrator unless he cooperates and confesses. This scene reflects the power dynamics and traumatic experiences that can arise in a ruler vs ruling context. This coincides with *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha discusses negotiating identities and hybridity in *The Commitment to Theory* and

Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation (1990). Bhabha and his concept of "hybridity" in postcolonial theory unveils how colonial encounters create a space of cultural mixing and hybridity, where the colonized and the colonizers interact and negotiate their identities. The power dynamics and the threat of torture highlight the asymmetrical relationship between the two. The quote vividly shows how the ruled subject engages with and negotiates power within the post-colonial context of Iraq. This perspective emphasizes the complexity of the colonized subject, even in situations of fear and vulnerability, as the character Hamko tries his best to turn out as a victor or least vulnerable in this unavoidable scenario. Notwithstanding, Trauma has a profound effect on the characters in the work. In the quote below, we witness a tense and traumatic encounter between the narrator's father, the narrator, and an Iraqi soldier. The threat of violence and the sense of otherness are palpable in this scene.

As my father rushed forward and wrenched the scissors from my hand, the Iraqi moved toward me threateningly. My father raised the scissors above his head and shouted, "You've already caused a lot of damage around here. Now get out!" The Iraqi walked toward the door. He growled, "I'll make sure you never see another sunrise." After the Iraqi had gone, my father looked at me and said, "Are you out of your mind, trying to stab a man in an Iraqi army uniform?" I tried to protest, but my father cut me off. "That's enough. Let's start cleaning up this mess." (pp. 83-84).

Within the context of traumatic otherness in a postcolonial context, one can draw upon the work of Bhabha's concept of "third space." Bhabha argues that in postcolonial societies, there exists a "third space" that emerges from the collision of different cultures and identities. This space is characterized by ambivalence and negotiation, challenging the dominant power structures as Hamko does in *When Mountain's Weep*. The quote unveils a clash of identities and power dynamics between the Iraqi soldier and the narrator's family. The presence of the Iraqi soldier represents the oppressive force of the occupying power, creating a sense of otherness and fear within the household. The father's act of forcefully removing the scissors and confronting the soldier can be seen as a moment of resistance and reclaiming agency within this context. Self-victimization could be noticed here and there, however, most of the quotes are manifestations of heartbreaking scenes where the narrator's family tries to give a proper burial to a deceased child. The act of digging a tiny grave with their hands, sharp stones, and pocket knives highlights the harsh and challenging conditions they face. Fanon and his concept of the dehumanizing effects of colonialism resonates here. Fanon argues that colonialism perpetuates a system of oppression where the colonized people are treated as "other" and stripped of their humanity.

Even so, we decided to try to lay the poor child to rest as best we could. Using our hands, sharp stones, and pocket-knives, we finally managed to scoop out a tiny grave in the rocky earth. My mother then handed the baby, wrapped in a small piece of white cloth, to my first cousin, who tenderly lowered the tiny body into the hole. His eyes glistened with tears, which he made a huge effort to control, since Kurdish men were not supposed to cry. As for me, I felt a tear roll down my cheek before I could wipe it away." (pp. 108-109).

The quote reveals harsh conditions that the characters endured that were so inhumane that the burial of their loved ones was not proper. The ruled and colonized often undergo conditions in which life itself becomes meaningless, especially in the case of the outcasted or outlawed characters as seen above. The other aspect here is related to the image of the Kurdish characters, who, despite such hardships, control their emotions. However, one can also say that the male characters above avoid showing vulnerability. The work also uncovers the traumatic experience the characters underwent as the tears rolled down their cheek, reflecting the deep emotional pain and trauma due to the death of an infant.

Kurdish literature often unveils the consequences of colonialism in greater Kurdistan, especially the post-Sykes-Picot agreement's events. Writers of fiction often write as reporters or teachers and try to deliver certain messages to the world by covering the issues of the Kurdish people and Kurdistan. Such attempts are meant to raise awareness about the Kurds and to critique the world order and the way it operates to serve the nation-states crafted for either political or economic reasons, as seen below

As a huge wave of people poured across the border, the rain again began to fall, causing the Turkish soldiers to withdraw to their bunkers on the hilltop and allow people to cross freely. The next destination was a Kurdish village on the Turkish side of the border (called Dashtan in Kurdish and Uzumlu in Turkish). In some places, the borderline divided the Kurdish village into two halves, each half in a different nation. Sometimes cousins from the same village went to different schools—some to Turkish schools to learn Turkish and become “Mountain Turks,” and some to attend Iraqi schools to learn Arabic and become part of the Arab world. It had been that way for hundreds of years. When the Arabs, Turks, or Persians needed Kurds to fight in their wars, they saw the Kurds as brothers living together in one land. However, when the Kurds cried for freedom, they were considered outlaws to be annihilated and buried in mass graves in the desert sand. (pp. 110-111).

The quote shows the movement of people across the border as a challenge due to the division of a Kurdish village between different nation-states. This highlights the complex dynamics and challenges faced by the Kurdish people in a postcolonial context. Through the lens of traumatic otherness in a postcolonial context, one can again draw upon the work of Bhabha and his concept of hybridity. Bhabha argues that the ruling entity creates a sense of cultural hybridity, where different cultures coexist and intersect, often leading to complex identities and divided loyalties. (Bhabha, 1994). In this quote, one can also see the impact of colonial borders on the Kurdish village, where cousins are separated by the border and attend different schools to learn the languages and cultures of different ethnocentric groups within post-colonial nation-states. This reflects the forced assimilation and erasure of Kurdish identity, as they are expected to become "Mountain Turks" or part of the Arab world, depending on the nation they are in, or other second-class Persians. Furthermore, the quote highlights the double standards faced by the Kurds. When they are needed as allies in wars, they are seen as brothers, but when they strive for freedom and autonomy, they are considered outlaws and subjected to violence and mass graves. Through this analysis, one can understand the deep-rooted trauma and marginalization experienced by the Kurdish people in their postcolonial context, as their cultural identity is suppressed and their struggle for freedom is met with hostility.

The image of self, which is rather an othered image, underwent severe and traumatic encounters by which the very sense of self of the Kurdish characters in the work is perplexed and distorted. Hamko, the protagonist, suffers from traumatic experiences that alter his sense of self and navigation of his identity. Hamko both observes and experiences torture, denigration, degradation, and forced assimilation; thus, by far, the whereabouts of his othered identity provide roots of serious issues related to power dynamics and the relationship between the ruling majority and the ruled minority.

Power dynamics, state-sponsored assimilation, exclusion, and marginalization of the Kurdish minority by the ruling majority within centralist post-colonial regimes of Iraq reflect serious issues related to both internal racism, superior mentality, and state-sponsored racism and chauvinism perpetuated and orchestrated by the Ba’ath party. Additionally, due to their resistance to assimilation, otherness is not only the result of self-exclusion from the general identity and society but also due to their exclusion by the ruling group from society. This shows a reactive sense of otherness to the extent to which Kurdish characters feel isolated yet surrounded by the forceful and fearful practices of the regime.

The threat of violence and the sense of otherness are physical in the work. The Iraqi soldier represents the oppressive occupying power and how it creates a sense of otherness among the characters. Confronting the soldier can be seen as a moment of resistance and reclaiming agency or status within this third space by the characters in the above work. The Narrative presents a powerful exploration of trauma, identity, and otherness within the Kurdish experience under postcolonial and authoritarian regimes in Iraq. Through the eyes of Hamko, the narrative illuminates how historical and sociopolitical oppression, ranging from Ba’athist linguistic assimilation, violent indoctrination, and marginalization to displacement caused by war and fractured borders, produce profound psychological and cultural trauma. Mustafa’s memoir captures both personal and collective suffering, showing that trauma is not merely a fleeting emotional experience but a

deeply formative force that shapes selfhood, social relationships, and cultural belonging.

Conclusion

The memoir reveals the dual dynamics of otherness: externally imposed by dominant Arab-majority institutions and internally negotiated within Kurdish communities. Hamko's alienation—from being called “the brainless Kurd” in Arab society to “the Arab boy from the south” in his northern homeland—illustrates how ethnicity, language, and geopolitics fracture identity and produce a “traumatic otherness.” Mustafa's narrative shows that such othering is not merely psychological but socially codified, embedded in everyday interactions, schools, borders, and state institutions.

Gharbi Mustafa's *When Mountains Weep* (2013) underscores the centrality of language and its role in constructing exclusion within Iraqi society. The protagonist's trauma in facing an alien language at his new school captures both the pain of displacement and the visibility of cultural difference. Beyond language, the teacher's discriminatory treatment exposes deeper patterns of denial and forced assimilation, showing how schools extend the reach of authoritarian structures rather than serve as spaces of learning in a multiethnic society.

By integrating postcolonial theory, psychoanalytic frameworks, and historical trauma, this study demonstrates the interplay between self-victimization, imposed victimization, and resilience. Trauma emerges as both an individual and collective experience, revealing how historical oppression continues to shape Kurdish identity. Mustafa's narrative affirms that language, memory, and human connection are central to reconstructing selfhood and preserving cultural continuity.

Ultimately, *When Mountains Weep* stands as a testament to Kurdish literature's power to bear witness, challenge oppressive structures, and affirm cultural identity. Mustafa transforms lived trauma into a narrative of endurance, showing that identity is actively negotiated in the face of marginalization and that resilience arises through confronting historical injustice. The work highlights the lasting impact of colonial and authoritarian legacies on personal and collective consciousness, offering a powerful literary testament to the Kurdish struggle for recognition, dignity, and belonging.

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