

CULTURAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS IN *RUNAWAY TO NOWHERE* BY QASHAM ALI BALATA

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ABSTRACT

Edith Hamilton, the famous German-American educator and author, once said that “A people's literature is the great textbook for real knowledge of them. The writings of the day show the quality of the people as no historical reconstruction can.” Hamilton's saying appropriately applies on Qasham Ali Balata's novel *Runaway to Nowhere*. This research study aims at the exploration of the closer considerations to the cultural and political references in the novel, which are found in every single page of the book. The observations will be documented through quotations from the novel.

The study starts with an introduction to the novel intending to familiarize the reader with the story and the characters. The first section (cultural references) deals with regional considerations; including the regional demography, language, cuisine, and the national costumes of the Kurdish people. The Kurdish folklore, with some of its tales and legends are also discussed. This section ends with the discussion of social themes; containing critical issues like the role of the Kurdish woman in society and socialization in the Kurdish community. The second section describes the political references, which are ordered logically. Starting from the geopolitical importance of Kurdistan, that moves Kurdistan into the focus of their imperialistic neighbors. The novel limits itself to Iraqi- Kurdistan; thus, only the oppressions of the regime in Baghdad are discussed. The Iraqi Kurdish resistance is explained as well as the sanctions of the occupiers of Iraqi Kurdistan, the Iraqi regimes in Baghdad, in particular the Ba'ath- party. The focus lies on the latter mentioned party, who is responsible for the sequence of wars and mass murders against other nations or their own citizens, in particular the Iraqi Kurds.

KEYWORDS: war, love, social traditions, oppression, Kurdish uprising, mass exodus, death

i. *RUNAWAY TO NOWHERE*: AN INTRODUCTION

The story takes place in Northern-Iraq, during the reign of the Ba'ath- Regime, specifically during the time of Iraq's annexation of Kuwait. Through this atmosphere of war, the love story of two Kurdish students, Nareen and Karwan, is told. Both are from Duhok, a small Kurdish city, and face difficulties and separation in their war- torn world. After the outbreak of the Second Gulf War, a chain of historical events occur, first the Uprising in the north and south of Iraq against the Ba'ath- Regime, then the suppression of the revolt, which also leads to a mass- exodus of the Kurdish population in the north. Amidst these events, is the misery of the lovers, Nareen and Karwan, Nareen's determination to survive on her journey through the rough and cold Kurdish mountains,

accompanied by her six- year- old- brother; after being separated from their parents during the mass-exodus.

The story opens by introducing the five female college students, who study at the University of Mosul and live together in a dormitory room, which they call 'Paradise'. Each one of the five girls is given a physical description and a family background. This introduction helps to recognize how the impact of war changes individuals and societies. Nareen, Buhar, Befreen, Jihan, and Zainab; the five roommates, are close to graduate; while Iraq stands in the face of the coming 'Second Gulf War'. The female students express their fear and contempt for the war, and see as much at their private affairs; at this point, the secret love of Nareen and the engineer student Karwan is briefed. Karwan is the brother of Nareen's high school friend Bayan and briefly after finishing

his high school, he meets Nareen and falls in love at first sight.

The story occurs during the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi army. The war affects the Iraqi people in many ways, including the economic embargo, which is forced on Iraq by the United Nations; resulting in a shortage of food, from which Nareen, her family, and the whole country have to suffer. The description of the characters and their circumstances helps to reflect many social issues within the Kurdish society, most importantly being the domination that Kurdish men practice towards their female family members. Polygamy is another main point that clarifies the unfair situation of Kurdish women in the society. These social defects in the society are represented frequently through the whole novel by the destination of Kurdish women. These flashbacks help the reader to have a slight introduction into the Kurdish world.

The story then goes forwards toward the beginning of the Second Gulf War, which forces the people to stay in shelters during bombardments. Nareen has to suffer twice, from the difficulties of the war and the separation of her lover Karwan, who leaves the city with his family to their native village. Karwan writes letters for his beloved, describing the village life, which again introduces the readers to the Kurdish people, who are famous for their agricultural life. Meanwhile, the 'Second Gulf War' created a power vacuum that leads to an uprising of the Kurds, which is guided by the Kurdish freedom fighters (Peshmerga) as well as the Kurdish collaborators (Jash) and the common people. After being informed that the United States will stay neutral, the Kurdish people recognise that this revolt will carry consequences with them; therefore, people start to prepare themselves for an escape, fearing from possible chemical attacks by the Iraqi army. Before the mass exodus, Karwan visits Nareen to see each other for the last time in their life.

Nareen's family leaves the city afoot towards the Turkish border, until a truck stops to carry the people. There, the story takes a turn, when Nareen and her little brother Salih are separated from their parents, because the siblings manage to jump on the truck, while their parents do not. Nareen's father, Hassan, orders her to wait in a town, called Amadiya, to re-join. Nareen and her brother do as her father told her, but their parents

do not show up, with the result that Nareen decides to follow the crowd on their path to the refugee camps along the Turkish border. Their way through the Kurdish mountains is a crucial test for Nareen, who suffers with her brother from cold, starvation, exhaustion, plus the big burden of having the responsibility for her little brother, who is the only male offspring of her parents, which makes the misery sorer.

Nareen and Salih wander during daytime and at night they stay together with many people in abandoned concentration- village- houses. After getting close to the border, there are no houses anymore, only mountains and valleys, which make their journey more difficult. On their road, the siblings recognize how many people do not stand the hard circumstances, by passing uncountable corpses and graves on the sides of the road. One reason of the soaring death toll is the poor water supply, which results in diseases like diarrhoea and dysentery. Nareen also fears to lose her brother, because Salih suffers like most of the children from a sustained diarrhoea and fever. After the airdropping of emergency food by the United Nations, Nareen and Salih's condition is enhanced. Big airplanes drop parachutes down, which are filled with small brown bags, well- stocked with nourishment.

After facing many difficulties on the road, Nareen and Salih eventually reach the big camp, which looks like a city of tents. Arriving at the camp, Nareen starts searching the camp administration office in order to register and receive a tent and blankets. The camp office will become an important place for Nareen, to call out for her parents, initially without success. One of Nareen's tent neighbours, a big family takes care of the new arrivals, especially the grandmother, Sinam. The friendly old woman explains to Nareen how to deal in the camp. Nareen and her brother start to assimilate in the camp life. Nareen explores the camp, while fetching up fresh water, recognising the bad situation in the camp, in which the smell of the air is filled with diarrhoea and other diseases. Nareen befriends with her tent neighbours, which makes her stay easier.

Time passes, and Nareen determines that the camp is like a death-trap, seeing that death is everywhere. The young woman listens also to the life stories of her camp- comrades, which introduce the readers to Kurdish traditions, which are characterized by a highly patriarchal

social structure. After time, the camp office becomes the place of news. First, Nareen and Salih are called to the camp office to find out that her aunt Saffe and her husband were killed by a falling parachute, leaving behind their twin girls, Shereen and Shermeen. Having this additional responsibility, Nareen faces a strong trial of patience and only her love for Karwan gives her the spirit to withstand these difficulties. Karwan's voice frequently comes in her mind, hearing nice lovely words and imagining a happy marriage with Karwan. After several weeks of separation, Nareen and Salih finally reunite with their parents, which make their life in the camp much easier. Now, Nareen's only focus is on finding Karwan, getting help from the American female journalist, Emily, whom she befriends. Emily sympathizes with the Kurdish people and Nareen in particular, but her attempt to find Karwan fails. Towards so many weeks, the Kurds in the camps decide to return to their homes, after being pacified by the instalment of a no-fly-zone by the United States. Nareen and her parents leave the camp wearily.

Arriving at home, they find out that their house is being ravaged. Nareen's mind is captured by Karwan, therefore she visits Karwan's house to know about his state. Finding out that Karwan has become a martyr by defending the city, all of Nareen's wishes and hopes collapse. Her life means nothing to her anymore and it takes much time to overcome this mental pain. Nareen decides to stay unmarried for her whole life, to sacrifice her future for the sake of her true love. The committed young lady dedicates her life for the help of women rights, by working with her former roommate Buhar in an organization for women rights, to live in a freed Kurdistan that improves itself, which was one of Karwan's wishes.

ii. CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The Oxford Dictionary defines culture as the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. Taking this broad definition into consideration, it is obvious that *Runaway to Nowhere* includes various aspects of the Kurdish culture. The author relates the Kurdish culture by a simplified narrative description of the Kurdish people, represented by marginal characters. These prolific

descriptions help to create an overview of the Kurdish way of life and behaviour for the readers, focusing on the uniqueness of the Kurdish people. Balata renounces presenting the Kurds in their best light; instead, she focuses on addressing critical issues within the Kurdish society. Although, stereotypes were not avoidable, Balata makes it to cover almost all cultural aspects of Kurdish life.

2.1 Regional Considerations

Runaway to Nowhere deals with the Kurdish people and with Kurdistan, but limits itself to the Kurdish part in Northern- Iraq. The fragmentation of Kurdistan into four countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria) has had a big impact on the social behaviour of the Kurds in their respective countries.

The Iraqi Kurds in particular are heterogeneous; the clothing, cuisine, folktales, tribes, religions, and the dialects vary widely. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the main events of the novel take place in the city of Duhok and the Iraqi-Turkish border. This region is known as the Bahdinan region, a former Kurdish principality during the Ottoman Empire. The region comprises roughly the largely mountainous northern districts of Duhok, Zakho, Akre, Amadiya, and Sheikhan. The majority of the population are Kurds and speak Kurmanji, the major Kurdish dialect group, also called Bahdini. The dominant religion is Islam (Shafi'ite Sunni), although the area, especially Sheikhan and Sinjar, has been the stronghold of the Yazidi religion. Other sizable, but declining, minorities are the Christian Chaldeans and Assyrians and there was also a small number of Jews (The Encyclopaedia Iranica).

Balata's highly descriptive narration provides also a regional depiction:

"The other four occupants were Kurds from Duhok, a small city in the north of Iraq, known for its rough and high mountains".

(Balata, 2010, 15)

Kurdish Language

Izady, who is one of the most prominent native Kurdish historians of our time, classifies the Kurdish language into the Indo-European family of languages. Kurdish dialects are members of the north-western subdivision of the Indo-Iranian language. The Kurdish language is an independent language, having its own historical development, continuity, grammatical system and rich living vocabularies. The Kurdish

language was derived from the ancient "Median" language or "Proto-Kurdish". Izady divides the Kurdish language into four main dialects: North Kurmanji or also called Badinani, South Kurmanji, Dimili, and Gurani (Izady, 1992, 118-126).

Nareen and her environment speak the North- Kurmanji dialect, exemplified by many cultural- specific terms in the North- Kurmanji dialect throughout the novel:

"She used a Bagordan, a stone roller; we used to fill [...]"

(Balata, 2010, 34)

Clothing in Kurdish Culture

The Kurdish traditional clothing is variant and an on-going part of Kurdish heritage. The clothing is unique and the Kurds express their national identity through it:

"You could see Kurdish men wearing shelo-shapik, traditional Kurdish clothes of large baggy trousers and matched tops with a colourful cummerbund wound around their waists and turbans [...]"

(Balata, 2010, 70)

The previous example of Kurdish clothing represents the male clothing, but the female clothing is no less significant as an identity marker for the Kurdish nationality.

2.2 Folklore

Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories, tall tales, and customs that are the traditions of a culture, subculture, or group. In usage, there is a continuum between folklore and mythology (Georges, 1995, 313).

Kurdish folk tales do not differ from the generality of Iranian lore, and they contain the motifs and settings common to tales told by Persian speakers and the peoples of Luristan, Azerbaijan, Gilan, and Mazandaran. Although the vast majority of Kurds today live in parts of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey that are not normally associated with Iran, Kurdish is an Iranian language, and culturally the Kurds are much more akin to Persians than they are to Arabs or Turks. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the realm of folklore (Tofiq, 2005, 5).

Balata affords a view of Kurdish folktales by mentioning some famous tales, when Nareen tells Salih his favourite story that is wide- spread among Kurds:

"Nareen took him to his room and told him his favourite story Zeng and Beng. It is a story

about two lambs. Their mother the sheep leaves them alone at home and goes to the woods to bring them food [...]"

(Balata, 2010, 49)

Additionally, the Kurdish language is rich of proverbs, which have their place in the novel:

"The lion could be a man or a woman"

(Balata, 2010, 136)

The most important feast day in Kurdish culture, called Newroz is discussed in the starting chapter; highlighting the political overtone of this occasion. According to Kurdish myth, Kawa was a Kurd, lived 2,500 years ago under the tyranny of Zoohak, an Assyrian king. March 20 is traditionally marked as the day that Kawa defeated Zoohak. Kawa is then said to have set fire to the hillsides to celebrate the victory (Izady, 1992, 243-244).

Balata provides the reader with a simple description of the Kurdish national myth:

"Newroz is the day when a Kurdish hero called Kawa killed the tyrant king Zoohak and freed the whole nation long ago"

(Balata, 2010, 24)

2.3 Social Themes

Runaway to Nowhere depicts the Kurdish culture in all its facets to ensure objectivity. Hence, critical social issues are constantly brought in during the events in the novel. Although, the novel focuses on the theme of love in war times, feminism can be seen as a hidden message in the novel. The patriarchal social structure is indirectly denounced, as well as the reactionary feudal traditions within the Kurdish community. Besides the dangerous life in war times and escape, Nareen has also to suffer from the rigidity in her society. Through Nareen's eyes the reader is able to understand how Kurds live; including tribalism, marriage, pastoralism, and traditions, which are all interrelated with each other.

2.4 Pastoralism

Kurdistan's wealth of high-grade pasture lands has long made it suitable for a pastoralist economy, but it is equally suitable in many areas for intensive agriculture. Karwan wrote many letters to Nareen, during his stay in the village, fleeing from the bombardments of Duhok during the Second Gulf War. In these letters Karwan elaborately explains the pastoral life, which will captivate Nareen:

“The view from the village is magnificent; we are surrounded by high mountains and there is a wider river to the west with a heavy current”.

(Balata, 2010, 102)

2.5 Tribalism

The commitment to tribal ideology is one of the strongly shared traditions within the Kurdish society. The significance of tribalism even within modern urban Kurds can be seen as a major reason for many other un-progressive aspects in the Kurdish community. Tribalism also explains the strong association not only within the nuclear family but also the bigger extended family. This tribal system governs the life style of Kurds. Tribalism has been also a major factor negatively affecting the notion of nationhood among Kurds, as Balata states:

“The chief of the tribes, the Aghas in Kurdish, were commanders of Saddam’s Kurdish militia [...]”.

(Balata, 2010, 117)

Another negative concomitant of tribalism is the blood feud amongst people of the same tribe or more commonly between two rival tribes. Thus, when a Kurd is murdered by someone from another tribe, not only the lineage of the dead man, but the whole tribe comes together for an extra-judicial form of punishment. Buhar, one of Nareen’s friends, has taken a bitter lesson of experience from that, when her father was killed through blood feud:

“Buhar’s uncle had killed somebody from another tribe and her father, a peaceful man, paid for it with his blood”.

(Balata, 2010, 14-15)

The reader is introduced to honour- killing within the Kurdish society through the family history Besna, Nareen’s mother, whose own mother was killed by her own brothers,:

“Adults usually don’t talk about a family that kills its daughter, but they consider that family an honoured family because they got rid of the shame”.

(Balata, 2010, 56)

The Kurdish Marriage

Kurdish marriage arrangements are very complex and defined by tribal traditions. Marriage is one of the most important events for establishing alliances and creating social hierarchies within and between tribes. Upon marriage, a woman leaves her birth homestead and moves to her husband’s village. Traditionally, a woman did not move away from

the territory of her lineage since most marriages were within the lineage where members live a short distance away. Traditionally, Kurdish marriages are arranged marriages. Marriage arrangements may be completed even before children are born. The average age for marriage increases in urban areas, where the parties involved are usually educated and employed. Although the marriage age of boys is slightly higher than girls, this depends on various social and economic strategies of households. Marriages are sometimes arranged in the form of direct exchanges, *pê-guhurk*. Direct exchange marriages are made if one household head, who gives a daughter to another one as a wife for their son, demands a wife in return. Most Kurdish marriages are monogamous marriages. However, Islam allows polygynous marriages; a man may have as many as four wives at one time providing that he fulfills his obligations as prescribed in Islam. Although statistically rare, polygamous marriages are practiced by Kurdish men who have high economic and political status or claim to have such status (Marriage and Family Encyclopaedia).

The theme of marriage is omnipresent within the novel; it takes a repeating role, centering on the true love of Nareen and Karwan. Imagining her future life with Karwan as her husband gives Nareen the spirit to survive during the stampede. On the other side, the reader is presented with traditional and reactionary ways of marriage. Nareen’s aunt Amina serves as an example for polygamy, because her husband married another wife. Nareen asked her aunt:

“Why would an eighteen-year-old girl marry somebody who is already married and as old as her father”?

(Balata, 2010, 54)

Nareen’s mother Besna replies to her daughter and introduces the reader consequently with the Kurdish idea of dowries:

“Because of money. Her parents practically sold her; they took a big dowry”.

(Balata, 2010, 54)

Furthermore, Besna explains the idea of polygamy by a Kurdish saying:

“They say when a Kurd gets rich; he either kills somebody or gets a second wife”.

(Balata, 2010, 52)

Balata also offers an insight in the direct exchange marriage, through Nareen’s tent neighbour Meyan. The young lady tells Nareen,

how her father arranged her marriage, after her mother's death. Meyan's father found another widowed man with a young daughter by telling his daughter:

"There is a man, his name is Abdulla, his wife also died and he has six children and his older daughter is your age. One of my friends suggested you marry Abdulla and I marry Abdulla's daughter".

(Balata, 2010, 186)

Patriarchalism

The Free Dictionary defines the term as a characteristic form of social organization in which the male is the family head and title is traced through the male line. Therefore, writing about Kurdish culture and excluding the patriarchal social structure is impossible. Patriarchalism dominates almost all areas of Kurdish life. It functions also as the subtext in the novel, opposing the freedom of women. The patriarchal structures are frequently shown in the novel, from which not only Nareen has to suffer, but closely all female characters in the novel. The author never obscures her negative sentiments towards the patriarchal way of life.

Balata summarises this theme very soberly by explaining:

"In general, Kurds believe that only the boy can help his parents when they become elderly. It is the boy who stays with his parents after marriage, while the girl goes to her husband's family".

(Balata, 2010, 186)

Socialisation

John Clausen states that socialisation is a term that refers to the lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs and ideologies, providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within his or her own society. Socialization is thus 'the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained' (Clausen, 1968, 5).

In the beginning of the novel, Nareen represents the typical Kurdish young lady, who socialises with her community. She unintentionally accepts and adapts the patriarchal thinking, as the author describes Nareen:

"She [Nareen] felt it was one of the world's greatest blessings to have a brother, and this idea never changed in her mind as she grew up".

(Balata, 2010, 75)

Nareen, the dynamic character, changes her viewpoint about the role of woman in the society throughout the novel; affected by her rebellious friend Buhar, who always challenges the society standards. The change of Nareen's awareness of socialisation is seen, when Nareen's mother warns her:

"Karwan was not your fiancée or your husband; if you visit his grave, many people will know you were in love with him and your reputation will be ruined and eventually nobody will marry you".

(Balata, 2010, 256)

Thus, Nareen neither cares about what people think nor about marrying in future, what makes her an independent Kurdish woman and these values should be further supported by her engagement in the Kurdish Women's Centre.

Besides all the critical issues that were discussed, Balata moreover shows the other side of the coin. In fact, the strong social bondage, which is criticised frequently, entails also positive aspects. The Kurdish mentality of communicating and helping strange people was one of the reasons that Nareen could survive during the Mass- exodus, as presented the best by Aunt Sinam and her family:

"Everybody inside the tent welcomed Nareen and her brother, and Aunt Sinam gave Nareen a towel to clean them with".

(Balata, 2010, 171)

The Kurdish people are famous for their hospitality and Nareen also profits from this mentality, because without the help of her tent neighbours she would have faced more difficulties. Balata mentions also the fact that Kurdish women socialise easier with each other than Kurdish men:

"Kurdish women are always affectionate to each other. They help each other and make friendships with one another very easily despite differences in age, education, and tribe".

(Balata, 2010, 171)

The clannishness leads also to the give-and-take-principle, which can be seen as a positive aspect of this social structure, as Nareen realises:

"Nareen thought of all the money her parents spent on social occasions [...] but this was the way to socialise in society".

(Balata, 2010, 66-67)

The aspects of hospitality, the give-and-take-principle, and the general care within the tribe, the extended family and the neighbourhood are

the reasons why Kurds uphold their social structures. The American journalist, Emily, also enhances the strong company of the Kurdish people, which has helped them to survive in this region:

“I could say Kurds are tough and adaptable, and this is the reason behind your longevity in this terrible part of the world”.

(Balata, 2010, 221)

iii. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Runaway to Nowhere starts with and centres on the topic of war. The fear of war is omnipresent and builds the basis of the novel. The political references within the novel presents the reader with an insight into the Kurdish misery, characterized by displacement, war, oppression, and genocide. One reason for this situation is that the natural resources, which are on the Kurdish settlement areas, always have excited the interest of their neighbours and other countries. Since, Kurdistan is not an independent state, which determines itself, the struggle with their neighbours will continue. As a result, politics will always play an important role for the Kurdish people and this dissatisfaction will constantly be expressed through literature. The fact that the minds of Nareen and her friends are occupied by war and dread, prove that politics takes a central role in the Kurdish society. Young female students in the western world would rather discuss about other things than the brutality of war, which is expressed by Buhar, one of Nareen's friends:

“You are right. And, it is not just everybody in this dorm, but everybody in the country is worried. I am not worried so much about death as I am about becoming handicapped, like losing an arm or a leg or getting burnt”.

(Balata, 2010, 14)

3.1 Geopolitical Conflicts

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term ‘geopolitics’ as “a political activity as influenced by the physical features of a country or area of the world”.

Another more extend definition of the term geopolitics states that “geopolitics is the study that analyzes geography, history and social science with reference to spatial politics and patterns at various scales. It examines the political, economic, and strategic significance of

geography; where geography is defined in terms of the location, size, function, and relationships of places and resources (O'Loughlin, 1991, 37).

The location of Kurdistan occupying that area of the mountain complex extending from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf which separates Anatolia from the Iranian plateaux has earned for Kurdistan a reputation as “the backbone of Middle East” and thus of great geostrategic significance (Howell, 1965,19).

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the regional powers signed a peace treaty – the Treaty of Sèvres – envisaging, among other provisions, the future establishment of an independent Kurdish state. However, following the Turkish war of independence under Mustafa ‘Kemal’ Atatürk and his followers, the Treaty of Lausanne was enacted instead. Following the First World War, Kurdish nationalism emerged as a reaction to the unjust division of Kurdistan among the four nation states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

The geopolitical importance of the region combined with significant oil and water resources there always appears to have hindered, not helped, the Kurds. Ethnic cleansing programmes, ‘Arabization’ and ‘Turkification’, have been implemented, accompanied by mass killings, displacement and prohibitions on Kurdish culture and language. Over the last twenty years, the Kurdish regions have been the scenes of genocide, crimes against humanity, extra-judicial killings, torture, mass displacement and censorship, among other abuses of international law. (Kurdish Human Rights Project)

The geopolitical importance of Iraqi Kurdistan is measured by several other factors including its wealth of raw material resources (primarily oil); the military-strategic value of its key location, which is directing to gain a dominant foothold in the Middle East; the importance of its transportation routes from West to East, and so on. Turkey, Iran, and Syria, which have large Kurdish enclaves, are showing a special interest in this area. In this respect, it not only continues to be an object, but also a subject of world politics and international relations in Western Asia.

Kurdistan is rich in natural resources, and Iraqi Kurdistan in particular is well- endowed with a broad spectrum including water and oil. However, the control of such resources, whether

in terms of dams, oil refineries or mines has rarely been in the hands of the Kurds, and has instead been controlled by the central authorities (Stansfield, 2003, 30).

3.2 Wars and Revolutions

The geopolitical significance of Kurdistan led not only to its occupation or the usurpation of its natural resources; Kurdistan has been and remains the scene of many wars, including the conflicts of Mongols, Turks, Russians, Persians, Arabs, Greeks, and in modern times also of the USA. Acting against the imperialistic ambitions of their neighbours, the Kurdish nation has always found itself constrained to revolt either against their central governments or their occupier. These realities made Kurdistan a steady source of unrest in the region. This turmoil generated an emerged nationalism among the Kurds expressed by an enduring wish for territorial integrity; thus, an independent state.

Furthermore, the element of war accompanies the proceedings of the novel, from the very beginning till the end. Showing the absurdity of war, Nareen's friend Zainab signifies resentment for the coming war:

"[...] it has been less than three years since the war between Iraq and Iran has been over, and Iraq is getting into another war. Really, this is not life."

(Balata, 2010, 35)

Being tired from successive revolutions and wars, the characters in the novel repeatedly express their anti-war sentiment. Using a narrative conversational style, Balata makes hints to all the wars Iraq had to go through for no reason and goal.

Revolts of Iraqi Kurds

Modern Iraq was created in 1920 from the three Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul after the 'First World War'. The drawing of boundaries in the Middle East was mainly implemented by France and the UK. Establishing heterogeneous countries, the imperialistic powers create an explosive flashpoint, called Middle East, in particular Iraq. As a result, the heterogeneity of Iraq in ethnic groups and religions led to an enduring instability in the country.

The early Kurdish revolts led by Sheikh Mahmoud Barzinji up to the revolts of Sheikh Ahmad Barzani and his younger brother Mullah Mustafa against the Iraqi monarchy, which was

under the British mandate, were the beginning of the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq (Lortz, 2005, 10-22).

It was becoming apparent that Mullah Mustafa Barzani rose to the leading figure of the Kurdish movement in Iraq. Participating in the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad as a military protector and afterwards fleeing to the Soviet exile, Mullah Mustafa still kept the Kurdish question alive. After the overthrow of the monarchy, Iraq became a republic. The political transition did not bring any sustainable reforms, which led to the outbreak of the 'First Kurdish-Iraqi- War' from 1961 till 1970, which is also called 'September- Revolution' on the Kurdish side (Lortz, 2005, 22-47).

The several political systems in Iraq have never changed their treatment towards the Kurdish minority. This fact is being well-analyzed by the young college student Nareen:

"When I grew up, I understood my father was fighting for our rights as Kurds because our identity, language, and culture have been always threatened by Baghdad's regime."

(Balata, 2010, 35)

Although the Iraqi Kurds gain semi-autonomy in 1970; the tension between the Iraqi government and the Kurds continued unabated, mainly because of the oil fields of Kerkuk, resulted in the 'Second Kurdish- Iraqi- War' from 1974 till 1975, ending in a terrible defeat for the Kurds and Mustafa Barzani (Lortz, 2005, 48-51).

Nareen remembers her first experience with war, when she mentions:

"This is my third war. My first experience with war was during the Kurdish revolution against Baghdad in 1974."

(Balata, 2010, 33)

The aftermath of this revolution are still kept in the minds of all involved.

First Gulf War

The 'Iran-Iraq War' or 'First Gulf War' was a war between the armed forces of Iraq and Iran lasting from September 1980 to August 1988. The war began when Iraq invaded Iran on 22 September, 1980, after a long history of border disputes and demands for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. Iraqi forces did well at the beginning of the war, but before long they were stopped and forced out of Iran. The war continued for years, and neither side gained much ground. Despite several calls for an end to

the fighting by the United Nations Security Council, the two countries fought until 20 August, 1988; the last prisoners of war were exchanged in 2003. The Iran-Iraq War is also noted for Iraq's use of chemical weapons and biological weapons against Iranian troops and civilians, many of which were supplied by the United States. The war ended in August 1988, with an estimated total of 1.7 million wounded and 1 million dead. The role of the United States in the war was very important (Chomsky, 2007, 58-59).

The involvement of the United States is also indirectly mentioned in the novel, when Nareen speculates about a possible disempowerment of Saddam Hussein by the allies in the Second Gulf War, which Buhar dissents:

“No, they will never do that. He is their favourite idiot in the region”.

(Balata, 2010, 36)

Buhar refers here to the support of the western world for the Ba'ath Regime during the First Gulf War. Saddam Hussein acted as a tool for the western interests and in return, the industrial nations armed Iraq. The Ba'ath Regime has been equipped with chemical weapons, which were used during the Anfal campaign. This is the reason why many western countries do not recognize the Anfal- campaign officially as genocide, because of following reparations and other consequences that they would have to carry (Glenn, 1990, A01).

The memories of the 'First Gulf War' are still fresh among the characters in the novel, the young mother of twin boys, Jihan, reminds the others of the horrible war:

“The Iraq- Iran war was terrible for all Iraqi people. Every day people were being killed on the front lines and from the bombings”.

(Balata, 2010, 35)

Second Gulf War

The perpetuation of state of war made the people of Iraq tired and sick. This should not change, after Iraq has lost many sons in the war against Iran. The novel enters in a time, when Iraq has annexed Kuwait for more than five months. The Iraqi people, including Nareen and her environment suffer a lot from the embargo, because of the shortage of food. Nareen's little brother Salih suffered the most in the family from the embargo, as Nareen describes:

“Salih hadn't eaten any kind of sweet since the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq seven months before”.

(Balata, 2010, 76)

The 'Second Gulf War' was a conflict in 1991, between Iraq and 34 other countries, led by the United States. It started with the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on August 2, 1990 and ended the following spring when Iraq's armies were fought away. Starting on the 2nd of August 1990, Kuwait's invasion by Iraqi troops was met with international condemnation followed by immediate economic sanctions against Iraq. This war consisted of two special operations, Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, the latter started on January 17, 1991 with an air strike. The war ended on February 28, 1991 (Simons, 2004, 333-343).

After many attempts to solve the crisis diplomatically, Saddam Hussein still refused a withdrawal from Kuwait; Nareen, her family and maybe whole Iraq listened to the voice of Saddam saying:

“The great people of Iraq, the glorious Arab nation; today is a day in the grand battle and the immortal mother of all battles”.

(Balata, 2010, 87)

Balata does not neglect presenting the character of the dictator, who is characterized by his stolidity, pride, and apathy towards the real needs of the Iraqi people. Saddam describes the coming war as the final battle, without thinking of the casualties. This war should be a little rift within the lute for Saddam; Nareen's father also foreshadows that:

“It's good he [Saddam] didn't withdraw from Kuwait – we might see his end soon”.

(Balata, 2010, 87)

Uprising in 1991

According to the news network BBC, the crushing of the 1991 uprising by Shias in Iraq's south and Kurds in the north was one of the most brutal acts of repression under Saddam Hussein. Human rights organisations estimate that tens of thousands of people died during the crackdown, which lasted several months. The rebellion began in the immediate aftermath of the first Gulf War. On 3 March 1991 an Iraqi tank commander fired a shell through a vast portrait of Saddam Hussein which hung in Basra's main square. This act ignited an uprising across Iraq's Shia-dominated south. A Kurdish-led rebellion followed in the north two days later, in the city

of Raniya on 5 March 1991. In the rebelling cities hundreds of unarmed civilians spilled out onto the streets and took control of government buildings, freeing prisoners from jails and seizing caches of small arms. At its height, control of 14 of the country's 18 provinces had been wrestled from Saddam Hussein's forces. The uprising was partly fuelled by the disastrous defeat of Iraq's security forces and their forced retreat from Kuwait. People were convinced that the army would never be weaker or more demoralised. But crucially, the rebels were convinced that they had the backing of the US, who would come to their aid to help oust Saddam. As the uprising spread throughout the country however, US officials insisted it was never their policy to intervene in Iraq's internal affairs, nor to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power (BBC).

Speaking on Voice of America, Bush Senior encouraged Iraqis:

"[...] to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside [...]."

(Announcement on the Voice of America radio, on February 15, 1991, by Bush Senior)

But when the dictator unleashed his security forces on the rebels, President Bush and other administration officials denied that they supported an uprising against Saddam. In a News Conference with the Japanese Prime Minister, in California, Bush Senior states:

"I made clear from the very beginning that it was not an objective of the coalition or the United States to overthrow Saddam Hussein. So I don't think the Shiites, or the Kurds ever felt that the United States would come to their assistance to overthrow this man [...]."

(Former US President Bush Senior, on April 4, 1991)

The questionable statements and actions of the former US President are also discussed in the novel, as a conversation between Nareen, Karwan, Bayan, Deliar, and Jowan about the coming uprising starts. The sharp Jowan poses a question:

"What if we rise up and then Bush changes his mind?"

(Balata, 2010, 111)

This legitimate question circled the head of many Kurds, having experience with American betrayal in 1975, but the vast majority of the

Kurds blocked out this scenario, reflected in Bayan's reply to Jowan's question:

"It will never happen. Bush is the president of the United States of America. He will never betray a poor nation like us."

(Balata, 2010, 112)

The power vacuum that the Ba'athist left behind, in the aftermath of the 'Second Gulf War' enabled the Kurds to rise up, which is described by Balata:

"The uprising began that night. The sound of shooting was constant the whole night [...]."

(Balata, 2010, 114)

The Kurdish uprising started on March 5, 1991 in the city of Raniya and spread out over whole Iraqi Kurdistan, arrived in Duhok on March 14, 1991. After several hours of fighting each Kurdish city was liberated; as Nareen's friend, Aishe reported:

"No government, no Saddam's men in the city – we are free [...]."

(Balata, 2010, 114)

Balata also focuses on the role of the 'Jash' in the uprising, when Aishe informed Nareen:

"You still don't know that the Jash helped with the uprising?"

(Balata, 2010, 115)

The author provides an explanation for the term 'Jash', describing them as traitors, who previously worked with the Iraqi governments against the Kurdish national movement.

Genocide

While a precise definition varies among genocide scholars, a legal definition is found in the 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG). Article 2 of this convention defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life, calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The Kurdish Genocide – Anfal

The Kurdish revolutions compelled the several Iraqi-regimes to crush these revolts, frequently resulting in encroachments on Kurdish civilians. The Iraqi Kurds had to face

many repressions over the decades, but what happened during the 1980s was different. Both, Kurdish political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party as well as the Patriotic Union Kurdistan fought during the 'First Gulf War' (Iraq vs. Iran) against their regime in Baghdad. The consequence of that were acts of revenge by the Ba'ath- Regime, including abduction, use of chemical weapons, destruction of villages, etc.

Having the experience of genocide, one of Nareen's friends, Buhar says without fearing from the coming 'Second Gulf War':

"There is no reason to fear this war in particular. It will not take much from us. We have already been through genocide, torture, and wars. This war will not bring anything worse than more chemical attacks or genocide".

(Balata, 2010, 36)

Nareen and her friend Buhar know exactly how Saddam Hussein's regime treated the Kurdish civilians before, and this fear comes up again, facing a coming war, which could make the war an excuse to attack the Kurdish people again. The events in the 1980s were so horrible that Nareen, her friends, and all Kurds burnt these pictures of brutality in their minds. The consciousness of Nareen is characterized by oppression.

The operation was called "Anfal Campaign;" Anfal means "Spoils of war" in Arabic. This was a genocidal campaign that was followed by a series of systematic attacks against the Kurdish population and their means of livelihood – villages, agriculture, infrastructures, roads, etc. The operation was carried from 1983 until late 1989 and it took the lives of more than 200,000 mostly women, children, and elders as most of these areas were only inhabited by civilians; destroyed 4,000 villages; displaced at least a million; 860 became widows with greater number of orphans. Then, in 1988, in a separate operation yet during the same time, there was another operation that was carried in the city of Halabja and its surroundings. This came to become the symbol of the tragedies of Iraqi-Kurdistan and of Anfal. Halabja and the surrounding cities were bombarded with chemical agents such as: mustard gas; nerve agents, sarin, tabun, and VX as well as blood agent hydrogen cyanide; or more commonly known as Weapons of Mass Destruction. These chemical attacks killed around 5,000 men, women, children, and elders; injured more than

10,000; thousands still missing; thousands more died later of complications, diseases, and birth defects in the years later (McDowall, 2004, 359).

Balata broaches the thematic of genocide, when Nareen asks her friend Buhar what kind of papers she has in her hands, Buhar subsequently answers:

"Files: I went to the government security office to get some documents about its victims, or its people, and records. Maybe it will be useful in the future".

(Balata, 2010, 117)

Buhar and some certain people anticipate the importance of saving documents from the abandoned security offices. These documents also helped in the aftermath of the Ba'ath-Regime, to account for the past and to have written body of evidence. Ultimately, these documents served as evidence in the trials of the former Ba'athist officials. For instance, Hassan Ali Majid was convicted of genocide against the Kurds and was finally executed.

3.3 Mass Exodus

After the mobilization of Saddam's special force, the 'Republican Guard', and knowing that the United States will not back up the rebels, and thinking of the previous genocide, all Iraqi Kurds were alerted and feared for their safety, like Nareen's father:

"Disaster, disaster, disaster! [...] Our lives are no longer safe. God knows what will become of us all. Bush betrayed us."

(Balata, 2010, 120)

Taking Saddam's unscrupulousness into consideration, the majority of the Kurds decided to leave their cities, either towards the Turkish or Iranian border, like Nareen's family:

"They [Nareen's family] joined a stampede of thousands, running top speed and fleeing Duhok."

(Balata, 2010, 127-128)

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) described the proceedings in late March, as "counter-attacks by Baghdad's army in the northern Kurdish-controlled regions, capturing Kirkuk within hours. Mass panic erupts across the region, causing an unprecedented exodus into the snowy mountain passes leading to Iraq's borders. The fear of Iraqi retribution caused over 1.5 million Kurds to flee towards both Iran and Turkey. To the north, the number of Iraqis encamped on the snow-covered slopes on either side of the border with Turkey exceeds 500,000

people. The majority is located in eight isolated mountain sites. Some 100,000 people were scattered outside the camps and in dire need of shelter and assistance. On April 5, 1991, the Security Council passed Resolution 688, demanding that the Iraqi government end the repression of Iraqi civilians and allow international organisations to aid the displaced. The western governments announced the creation of "safe havens" patrolled by allied descriptive narration. The imagery of death and misery produce authentic scenes of the Kurdish mass evacuation in 1991. Nareen is actually the most important character in the novel, especially in the chapters that deal with the mass exodus. Although these chapters are narrated in a third person view, the readers find themselves on a journey through Nareen's eyes. The resulting emotionalism is constantly developed by the sequence of serious events, which Nareen and her brother have to go through. The traumatic experiences which they gain on their 'death road' not only form Nareen and Salih's character, but also the reader's approach towards humanity; by observing how people abandon their dead or living relatives, steal from others or force others, and many other actions, which lack standard norms of morals and principles. //// On her way to the border camps, Nareen finds an abandoned baby, asking herself:

"How could a family walk out on a small child and leave him alone on the road in the mountains?"

(Balata, 2010, 156)

The mass exodus was complicated by temperatures plunged deeper overnight and fresh snow blanketed higher reaches. Deaths continued to mount, especially among children unable to resist the punishing effects of dehydration and exposure. Thousands of small children are grappled with death, afflicted with various diseases like diarrhoea and vomiting because of malnutrition (Haberman, *The New York Times*, Published: April 12, 1991).

Diarrhoea was omnipresent and Nareen's little brother had also to suffer from it:

"The rain began [...] and Salih's diarrhoea became worse and worse."

(Balata, 2010, 147)

In spite of all the tragedy, Balata did not forget to mention the vital part of the UN help:

aircraft in order to head off further arrivals in Turkey."

Fearful of Saddam's revenge, and being aware of the brutal methods of the Ba'ath Party, including the usage of chemical weapons, their escape was unforeseen and disorderly with thousands of helpless refugees running on foot, or stuffed into open-backed trucks and tractors. (BBC News, August 21, 2007). Balata creates powerful details through the usage of a detailed "She lifted up her head and saw a parachute falling from it. [...] She knew it must be food."

(Balata, 2010, 154-155)

CONCLUSION

By linking the collective socio-political and cultural situations of their societies to the experiences of individuals, Balata suggests that women should be seen as part of Kurdish history and the nationalist movement for liberation. As exemplified by *Runaway to Nowhere*, Kurdish women writers not only depict women's concerns but they politicize such concerns to address the interlocking nature of ethnic, sex, and class oppression. They bring women's marginalized voices to the center, confirming that women need to create counter-public spheres that better represent their changing needs and desires. Focusing almost exclusively on female characters, the novel suggests that retelling and documenting personal stories of struggle and resistance through acts of writing and life-oriented stories, and women's solidarity and communal affinity, are the means by which to redirect attention to women's changing roles and perceptions, and thereby intervene in history. The epilogue tries to create hope, for the cultural and political future of the Kurdish people. The establishment of a Kurdish parliament; and the release from the fetters of the Arabic occupiers is the attempt of a happy end. Although, Balata mentions in the epilogue Nareen's dedication to Women rights, the social upturn seems to have an open end.

Believing in women's education is frequently discussed, which should not only be seen as a social progress; Balata's hidden message, the emancipation of the Kurdish woman will not just bring democracy and freedom for Kurdish women, but democracy in the household brings democracy for the whole nation.

Qasham Ali Balata and her main character Nareen have taught us a moral lesson about the importance of women's education; otherwise we would have never read this fascinating and interesting novel– *Runaway to Nowhere*.

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ناماژه‌یێن که لت وری و سیاسی ل ناڤ رۆمانا "رهف بو کیه نه" یا قه شه م عه لی بالاته ی

پوخته

ئیدت هاملتون، نقیسه ر و فیکره را ئەلمانی - ئەمریکی، د ئیک ژ گۆتتین خۆ دیاردکەت کو: ئەده بیاتین هەر گه له کی باشتترین په رتوکه بو وه سفکرنا وی گه لی. نقیسینن سهرده م ب درستی جوړی ئەقی گه لی پيشان دده ت هەر وهك چ جوړی نقیسارین میژووی نه شین. ئەف گۆتتا هاملتون باشتترین ده برینه ژ رۆمانا "رهف بو کیه نه" یا نقیسه را کورد قه شه م عه لی بالاته ی. ئەف قه کۆلینه خواندنه که بو هزر و ناماژه‌یێن که لت وری و سیاسی ل ناڤ قتی رومانن دا. ل پيشه کيا قه کولینن رومان ب چیرۆک و که سایه تیپن خۆقه هاتیه پيشان دان. پشکا ئیکن (ناماژه یین که لت وری) دیارده یین هه ریمئ وهك نامار، زمان، خوارن و داب و نه ریتین نه ته وه ی یین کوردان دیاردکەت. فولکلورن کوردی ب چه ندین چیرۆک و نه فسانه یین خۆقه هاتینه گه نگه شه کرن، ئەف پشکه ب دویمه یه ک دهیت ب شوڤه کرنا چه ندین هزرین جفاکی وهك رۆلن ژنا کورد و په یوه نديین جفاکی د ناڤ کومه لگه ها کورديدا. پشکا دووی ناماژه‌یێن سیاسی ل ناڤ رومانن دا ب هویری دخوینیت. گرنگیا جیوپولیتیکي یا کوردستانن ب تايه تی کوردستانا عیراقن هاتیه گه نگه شه کرن و هه روه سا زورداریا رژیمین جودایین به غدا ل گه ل گه لن کورد و به رگیریا وان بابه تین گرنگین ئەقی پشکن نه و ب تايه ت رژیمه به عس ب هه می شهر و کوشتن و جوړین نه شکه نه جه دانن ل دژی گه لن کورد و گه لین ده وره بر.

الخلاصه

قالت الكاتبة والتربوية الالمانية - الامريكية أيدت هاملتون ان ادب الشعب هو اكبر كتاب يعبر عنه وان الكتابات الحديثة هي التي تعرض نوعية هذا الشعب اكثر من أي كتابة تاريخية أخرى. مقولة الكاتبة هاملتون هي بحق اكبر وصف لرواية (الهروب الى اللامكان) للكاتبة الكردية قشم علي بالاته، تقوم هذه الدراسة بمناقشة الاشارات والتعابير الثقافية والسياسية في هذه الرواية. تبدأ الدراسة بتقديم الرواية لغرض تعريف القارئ بالقصة وشخصياتها ومن ثم يأتي القسم الاول من البحث والذي يركز على الاشارات الثقافية من تعابير اقليمية متضمنة الاحصاءات الإقليمية، اللغة، الطعام، والعديد من العادات القومية للشعب الكردي. يناقش القسم الاول كذلك الفلكلور الكردي مع بعض حكاياته وأساطيره. ينتهي القسم بمناقشة بعض الافكار الاجتماعية في الرواية مثل دور المرأة الكردية في المجتمع وطبيعة العلاقات الاجتماعية في المجتمع الكردي، يأتي القسم الثاني من البحث موضحاً الافكار والإشارات السياسية المستخدمة في رواية بالاته، ويبدأ بمناقشة الالهية الجيوبوليتيكية لكردستان والاطماع الامبريالية لجيرانها وبخاصة العراق، اضافة الى طغيان الانظمة الحاكمة في بغداد والأحزاب السياسية وبخاصة حزب البعث الذي مارس العديد من وسائل الاضطهاد والقتل الجماعي ضد الشعوب الاخرى وبخاصة الشعب الكردي.