



## The Significance of The Mesopotamian Divinities in Rasha Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad*

Enas Subhi Amer<sup>1</sup> , Esraa Jalal Jawad Al-Gawahari<sup>2</sup> 

Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad, Iraq<sup>1</sup>

Department of English, College of Arts, University of Baghdad, Iraq<sup>2</sup>

[enassubhi@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:enassubhi@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)<sup>1</sup>

[israajalal@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:israajalal@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

The current paper examines Rasha Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* (2003). It highlights many controversial social and political topics. Fadhil's play can be considered as personal as well as cultural trauma. It pinpoints certain harsh realities associated with the U.S. military and their occupation of Iraq. Fadhil's play originates a new voice for powerless Iraqi people. The play is examined in the light of some literary trauma studies. Cathy Caruth's theory of empathy with the traumatized characters emotional struggles is the first theory; while the second theory is Dominic La Capra's working through method of healing repeated experience of traumatic events. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional aftermath the U.S. military and their occupation of Iraq. The paper concludes that Fadhil's characters do not fear death; it is an act of salvation to them. It is the uttermost baptizer with all worldly filth is going to be removed and purified. Death in the Fadhil's play is not the end, but it refers to a promise for a new beginning, for regeneration and revival.

**Keywords:** abuse, immortality, salvation, terrorism, post-trauma



## دلالة الآلهة الرافدينية في مسرحية عشتار في بغداد للكاتبة رشا فاضل

ايناس صبحي عامر<sup>١</sup> ، اسراء جلال<sup>٢</sup>

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة بغداد، العراق<sup>١</sup>

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة بغداد، العراق<sup>٢</sup>

[enassubhi@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:enassubhi@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)<sup>1</sup>

[israajalal@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:israajalal@coeduw.uobaghdad.edu.iq)<sup>2</sup>

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### المستخلص :

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية مسرحية عشتار في بغداد (٢٠٠٣) لرشا فاضل. وتسلط الضوء على العديد من المواضيع الاجتماعية والسياسية المثيرة للجدل. ويمكن اعتبار مسرحية فاضل بمثابة صدمة شخصية وثقافية. وهي تسلط الضوء على بعض الحقائق القاسية المرتبطة بالجيش الأمريكي واحتلاله للعراق بالإضافة الى انها تولد صوتاً جديداً للشعب العراقي المغيب صوته بسبب الاستعمار. يتم فحص المسرحية في ضوء بعض دراسات الصدمات الأدبية. وتعتبر نظرية كاثي كاروث في التعاطف مع الصراعات العاطفية للشخصيات المصابة بالصدمة هي النظرية الأولى؛ والنظرية الثانية تعود لدومينيك لا كابران من خلال طريقة الاستشفاء من التجارب المتكررة للأحداث المؤلمة. ويساهم هذا البحث في فهم أعمق للعواقب النفسية والعاطفية للجيش الأمريكي واحتلاله للعراق. وتخلص الورقة إلى أن شخصيات فاضل لا تخاف الموت؛ بل إنه عامل خلاص لهم. إنه المعمدان المطلق الذي سيتم إزالة كل الأوساخ الدنيوية وتطهيرها. الموت في مسرحية الفاضل ليس نهاية المطاف، بل هو بمثابة وعد ببداية جديدة، بالتجديد والنهضة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاساءة، الخلود، الخلاص، الإرهاب، أزمة ما بعد الاستعمار

## 1. Introduction

Iraq is a multi-ethnic and religious country. It has rich cultural heritage which paves the way for permanent conflict and trial for supremacy and dictatorship by interior as well as external drives. The paper delves deep to conduct a study that focuses on the portrayal of Iraq as reflected in drama during the past two decades through Rasha Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* representative play. The main objective of the study is to offer a penetrated awareness into the works of a contemporary Iraqi playwright in the diaspora. The second objective is to present a distinguished precise image of humanitarian nature of Iraq because the unjust and dishonest purely political image which shows the Iraqis as an uncivilized people as the media persistently conveyed. Iraq is isolated from the world because of the economic sanctions in the 1990s. This isolation is followed by the invasion of the coalition forces in 2003 which results in "chaos, civil wars conflict and terrorism that still form the general environment in the country" (Qtd in Al Shammari, 2016). The Iraqi playwright is carefully selected to reflect the facts about the contemporary condition in Iraq. Professor S.E. Wilmer Aleks Sierz underlines the idea that:

Theatre is a public forum which offers a 'particular effective means of conveying notions of what is national and what is alien'. Most playwrights not only reflect and refract the reality around them; they sometimes anticipate and second guess the future. (Qtd in Al Shammari, 2016)

The selected playwright, Rasha Fadhil descends from Iraqi origin. She establishes a distinguished status in international theatre. Despite her actual distance from Iraq, her heritage and rich memories help her to construct a remarkable understanding of her country's political and social situation. She applies an effective and unique style and content which enables her to attain world spread fame. She highlights different Iraqi women's stories and themes that used to be taboos before. Her female theatrical work provides an insightful depiction of the reality of Middle Eastern Women in general and Iraqi women in particular. In her book *Act of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays 2011*, Karen Malpede explains that reading plays written by / about women brings the mind to the threshold to:

ask the gender question: Are women's plays different than men's and, if so, in what ways? Or when women come to write plays about war and witness, what do they add? Of course, they offer a woman's perspective; they look at history from woman's head. (Malpede 2011)

The play does not only denounce and condemn Western policy, but it sensors the American politics and its media manipulation which reproduce

the Iraqi character with certain frame of mind. The play also exposes the unobserved unobtrusive and veiled reality behind its symbolic and creative representations.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* presents many characters whose traumatic experiences are exposed through the use of symbolism and nostalgia examining historical and mythological figures and developing characters. The play is examined in the light of some literary trauma studies. Cathy Caruth's theory of empathy with the traumatized characters emotional struggles is the first theory. In many occasions, Fadhil's characters show good examples of testimonial narrative. *Ishtar in Baghdad* is loaded with the occurrences of remembering traumatic incident outside of conflict. They present the opportunity to acknowledge the "legacy of incomprehensibility of the heart of the catastrophe experience [by acknowledging] the paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival (Caruth 2016) Fadhil's characters face the challenge of how not to betray the past" (Caruth 2016) through the use of historiography. The second theory is Dominic La Capra's working through method of healing repeated experience of traumatic events. Working through traumatic experience requires the individual to set emotional distance from the trauma and perceive it as a past event without fully overwhelmed by its strength. Voicing a silenced traumatized individual is part of the process of working through. It provide a room for change for the individual from being a "victim" to a "survivor" (xi) In Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad*, the glorious history; the prophecy of the rebirth of a life; and the characters ability to cope with their prolonged personal as well as cultural traumas provides a safe place with which a traumatized individual can recuperate and get over their wounds. Judith Herman claims that:

healing is based on the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections...In [the] renewed connections with other people, the survivor re-creates the psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by traumatic experiences ...such as trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy. (Herman 1997)

## 3. The Analytical Part

### 3.1 Introductory Analysis for the Play

The paper tackles Rasha Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* (2003). The play is concerned with the shocking events that took place at Abu Ghraib and the crimes committed by American soldiers that have left a black mark on the history of Iraq. Yet, The Abu Ghraib photographs have more to say about establishing dominance through creating an atmosphere of trauma than

extracting truth; as the testimonies of accused soldiers have revealed, these were acts of both spectacle and surveillance, resulting in trauma for both the victims and those who perpetrated them. The term “War on Terrorism” leaves people unable to discriminate between the innocent and the criminal; the confusion is magnified by alleged news that Iraq represents the ultimate evil. In contrast, the photographs of Abu Ghraib, which quickly multiplied across internet sites and newspapers throughout the world, have had a negative effect on the perpetrators. As visual evidence documenting the abuse of prisoners emerged, the links between the violence of representation and the violence of war became even more apparent. Jenny Hughes records that: “War and terrorism make powerful interventions into our social worlds via theatrical acts that seize the imagination of the public.” (Hughes, 2007) Mythological characters from ancient Iraq, Ishtar and Tammuz, make an appearance in Baghdad during the Iraq War and endure many of the atrocities connected to the American occupation, such as being tortured at Abu Ghraib jail. Fadhil's attempt to connect with Iraqi audiences stemmed from her use of a popular tactic in Iraqi drama: bringing up historical figures or figures from Iraqi mythology to criticize the political present. But Fadhil challenges new concern by “mix[ing ...] legend and reality,” (Midhin and Clare, 2003) rather than keeping the action safely confined to the past or a mythical realm. Her play was also groundbreaking because it gave women a prominent role in a narrative that, in Iraqi theater and media, would often center mostly or solely on men. In the end, Fadhil's risks have reduced the play's attraction to Iraqi readers and theater creators. The goal of Fadhil's play was to reach and impact people worldwide as well. She specifically intended to use the play to highlight and denounce the deceit and dishonesty that lie at the core of American neo-imperialism.

In a war-torn Baghdad, Fadhil presents figures who are not only witnesses to the devastation of the city and the attack on its citizens, but are also captured and tortured by American troops. These characters are Mesopotamian deities. She, in a sense, brings her nation's cultural legacy to life rather than portraying the destruction of items as symbols of it. Her portrayal of the Iraqi people as resilient is made easier by the fact that the protagonists are fertility gods connected to cycles of death and rebirth; she suggests that, like the gods, they will be brought back to their former splendor in due course. Fadhil's expansion of the mythology of these two symbolic characters signifies the Iraqi consciousness in the face of the conquest and, precisely, the Abu Ghraib afflicts mortification. The divinities' promise of rebirth, which takes place at the end of the play: “is linked to the concept of ‘sumud’, or ‘steadfastness,’ as an attribute of the Iraqi character. In this way, the dramatist deploys Iraq's ancient heritage as cultural currency.” (Al-Azraki and Al-Shamma, 2017)

### 3.2 Rasha Fadhil's Biography

Rasha Fadhil is a journalist, playwright, author, and short story award winner. She was raised in Basra after being born there in 1975, went to college there, briefly resided in Tikrit, and is now a resident of Lebanon. In 2008, the Institute of Arab Strategy in Beirut granted her a diploma in International Journalism and Media Studies. She graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Tikrit. She has taken part in a great deal of literary and cultural events both inside and outside of Iraq, as well as conferences and conventions. Five of her books—short story, poetry, and critique collections—have been released in Syria and Cairo. She is a member of the Palace of Culture Advisory Board and the Federation of Writers in Iraq. She has experience working in the Department of Prisoners and Detainees of the Red Crescent and Red Cross in Iraq, as well as in health education pertaining to AIDS prevention. She won multiple international playwriting and short fiction competitions, and in 2010 the Iraqi Ministry of Culture acknowledged her as one of its creative writers. Her plays have been performed in Iraq, Oman, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. (Al-Azraki and Al-Shamma, 2017)

### 3.3 Sketching Trauma in Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad*

Rasha Fadhil's play expresses openly and honestly—a self-described plea with sincere emotions to the whole world, the bitterness and fury experienced by the Iraqis during the American occupation of Iraq. In her play, Fadhil is speaking to and for everyone in spite of the newly divided society in Iraq. Iraq is divided across religious and geographical lines after the occupation of American forces. She finds voice for silenced and powerless people in Iraq. Each character in her play stands for certain type in the society. Abu Ghraib scandal is depicted carefully in Fadhil's play because it is used to be very dangerous to step across such lines in the Arabic media in an Eastern society.

Fadhil's use of mythology and magical reality in the contemporary world is what distinguishes her play most. In her play, Fadhil introduces Ishtar the ancient Mesopotamian goddess associated with love, fertility, and war sitting in her balcony with Tammuz looking with horror and astonishment down at her homeland. She is very concerned about the destruction and bloodshed taking place as a result of the 2003 invasion of Iraq by U.S.-led forces. Tammuz keeps on warning Ishtar about the danger associated with descending down to Iraq. Yet, she insisted to do so. After walking through the ruined and destroyed streets of Baghdad and meeting depressed and traumatized Iraqi citizens, both mythological figures are separately in official custody and seized for questioning, abuse, and brutal torment at Abu

Ghraib prison by U.S. military officers.

In act one the first scene starts with Ishtar and Tammuz discussing their concerns about the new Iraq. Ishtar is overwhelmed by her grief about her homeland and decides to go back there in order to save her land and her people (Al-Azraki and Al-Shamma, 2017)

In scene two, she actually descends but thinks that she “got the wrong address” (Fadhil, 2017 p.40) because of the great destruction took place in Sumer her homeland. The place is dark, full with explosions, cries everywhere, women screaming and people are running in horror but she can still smell the soil and recognize her land. She moves freely and people pay no attention to her because they are in a hysterical situation. Tammuz asks her several times not to go far but she is totally occupied with the agony of the children and women there and then she lost Tammuz. Act one ends in her helpless trials to find the Tammuz in the crowd resulted as a result of an explosion.

Act two presents the American officers and soldiers interrogating Tammuz and torture him. They speak to him through translator. They make fun of his name and his claim about his mission on earth. They accuse him of being a terrorist or a suicide bomber. Sarcastically, they ask him to dance and bark like a dog for them. Ishtar, on the other hand, in scene two, is arrested by other officers, questioned, abused, and accosted with the same crimes of Tammuz. Scene three shows loud demonstration in the prison where prisoners are bursting into tears and cry out in despair because of the brutal torment of the American officers and soldiers. Accordingly, in scene four Ishtar collapses due to the harsh, repeated and violent strikes of the officers and soldiers.

Act three opens with Ishtar’s shock when she meets naked Women in the prison who try to hide their nakedness in the darkness and weep silently. She is terrified to hear their conversation because they welcome death and call it beloved. For them, death is the only purifying light. It is where they join the martyrs in Heaven and get rid of their shame. These women desire death so much and live on the hope to die by fire rockets and mortar shells on them as soon as possible.

The last scene in the play gathers Ishtar, Tammuz and the officers in the prison. Both mythological figures are shown in the tortured bodies, unable to move, almost naked and bleeding. The officers’ insistent on them to confess about their true mission and their disappointment in recognizing their land led them to decide to die with their people, to be faithful to them and to their noble civilization. They think that their death will bring new reborn. This rebirth is part of a prophecy. They decide to go back to the



womb of the Earth which “perpetually create life from death” (Fadhil, 2017 p.48)

Then the officer starts to feel shocked and furious. There are many explosions close by the prison. It seems that there is an attack on the prison to free the prisoners. The Americans run away finally. Sound of joy came out of the prisoners then the voices gradually fade away too. The end of the play is a promise, a light of a prophecy, and a victory of a new kind. Ishtar and Tammuz ignore the officers who are the embodiment of evil forces on Earth and insist on challenge she states at the beginning of the play “but god do not die. Even if they are killed, their immortality is rekindled” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39)

Through Ishtar in Baghdad, Fadhil exposes the trauma experienced by Iraqi women in the prison regarding their responsibilities towards their illegal children due to social conventions and traditions as well as exposing the dilemma of displaced Iraqi people in the diaspora. Fadhil’s Ishtar in Baghdad is an attempt to provoke a kind of change against the Iraqi cultural traditions of shame and suppression of speech and thought control on one hand. And as an attempt to expose and condemned their perversion and deceit of the American new- imperialism. Her play is a cry through which she highlights the corruption of the American militarist and aggressor and every bitter reality that are associated with them, the provokers of war. Fadhil uncovered the reason behind writing her play stating that

[T]he horrible events at Abu Ghraib and the violations committed by American soldiers there.... have left a black mark on the history of Iraq. These soldiers tried to destroy the Iraqi detainees from the inside by submitting them to the severest physical and psychological degradation and, by extension, to desecrate Iraqi civilization itself, with its deep roots in the past. This painful incident inspired me to cry out....in opposition to those who invaded Iraq under the pretense of acting humanely, with the stated purpose of saving an oppressed people from a dictator....I have called up Ishtar and Tammuz to bear witness to....the collapse of a present built on the edifice of history. (Midhin and Clare, 2003)

Tortured and traumatized gods and Fadhil’s play shows the blasphemous nature of the American officers and soldiers. Fadhil knows the danger of her topic which is based on real stories, thus she decides to protect herself through using historical events or mythological materials as metaphors. Ali Abdel Nabi Al-Zaidi mentions that Fadhil originates a new ground in her play by:

‘mix[ing . . .] legend and reality.’ That is, instead of keeping the action safely in a mythological or historical past, she (in Al- Zaidi’s words) ‘extracts



[mythological] characters' such as Ishtar and her husband Tammuz 'and seeds them into reality during the American occupation in 2003.' (Midhin and Clare, 2003)

Fadhil breaks a new ground in her play also when she focused mainly on the suffering of the female Iraqi prisoners. She makes Ishtar her main character with subordinate for her husband Tammuz. Fadhil challenges not only the Iraqi traditions but the whole Arab social norms and conventions. Rape and assaults being suffered and tolerated throughout the whole play by female prisoners. Abdul Kareem Al Ameri, an Iraqi playwright notes that Ishtar

Ishtar in Baghdad: 'The text raised and revealed several things, the most important of which is the rape of Iraqi women in the prisons of the occupation at that time, the sense of shame that befell' those female prisoners, 'and their wish [to . . .] die' in response to that shame. (Midhin and Clare, 2003)

Iraq is one of the countries perpetuating the American horrors. Yet, Fadhil succeeds in producing *Ishtar in Baghdad* in New York. It pinpoints certain intellectual as well as emotional ideas. In using mythological figures, Fadhil expresses her desire to address a global audience. The American superpower status in communications and media technologies turn to be a curse and not bliss indeed on the hand of those powerless and helpless prisoners. What the American officers and soldiers try to hide for a long time, is deliberately exposed shameful across the world by camera phone in all new cycles and social media. It shows this scandalous scheme practiced by the US military and intelligence service at Abu Ghraib. The American persecutor and tormentors are dependent on their knowledge of Iraqi sexual ethics and taboos to make their torture on Iraqi prisoners more catastrophic and fatal.

In her play, Fadhil suggests that American torturer is under the supervision of experts who instruct them carefully about Iraqi culture. Important historical sites are part of the systematic brutal sabotage and subversion. Lion of Babylon is a torture technique used by the American military and intelligence personnel. The lion of Babylon statue is built by the Chaldean Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562BC). The statue shows the Lion awakening fear into the hearts of Babylon's enemies, the Lion shows a trembling man under his feet. The American understand only sexual connotations associated with this historical milestone. They mock this sacred statue and also ignore the mentioning of the 'Ziggurat' which refers to the 'umbilical cord which connects the Earth to Heaven'. (Mallam, 2024)

A new weapon is used in Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* and that weapon is used exclusively for Abu Ghraib male prisoners. Women soldiers use their sexual power to humiliate Iraqi male prisoners. Muslim majority countries like Iraq

consider sexual torture by American women soldiers as fatal psychological torture which causes more complicated and incurable traumas. Furthermore, the sexual threats that the American officers in the play make against the wives, sisters, and mothers of male prisoners have other dimensions in their torture.

The aforementioned sexual torture technique affects the Iraqi conservative society and causes complex trauma. American military intelligence is aware of the forbidden practice of sex outside marriage in Iraq and the issue of 'honor killings' as a form punishment for women in the country. This daring sexual tactic is used to force female prisoners to confess useful information to the U.S. war effort. Such physical and psychological humiliation of male as well as female prisoners proves Laura S. Brown note about the superiority of "hegemonic American manliness over subordinated Iraqi masculinities" was the U.S.'s main motivation for using both female and male personnel to humiliate the Iraqi male prisoners (Qtd in Midhin and Clare, 2003)

In spite of all the American authorities skills at media manipulation, as they made tremendous efforts to impress upon their soldiers that they were in Iraq for one primary reason; to hunt down and destroy terrorists, their treatment of helpless male and female prisoners proves to be the essence of terrorism and inhumanity. The photos taken by the U.S. military at Abu Ghraib with the brutally, tortured, and traumatized prisoners expose and stigmatized their (U.S. military) shallow claim about human rights and sincerity of the war on terrorism. It emphasizes their sadistic and inclinations in treating powerless people

We're functioning...with peacetime restraints, with legal requirements in a war-time situation, in the information age, where people are running around with digital cameras and taking these unbelievable photos and passing them off, against the law, to the media, to our surprise, when they had not even arrived in the Pentagon. (Qtd in Midhin and Clare, 2003)

Paradoxically, they are attacked by the same weapon they are using in this war. The enhanced technological development exposes the most shameful side of war. It dismantles their propaganda for just and fair war on terrorism. Media has help to shape peoples' understanding of the news via immediate images and ruins the government ability to control political narratives.

### 3.4 Cocooning Trauma in Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad*

Fadhil attempts to cocoon her characters in the middle of trauma is associated with her concern about Iraqi mythological and historical figures. She uses Ishtar to voice Iraqi protest against the American invasion. Ishtar stands for nationality; she is not a type of people. The choice of going back

to historical material invites the idea of regaining a lost identity, recalling healthier past, and brings to the scene the ancient glory and prosperity. Ishtar speaks for hope when she says that she “will not abandon [her] land to the ravenous mouth of the desert.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) She tries to cocoon what is left of her land and people resources claiming that “the country that gave birth to civilization will never die!” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) She insists on resisting the destruction inflicted by the American troops. She assures Tammuz that she “will go down to bless them again... to charm them from death... to grace them with the plant of life.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39)

Although Tammuz has developed a very gloomy view about their homeland which is based on visible scene and visual observations, Ishtar insists on an immortal fact about the cyclic existence of gods in life. She challenged him saying that “gods do not die. Even if they are killed, their immortality is rekindled.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) The first scene starts with Tammuz warning Ishtar about going down to Earth telling her that your help won't be enough to cover up your people need “the cup of your hand is smaller than their thirst!” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) And that darkness is spread all over the whole land “the desert has swallowed everything.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) In spite of all his pessimism, Ishtar shines with her fertility and hopeful view point of life. She heart fully asks him to “observe how greenness pushes back the tide of blood.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 39) Nevertheless he keeps his perspective and tells her that it is your hand that plant life. In fact he emphasizes the importance of her role to save the land. Actually, she is the only hope for her people. The last scene in the play again ends with Tammuz and Ishtar, but with some changed points of views. Ishtar is convinced at the end that “this is not our land. Our dynasty is overthrown, conquered by those who are armed with death.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 48) Then she decides to use her last and only method to save her faithful people and be faithful to them and to their noble civilization. She decides to die in order to be reborn again according to an ancient prophecy “Let us die that we may blossom once more.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 48) The last scene gives room to hope again because it is only now that the Tammuz agrees to Ishtar choice for he says “let us die now to share with the plants and animals their return to the womb of the Earth, which perpetually creates life from death.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 48)

Fadhil presents a new perspective about cocooning a post traumatized being. She suggests mixing legend and reality, and through the use of those legendary figures, she tries to speak freely about her characters many traumas. Ishtar is every traumatized Iraqi woman in disguise. In spite of her challenging spirit, Fadhil prefers to use famous mythological logical persons in order not to disturb the Iraqi Muslims traditions. Ishtar smells the soil; it keeps her connected to her motherland. The smell of the soil is a material

memory which she never wishes to lose. It is a self-defense mechanism through which a broken soul keeps it compromise and balance. Fadhil makes Ishtar's presence in the street very reasonable and tolerable in order to prepare the reader for her essential role in the play.

In another occasion, Ishtar shows insistency and hope for future positive change when she tells Tammuz that she is going to find the lost child friend. "This is my land! I won't allow my people to be burned." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 43) And even when she has lost Tammuz in the crowd, she never stops rejoicing the importance of a new beginning. When a wounded man tells her that she does not have to worry about Tammuz for he might be taking for interrogation, she tells the man that they should not do that. Tammuz is the god "for whom people perform morning rituals... dream and sing for his return... and offer him sacrifices and oblation." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 41) In explaining the essential role of Tammuz to people, she is reminding them to shelter and cocoon themselves against every hardship in life.

Humor is used mainly as an intellectual defense mechanism, although Ishtar faces some difficulties in getting people to understand her vocabulary sometimes. When Ishtar asks the Wounded Man about Tammuz and Sumer, he replies with astonishment. He thinks that Tammuz is the name of a month of the year. And another Boy answers that Sumer is a kind of cheap cigarettes to whom she looks angrily. Another instance where humor is used to cool down a horrified situation is when Ishtar questions a woman selling household items on the pavement. She replies to Ishtar query about Tammuz with indifference which catches Ishtar's attention. The woman tells her that they are going to teach him some exercises. The woman then explains in detail how they are "going to ride on his back for a little while... to kill the time that passes so slowly... and teach him the Lion of Babylon exercise." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 42) Neither Ishtar nor the woman understands each other clearly. Yet, their conversation ends in Ishtar's disappearance among the crowd with the women's sympathetic gaze.

In act two, both Ishtar and Tammuz speak for Fadhil's belief in the importance of sheltering a traumatized person with his original status. When being interrogated by American officers and soldiers and accused of a terrorist mission, he insists that "this is our land" and that he is here "to protect Ishtar on her way to immortality." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 43) Ishtar on the other hand, is accused of being a suicide bomber instead of believing that she is the Queen of Earth. She helplessly tries to convince them about her real mission on earth but in vain. She says that her coming is:

To renew the gift of life to my people, my country, my sons and daughters who were cut down by your iron weapons. I am the goddess of their fertility,

joy, and growth . . . I am the goddess of heaven. (Fadhil, 2017 p. 45)

She then realizes her fruitless efforts in changing these merciless officers calling him having “white face but sinking into darkness.” (Fadhil, 2017 p. 43)

Another type of cocooning traumatic experience is shown in Act three. Even if the characters experience violence and oppression, the reality never fully vanishes, leaving behind what are known as souvenirs and codes of violence—physical items that serve as a reminder of one another to others. These people use the laws of violence as souvenirs to achieve psychological equilibrium by forging a social reality that validates their existence. In certain instances, the play's violent codes help the traumatized character reconcile with their painful experiences and share them with others by drawing a distinction between symbolic and biological death. In other situations, however, they support the characters in achieving psychological equilibrium and developing a social fantasy.

Social fantasy is a term used first by Slavoj Zizek, the Slovenian philosopher and cultural theorist, and is originally comes from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory of individuals and identity construction. In the play this fantasy is created by Fadhil's insistence to give an outlet for the creative part of the brain without straying too far from real life. Through Ishtar's character, she keeps her hold on the Iraqi traditions which defines their identities. In her “Trauma and the Memory of Politics, Jenny Edkins” examines the intermingling of trauma and memory within a psychoanalytic framework that sheds light on the “existence” of the subject and its relation to the “Real” and the “social reality,” using Slavoj Zizek's term “social fantasy” (2003). Edkins states that “our sense of existence as subjects stems from the sense of security that social order, which represents the state, allows us to have” (Edkins 2003, 4). Social order, which “gives our existence meaning and dignity, is exemplified in family, social circles, educational institutions, and so on” (Edkins 2003, 4). Our sense of completeness or wholeness within a social order is what creates our existence and shapes our satisfaction with who we are and what roles we play in life, or our roles in what is known in psychoanalytic theory as a symbolic order.

In act three in Fadhil's play, the codes of violence are presented in the phrases used by the women in Abu Ghraib prison. Ishtar is terrified by their nakedness and silent weeping. She is shocked when she listens to their desire to kill themselves willingly to get rid of their shame and helplessness. It is only through death that they can be purified from the filth of the American officers and soldiers. The women in the prison encourage each other to resist their reality and revolt against it in any possible way: “Go ahead and throw

up! Perhaps you can vomit up your life and find relief. Perhaps your womb will be cleansed, then you'll be purified of their filth." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 46) For them, the violent act of killing oneself is an urgent need to regain peace of mind and to heal spiritual wounds caused by war trauma

Woman 2 (calmly) We kill ourselves.

Woman 1 What if they release us?

Woman 2 Again, we'll kill ourselves (Fadhil, 2017 p.42)

The only way for them to relieve the burden of the brutal abuse they suffer in prison is through these codes of violence represented by curses: "They raped us! Bastards! Monsters!" (Fadhil, 2017 p. 43) Incredibly, one of the women suggests a fat way for death to her companion. She asks her to "cheer up and get ready for the mortars and rockets, and maybe Allah will have mercy on us and lunch a rocket on us of His own." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 43) These women decide to resist their misery, agony and humiliation in prison and suggest voluntarily suicide to end up their endurance and anxiety and anguish. They believe that in committing this severe act, they are going to join the martyrs in Heaven:

They are coming. We will join the martyrs in Heaven. We will judge our tormentors before Allah's throne. We will go from here and be free from shame and from the children of adultery who are feeding on our bowels. Welcome, death! Welcome, our beloved. You have been slow in sending your purifying light. (Fadhil, 2017 p. 47)

Male prisoners also share the same codes of violence. Under the American Officers' traumatic, distressful and humiliating torture, the male prisoners ask their torturer to kill them shouting:

Kill us! We have died since we came here; since you seized our bodies and made us horses that neigh over each other. Shoot us with a merciful bullet. Nothing can bring back what we've lost but a merciful death . . . Kill us! Kill us! Kill us! (Fadhil, 2017 p. 45)

These shouts then turn into demonstration which forces the officers and soldiers to retreat and leave them alone at the end. These officers threat the prisoners and extort them very badly by saying that "if you don't we will make your wives, sisters, and mothers kneel down." (Fadhil, 2017 p. 44)

#### 4. Conclusion

Fadhil's *Ishtar in Baghdad* highlights the issue of bringing the voice of Iraqis to International awareness and anticipating salvation and



empowerment in all its forms; personal, political, cultural and national. It pinpoints many controversial social and political topics. Fadhil's play can be considered as personal as well as cultural trauma. It pinpoints certain harsh realities associated with the U.S. military and their occupation of Iraq. Fadhil's play originates a new voice for powerless Iraqi people, she expresses the severest physical and psychological degradation practices of the occupying forces. She unmasked scandalous pretends of the American forces acting humanely. Fadhil works on two levels; she carefully tries to approach very sensitive areas in the Iraqi society like honor, sacred history, glorified mythology, and divine entities. And then she tries to expose the falsehood of the American propaganda. She attempts to uncover many challenging issues through creatively mixing mythology and reality. The Holy Goddess of love and fertility ascends to Earth and wonder as any human being without people's astonishment about her presence. She is brutally tortured with Tammuz, interrogated, and unjustly accused of many severe accusations. Fadhil cocoons her characters against their traumatic experiences through reinforcing and intensifying their belief in the opportunity and potentiality of recurrence or rebirth after death. Also she emphasizes the role of death as a spiritual as well as physical purgatory. Fadhil's characters do not fear death; it is an act of salvation to them. That is the uttermost baptizer with all worldly filth is going to be removed and purified. Death in the Fadhil's play is not the end, but it refers to a promise for a new beginning, for regeneration and revival.

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