



**Women as Commodity in the Iraqi
Theatre with reference to Bateekh Fee
Al Mareekh [Watermelon on Mars]**

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Introduction :

The present paper aims to examine the way women are introduced, manifested and treated as commodities in *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh*, a play performed at Al Najah Theatre in the capital Baghdad in 2013. The consumer/commodity relationships are very palpable in the performance. Thus I argue that the performance defines women as mere commodities whose roles are prescribed by the male(s) to win the audience's attention (tickets!). The analysis of the performance is thoroughly informed by Luce Irigaray's 'Women on Market', an essay in her influential book *The Sex Which is Not One*. Considering the Iraqi conservative culture *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh* violates the social norms since the performance purely objectifies women and, thus, signifies men's ultimate superiority and women's deficiency. The performance exhibits sexual lust, seduction and flirtations as components which altogether lead up to gender subjugation. Accordingly, spirituality, genuine love, and intellectual banter do not exist. Finally, it is very apt to argue that the performance is mainly intended to commercialise the female body and structurally built on the disavowal of women's identity.

Keywords: commodity; Luce Irigaray; comedy; performance analysis; female sexuality.

Diminutive statement on Luce Irigaray and commodity

Luce Irigaray is one of the most prominent and leading French feminists who has made invaluable and major contributions in diverse fields. She is, Caroline Bainbridge writes, ‘a psychoanalyst, a philosopher and a linguist whose aims centre on the importance of the (un)spoken gendered subject-position’.¹ Indeed, Irigaray is called the ‘philosopher of change first and foremost’.² *The Sex Which Is Not One* is Irigaray’s second stupendous book in which its assorted eleven-essay collection critically examines the western perspectives on the sexual differences, political economy and female sexuality.

Generally speaking, ‘Commodities are any things, material or immaterial,’ defines Daniel Chaffee, ‘which have exchange value on the market’.³ However, Irigaray emphasises that the term commodity is complicated because it is ‘a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties’.⁴ It is very apparent that Karl Marx’s *Capital* has very much informed Irigaray’s metaphorical notion of woman as commodity. “Marx’s analysis of commodities”, she affirms, “...can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called [patriarchal] societies”.⁵ Irigaray’s “Women on the Market” contributes immensely and quintessentially to feminist studies in which she underscores how the male economy exclusively dominates the different categories of

exchange. Women, as scarce commodities, Irigaray argues, are exploited due to their exchange values and subject to exchange because they are “essential to the life of the group”.⁶

By exchange, Irigaray refers to the use(s) of women’s bodies. In fact, culture is based on the exchange of women without which ‘we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy [...] randomness [...] and] the animal kingdom.’⁷ “Ur-object of exchange,” or society’s original commodity’ is the concept that Irigaray employs to refer to women.⁸ It is only because of the exchange of women life culture can be maintained and sustained. However, even with their invaluable contributions, women ‘remain an unknown “infrastructure” of the elaboration of that social life and culture’.⁹ Accordingly, their rights, equality demands and voices are lopsided. In fact, women feel safeguarded only when men directly or indirectly invest in them as commodities.

According to Irigaray woman as commodity has both a natural body and exchangeable body. The latter, she scrutinizes, is socially prescribed and valued, thus rendering her as commodity. Ironically, we notice that these two bodies are ‘*irreconcilable*’.¹⁰ Moreover, for Irigaray, women as commodities are both ‘*utilitarian objects and bearers of value*.’¹¹ As a result of examining Mary Ann Doane’s article “The Economy of Desire”, Shana MacDonald comments that ‘there is a connection between the female body and commodification’ (2010: 57).¹² Irigaray sees that men are socially/ symbolically empowered only when they effusively objectify women.

It worth noting that by labeling woman as commodity- from a traditional perspective- Irigaray indicates both the use-value and exchange value in which men are involved. The price is, thus, determined by and founded on ‘the standard of [women’s] work and of their need/desire, by [patriarchal societies]’.¹³ Thus these two substantial values assign the female body as commodity. Irigaray, along with Des Roches, demonstrates that women are reduced, thereby considered ‘exchangeable units’.¹⁴

Mother, virgin, and prostitute are the three manifestations of the woman’s “natural value” and a “social value” which Irigaray concludes in her essay ‘Woman on the Market’. Indeed, these manifestations are not sufficient to prevent the social systems from exploiting women’s bodies and restricting their benefits for the erotic and reproductive uses. Thus, ‘Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute’ writes Irigaray, ‘has woman any right to her own pleasure’.¹⁵ Accordingly, ‘a complete transformation of social and symbolic forms’, Jones comments, ‘is necessary’.¹⁶

Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh (Watermelon on Mars) in the light of Irigaray’s ‘woman as commodity’

Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh (written and directed by Abd Ja’afar Al Najar) belongs to the Commercial Popular Comedy of the Iraqi theatre.¹⁷ *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh* manifests women as sex objects projected to attract the audience (male) gaze. The performance both covertly and overtly displays women as commodity, mainly for erotic and sexual arousal intentions. Accordingly, women are

alienated from their own personalities, oppressed, and victimized. Following the Irigararin perspective of woman as commodity, the performance closely shows a very clear example of eradicating women's identity since they are manifested as toys satisfying certain desires in the audience. Thus, women become the main source of the profit for/ of the performance. It is worth noting that the play was performed at one of Baghdad's noticeable theatres. Baghdad, unlike most of the provinces in Iraq, is considered a more liberal place where women experience the highest space of freedom and fewer restrictions on the way they dress, behave, act ...etc. However, the Iraqi conservative culture- even for the Baghdadi- perceives such a play as an example of the nude and vulgar performances.

There are four women in *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh*: Regayia, Sandy, Nunu and The Princess. Regayia- a mother of four sons- plays the role of the woman who lives in the countryside-supposedly in a southern province in Iraq.¹⁸ She is expected to better reflect the conservative culture of the southern regions. Sandy is a European -Iraqi girl who has spent most of her life in Europe. Nunu is one of the members of a spaceship that comes from Mars only to land on the village where Regayia's family live. The fourth woman is The Princess. She is the leader of the spaceship and, most importantly, a dwarf.¹⁹

Obviously, the playwright has provided as much as necessary space according to which actors are able to introduce and exploit women since they supposedly don't

belong to the conservative Iraqi culture: Sandy is from Europe; Nunu is from Mars. The Princess is of a very short stature. Thus the patriarchal cast wittingly makes use of these advantages in order to freely address/ deal with women the way the performance is built on- especially when considering the sexual hints and implications. McDougall states that 'Theatre is in its process a vicarious medium. Its tendency is to show rather than do'.²⁰ Accordingly, theatre, where *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh* was performed, serves as the platform, or more accurately the market, on which the commodity is being traded/ exchanged.

Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh opens with Regayia's three sons and their cousins all present on the stage arguing about the problem of irrigating their land. Regayia starts chasing one of her sons' cousins to the left side of the stage. She picks up her dress so that to be able to run freely. Thus, it turns out that she is wearing stretch pyjamas. It is the first moment in the performance the audience's attention is paid to the woman's body. Her son, Naeym, mockingly shouts 'Oh mother, the stretch pyjamas become visible'.²¹ She looks down at her feet while still picking her dress up and goes back to the centre of the stage. 'Whose stretch pyjamas is this?' Naeym asks. She answers 'It's Ronaldo's'.²² The audience would never expect/accept a woman playing the role of a mother living in the countryside to behave in this childish manner as this contradicts the stereotype of countryside women.

Thyab- Sandy's father- comes to the stage to inform the audience that he left this village- in which he was born- twenty years ago. He now returns with his young daughter

from Europe to build a factory. In fact, the political implications are inescapable and the audience can grasp Thyab's forthcoming intentions.²³ Due to the cultural differences, the performance foreshadows that Thyab's family- Sandy in particular- will collide with Regayia's. Thus, early in the beginning of the play, the consumer/commodity relationship is foregrounded and well established. Introducing Sandy to the audience, Thyab states:

Along with my daughter Sandy, we came from Europe. I raised her according to the best educational standards. Sandy is a very transparent, decent girl. By the way, the European girl is very conservative. She even doesn't know where the handle of the door is! Why? Because she is always out of the house! Six months later, she comes to her dad (*He refers to his belly demonstrating the shape of woman's body when pregnant*). However, my daughter is different; I raised her according to our traditions and values'.²⁴

In contrast to her father's moral introduction, Sandy shocks the audience with what can be considered sexy outfits. She appears putting on a mini-skirt with black high heels. Her legs almost bare. Once he sees his daughter, Thyab starts stretching his shirt down indicating that she must have put on a longer skirt. Thus- to draw the audience's attention to the commodity- he mockingly addresses his daughter 'We said above the knee, not above the neck'.²⁵ Then he continues- apparently improvising- by stating:

Thyab: Let me ask you. The ticket costs 25,000ID and you are wearing up to here (*He indicates the area above his knees*).

Sandy (*Interrupting*): So?

Thyab: If it costs 75,000ID, above where we will be performing? ²⁶

Thyab and his daughter start laughing and the theatre gets very noisy due to the audiences' loud laughter. Thyab ironically warns his daughter because of her appearance 'They are very simple young men; they may cause us troubles'.²⁷

Indeed, Thyab plans to use his daughter as an object by which he can disintegrate Regayia's family members in order to be able to get their land to build a perfume factory. Therefore, they both agree to provoke problems among, mainly, the men. Sandy promises her father that she will proceed with his plan by tempting her cousins one after the other. Irigaray asserts that 'wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men'.²⁸ The father uses his daughter as an object ready to be sold off for fulfilling his materialist values/desires. Thus, she becomes a commodity at his free will. Similarly, Sandy willingly agrees to proceed and cope with her father's beforehand arrangements without further considering the consequences. Thus she serves as the exchangeable object that is ready to be traded.

When Regayia meets Thyab, her brother-in-law, she is shocked upon seeing Sandy. Thyab reacts by calling on Sandy 'Cover it, cover the dashboard. You made me a scandal. A woman is now surprised, what about young men'.²⁹ Accordingly, Thyab uses the dashboard metaphor to

show us how he looks at his daughter's body being a commodity.

Thyab and Regayia discuss Sandy's forthcoming position among her cousins since she seems to be more open and the men are singles. Thyab asks Regayia to teach his daughter the tradition of the village and the proper way according to which she needs to behave. Regayia replies 'What shall I teach her. She comes all very well taught' (*Regayia refers to her body from legs to chest*).³⁰ The sexual hint is patent. Regayia implicitly indicates that Sandy has had a good experience with men.

Regayia calls, one of her sons, Flaiyeh, to come and greet his uncle. Seeing Sandy, Flaiyeh ignores his uncle and goes directly towards her attempting to give her a big hug. The father objects and comically points out 'Look, if you hug my daughter one time, I will hug your mother for six months'.³¹ Regayia expresses her happiness with this announcement. She starts moving her hands as if she is swimming. Indeed, this is the first time in the performance in which Regayia- although she appears to be in her fifties- shows that she lacks a man in her life. Flaiyeh asks his uncle about the reason of the difference of the exchange value between Sandy and his mother, bearing in mind they are both women.

Thyab (*pointing at his daughter*): Look and see the difference; she is full option.

Flaiyeh: What about my mother?

Thyab: She has been mended a lot.³²

Thyab judges the two women here based on their exchange values. Moreover, he refers to them using the

expressions that Iraqi men use when buying/ selling cars. Accordingly, like cars, the number of the years of car's use determines the value. Regayia revolts because of the price that her body records and confidently assures 'I am genuine. Look, I have neither plumped my lips nor done a liposuction'.³³

The audiences are still invited to look at the commodity as Regayia and Sandy have a chance to stay alone on the stage for less than a minute. It is the right time for Regayia to criticize Sandy's short skirt. She uses expressions (slang) that are usually used to describe prostitutes. Thus, she looks down at Sandy's bare legs and madly says 'Go and be a prostitute'.³⁴ She repeats this expression twice while keep gazing at her legs. 'Well, you don't need to be a prostitute as you are already one'.³⁵ It can be argued that Regayia uses, what we may call, a double-commodification of the female body. Thus, she helps the men in their attempts in objectifying women forgetting/ ignoring that she is only a different manifestation of woman as commodity. Most significantly, being a woman, she draws the audience's attention to the women's attractive body parts. So, she is doing two tasks: she enforces the males' attempt from the one hand and encourages the audience to be aware of the commodity from the other.

The hero of the play, Bateekh, comes to the stage to meet Sandy for the first time. As he sees her, Bateekh gazes down while examining her legs for fifteen seconds without saying a word. The audience react to this comic part by greeting him with a big round of applause.

Bateekh: Who are you?

Sandy: I am Sandy. I came with my dad from Europe.

Bateekh: From Europe! Your father came with you?

Sandy: **Of course!**³⁶

Bateekh: Does he know that you are dissolute?

Sandy (*Wondering*): What does 'dissolute' mean?³⁷

The dialogue above frankly commodifies Sandy as Bateekh calls her 'dissolute' which is in the Iraqi slang similar in meaning to 'prostitute'. It is worth noting that Sandy, as a European girl who is not very well familiar with the Iraqi slang, fails at first to interpret the meaning of the word 'dissolute'. Seconds later, when Bateekh repeats the question using the noun form of the same adjective he uses above, Sandy assertively replies 'What are you surprised about? This is the way development in Europe is'.³⁸

Irigaray states that 'In order for a product-a woman? -to have value, two men, at least, have to invest (in) her'.³⁹ Bateekh's cousins come to the stage one after the other. Their reactions to seeing Sandy is peculiar. Sandy walks towards the back of the stage and accidentally meets one of Bateekh's cousins who is totally shocked when he sees her. He examines her bare legs closely and accordingly faints and falls off. The second cousin is also shocked. Like his brother, he does the same by gazing at her legs while remaining silent. However, he escalates the action as he starts, like women, screaming and slapping on his cheeks.⁴⁰ He keeps calling out loud 'Oh mom!' as he chases Sandy from one direction to the other. She moves in opposite directions to avoid getting caught. Then he jumps on her as

if he was diving into a deep swimming pool only then to hit the wooden floor of the stage lying on his chest with his hands stretched forward. He remains standstill as a dead body. Bateekh uses this incidence to promote the comic environment by commenting ‘Why did our national team lose the matches if we have such a goalkeeper’?⁴¹

The third brother describes her ‘She is so charming’. Then he faints and lays down on the ground next to his brothers. The fourth brother shouts upon seeing her ‘She is half-naked’. He runs out of the stage and returns back again. He asks ‘Who is she?’ Bateekh replies ‘She is a peasant from Europe’. Then he looks to see his bothers on the ground wondering what happened to them. Bateekh continues: ‘They faint upon seeing the peasant from Europe... the most important thing is our reputation... Find you a place and lay down’ ([nihadkamil](#)).⁴² Soweleh, another male member of the family, also faints and lays down. So we have five men on the ground. The audience are now summoned to thoroughly examine Bateekh’s ‘our reputation’. In other words, he is informing us that Sandy brings disgrace to the village.

Naeym is surprised when sees his brothers and cousins all lined up on the ground. Bateekh repeats his earlier expression ‘the most important thing is our reputation.’ He justifies the incident as ‘the men have seen things which are not good’.⁴³ It is worth noting that Bateekh explicitly describes Sandy as ‘things’. The plural form of the word ‘thing’ is intentionally meant to indicate Sandy’s numerous seductive parts of her body.

To draw the audience attention to Sandy's body, Bateekh stands close to her and then lifts his dishdasha up showing his legs to the same level of Sandy's bare legs.⁴⁴ He- in an attempt of comparison- looks down at his legs and hers commenting 'Mine are more suitable for winter season'.⁴⁵ Naeym asks Bateekh to take Sandy inside. Bateekh refuses by stating that his reputation might be morally offended.

Naeym, now is left alone, condemns his cousins' reactions to seeing Sandy arguing that they should have never acted like that. A woman, Nunu, comes out from the spaceship's door at the back of the stage. She is a tall beautiful blond lady. She puts on very short trousers. So her bare legs (though she is wearing transparent socks) are more apparent than Sandy's. Also, she is slightly showing the upper part of her bosom. Obviously, the male gaze becomes the target and at the centre of the performance. Thus her sexy outfits intend to promote the material commodity. So Nunu walks towards Naeym as he is talking to the audience and hugs him from the back without saying a word. Then Naeym seems to lose control: his voice gets very low with a slow tone. She then goes to the other side of the stage to open the dialogue. She greets him:

Nunu: How are you doing?

Naeym (*Looking at the ground*): I am doing well, but they are not. (*He indicates the audience*)

Nunu: Why don't you look at me?

Naeym: Isn't enough that they are looking at you.⁴⁶

In discussing the role of the audience, Lizbeth Goodman points out that ‘all theatre is influenced to some extent by audience reaction’.⁴⁷ Naeym informs her that he is shocked to see a woman dressed like this as women in his village are very decent. She tells him that she and her team have come from Mars to choose and take one man from the village. Noticeably, Naeym encourages the audience to examine Nunu’s body.

The audience at this stage desperately want to see the men’s reaction to seeing Nunu since her clothes and attitudes are sexier and more seductive than Sandy’s. Thus Nunu brings the seduction in the play to a higher level. Upon the arrival of the brothers, one after the other, Nunn touches them with her exaggerated performance acting like a night girl. Once again, we have all the men fall on the ground because of the woman’s body.

When Soweleh sees Nunu, he starts gazing at her body in a strange look ‘Look at this Kiwi.’ And in a more serious tone he turns to his brother, Naeym, to ask ‘Hey, tell me are we performing a play or we are in a dubbing series? Where do you find them?’⁴⁸ Because of his short stature, Soweleh states that there is a similarity between and the lady from Mars and himself as they both may wear trousers of the same size. Also to objectify her, Soweleh asserts that Nunu resembles the famous cartoon character, Nils, because of the way she fervently talks. Again, he falls to the ground after being touched by her.

The fifth man arrives but he reacts madly as he starts dancing and crying at the same time while keep gazing at the top part of the Nunu’s body. He then collapses after she

touches him. The special use of the actress's language is intended to enforce commodifying her body. Additionally, her exaggerated performance intends to enhance the male gaze.

Like Soweleh Bateekh comes again and asks Naeym, in a serious tone, 'Are you a women's dealer? Do you hold parties, tell me?'⁴⁹ It is only this time Bateekh lays down to the ground commenting that he has seen a very charming woman. So, once again, six men take the stage as beds.

We have another meeting between Thyab and Regayia who both seem to have now developed a relationship. We understand that he has his eyes on her land to construct his perfume factory. Thus he tries from his end to win the mother's acceptance leaving his daughter to do her task by seducing her cousins. When Thyab joins her, the Titanic song track is played. The director gives us the hint that they may have fallen in love or developed a special relationship. Indeed, she starts waving her hands to express her rage emotions. Again, Regayia expresses the misery of lacking a man in her life 'I have spent my life alone'.⁵⁰ Therefore, she admits that she is an old woman and it is impossible that a man considers her as a wife. Thyab suggests that she gets 'a yellow hair, yellow tattoo, yellow lenses, yellow gold, this yellow dress you are wearing, yellow shoes so that when you walk down in the street everyone will hail to you'.⁵¹ He indicates that she will look like a taxi. When she asks him why he has not got a wife, he deceivingly replies that he is looking for a woman who comes from his background, tradition and culture. Then she starts selling herself by suggesting her condition being a widow who has three sons.

Thus, he proposes to marry her as an attempt to deceive her to accept his project. Principally, she agrees since the proposal, due to her weakness, is irresistible.

In her second appearance Sandy wears a blue short dress. Again she meets her cousins. She tries to seduce them all by following the same strategy. Thus everyone she meets, she closely approaches, touches and asks about the land. In addition, she promises if anyone agrees to the project of her father, she will be his wife.

She then plays the same trick with Soweleh who seems to have- among his brothers and cousins- admired her the most. Thus, Soweleh gets into a fight with one of his cousins because of her. When his uncle comes, Soweleh explains that he has seen his cousin kissing Sandy. The father agrees that his daughter is kissed. However, he gets mad when Soweleh tells him that he has also seen him touching her. Ironically, Thyab has no problem with the 'kissing' but 'touching' is not allowed. His slogan-confirmed by Sandy- 'Yes for kissing; no for touching'.⁵² In the middle of this, Regayia comes to figure out the reasons of this dispute. She examines Sandy's clothing and mockingly announces 'make it longer'.⁵³

Irigaray points out that the way women are used by men for the reproductive intentions is vital as much as their number. In other words, man strives to possess all women so that 'To "accumulate" them, to be able to count off his conquests, seductions, possessions, both sequentially and cumulatively, as measure or standard(s)'.⁵⁴ Flaiyeh is married to three wives. However, they don't appear on the stage. He arrives to have his own share of the commodity.

So, Soweleh advises him that he should follow their uncle's slogan. Flaiyeh and Sandy are left alone on the stage. Thus he starts to prepare his lips- as a warming up- for a long kiss. So he heads toward her, takes off his belt and seems to be more serious, not acting. Thus, we now notice that Sandy terrifyingly calls him by his real name 'Jawad, Jawad, the scene ends'.⁵⁵ As he keeps walking towards her, Sandy tells him that she agrees to be kissed on the condition that lights are turned off. He reacts 'Why darkness! The ticket costs 25,000ID'.⁵⁶ He encourages her to perform the kissing scene before the audience. As he gets very close to her, she seems a bit cooperative and asks the technician of the theatre to turn the lights off. Accordingly, they head to the backstage. Indeed, Sandy helps the man in sexually commodifying her body. The father sells his daughter to his nephews in order to get the land. In return, the nephews, along with the father, sell the daughter to the audience. All in all, she is nothing but an object.

In a dancing scene, the female sexuality is symbolized through the use of language, body language, expressions and action. The scene can be regarded as the peak of commodifying the female body. Nunu, reappears with another sexy leather short dress. This time the three brothers come all at once. She asks them to dance promising that she would give the best dancer all the coddling action that she could offer. She stands in the middle of the stage surrounded by the three brothers. She dances on western music: flashing lights turn the stage into a nightclub. Bateekh joins them and starts dancing with them for seconds. Then he condemns their vulgarity since they are dancing on western music. However, he encourages them to

listen to Iraqi songs. Later, Soweleh joins them. In this scene, Nunu is at the centre allowing her to derive ‘her price from her relation to the male sex’.⁵⁷ Hence, Nunu becomes the object of all subjects of the entire performance. In other words, she serves as the object everyone wants to gaze at, share and take.

In the same scene Naeym, the handsome young man, also joins them. He appears to be very angry and denounces that his brothers and cousins are dancing with Nunu. However, he instantly changes his mind as Nunu calls him ‘Oh, darling, sweetheart, my heart, come to my lap, come’.⁵⁸ She goes to him and takes him by her hand to the middle of the stage. The word ‘lap’ is considered a very explicit word in this context bearing in mind the speaker’s sex. So, they stand in the middle under the observation of five men from both sides of the stage. Bateekh- as a notable Iraqi comedian- takes this chance by mocking Naeym and Nunu. The jocks seem to be all his improvisation because he calls Naeym by his real name and all the other characters on the stage are laughing at his jocks. Now, Bateekh orders Naeym to dance because ‘the ticket costs 25,000 ID, why do you refuse to dance?’⁵⁹

The playwright brings the theme of consumer/commodity relationship to its peak as he finally allows to what could be considered, to a certain extent at least from the Iraqi cultural perspective, an explicit scene on the stage. Thus, Naeym embraces Nunu with his hands and she does the same. They dance passionately in such a rare scene performed on any of the Iraqi theatres. However, the

flashlights are used to lessen the impact of this scene on the audience.

As the music stops, Soweleh goes to Naeym-who now seems to have slept on Nunu's shoulder- taps on his back and calls him by his real name 'Alwai, Alwai... the scene ends. Have you stuck?'⁶⁰ Also one of the cousins blames the director of the play for not giving him this role- obviously feeling sad that he has lost the opportunity to dance with Nunu. The audience react with a big laugh!

The attempt of presenting woman as commodities continue as we witness the Soweleh and Sandy dating for the first time in the performance. The same setting is actually used. However, Soweleh tells Sandy that they should assume that they are at Al Zora'a Garden.⁶¹

Sandy: My darling, if lovers decide to have a date, where shall they go to?

Soweleh: Here?

Sandy: Yes!

Soweleh: If the guy is rich, he'll take her to a flat either in Kerada or Manssor.⁶² (*Audience laugh and clap*). However, if he's poor like me...

Sandy (*Interrupting*): Yes!

Soweleh: He will walk her either to Al Zora'a or they walk by the river.

Sandy (*Sadly*): In Europe we don't have Al Zoraa.

Soweleh: You don't need Al Zoraa there as in Europe all places are Al Zora.⁶³

Soweleh starts describing how genuine love in Iraq is, particularly in his village. Sandy indicates that love in

Europe is completely different as it goes according to the following stages:

Sandy: A look.

Soweleh: I know that.

Sandy: Then, a smile.

Soweleh: Correct!

Sandy: Then, a meeting.

Soweleh: Exactly!

Sandy: Then... (*She pauses*).⁶⁴

Soweleh (*Excited*): This is the 'then' part I am looking after. So, what is it?

Sandy: Then...!

Soweleh (*More excited*): What is it?

Sandy (*She seems more bashful*): Then.

Soweleh: Oh, I see. People are here! Anyways, we here follow the opposite path.

Sandy: How?

Soweleh: We here immediately begin with the 'then' part.⁶⁵

Sandy feels /acts bashful as she covers her face with her two hands and gives her back to the audience. Soweleh asks Sandy to imagine that they are now in Al Zora'a so he can express his love to her. So he takes her to the left side to sit her on a wooden chair facing the audience. As he tries to touch her hands, she refuses calling out her father's motto "Yes for kissing, no for touching".⁶⁶ He feels extremely happy with this motto so he approaches her trying to kiss her only to be interrupted by a wandering street seller selling coca. Then, he is interrupted by a beggar.

He gets very close to Sandy to allow her to rest her arms and head on his shoulder. By the time he starts narrating his approbation and how he has fallen in love with her, Soweleh is again interrupted by Bateekh who now acts as another wandering street seller selling popcorns. Soweleh in an aside tells the seller to go away because he has no money to buy snacks for his girl. So Soweleh starts pushing Bateekh away. Bateekh asks Soweleh a question which seems to be not from the play script as we notice that they both start calling each other by their real names.

Bateekh: Saad Khalefa, can I ask you a question?

Soweleh: Sure, go ahead.

Bateekh (*He seems to be very serious*): You are an actor. Indeed, you have become an Arab star. You are also a very famous Iraqi actor.

Soweleh: So?

Bateekh: What did you have in mind when you appeared in a commercial advertisement in which you put on a diaper?⁶⁷ Are you serious?

Soweleh (*Shockingly*): Majid, have you finished?

Bateekh: I am sorry though.

Soweleh: Majid, let our audience be the witnesses. (*He turns to directly address the audience*). Folk, that was an advertisement for which I was paid 10,000\$.

Member in the audience: Good for you!

Soweleh: Thanks. However, Majid Yaseen is ready to make his mother put on a diaper only for 200\$.⁶⁸

In her influential book *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, Lizbeth Goodman differentiates between the

reception of the reader of the text and the spectator of the live performance. The latter, Goodman notes, 'becomes the active subject interpreting events and evaluating them from her or his positioned perspective'.⁶⁹ Although they seem to be following their theatrical intellect- being professional actors, women bodies are still the males' main focus. Thus we notice that the actors are still playing with women and money as commodities. Soweleh goes back to Sandy asking her to get back to the mood of the scene. So she rests her arms and head over his shoulder to allow him flirting her. As he describes his love for Sandy, he stops after noticing a member in the audience looking at Sandy's bare legs. So he asks him 'Why do you gaze like that?'.⁷⁰ Then he looks at her bare legs and looks back at the audience. He reacts by stretching her dress down to cover her knees. So Soweleh keeps his arm on her knees while holding tight to her dress. In the meantime, the audience clap while shouting. He calls 'Producer, bring us a hammer and nails'.⁷¹ He then shouts at her:

Soweleh: Make your dress longer.

Sandy: I don't have one.

Soweleh: (*Angrily*) You don't have one.
(*Pleasantly*) It is Ok; he is a poor guy who paid 25,000ID (*He takes her dress back up to show her knees to the audience*).⁷²

Sandy doesn't mind her father's plan to sell her off as commodity so that he can achieve his plans. In this particular scene, we notice that she even doesn't mind Soweleh's actions and expressions. She seems very cooperative although we are somehow forced to accept what happened is a result of Soweleh's improvisation. Irigaray

pinpoints that women are "objects" for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a "language" that they have not produced'.⁷³ Hence if this scene is an improvisation, this could mean that Sandy properly would not mind such action in real life and accept to be nothing but commodity.

For Irigaray, women's development as objects- since they are the carriers of natural and social values- can be only fulfilled when they are passed from one man to another.⁷⁴ Thyab comes to the stage to inform Soweleh that he has heard the dialogue with his daughter. 'It's been more than an hour and you are still talking about the 'then' part.'⁷⁵ 'Your mother and I have already finished the 'then' part'.⁷⁶ He implicitly informs Soweleh that he has had an affair with his mother. He then tells him that he means that he is getting married to Regayia.

The visual utilisation of the women's bodies represents the commodity that is ready to be marketed to the audience. It is worth noting that even Regayia (the old, supposedly, conservative woman) overtly and covertly promotes the strategy of the performance in commodifying the female body. Naeym falls in love with Nunu and thus decides to marry her. He informs his mother about his decision. She tells him that she needs to check Nunu just in case she has done some lipofiller in her body, such as lips and other parts. She illustrates that most women have become fake at the present time. Indeed, she starts physically checking some of Nunu's body parts. When Bateekh arrives, he refuses that his brother Naeym gets married to Nunu because she is from Mars. He states that she belongs to a

cartoon family. Thus he describes her father as Grendizer; her uncle as Suzuki and her grandfather as Popeye. Bateekh continues treating Nunu as commodity appears by the end of the play- the same as Sandy and Regayia- very serious and tries to re-establish an identity. Also, we finally discover that Sandy is Bateekh's sister and Thyab is his father. Once he knows that he is the brother of the girl who has been showing her legs and wears only such sexy clothes, Bateekh decides (which he will not attempt) to kill her in order not to be blamed for the shame that she is causing to him since he belongs to a very conservative family living in the countryside.

In the last ten minutes of the performance we see the two young women behaving differently wearing more decent clothes and have acquired some independence and voice. Nunu accepts to leave the spaceship, marries Naeym and stays in the village. She wears a very long dress. The audience cannot see any bare part of her body and she even covers her head with a scarf. Sandy faces her father with the fact that she has finally realized her identity and thus accepted to stay in the village forever. Irigaray notes that 'Woman has functioned most often by far as what is at stake a transaction, usually rivalrous, between two men, her passage from father to husband included'.⁷⁷ Woman functions, she adds, 'as merchandise, a commodity passing from one owner to another, from one consumer to another'.⁷⁸ Sandy changes her outlooks entirely. She is now putting on jeans and long shirt. She also seems to have changed. Knowing the fact that she is Bateekh's sister she decides to stay in the village and marries Soweleh. She favours her country over all the temptations in Europe.

Regayia gives the moral lesson of the performance of how important the homeland is.

Conclusion

The basic and most essential role of women in *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh*, particularly Sandy and Nunu, is to commodify their bodies. Women's bodies have exchange and/ or material values (male's gaze). Accordingly, they behave in a more exaggerated feminine way. An observer can perceive how the playwright employs women's outer manifestations to be a dominant theme on which the main plot of the comedy is built. Thus their bodies are perceived docile in the sense that women during the performance try to gain the male's attention to the commodity. Sandy and Nunu are cogent examples of the way women living the life of objectification, marginalization and servitude. They are only identified with the beauties, charm and the seduction of their bodies, thereby treated like commodities. Thus, certain looks (mostly sexual lust) are imposed on them. Women in *Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh* don't recognize, or rather fail to realize, that they have been, exploited, used, marginalised and even verbally oppressed by the playwright/ director, actors and the audience. The gender repression is the performance's main component. The actors in the performance strive very hard to draw the audience's attention to the commodity of the performance- women's bodies. Thus they use numerous techniques and explicit references more than the implicit ones to commodify women. They deviate from the conventions of the decent Iraqi theatre traditions.

The performance exemplifies how women's voice and identity are proscribed. Their demands and desires cannot be aspired and effectively articulated. Unfortunately, women (willingly or unwillingly) are being cast as mere sexual commodities ready to be served to satisfy the male gaze. Indeed, they are trapped in a corner to become nothing but commodity. They are sex objects ready to be maneuvered by the male characters. Accordingly, audience's gaze desire may be satisfied. Thus they are mere commodities who have been put up on the stage for satisfying the spectators' consumption.

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Notes:

¹ Bainbridge, *A Feminine Cinematics*, 11.

² Rosi Braidotti, 'Feminist Ethics', in *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture*, ed. Theresa Krier and Elizabeth D. Harvey, (London: Routledge, 2004), 11.

³ Daniel Chaffee, 'Structuralist and Post- Structuralist Social Theory', in *The Routledge Companion Social History*, ed. Anthony Elliott, (London: Routledge, 2010), 74.

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 182.

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⁵ Ibid., 172

⁶ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 170.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Shana MacDonald, 'Materiality and Metaphor', in *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 56-57.

⁹ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 171.

¹⁰ Ibid., 180

¹¹ Ibid., 175

¹² MacDonald, 'Materiality and Metaphor', 57.

¹³ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 31.

¹⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones, 'The Commodities Dance', in *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture*, eds. Theresa Krier and Elizabeth D. Harvey (London: Routledge, 2004), 160.

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 87.

¹⁶ Jones, 'The Commodities Dance', 155.

¹⁷ Abd Ja'afar Al Najjar is noticeable Iraqi actor, playwright and director.

¹⁸ The name Regayia is so funny as it means watermelon. Besides, this name is not used Iraq to refer to a woman unless is used for mocking.

¹⁹ This article does not intentionally comment on the role of The Princess (being a dwarf) as this theme is intended be discussed in a separate article.

²⁰ Gordon McDougall, 'Revolution and Re-Creation', in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, eds. Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay, (London: Routledge, 2000), 129.

²¹ This extract and all the subsequent ones are taken from [nihadkamil], المسرحية العراقية الكوميدية - بطيخ في المريح نسخة كاملة, (2014, August 13), [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC2SqY2luq4>. The researcher has translated into English all the quoted extracts used in this article.

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²² nihadkamil, 2014.

²³ The political implications of the corrupt politicians in post-2003 era is intended to be highlighted.

²⁴ [nihadkamil](#), 2014.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. In this speech, he indicates the audience.

²⁸ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 172.

²⁹ nihadkamil, 2014.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ nihadkamil, 2014

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Expression in bold means that the actress uses English.

³⁷ nihadkamil, 2014

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 181.

⁴⁰ He imitates what typical Iraqi women do when lamenting and mourning the loss their loved ones.

⁴¹ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁴² nihadkamil, 2014. The three dots indicate that the speaker pauses for a while.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Dishdasha is a customary cloth which men put on, especially those live in the villages, marshes and countryside.

⁴⁵ Ibid. He shows his hairy legs to indicate that they would be warmer in winter compared to her hairless legs.

⁴⁶ nihadkamil, 2014

⁴⁷ Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatre*, 38.

⁴⁸ nihadkamil, 2014. Women in the dubbing series shown on the Iraqi National TV are considered models who have no major roles other than showing their beauties and bodies.

Women as Commodity in the Iraqi Theatre with reference to Bateekh Fee Al Mareekh [Watermelon on Mars].....

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 174.

⁵⁵ nihadkamil, 2014

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 188.

⁵⁸ nihadkamil, 2014

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ nihadkamil, 2014

⁶¹ Al Zora'a is a recreational area and a zoo situated in the middle of Baghdad. However, lovers find Al Zora'a a good place to date. Thus scenes of people kissing, hugging...etc are highly expected to be noticed at such place.

⁶² According to this context, taking a girl to one's flat means that the couples are likely going to have sex.

⁶³ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁶⁴ Sandy implicitly indicates that after this stage 'then', couples possibly can proceed with sexual intercourse.

⁶⁵ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The reference here is for the woman diaper.

⁶⁸ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁶⁹ Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatre*, 19.

⁷⁰ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 189.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 185.

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⁷⁵ He indicates that Soweleh should have come to a developed stage in his relation with his daughter; i.e., he should have a physical contact with her.

⁷⁶ nihadkamil, 2014.

⁷⁷ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 157.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 158.