

# «Symbolism of Dreams During The Occupation of Kuwait»

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## **Abstract**

This paper studies the significance of dreams during the occupation of Kuwait as a system of symbols. It contains samples of 52 dreams collected mostly during the occupation. These dreams were reported by the members of the Shii community in Kuwait. They were related to the Shii thought and some main concepts which are inherent in this thought like the concepts of Imamah, infallibility, and persecution.

This paper attempts – through the analysis of dreams – to manifest the cultural connotation of the dreams as symbols which gain their power and their cognitive significance from the components of their culture and at the same time reinforce the elements of this culture.

At dawn on the second day of August 1990 Kuwait was occupied by Iraqi forces. This day coincided with the eleventh day of the *Hijri* month of *Muharam*, just one day after the *Ashura*, the day commemorating the death of Hussein, also known as *Sayyid al Shuhada* (the lord of martyrs), the third *Shii* Imam and prophet Mohammad's grandson.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the *Shii* people spent the day which preceded the occupation in the *Husseiniyahs*, the place where the commemorating ceremonies take place. The eve of Ashura is called «the night of the strangers». This night's ceremonies finish around nine in the evening and people leave for their homes earlier than usual after a long and tiring day.

The majority of the *Shii* community of Kuwait came back early that night from their *Husseiniyahs*.<sup>2</sup> They woke up at dawn to witness a safe and peaceful country subjected to ruthless atrocities including random killing, rape, hostage - taking, and looting. In addition, people were cut off from the outside world and left to face an incomprehensible present and an unknown future.

From the first day of occupation, the Kuwaiti *Shia* (the *Shii* people) compared what happened to them along with the *Sunni* population, and what happened to the members of the family of the Prophet, *al-il bayt*, and their followers, who under the leadership of Imam Hussein were subjected to the atrocities of Yazid in the desert of Karbala, in Iraq. These atrocities reached their peak on the day of *Ashura*: the tenth day of *Muharam* of the year 61 after *Hijra*, 680 A.D. It is considered a day of mourning by the *Shia* all over the world.

From the beginning of occupation the *Shia* started to report many dreams related to occupation and pre-occupation during which the Imams and other members of their family (*al-il bayt*) were the main characters and the occupation was the main theme.

This paper deals with the symbolism of these dreams in this period of crisis and studies them in their cultural context. Hence, it is important to give an account on certain concepts prevalent in *Shii* theology and popular belief, and their manifestations in the *Shia* cultural life during this period of utmost crisis. But we will first proceed with the review of the literature.

### **Review of literature**

The main characteristics of the anthropological writings on the subject of dreams is the emphasis laid on the cultural context of dream symbolism and the refusal of the single western theoretical consensus on dreams.<sup>3</sup>

Bastide, in his attempt to compare dreams to myths reflects this cultural view:

Many anthropologists agree that myths answer tensions at the center of social structures and act as screens on which the group projects its problems of being. For the individual, also, the dream is a myth insofar as it evokes the dreamer's difficulties of

being. But if the whole world agrees in considering the mythologies as an integrating part of various cultures, should we not in the same way consider a collection of dreams as a "quasi culture" enclosed by a general culture of the place and of the time?"<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore he states that

"...the dream is always functional, even if its function changes from one culture to another. It is also a construction of the future, whether that future be that of the individual or that of the group."<sup>5</sup>

Michael Brown (1993) puts his view regarding the way dreams should be studied as follows:

"If dreaming is a kind of thinking, then it might profitably be studied in terms of its place in the total knowledge system of a culture. What role do dreams play in the acquisition, validation, modification, and transmission of knowledge?"<sup>6</sup>

He indicates from the study he carried out on the Aguaruna society, which is a small-scale, unstratified society, where the circumstances that face the leadership are that of power scarcity, that?

"The acquisition, interpretation, or control of dreams may be an important means of demonstrating competence beyond that which is required by immediate practical necessity."<sup>7</sup>

He adds that the complexity of dreams invites interpretation by experienced people in this field, whose "mysterious nature suggests a link to the numinous; by extension, control of dreams implies control of obscure but powerful forces."<sup>8</sup>

"Rather than viewing dreams as subjective mental phenomena bearing little relation to events outside of the dreamer's mind, the Aguaruna use dreams and altered states of consciousness as bridges between self and other, as sources of imagery that can be consciously appropriated to alter the dreamer's world."<sup>9</sup>

During occupation Kuwait lacked its legitimate leadership. A few *Shii* religious people whose dreams and views are regarded highly by the people, used their ability to interpret dreams in two different channels: First they tried to ensure that their leadership as religious authority was intact and in fact, more needed in these circumstances. Second, they were trying to comfort the devastated *Shii* population of Kuwait through their interpretation of the dreams alluding that Kuwait would be liberated and the legitimate leadership would be back.

In his study of dreams in Ojibwa society, Hallowell (1966), taking dreams as a stage in man's evolution, shows how dream experience in this society was

interpreted as actual experiences of the self, functioned as a positive factor in the operation of their aboriginal sociocultural system. He adds that:

“In this case we have an interesting example of a mode of cultural adaptation in which man’s capacity for dreaming has been made an integral part of the life adjustment of a people who faced the harsh realities of a northern environment in which subsistence depended upon hunting, fishing, and gathering.”<sup>10</sup>

Without going into the details of the evolutionary stages of the Hallowell study, it was found that dreams were used by *Shii* Kuwaities as a positive factor in managing their day-to-day lives in the time of crisis. A major factor in their tolerance for the occupation was the fact that they were certain that it was not going to last, a prophecy which they obtained through the way their dreams were interpreted.

Dorothy Eggan (1966), in her research which began in 1939 on the Hopi Indians, a small sedentary, agricultural Pueblo tribe in the South-western desert plateau of the United States, discusses certain religious beliefs and ceremonies, particularly those that feature Palulukon, the Water Serpent, and a number of Hopi dreams related to them. She suggests that:

“Dreams may be thought of as a triangle production involving (1) the latent content that is said to appear in universal symbols, and represents material not accessible to consciousness; (2) the dreamer’s personality organisation, and his personal situation at the time of the dream; and (3) the *relation of the dream to cultural provision*. (italics in the original text)”<sup>11</sup>

And it was this latter point? that her paper (1966) was concerned with. In this paper, which she analyses several Hopi dreams, she notes that:

“Hopi culture not only stressed the importance of dreams, but that their religious ceremonies provided a rich source of imagery, which was present from infancy to death, and which served both the purpose of the dreamer and the interest of the society.”<sup>12</sup>

William Merrill (1992), in his study of the dreams among the Raramuri Indians of northern Mexico, argues that the Raramuri stereotype of dreams is that dreams involve threats, specifically threats from beings outside society. They maintain this image because the threats that do occur during dreams resonate more than any other feature of their dreams with their world-view. He further argues that this stereotype of dreams represents one expression of the image, pervasive in Raramuri world view, of insiders threatened by outsiders. This image emerges from certain features of Raramuri society and social process. The principle means by which the Raramuri create and maintain positive relations with one another is by establishing obligations through

balanced reciprocity. The failure or inability to produce such obligations results in a situation of potential confrontation for the Raramuri:

“dreaming is their principle avenue of communication with beings dangers that await a dreamer’s soul, dreams are crucial to the preservation of the like God and the devil, who have a substantial impact on their lives. Despite the individual’s and community’s well-being.”<sup>13</sup>

Hence, it is the cultural factor that is mainly stressed in anthropological studies rather than the universal, although this latter factor is not totally ignored.<sup>14</sup>

In this paper we will discuss the symbolism of dreams among the *Shii* Kuwaitis in its cultural context, taking into consideration the *Shia’s* world view and the appearance of the Imams in the dreams as representing certain aspects and reflecting a certain understanding of the world. In real life the Imams are considered as protectors and supporters of the *Shii* people. In dreams they appear in the same role, both reflecting and appeasing certain tensions in time of crisis.

#### **Dreams in the *Shii* sect:**

According to Moslems (*Shii and Sunni*) there are three types of dreams, as mentioned by the Prophet Mohamed in his (*Hadith*) saying: A good omen from God, a saddening dream from Satan, and that which consists of the things which the human being tells himself during the day and then sees in his dream.

The interpretation of this *Hadith* indicates that there are real dreams and false dreams. The real ones fall in the first category: a good omen from God. The false ones are the ones either from Satan warning the dreamer from doing the right things or false and confused dreams called *Athghath*.<sup>15</sup>

It is believed that the real dreams are those which come true and the false ones are not realized. It is also believed that the false dreams are from Satan and occur at the beginning of the night and the true dreams are from the angels and occur in the last third of the night.<sup>16</sup>

A famous *Hadith* of The Prophet Mohamed on dreams is: “whoever dreamt of me has seen me, as Satan does not get embodied in me”.

In spite of the fact that there are some ideas regarding dreams accepted by both *Sunni* and *Shii* sects, yet dreams in the *Shii* sect have more implications than that in the *Sunni* sect. In the life history of each *Shii* Imam there are a number of dreams which are sometimes considered as miracles.<sup>17</sup> The Imams themselves were considered during their lifetimes the best dream-interpreters. The most renown Imam in this field is the sixth Imam, Imam Jafar al Sadiq. In some dreams Imams come with certain hymns to help people overcome certain difficulties, they might as well provide them with certain solutions for some

problems. Some Imams appear in the dreams to predict the destiny of the person in the after life, usually to tell him or her that he or she will go to heaven. The dream in this case is a good omen. *Dar asslam fi tafsir al ro'ya wal manam*, a book written by the *shii* scholar al Tabrasi (died year 1330 of hijra), contains about 670 dreams, the majority of which are either dreamt or interpreted by Imams, or show a certain virtue related to a certain Imam or in which a certain Imam appears, usually to convey a message to the dreamer.

The sleep is mentioned in the *Shia* books on the interpretation of dreams, as a small death, and according to Imam Jafar al Sadiq (died in 149 hijra/766 A.D).

When the pious men sleep, God ascends their souls to Him, those who are destined to die will be in the heavens, and those who are not destined to die, their souls will be sent with the guardian angels to their bodies.<sup>18</sup>

Yet this does not mean that the soul leaves the body entirely, as Imam Jafar al Sadiq continues:

"If the whole soul leaves the body so as nothing remains of it, then the person will die'. Then he was asked: 'how it goes out?' The Imam said: 'Don't you see the sun in the sky is in its place, and its light and flash is on the earth. This is the case with the soul, its source is in the body and its movement is extensive'<sup>19</sup>

Most books on dreams also contain chapters on the manners of sleep, the best time to sleep, the religious hymns and/or Quranic verses that should be recited in order to have a certain dream or to see a certain Imam or even the Prophet himself in the dream.

The science of dream interpretation is considered a very honorable science and few people are gifted with. Imams are well-known for their ability to interpret dreams. One of the virtues of the Imams is their *al ilm al ilahi* (The Godly knowlege), which allows them, among other things, to be able to interpret dreams. But this does not prevent ordinary people from interpreting each others dreams very often, although they do not claim that their interpretations are totally right.

Ordinary *Shia*, especially the middle-aged and elderly, interpret dreams depending on their general knowledge and experience, yet they might sometimes prefer to refer to the books of dream interpretation. They do not have a strong preference for *Shii* books, especially if the person is not particularly religious. Yet if the person is religious, he would refer the *Shii* books, which depend on the sayings and interpretations of Imams. Usually such books contain a glossary at the end of the book of the things that might appear in one's dream and their meaning and connotaion.<sup>20</sup>

The *Shia* usually think that the majority of dreams foretell the future whether in a positive or a negative way. Hence, whenever a person starts reporting a dream by saying: "last night I dreamt..." the listeners interrupt by saying immediately: "Be it a good omen. God willing" (*khair Inshaallah*).<sup>21</sup>

As in the *Shii* theology, ordinary people think that human beings are made of body and soul, and during sleep, the soul departs from the body for a short while and roams in the skies and the upper world, and there, it sees the future events of this actual world and people's destiny in the after life.

Yet, there are some dreams which are not caused by the departure of the soul to the sky, but by satan's intervention. These dreams are those which do not have a significant interpretation and when the events of the dreams are not in right sequence and might contain some ridiculous scenes. It should be stressed here that people think that Satan is present everywhere, although we do not see him. He affects our conduct and our way of thinking.

When people see bad dreams that predict with certainty an unfortunate event, (e.g. a dream in which somebody sees that losing a tooth means he is going to lose a close relative), the first thing they should do in the morning is to give a sum of money, food, or clothes to a needy person. It is believed that this act might prevent the dream from coming true as interpreted. It is also important to stand on a well, if available, or a big, deep hole and recount the dream without allowing anyone to hear it. The person himself might be able to interpret his dream. He might depend on general popular knowledge concerning dream interpretation as in the loss of a tooth predicting a relative's death. Or the person might depend on his own experience, that is the association he makes between certain dreams and the occurrence of certain events in real life which follow these dreams. Yet people usually report their dreams and ask each other for interpretation.

Dreams are sometimes used by traditional healers, from both *Shii* and *Sunni* sects, to diagnose some types of illness, like in the case of Zar patients.<sup>22</sup> The people who treat this illness ask the patient to report their dreams in order to be helped in diagnosing their illness.<sup>23</sup>

#### ***Al-il bayt:***

The *Shia* regard the Quranic verse: "And God only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless."<sup>24</sup> as a main reference to the correctness and infallibility of the Imams and their right to the religious leadership.

*Al-il bayt* are the members of the family of the Prophet Mohamed from his daughter Fatima and her husband Ali, who is also the Prophet's cousin. The Prophet was known for his love for his daughter, her husband, and their sons Hassan and Hussein. It is said that he predicted the martyrdom of the latter.

The *Ithnaashari Shia*, the *Shia* who believe in the right of the twelve Imams to the political and religious leadership, are among the vast majority of the *Shia* in Kuwait. The twelve Imams are: Ali, his sons Hassan and Hussein and the other nine are the offspring of Hussein. Ali, the first Imam was born around 24 years before the Hijrah. The twelfth Imam is Imam al Mahdi (born 255 hijra/868 A.D.) The *Shia* believe that he had disappeared, hence he is called the absent Imam and/or the awaited Mahdi, and he will re-appear and will make justice reign in the world.

The concept of *Imamah* represents an important point of difference between *Shii* and *Sunni* Moslem. It started after the death of Prophet Mohammad and the succession of Abu Bakr as the first Moslem caliph. The *Shia* claim that Ali is the lawful successor of Mohamed because he was his cousin, one of the first to accept Islam as a religion, known for his intelligence, very close to the Prophet since his childhood, and the husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Above all, the *Shia* keep a host of Hadiths which prove that the Prophet has chosen Ali as his successor during his life.

After Abu Bakr, the second Caliph Omar ruled and then after his death Othman became the third Moslem Caliph. Ali finally became the Caliph, about twenty five years after the death of the Prophet. *Shia* believe that Ali is the only legitimate successor of the Prophet. He was their political, spiritual, and religious Imam. They did not accept the three Caliphs as legitimate leaders of the Moslem world.

As mentioned before, after the death of Ali the *Imamah* went to his two sons: Hassan and Hussein and the offspring of the latter to the twelfth Imam, where the *Imamah* discontinued after his death (*disappearance*).

The two positions of Caliphs and Imams existed in the Moslem world. The history of this existence was that of conflict and struggle. The most famous manifestation of this struggle is that which took place between Hussein and Yazid during the reign of Yazid, the son of the first Omawid Caliph Moaweyah. This struggle continued between other Imams and Caliphs. The former were generally persecuted by the latter, a fact which made the history of *al-il bayt* rich in tales of oppression and persecution. The stories of the atrocities practiced against the *al-il bayt* are a vital part of *Shia* History. They are recounted in all religious occasions, especially in the two sacred months of Moharam and Safar. The position of *Shia* as minorities in the Moslem world has also encouraged the continuous revival of these past events.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of *Ismah* (infallibility of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima and the twelve Imams) is very essential to the *Shii* thought. This god-given Infallibility accompanies the Imams from birth to death. Infallibility is a main

requirement of *Imamah*. It ensures truthfulness and correctness which are the most important characteristics of the Moslem guide.

The *Shia* regard the Imams as more capable to interpret the Quran and *Hadith* and assist the Moslems in their religious matters. They are chaste, intelligent, and knowledgeable in different branches of science, especially those related to religion.<sup>26</sup>

Another concept which is associated with *Imamah* is *Shafaah*, which connotes both mediation and patronage. The *Shia* believe that their twelve Imams are capable of mediating between them and God in this life and the hereafter. Many *Shii* practices originate from this concept including: shrine visiting, making vows to the Imams and other saints, and their preference to have their dead buried in the sacred *Shii* cities. They believe that Imams are aware of the sufferings of the *Shii* people even though they are dead and that they never refuse the demand of any Moslem, including the *Sunni*, who believe in the Imams powers and also those Moslems who are helpless and face persecution. Some miracles are thought to have occurred not only during Imams lives, but also after their death.

There are some female figures who are highly respected by the *Shia*. the most loved and revered ones are Fatimah, who is believed to be infallible, and her daughter Zeinab.

The Sayyids are believed to be the offspring of the Imams. They have a religious role in the *Shii* communities and the *Shia*, in general, have a special respect and devotion for them.<sup>27</sup>

### **The tragedy of Hussein:**

After the death of Ali, the fourth Moslem Caliph and the first *Shii* Imam, his eldest son Hassan became the second Imam, while Moaweyah became Caliph. He moved the capital of the Islamic Caliphah to Damascus, planning to establish the Omaweed Caliphah from his offspring. Hussein became Imam, after the death of his brother Imam Hassan. Moaweyah had promised Hussein that he would vote for anyone as a Caliph after himself. But soon this promise was forgotten and he wanted his son Yazid to succeed him as a leader of the Moslems. To achieve this, he spared no expense and he spared no lives that crossed his plans. After his death, Yazid, a drunkard and a pleasure seeker became Caliph (i.e successor of the Prophet Mohammad). The *Shia* think that Imam Hussein felt if he let Yazid get away with disrespect of religious laws, Islam would soon be forgotten and efforts of the Prophet and other Imams would be wasted. So he stood against him and challenged Yazid.

The population of Kufa (Iraq) wrote many letters of dissatisfaction towards the Caliph Yazid and asked Hussein to come to Iraq while promising any assistance that he may require. Hussein discovered that Yazid and his

followers were planning to assassinate him while, on the other hand, the people of Kufa wanted him to suppress Yazid and his followers. During the pilgrimage of Haj that year, Imam Hussein made a speech in which he outlined his plan against performing the Hajj due to his sudden duty in Kufa. Yazid heard of this and dispatched an army from Damascus to Kufa to face Hussein. Imam Hussein with his family members, including children and some of his friends and followers from Kufa, faced the army of Yazid in the desert of Karbala. On the day of Ashura the tenth day of Moharam, in the hijri year 61 (680 A.D), Imam Hussein suffered a defeat and was martyred. His followers and the members of his family were captured and taken to Damascus.<sup>28</sup>

The *Shia* regard Hussein's challenge to Yazid as a battle against oppression and tyranny and a movement which gave Islam a new revival after corruption and persecution had spread in the Moslem world during the Omaweed rule. They also regard his martyrdom as his destiny which God had assigned for him since the beginning of the creation. It is believed that the Prophet too foretold Hussein's martyrdom during Hussein's childhood and that Hussein also knew that he was going to be martyred. Dreams were one of the ways through which he knew of this martyrdom. It is also believed that Imam Ali foretold his son's martyrdom, when he passed by the desert of Karbala (Iraq) on his way to Saffeen: a place where the important battle of Saffeen took place. When he saw the desert of Karbala, he said: "Here is where their journey will come to an end and their blood will be shed". Throughout *Shii* history, Hussein's martyrdom remained a source of inspiration for many uprisings against tyranny. The latest example is the Islamic revolution in Iran.<sup>29</sup>

The *Shii* community all over the world commemorates the occasion of Hussein's and his followers' martyrdoms every year in the months of Moharam and Safar. They also commemorate the death of other members of *al-il bayt*, which took place in other months. The most important one which does not fall in Moharam and Safar is the death of Imam Ali, which took place in the month of Ramadan. As mentioned above, the places where the commemoration ceremonies take place are called *Husseiniyah*.

The *Shia* regard these ceremonies as the means to manifest their loyalty to Hussein and the *al-il bayt* since they believe that Hussein sacrificed himself and his *al-il bayt* for Islam and his followers, the *Shia*. The average religious *Shii* person knows all the details of the events which took place from the beginning of Hussein's conflict with Yazid, especially those which took place around the day of Ashura. Ashura day is the day when Hussein and his family members and followers were ruthlessly killed and the survivors were led as hostages to Yazid's court in Damascus. The stories and details concerning these events are told in an emotional way in the *Husseiniyahs* every year. Recounting of these

stories are usually accompanied with chest-beating and weeping. The ninth and tenth days of Muharam are the days where the saddest and most moving stories are told. On the ninth day of Muharam, as in other days of this month, *Shii* women go to the *Husseiniyachs* in the afternoon. They stay there for a couple of hours and then go to their houses for dinner and return to the *Husseiniyachs* in the evening (the Ashura night) where the recitation and chest beating continue until they reach their height towards the dawn. In some *Husseiniyachs* a light breakfast is served at the end of the ceremony. Not all people stay until the dawn, some leave shortly after midnight. Except for the day of Ashura, men go to *Husseiniyachs* in the evenings only.

*Husseiniyachs* are strictly sex-segregated. In the tenth day of Ashura, both men and women attend the *Husseiniyachs* from around eight in the morning to midday to listen to the recitation and participate in chest-beating. Food is cooked in the *Husseiniyachs* to be consumed by the people inside or those who come from outside to take the food as a fulfillment of a vow, or simply to gain *baraka* (blessing). The afternoon recitation usually describes the situation of the survivors of Hussein's family and followers, their isolation, helplessness, and loneliness after Hussein's and others' martyrdom. At night, the ceremony is rather short and solemn. The lamps are extinguished in the *Husseiniyah* and only candles are used. People, usually in a collective way, recite the pieces which correspond to the situation of the survivors of Karbala massacre in their first night in the desert of Karbala. The recitation is often accompanied by rather silent weeping. This night is called "the night of the strangers".

Near dawn after "the night of the strangers" at around two in the morning the occupation of Kuwait by Iraqi forces took place. Most *Shia* commented, "Our night of the strangers is going to be very long". From the first day of occupation, all the *Husseiniyachs* were closed by order of Iraqi authorities who banned all gatherings.

### **Dreams during the occupation**

The dreams which are mentioned in this paper are a part of fifty-two dreams which were collected by the author who was in Kuwait during the occupation. It should be noted that the dreams discussed in this paper represent samples of the collected dreams and include the main recurring themes.

Most people believe that not everyone is capable of interpreting all dreams, and sometimes not all dreams are easy to interpret. Hence, one way of knowing the message that is implicit in a certain dream is to wait and see what the future carries. When people encounter a certain disaster, like the death of a dear person, a dangerous accident, or a great loss in the family, they tend to recall their previous dreams and reinterpret them, creating a certain interpretive link

between a certain dream and the event which took place. Hence, in any mourning ceremony there are a number of people among the relatives and friends of the deceased who recall some dreams, which they realized after the death of the deceased were foretelling the death. Therefore, some dreams might seem meaningless at the time, but gain significance later.

When the occupation took place, many people started reporting their dreams which preceded the occupation. After the occupation, they found out that these dreams were predicting the invasion.

A woman dreamt about two months before the occupation that her sitting room was full of greenish-black flies some of them were sticking to the windows and, in spite of her efforts to wipe them off, they were not moving.

The following morning when she told her family about her dream, they all laughed and told her that this dream shows that even during her sleep she worries about the tidiness of her house. Only when the occupation took place did they all realize that the sticky, ugly, dirty flies she saw in her dream were the Iraqi invaders who were as dirty, ugly, and numerous with their green uniforms and "sticky" (did not want to leave Kuwait).

Another woman had a constant dream which kept recurring for one year before the occupation and stopped immediately after the occupation:

She was standing on the shore of a familiar sea, suddenly the clear sky turned black and stormy, and the waves became so high that she feared they might pull her into the sea.

When the occupation took place, she knew that this dream was a bad omen and was a warning about the occupation.

The following dream is reported by a woman who had her young son and nephew taken by the Iraqis just five days after the invasion.

She was standing at the balcony of her house. Suddenly, she saw two young knights riding two beautiful horses coming towards her house. When they reached the gate, they changed their direction and disappeared slowly. She asked some people about them. She was told that they were Ali al-Asghar and Ali al-Akbar, the sons of Imam Hussein.

When the occupation took place and her son and nephew were taken by the Iraqis, she realized that these two young knights were them.

A woman whose son was taken by the Iraqis went to bed very sad and depressed. She dreamed that she was at home alone. Somebody knocked on the door. She opened the door and a man in green with a bright face appeared and handed her a letter. She opened the letter to read but it was blank. Yet she was happy at

the letter. She turned to thank the man, but he had disappeared. This was interpreted as one of the *al-il bayt* was conveying good news from her son.

The main message in the dreams that the *Shia* reported, revolves around the necessity of tolerating the occupation and the inevitability of the liberation. This message was usually conveyed by the *al-il bayt*.

It should be noted here that people reported other dreams during the occupation, which did not manifest the *al-il bayt*, but nevertheless conveyed fully or partially the same message. Yet the dreams with the *al-il bayt* had a strong effect on the people and were more comforting than other dreams. People were keen to report these dreams (which were numerous) to each other. The importance these dreams gained was due to the *Shii* belief that the *al-il bayt* are omniscient and omnipresent. Hence, whenever a dream was reported in which a member of the *al-il bayt* appears with a message predicting the liberation, many people, especially the religious, took this as a proof that liberation was inevitable.

The following are some examples of these dreams: A young girl who had three brothers who were captured by the Iraqis, reported this dream:

She was looking at three bright stars in the sky. Two of them were bright and close, the third one was distant and unclear.

When she asked about the interpretation she was told that stars are symbols of *al-il bayt*. The three stars that she had seen were three members of the *al-il bayt* each one telling her that each of her brothers would come back. Immediately after liberation, her brothers came back at the same time. Two of them were in good health, but the third was ill. He was the one whose return was foretold by the third member of the *al-il bayt*, appearing in the dream as a remote star. This dream needed interpretation from a religious man or woman or someone who has some knowledge in interpreting dreams. But usually other dreams were easy to interpret.

A woman dreamt that she was being chased by a group of Iraqis, through a deserted land. She was very scared of them. Suddenly, she glanced an old dignified man facing her at the end of the road. The old man said: "don't be afraid of them, they will not be able to catch you. You are on safe land".

She woke up terrified. She had a feeling that the old man was a member of *al-il bayt*. When she inquired about the interpretation of her dream, she was told that her feeling was accurate and that "this land is safe" meant Kuwait is safe.

During the air-strikes of the Allies, a man who lived by himself, saw in his dream a very bright face appeared in the pitch black sky. The man was smiling and nodding to him.

This dream was interpreted as a message from one of the *al-il bayt* informing him that Kuwait was out of harms way.

A few days after the occupation, a woman reported this dream:

She was left alone in the courtyard of her house. Suddenly, she heard loud noises of panic. She rushed to her room and closed the door. Abruptly, her eyes fell on her old wooden chest which she opened it. Within it she found a green piece of cloth embroidered with golden threads. At this, her friend entered the room and asked: "have you received the gift of Abu-il-Fadhli al-Abbass?"

This dream did not require an interpretation as it was obvious that the gift was the green cloth, a very well-known symbol of *al-il bayt*. The dream meant that the situation in Kuwait would be settled in Kuwaitis favor.

The following are examples of dreams in which Fatima (the daughter of the prophet, the wife of Imam Ali and the mother of Imam Hassan and Imam Hussein), appears as a motherly and protective figure:

Three days after the occasion of commemorating the death of Imam Hassan, which coincided with the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1990, a *Shii* woman reported the following dream:

A sad woman in a black dress entered her house. The woman asked her, "Who are you?" The woman in black answered, "I am Fatima". The woman asked again, "Why are you so sad?" Fatima answered, "I am sad because you have not commemorated in the *Husseiniyahs*, the death of my son Hassan". The woman answered, "But you know we cannot congregate in the *Husseiniyahs* as we are under the occupation". Fatima answered, "Do not worry. This predicament will reach an end. Go and ask the people to pray a two-prostration prayer and after the prayer repeat this sentence: Oh the mother of Hassan save us!"

The following dream was reported three months after the occupation, by a religious *Shii* man who used to volunteer for working in the *Husseiniyahs* every year during Moharam and Safar. By this time people started to lose hope that the Iraqis would leave.

He was sitting in the courtyard of the *Husseiniyah* when Fatima entered slowly and asked him why they were becoming impatient, although the solution of this problem would be soon. The man answered, "We can no longer tolerate this situation, everybody tells us that we should wait, but nothing has happened". She looked at him and said, "A miracle will take

place, only wait and you will see that everything will be solved peacefully”.

Many people reported several dreams similar to the previous ones in which Fatima appeared comforting the people and asking them to be patient.

After the liberation, two people reported dreams in which Fatima told them that the relief (al faraj) would come after seven, but they did not know if it was seven weeks, months or years. When the liberation took place after seven months of occupation, they realized that she meant seven months. Imam Ali also had the same role in the dreams that were reported during the occupation.

Young men were the main target for Iraqis during the invasion, as they were active in the resistance operations. A *Shii* woman who had many sons and brothers reported this dream:

An old man with a bright face and clean clothes (she had a feeling that he was Imam Ali), came to her and gave her a piece of white paper and said to her “give this to Fatima and Zeinab”.

Fatima is the mother of Hussein and Zeinab is his sister. Zeinab is a heroic female figure and a symbol of suffering and grief as a result of what happened to her family members, especially her brother Hussein and her nephews during their struggle with Yazid in Karbala and later on when they were taken as prisoners by Yazid to Damascus. Fatima is also known for the same characteristics. The *Shia* think that she had experienced much suffering from the injustices that she faced from Abu Bakr and Omar when they deprived her of her share in a small village (fadak) which was owned by her father, the Prophet. They also deprived her husband Ali from becoming the first Moslem Caliph. These injustices and sufferings were very hard on Fatima. She died only six months after her father's death. Another occasion of Fatima's suffering was the tragedy of Karbala, although it took place a long time after her death. Yet the *Shia* believe that she was aware, both during her life and after her death, that her son was going to be martyred. She was also aware of all the details that took place for her children and other members of her family in the desert of Karbala, and her suffering was great.

At the beginning of the occupation, a *Shii* woman reported the following dream:

Saddam was buried in a grave. Only his head was seen. He was alive and looked frightened, while an old man with a white beard who she thought must be Imam Ali was standing with a stick in his hand. He was waving his stick angrily towards him.

In January, with increasing anticipation that the war was inevitable, and people were expecting Saddam to use his chemical and other mass destruction weapons in Kuwait, a *Shii* man reported the following dream:

While he was sitting on his prayer mat, a man in white, who he thought should be Imam Ali, came to him and told him, "don't get frightened, no harm will reach Kuwait".

This man used to go to the mosques and tell his dream in an attempt to calm the people.

The other members of *al-il bayt* also appeared in peoples' dreams. Here are some examples:

A dream reported by a *Shii* woman:

The sky was full of birds carrying stones which looked like pieces of fire. Then the birds started to throw these stones at the people. As the stones touched a person, he died immediately. She suddenly saw her young son. The birds threw their stones at him. She expected him to die like the others but, when she looked at him, she saw this sentence written on his forehead. "Oh Hussein help us". He was alive and in good shape.

Another woman reported this dream:

She was in Karbala at the shrine of Abu-il-Fadhl al-Abbass (half brother of Hussein, who was killed in Karbala along with his three brothers). She was sitting at the *bab il hawaij* (literally, "the door of needs". It was believed that whoever has a certain wish should go there and hold the knob of the door and ask Abu-il-Fadl al-Abbass to realize his wish). She was thinking of her brother, who had left Kuwait at the beginning of the occupation. No news came from him since then. Suddenly, she saw her brother passing by the door in a hurry. At the same instance, a man who was sitting in the shrine, told her that her brother was alive and that she should not worry about him. She had a feeling that this man was Abu-il-Fadl al-Abbass.

Some people reported dreams in which they only heard a voice saying. "Relief will come soon" or that they should not worry about Kuwait, yet they were not able to see anything. They usually concluded that they had a feeling that the voices were from the members of *al-il bayt*.

### **Analysis**

During her eight-year war with Iran, Iraq had all types of support from Kuwait, especially economic. Iraq enjoyed many facilities in Kuwait. Almost all Kuwaiti newspapers were glorifying Saddam Hussein and illustrating him as the Arab hero who was protecting the "Eastern Gate of the Arab world". In addition to generous governmental economic aid and support, citizens themselves also participated in donating. The Iraqi embassy in Kuwait was known for its influence on the Kuwaiti newspapers. This interference and influence Iraq had

over Kuwaiti policies, created much tension in the relationship between the Arab *Sunni* population and the people from Persian origins (both *Sunni* and *Shii*).

When the tension started between Kuwait and Iraq, Kuwait continued her rather soft tone in analyzing and commenting on the Iraqi allegations. The Kuwaiti newspapers of the first of August showed the Crown Prince returning from Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, announcing that the differences in views between Kuwait and Iraq are "A summer cloud which will roll by". Yet Kuwaitis who were entering the county through Iraqi frontiers noticed that Iraqi armies were approaching the Kuwaiti border. Kuwait had had two previous experiences with the Iraqi government in the past when Iraq attempted to invade Kuwait.

People, in general, did not expect the invasion to take place, although a couple of weeks preceding the invasion people started to anticipate an aggressive act against Kuwait, perhaps an occupation of one of Kuwaiti islands or some terrorist operations. They started to repeat the famous sentence which was said by Imam Ali "The people of Iraq are the people of infidelity and hypocrisy."<sup>30</sup>

The occupation took place at dawn on the second day of August. At 2 a.m. some foreign news agencies announced that the Iraqi army had crossed the Kuwaiti borders. Some people who were awake at the time heard this news from these agencies, while some had calls from outside Kuwait, especially the U.S.A and the United Kingdom telling them about the invasion. No local source was available through which people could verify the news. Some people learned about the occupation in the morning on their way to their work.

From the first hours of invasion, the country was subjected to the most ferocious atrocities: random killing, hostage taking and consistent destruction and looting of the country. There was no legitimate government, the future was unknown, and for more than five months, people were unable to grasp the world's reaction towards Iraq. The signals were confusing and inconsistent. Some Arab countries were against the occupation and supported all actions of the Kuwaiti government in exile. Other Arab countries were against the occupation, yet they were also against the dispatch of foreign forces to liberate Kuwait and they were promoting an Arab solution for the crisis. Still other Arab countries were not against the occupation and strongly supported Saddam Hussein.

The foreign countries had a clearer position, yet Kuwaitis were not sure that these countries position would remain intact under certain, perhaps unexpected circumstances. The position of Iraq itself was not clear. At the beginning of the invasion, Saddam claimed that there was a revolution in Kuwait and that he was sending his forces to support the revolutionary faction.

When he failed to find a single Kuwaiti to collaborate with him, he formed a puppet government. When this also failed after a short time, he decided to annex Kuwait as a country to which he had historical claims. Even after this last step, he announced that he was ready to withdraw from Kuwait if the great powers accepted his initiatives.

The differences in the views expressed to analyze the political situation, by news agencies, increased people's confusion. Even when operation Desert Storm started, people were not optimistic about its consequences. There was an overwhelming fear of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. Most people tried to get hold of masks to protect themselves against any chemical attack. They stayed in the basement of their houses during the night. Some basements were shared by families who had no basement of their own.

As mentioned above, the occupation coincided with the eleventh day of the Arabic month of Moharam. From the first day of occupation the *Shia* started to emphasize similarities between themselves and *al-il bayt*. They believed that what happened to them was similar to what befell *al-il bayt*. They were a small minority which was attacked by a big and ruthless army, just as Hussein and his followers were a minority that had to face Yazid's big and ruthless army. This, of course, include both the *Shii* and *Sunni* communities in Kuwait. Sectarian differences and grudges that used to exist before the invasion almost disappeared during the occupation. Both *Shia* and *Sunni* population regarded themselves as one nation facing a common fate. Hence, even when the *Shia* regarded themselves as being protected by the Imams, they did not exclude the *Sunni* population from this protection. They regarded both *Shia* and *Sunni* people as one people who were suffering the atrocities of Saddam Hussein. They regarded the Imams as the protectors of all persecuted people and, during occupation, all Kuwaitis were persecuted.

The *Shia* believe that they should be protected, always and everywhere, by *al-il bayt*, who are able to use their power of *Shafaa* in asking God to protect their followers, their *Shia*. Yet as the Imams can protect all persecuted Moslems, and during occupation all Kuwaitis were persecuted, the *Shia* expected the power of Imams' *Shafaa* to include the *Sunni* population as well.

According to *Shii* theology, *al-il bayt* were a minority which went to fight Yazid (who symbolized corruption and tyranny) and his army in order to protect Islam. It is true that they were killed (martyred) and tortured in a ruthless way, but they were predestined by God to be martyred. Through their martyrdom, *al-il bayt* sacrificed themselves and became the guardians and the saviors of the *Shia* in both lives.

The following sentences were heard repeatedly during the occupation: "We are like *al-il bayt* in Karbala. We have no guardian, no protector. Yazid is ready to practice more atrocities on us". Saddam was called Yazid or Shimr. The latter is the man who killed Hussein and carried his head to Yazid in Damascus.

It should be noted that *Shia* usually make these comparisons with *al-il bayt* and their enemies when they describe certain people: a woman who had lost her brother is compared with Zeinab, Hussein's sister. This comparison was often used during the occupation as there were many *Shii* women whose brothers were killed or imprisoned. A cruel person is usually compared with Yazid, so when someone asks about the character of such a man, the answer may be, "he is like Yazid."

Again, we have to return to the concept of *Imamah* to comprehend the Kuwaiti *Shia* sense of unity and collective identification with the *al-il bayt*. The Imams, according to the *Shia*, are the infallible members of the family of the prophet who have been deprived of the political power. During their lives, they were persecuted. This persecution was practiced against them by the political center of power *al-Chilaphah*, which they considered unfair and corrupt. Yet they have used the power of their knowledge which was bestowed on them by God, in the face of the earthly power of their contemporary politicians (the Caliphs). On the second of August, the legitimate power of the Kuwaiti government was challenged and conquered by a ruthless and inhumane ruler of Iraq, who was called Yazid by the Kuwaiti *Shia* from the beginning of occupation.<sup>31</sup>

The Kuwaitis found themselves in a country that lacked a legitimate leadership. Instead, cruelty, inhumanity, and devastation were ruling. This situation was similar for many *Shii* Kuwaitis, to that of the *al-il bayt*. The power which was recalled to face the earthly power of Saddam/Yazid was the power the *al-il bayt* used: the knowledge of *il-Imamah*. The Imams, who (according to the *Shia*) never forget their followers, have communicated their *Shia*, (their followers) through the dreams which contained their Godly knowledge (*al-ilm al-ilah*).

The dreams in which the *al-il bayt* appeared were cultural messages of protection and comfort for people who were left surrounded with danger, confusion, and the inability to decide their future and the future of their loved ones. These dreams were a collective way of surviving the crisis when all other

conventional methods had failed to come to their rescue. It was the revival of the past which was similar in many ways to the present, which made the present bearable and comprehensible. It was a way of sublimating and surpassing the present, not by glorifying a historical past in comparison to a humble present, but by recreating the same past events and symbols and accommodating it in a similar present context.

The *Shia* stopped reporting dreams in which *al-il bayt* comforted them since Kuwait was liberated. Yet, even seven years after the liberation people still report (less frequently) dreams in which *al-il bayt* appear to tell them that the Kuwaitis who were taken hostage during the occupation are alive and they will return to Kuwait. They still have no news about their fate in Iraqi prisons. In fact, Iraq denies continuously her holding of more than 600 Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti hostages. Dreams are perhaps still the only source of knowledge and comfort available for the *Shii* families whose relatives are held in Iraq.

It is hoped that this paper might cast light upon various methods which different societies adopt in time of crises: occupation, war, natural disaster, and other similar situations. We should look into different mechanisms and ways people use, depending mainly on their cultural reservoir, when usual and conventional methods are no longer available. We might also draw attention to the cultural symbolism of dreams and cultural differences in this, as yet, not fully explored field.

#### NOTES

1. The concept of *Imamah* will be discussed in the section on *al-il bayt*.
2. There are no formal statistics for the exact number of the members of the *Shii* community in Kuwait, but the estimated proportion of the *Shia* Kuwaitis to the total Kuwaiti population is around one third.
3. Barbara Tedlock (1992), "Dreaming and Dream Research". In Tedlock Barbara. ed, *Dreaming. Anthropological and Psychological Interpretation*. (School of American Research Press, Santa Fe, New York). See also the preface.
4. Roger Bastide (1971), "Dreams and Culture" in Jules H. Masserman. ed, *Dream Dynamics* (Grune & Stratton), New York. 43.
5. Bastide 45.
6. Michael F Brown (1992), "Ropes of Sand: Order and Imagery in Aguaruna Dream". In Tedlock 156.
7. Brown 167.
8. Brown 167.
9. Brown 168.

10. A. Irving Hallowell (1966), "The Role of Dreams in Ojibwa Culture". In G.E Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillouis. ed. *The Dream and Human Societies* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles) 271.
11. Dorothy Eggan (1966), "Hopi Dreams in Cultural Perspective". In G.E Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillouis. ed. *The Dream and Human Societies* (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles) 238.
12. Eggan 238.
13. William Merrill (1992), "The Raramuri stereotype of dreams". In Tedlock 200.
14. The cultural factor has an important role not only in dream interpretation but also in dream classification. For more details on this subject see Benjamin Kilborne, (1992), "On Classifying Dreams", In Tedlock.
15. Dar al-Muhijah al-Baydhaa, ed, (1995), Tafsir al-Ahlam lil Imam al-Sadik. Dar al-Muhijah al-Baydhaa. Beirut. P.12. And al-Asfour, al-Mirza Muhsin (1986), Bi lughat al Shia al Kiramm fi Taabir al - roayah wal manam. (al-Faqih Bookshop. Kuwait) 123, 124.
16. Al-Asfour, 107, 108. And Dar al-Muhijah al-Baydhaa, ed, 12.
17. An example of a miracle related to Imam Ali is the following dream which is quoted in al-Tabrassi, Mirza Hussein al-Nuri (1983), Dar al-Salam. (four volumes). al-Alfayn Bookshop. Kuwait. (Volume one) P. 215: A man came to a guardian of the shrine of Ali Ibn abi Taleb and gave him two Dinars and asked him to shut the shrine's door and let him sleep there. The guardian shut the door and slept. That night he saw Ali Ibn Abi Talib in his dream telling him to wake up and throw the man out as the man was Christian and should not be allowed in a Moslem shrine. The guardian woke up and put a rope on the man's neck and said to the man, "Get out. You gave me two Dinars and lied to me. You are Christian". The man said, "I am Christian". The guardian answered, "Yes you are Christian. Imam Ali came to me in my dream and told me that you are Christian and ordered me to throw you out". Then the visitor said, "Give me your hand. I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet and Messenger and Ali is His devout one. I swear by God that no one knows that I left Syria and no one knew me in Iraq". He then converted to Islam. (It should be noted that non-Moslems are not allowed in Moslem holy palces).
18. Dar al-Muhijah al-Baydhaa 11. See also al-Tabrsi and al-Asfour.
19. Al-Asfour. 11.
20. Al-Asfour. 121., criticizes a popular *Sunni* book in dream interpretation known as the book of Ibn Seereen. {Ibn Seereen, (N.D), Muntakhab al-kalam fi tafsir al-ahlam. Al-Istiqamah. Cairo. According to him, "The dream is a revelation and inspiration and these two things are concealed from the perception of the human minds, except those who have been chosen by God. "By those he means the Imams. He and other *Shii* authorities claim that the information which came in this book is mainly derived from the works of Greek philosophers. The book is among popular books of dream interpretation in Kuwait. For more details on dream interpretation according to the *Sunni* sect, see al-Nabulsi, Abdul ghani (N.D) Taatir al-anam fi taabir al-manam. Al-Istiqamah. Cairo. And Abi al-dunia, al-Hafidh Ibn (1988), Al-Manamat, al-Quraan Bookshop. Cairo. For more details on the *Shii* books on dram interpretation, see Al-Asfour. (four volumes), al-Hain, Abd Ali, (N.D) Tafsir al-Ahlam. Al-

Ghura al-Hadithah, Iraq and Idrissawi (1996), *Tafsir al-roayah wal manam*. Al-Alami Library. Beirut.

21. It should be noted that both *Shii* and *Sunni* populations believe that dreams predict the future. The differences are in the significance of symbols for each sect. Nevertheless, there are some symbols which are shared by both. The following is an introduction to the "Good Night" section in the Kuwaiti magazine "Hyatuna." This section is allocated to dream interpretation.
 

"about one month before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, many female readers had contacted "Good Night" section to tell its editor an almost identical dream which was dreamt by all of them, in spite of the fact that the reporters did not know each other. They were seeing lightning and thunder in Kuwait's sky and on earth they were seeing earthquakes and volcanoes along with destruction and devastation in both sky and earth. The dream was alluding to an approaching predicament... and after the occupation, there was a dream which kept recurring among a number of people. In this dream, the dreamers heard the voice of shelling and airplanes filling the skies, but when they went to their roofs or opened the windows they saw pigeons in the sky and no sign of the bombs or airplanes". *Hyatuna*. No. 256. Kuwait 4/5/1991. p.47.
22. Zar is a ritual performed for treating a type of illness which is believed to be afflicted by Jinn. This illness is manifested in a number of physical and psychological symptoms.
23. The important role that dreams had in Arab and Moslem life had attracted the attention of the early missionaries who worked in the Gulf area where they have found that, even in the case of conversion to Christianity, dreams have often played an important role. See Bilkert. H.A. "Dreams". *Neglected Arabia*. No. 136. Jan, Feb, Mar 1926.
24. Al Ahzab: 33. The Holy Quran (1968). Text, translation and commentary A. Yusuf Ali. Dar al Arabiya. Beirut.
25. Thais describes the concept of persecution among the *Shia* as follows:
 

".....basic to the *Shia* worldview is a sense of persecution *unjust* persecution. Much as the underlying assumptions of Freudian psychoanalysis focus on certain negative attributes of the personality. So the *Shia* are preconditioned to see the negative, the sad, the tragic and those who are persecuted. The *Shia* see themselves in a *passive* situation as people who are and who have been *acted upon*. There is no doubt that historically, from the time of the Ummayyads to the persecution by the *Sunni* Ottman Turks of the *Shia* minority in eastern Anatolia, there is ample justification for such a view". Thais Gustav (1972), "Religious Symbolism and Social Change: the Drama of Husain". In Nikki R.Keddie. ed. *Scholars, Saints and Sufis. Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*. (University of California Press, Berkeley) 358.
26. For more details on the concept of Imamah and *al-il bayt*, from different perspectives see Haidar, Khalil Ali (1977), *al-Imamah wal Sawlajan*. Qurtas. Kuwait, Gustav Thais. al-Kadhmi Abdulminim (1952), *al Maassumun al arbaa ashar*. Al najah. Baghdad, al-Khoui, al-Tabtabai and al-Majlissi (1977), *al Shafaah min wa fi al bayan wal mizan*. Dar al bayan al arabi. Beirut and Makki, Sadik (1984), *Madhalim al-il bayt*. Al-Dar al-alamiyah. Beirut.
27. For more details on the role of the descendents of the Imams see Emrys Peters (1970), "Aspects of Rank and Status among Muslims in a Lebanese Village". In Louise E.Sweet ed. *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*. Vol 2. (The Natural History Press. N.Y.) 76-123.

28. See Hussein, Taha (1953), *Ali wa Banuh*. Dar al-Maarif. Cairo. Thaiss and Haidar.
29. See Thais for more details on this subject.
30. This was said when the people of Kufa asked him to go to Kufa as they will support him in his struggle against his enemies, at the beginning of his rule, *Chilaphah*, and when the great disorder started in Madinah, following the death of Othman. Yet, when he went there, they deserted him.
31. It is important to note that, unlike the majority of the *Sunni* community in Kuwait, the *Shia*, through their links with the Iraqi *Shia*, were familiar with the atrocities of Saddam Hussein, a long time before the occupation took place.

