



An Analysis of Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* from the Theories of Identity, Race and Gender

Heather Raffo'nun *9 Parts of Desire* (*Tutkunun 9 Parçası*) Adlı Tiyatro Eserinin Kimlik, Irk ve Cinsiyet Analizleri

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Abstract

Gender is a complex issue, especially for women in Iraq during its tumultuous historical period, and many women suffer from both gendered and racial hardships. Not only sexual harassment but also a patriarchal society oppress their physical and psychological state of mind. Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* is an excellent symbol for indicating how diverse women portray different identities and experiences. However, each of them fights for one thing: love. Patriarchal regulations, with their clothing rules or religious restrictions, create limited space for Iraqi women in the play, and the women search for liberation throughout the play. Some escape from their home countries, and some stay and fight for freedom. However, each character in the play struggles bravely against difficulties. This study will examine these women regarding identity, racial, and gender theories. From these approaches, the gender theory will uncover the essence of the play due to dealing with nine women's search for desire. The space reflects these women with lyrical statements, so the theatrical play must be narrated in a poetic monologue. Using the theories of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Julia Kristeva, the study creates authentic perspectives in Middle Eastern American Drama.

Keywords: Heather Raffo, in-betweenness, *9 Parts of Desire*, identity, gender, race, patriarchy

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Öz

Cinsiyet kavramı, tarihteki karmaşık dönem ile birlikte kadınlar için -özellikle Iraklı kadınlar- karmaşık bir durum haline gelmiştir ve bu nedenle buradaki pek çok kadın hem cinsiyet açısından hem de ırksal anlamda sıkıntılar yaşamaktadır. Yalnızca cinsel saldırı değil, bunun yanı sıra ataerkil toplum fiziksel ve psikolojik olarak baskı uygulamaktadır. Heather Raffo'nun *9 Parts of Desire* adlı eseri, pek çok farklı kadının yaşamlarındaki farklı kimlikleri ve tecrübeleri nasıl yansıttığını gösteren önemli bir örnektir. Fakat her bir karakter tek bir şey için savaşılmaktadır: aşk. Kıyafet kuralları ya da dinsel kısıtlamalar ile ataerkil düzenler oyunda Iraklı kadınlar için sınırlı bir alan oluşturur ve oyun boyunca her bir karakter kendi öz kimliklerini arar. Bazıları kendi memleketlerinden kaçarken, bazıları ise özgürlük için kalıp savaşırlar, ama oyundaki her bir karakter cesur kalpleriyle zorluklar karşısında mücadele etmektedir. Bu çalışma, kimlik, ırk ve cinsiyet açısından bu kadınları incelemektedir. Bu yaklaşımlar arasında cinsiyet teorisi, 9 kadının tutku arayışlarıyla oyunun özünü yansıtacaktır. Tiyatro oyunu aynı zamanda kadınları lirik bir anlatımla ifade eder ve bu nedenle poetik monolog şeklinde sunulmuştur. Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall ve Julia Kristeva gibi farklı teorisyenler sayesinde, çalışma Orta Doğu Amerikan Tiyatrosu'nda otantik bir bakış açısı yaratmayı hedeflemektedir. **Anahtar Kelimeler:** Heather Raffo, arada kalma, *9 Parts of Desire*, kimlik, cinsiyet, ırk, ataerkil düzen

Introduction

“God created sexual desire in ten parts; then he gave nine parts to women and one to men” (Ali b. Abi Talib qt in Raffo, 2006, p. 12). The play starts with the caliph of Talib, the founder of the Shi’a sect of Islam, and this statement indicates how women are considered seductive beings. Womanhood is always viewed as an inferior and sexually gendered category worldwide. Islamic countries especially describe women as obedient to their husbands. Conversely, men are considered authoritative and influential people in the patriarchal society, and they generally rule over wars that destroy history.

Heather Raffo’s *9 Parts of Desire* presents how women experience harsh difficulties and overcome these troubles with the desire for freedom and liberation. Raffo has a multicultural heritage: her father is from Iraq, and her mother is American. In the Author’s Note for the play, Raffo states how she is classified as the ‘other’ from the perspectives of Iraqi people. She tells a story of what an Iraqi border patrolman says to her, even after stating her ethnic background. He says, “Welcome to your father’s country; we hope you take back a good expression of the Iraqi people, know our people are not our government, please be at home here, and when you return, tell your people about us” (Raffo, 2006, p. ix). This statement sheds light on Raffo’s alienation from her home country and her original identity. Iraqi people cause Raffo to feel marginalized in her home country, Iraq. It also leads her to search for the meanings of identity and home. Her search extends to *9 Parts of Desire*, where she presents various Iraqi women’s identities, most colored by traumatic experiences under the dictator Saddam’s government. In this theatrical play with poetic monologues, each Iraqi woman reveals her ultimate desire for liberation and freedom from painful hardships.

The play *9 Parts of Desire* has many political and historical illustrations, including the results of the Gulf War, the restrictive Saddam policy, and the bombings in Iraq. Written in 2003, Raffo constructs a type of political agenda with undefinable traumatic situations: brutal tortures towards Iraqi women and men appear as inhumane reactions to the history of Iraq. In the article “Shahrazad Tells her Stories in Raffo’s *Nine Parts of Desire*,” this gloomy atmosphere is mentioned with historical references: “Under Saddam regime and for more than a generation, Iraqi people lived in a state of ‘permanent paranoia,’ which created fear of being expressible” (Mahadi, 2012, p. 93). The play is full of traumatic and painful war experiences narrated by nine women. It can be considered “an example of how art can make the world eloquently name pain” (Lahr, 2004, par. 3). Raffo is also concerned about feminist issues with the depictions of women who suffer from many difficulties and who show the excellent resistance against the

patriarchal government and society. In addition, the Iraqi-American writer Raffo uses multiple cultural iconographies to demonstrate her home culture. Inside these iconographies, the most significant element is Islam itself and traditional clothes such as the *abaya*. In part involving identity theory, these cultural heritages will be seen by analyzing characters as they are essential for creating a sense of belonging in their minds. This study will also focus on *9 Parts of Desire* regarding three theories: identity, race, and gender.

Iraqi-American playwright and artist Heather Raffo grew up in Okemos, Michigan, with her father's Iraqi traditions. As a result, Raffo experiences in-betweenness in that she was born in America with her Iraqi cultural identity. In her life, Raffo suffered from many hardships because of living in the US with her Iraqi identity. The countries of Iraq and the US create in-betweenness in her life because these two countries are entirely different from each other, and she is always trapped simultaneously in between the two identities. Her eye-opening visits to Iraq led her to attribute diverse prosperities as she was writing about the real experiences of Iraqi women in *9 Parts of Desire*. The following quotation explicitly states her writing process:

She visited Iraq twice, once when she was only five years and the other once in 1993. During a 1993 visit to the Saddam Art Center in Baghdad, she saw a painting in a back room called "Savagery," which depicted a nude woman clinging to a barren tree. Raffo's curiosity about the artist and the work let her begin interviewing Iraqi women. She interviewed Iraqi women inside and in exile for over ten years. The composites she has drawn of their lives - stories of hardship, violence, and precarious survival - comprise her play *Nine Parts of Desire*, which she wrote in 2003. (Mahadi, 2012, p. 90)

The Saddam Art Center in Baghdad can be a turning point for Raffo's life because she starts to collect harsh memories of Iraqi women and narrates these women's experiences in a poetic monologue. Her observation reflects how the patriarchy and its practices create the effect of loss for Iraqi women, and as a result, historical destruction causes a fearful identity. Furthermore, Raffo's language is very harsh: she strictly criticizes the Iraqi society and government; for example, she states: "I did a painting once of a woman/ eaten by Saddam's son" (Raffo, 2006, p. 8). As the woman stated in those lines, Saddam and his government victimized many innocent people. Being a woman in Iraq is quite tricky with a patriarchal government. Raffo authentically expresses the nine women's desires and wishes for liberation and love in *9 Parts of Desire*.

An Analysis of Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*

Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* is an experimental theatrical play with poetic monologues in which all the characters tell their personal experiences with a sincere mood.

Each woman is seen as strong and brave despite oppressive historical events. Raffo uses English and some Arabic words throughout the play to construct a multicultural identity. The play has nine characters: Mullaya, Layal, Amal, Huda, The Doctor, Iraqi Girl, Umm Ghada, The American, and Nanna. All women wear the abaya, a traditional cloth covering the body of women, strengthening the idea of obedience for womanhood. The play starts with the expressions of Mullaya that are full of catastrophic and gloomy atmosphere. She emphasizes how history shapes their fates with the destruction of Genghis Khan:

When the grandson of Genghis Khan/ burned all the books in Baghdad/ the river ran black
with ink/ What color is this river now? / It runs the color of old shoes/ the color of distances/
the color of soles torn and worn/ this river is the color of worn soles. (Raffo, 2006, p. 4)

These lines reveal the patriarchal roots and their harm towards humanity and cultural heritage. Another character is Layal, an artist, and she defends her home country while in Iraq, not as an escape from Iraq. She is an essential symbolization of resistance in the play as she states: “and we are looking for something always / I think it’s light” (Raffo, 2006, p. 7). These lines create hope for humanity despite all the destructive bombing incidents in Iraq. Amal is a more dynamic character than the others with her search for peace and love. Amal’s expressions indicate her emotional state of mind, and this character continuously changes location because of her complex love relationships. As a result, she has difficulties with the sense of belonging and home in her life. The other character, 70-year-old Huda, criticizes Saddam and his government, and she mostly mentions political issues with references to Communism and bourgeoisie: “I protested all my life, I was always political / even if I was bourgeois /in 58 anybody intelligent was Communist” (Raffo, 2006, p. 19).

The play contains political and satirical illustrations depicting the Gulf War and bombing events. The Doctor explains the brutal oppression of history via medical references. The radiation damages many Iraqi people’s lives and their future generations. The Doctor states: “And the cancers, *la*, I’ve never seen them in Iraq, girls of seven, eight years old with breast cancer. But it’s toddlers even with breast cancer, more than once cancer in the same patient, whole families all suffering from cancer—” (Raffo, 2006, p. 21). As seen with this statement, even little children have cancer due to the effects of bombings during the Gulf War. The Doctor’s striking expression upon this issue, “it’s better, maybe, death—” (Raffo, 2006, p. 21) summarizes how the world is becoming dirtier with cruel practices, and even death is the best escapism from a natural face of life. Iraqi Girl is another character in the play, and she is oppressed under the dark history of Iraq. She tries to understand all the dire circumstances

around her. For instance, she narrates her mother's protective manner with the following statements:

I have not been to school/ since America came/ "You are stupid," she says, "you don't need to go to school."/ But I think she didn't like the soldiers coming to our school/ they looked like N-Sync, mostly Justin Timberlake, / and they made all the girls to laughing really hard/ and since that day she won't let me go to school/ because I waved to them. (Raffo, 2006, p. 23)

The mother of an Iraqi girl here expresses her desperate excuses to protect her daughter from the rapist and savage American soldiers. There are many innocent commentaries of Iraqi girls on all the situations at that time. Umm, Ghada is another hopeful character despite all difficulties in history. In the poetic monologue, Umm Ghada states: "I named my daughter Ghada./ Ghada means tomorrow./ So I am Umm Ghada, Mother of Ghada./ It is a sign of joy and respect to call a parent by their *kunya*" (Raffo, 2006, p. 28). The implication for tomorrow illustrates hope with the name Ghada, but all the sad events and dead bodies destroy this hopefulness in the play. The other character, Nanna, is an older woman who sells items in the play. She reflects the American capitalist society because she continues to sell cultural things despite all the losses and deaths. Nanna also remembers gendered commentaries with her personal experiences:

My teacher say no/ it is wrong before Allah/ drawing her hair and her body showing—/ I am disrespecting./ So I look to the other children and/ they drawing only the fathers and grandfathers/ because of the name line. (Raffo, 2006, p. 44)

Patriarchal practices start in schooling time, and children subconsciously learn about the discriminated society. Showing women's hair and bodies is a great sin in Islam, and this perception creates various taboos for women in Iraq. The last character in the play is the US, and she is presented as a watcher from America of all the catastrophes in Iraq via TV. Throughout the play, she tries to contact her uncle, and their helpless connection with a telephone strengthens how the American adheres to her home country. Her identity searches for cultural and traditional heritage with a desire for a common culture. The next part will focus on these characters in terms of identity and racial and gendered theories.

Identity Theory

Identity is a complex phenomenon, and each woman in the play has a solid but traumatic identity. Historical and social circumstances in life shape it, and Stuart Hall with Paul Du Gay explains it as follows: "Identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse; we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific

discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (1996, p. 4). Discourses created by cultural and historical practices mirror the processes of characters in that each experiences different perceptions. Raffo herself has the problem of in-betweenness because of her parents’ cultural contradiction, so she reflects the nine women with deeply sensitive moods in poetic expressions.

In the play, the most apparent indicator of identity is cultural iconographies such as the Muslim prayer, a traditional song such as “Che Mali Wali,” and the *abaya*, the traditional cloth for women and men. Both these values are unique for Muslims because their principles strictly show the practices of Islam and religion as an essential element for constructing identities. For instance, the *abaya* is a kind of cloth that covers a woman’s body as it is a religious rule to protect the body of women. The nine women merge their cultural identities by using traditional heritage icons. Despite their cultural practices in Iraq, they feel loss and desperation because of the historical turbulence and the lack of originality in many parts of the play. For example, Mullaya, with poverty in her life, suffers from emptiness, and this impoverished condition can imply that she lives with a lack of identity. The following statements express her emptiness: “My feet hurt/ I have holes in my shoes/ I have holes now even in my feet/ there are holes everywhere/ even in this story” (Raffo, 2006, p. 5). The pain in her feet powerfully illustrates Mullaya’s tiredness due to patriarchal effects and poor living conditions. Another identity problem is seen in the contradiction between men and women. Throughout *9 Parts of Desire*, Raffo emphasizes how patriarchal society is dominant and oppresses women in Iraq. However, women always resist this tyranny and try to construct their own identities with love, desire, or regret in the play. Laclau explicitly argues the identity with references to the man and woman contradiction:

If an objectivity partially affirms itself, it is only by repressing that which threatens it. Derrida has shown how an identity’s constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles - man/woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black-white relationship, in which white, of course, is equivalent to ‘human being’. ‘Woman’ and ‘black’ are thus ‘marks’ in contrast to the unmarked terms of ‘man’ and ‘white’. (Laclau in Hall, 1996, p. 5)

The continuous struggle between two poles creates constructed identities in society. For instance, womanhood is always credited with an obedient and suitable identity; on the other hand, manhood is considered a solid and authoritative identity. In the play, Amal and her love relationships show the constructed identities of men and women. She states her second marriage in this way:

So I marry him, my second marriage, / and I went to his village in Israel. / He promised me/
we would move and go to Europe somewhere or Canada/ but then we never move/ his wife
didn't want—/ aa, his other wife, number one, she makes him stay. (Raffo, 2006, p. 14)

These lines shed light on many significant issues, such as identity and gender. Amal's second marriage happens somewhere outside Iraq, and so it is understood that gendered regulation is seen everywhere. Moreover, her second husband has another wife. It is an insulting event for Amal as there is no marriage equality, creating hypocrisy in love affairs.

Racial Identity

Race is about power relations worldwide because it creates constructed identities and situations. Delgado states, "As marginalized people we should strive to increase our power, cohesiveness, and representation in all significant areas of society. We should do this because we are entitled to these things, and fundamental fairness requires this allocation of power" (2009, p. 110). For example, America manipulates ethnic and racial issues with its cultural mosaics, and in history, it has tried to be a world power. Thus, it exploits other countries and nations while misusing their traditional practices. The playwright Heather Raffo is racially and ethnically in a multi-cultural status because of her parental background, and she is the one who is suffering an identity crisis in her personal life.

9 Parts of Desire has racially essential points that are analyzed from the perspective of women. One of the characters, Huda, mentions that there is no segregation between different racial groups in Iraq:

the worst thing I fear most now is civil war. / Iraqis don't want to be cut up, to be separated.
/ Ya'ni, we had fine interrelations/ my family married with the Shi'a, my husband was a
Kurd/ there was no segregation sort of thing— these people/ they have been living together
in this area for thousands of years. (Raffo, 2006, p. 39)

It is a significant commentary that Iraqi people give importance to living together, and the unity with diverse ethnicities inside one culture shapes the culture of Iraqis. However, external forces such as American soldiers and historical economic depressions damage the Iraqi culture. Racial and ethnic connections are also seen in the conversation between the American and her uncle throughout the terrorist attacks in Iraq. The American is worried about her family and relatives in the play. Her emotional expressions give a critical aspect of understanding how Iraqis protect their connections despite hardships in communication tools such as the telephone. The American reveals her worries with the following lines, which involve just "I love you" and the names of her families: "I love you/ habibti, habibti/ I love you/Behnam/ Rabab/ Ammar/ Bashshar/ Nassar/ Luma" (Raffo, 2006, p. 59).

Another racial commentary can be again seen with the American in that she is in America but carries Iraqi heritage with her soul. She tells the racial points in her poetic monologue:

We just keep going/ subway/ rush rush/ Christmas shopping/ and/ the war, it's all so heartbreaking don't you think? / I don't even know/ hundreds of thousands? / How many Iraqis? / And/ a woman actually turned to me/ and said that/ she said/ "The war it's all so heartbreaking"/ she was getting a pedicure. / I walk/ I can't walk/ down/ the street/ I want/ New York to shop. / Why don't we count the number of Iraqi dead? (Raffo, 2006, p. 49)

Christmas shopping and 'war' reveal the clash of cultures that Iraq and America have entirely different practices and traditions. Besides, the indifference of American women represents American society in the play, as America is such a greedy country that it destroys Iraq and its folks. Kristeva's term "abject" emerges as a fundamental understanding of the race issue in that a person can alienate himself/herself with the loss of authentic self rather than others. Kristeva explains it as follows: "Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you." (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). In the play, a woman with a pedicure can be an abject position because she loses her moral values. Abjection is seen with hostile and disgusting meanings in depicting the racist woman here.

Gender Theory

Gender is the foremost issue in *9 Parts of Desire* because of its feminist outlooks and criticism. Raffo chooses nine strong women characters to strengthen the effects of monologues, and these women's expressions are mentioned in a poetic style. Women search for freedom and liberation against men who are reflected as "savages--brutes, betrayers, rapists" (Lahr, 2004, p. 136). From the perspective of feminism, *9 Parts of Desire* "brings us closer to the inner life of Iraq than a thousand slick-surfaced TV reports" (Teachout, 2005, par. 2). The play has emerged as a powerful symbol for showing traumatic experiences in that each woman is also the embodiment of victimized patriarchal culture. One of the suffering women, Huda, expresses the torture and emotional rape around her: "We could hear things, all night, always rape, / or rape with electronic instruments" (Raffo, 2006, p. 52). History is so brutal that many people have traumatic disorders in their lives. Besides patriarchy and terrorism in history, religion also restricts women; for instance, it orders them to cover their heads, and an Iraqi girl states her mother's fear about this issue: "She doesn't leave the house/ except to go to the market/ with my uncle/ and before she goes she covers her hair/ she is afraid of getting stolen by gangs—/ now they steal women for money/ or to sell them." (Raffo, 2006, p. 24). Women cannot go

outside without men, and these scary thoughts are shaped by historical situations such as American soldiers who rape or terrorist bombing attacks.

In patriarchal societies, women have challenges understanding their identities because dominance is in the hands of manhood. The following statement explicitly summarizes the situation of womanhood in the context of identity: "Identity is based on a distinction of the self from what is believed to be not self" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 76). Simon de Beauvoir tries to catch the readers' attention while asking questions about the definition of womanhood in *The Second Sex*:

Why do women not contest male sovereignty? No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset; it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, represents the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view. Where does this submission in woman come from? (2010, p. 27)

Homi Bhabha's 'third space' theory explains how Arabs alienate from their own cultures while living outside their home countries, and in the play, Raffo gives the idea of alienation with the nine-strong women. Some of these women are living in their own home countries. Still, some are far away from their homelands, observe all the catastrophes in the media, and are significantly impacted and experience alienation in the sense of belonging to the home. For instance, the Americans and Huda are considered the watchers of their countries' news outside. In addition to all these issues, it is essential to think that being a woman in an Islamic country is much more complex than in other countries. The hardships of being far away from home are stated with the references of Frantz Fanon in *The Location of Culture*:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged (Bhabha, 1994, p. 40-41).

In the part of gender theory, Amal is one of the most significant characters with her continuous change of location and love affairs. She shows incredible bravery in deeply loving and following her dreams in the play. From the perspective of feminism, she resists the patriarchal society with her free self-decisions. Amal has many husbands, and the first one cheats on her. She states this situation in the poetic monologue: "I left him. / I was feeding my daughter, Tala, at the time/ and driving my son Omar to school/ I forgot some papers for Omar/ so I drove back to get them/ and I saw my husband in bed with my very close friend" (Raffo, 2006, p. 13). This brief and shocking statement emphasizes how Amal cares for her children,

unlike her husband, who cheats on her. Amal's sincere devotion to her children without provision makes her a courageous birth mother.

Conclusion

Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* depicts how Iraqi women fight for liberation through their traumatic experiences. Raffo expresses her in-betweenness while talking in the poetic monologue. She strengthens the idea of being a woman in an Islamic country. At that time, historical hardships such as terrorist bombings and American harassment severely repressed women in addition to their cultural patriarchy, such as Islamic and social rules that are determined by manhood in society. The images of Iraqi women are explicitly seen inside Iraq and in exile, and these images erase the general conception of loyal Arab American women. The nine women, who illustrate the dark sides of history with their poetic expressions, follow their desires for love, liberation, or freedom. Heather Raffo is a powerful representative voice for Iraqi women with *9 Parts of Desire*. At the same time, she is an embodiment of the in-betweenness between the Iraqi and American identities. She tries to embrace the American identity with her Iraqi one. These two cultures are entirely different, so she also lives otherness in American society.

Having used the traumatic stories about war, Raffo implies 9/11 in history, leading to fragmented identities for women, especially after the sexual and social harassment. Her theatrical play is a political commentary and a poetic source in Arab American Theater. It helps to create a voice for women in Arab countries because the play provides an understanding of the statement that "the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" (Hall, 1996, p. 89). Raffo creates this eye while reflecting on her Iraqi identity that comes from her father's side. Each woman in the play symbolizes diverse issues via historical, social, and cultural references. For example, the artist Layal tries to construct her own space with colors and paintings to reflect life's harsh realities. Raffo is also seen as the combination of two different cultures, but she is close to the Iraqi culture, and the following quotation expresses her feelings:

I am an American, but I became aware of myself as an Iraqi--had a sense of myself as "the other"--for the first time during the Gulf War... I'd walk down the street and overhear people saying, "Let's go fuck the Iraqis." I realized from that point on that my cousins in Iraq--family whom I loved--would be viewed by many Americans as dark and dirty. (Renner, 2005, p. 20)

Despite living in America, her statement indicates her sense of belonging to Iraq in that she sees her American identity as the "other". She suffers from in-betweenness because these two cultures are entirely different in terms of various cultural and religious practices. In the play,

the American can be the reflection of Raffo as she uses 'my great city' for Iraq, and her connections with both cultures reveal her multi-cultural aspects of her. The following lines in a monologue explicitly illustrate her feelings towards her home country and the other:

Sorry for my great city/ hopes this never happens again—/ all the family/ worried sick about me. / And/ my mom's family in Michigan/ they all called my parents in Michigan to see if I was OK/ I know they love me but/ they didn't call me personally/ and my Iraqi family are calling from halfway around the world/ calling New York/ they didn't stop until/ they heard my voice. (Raffo, 2006, p. 56)

At that point, belongingness is the crucial term for accepting the social norms in society. Belongingness is "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (Hagerty et al., 2002, p. 794).

In the play, the nine women attempt to belong to the place where they live, but many problems face them. The most crucial is their religious and cultural differences, as Iraq and America have entirely different practices. They alienate themselves and those around them because it naturally appears from the other rules and traditions. The nine women reveal the play as not only the materialist side of America but also a political agenda. By narrating their stories in a poetic style, Raffo tries to transmit the deep emotional sides of women. Besides these moving parts, they also demonstrate excellent resistance against the patriarchal society and its dominant system. In general, history sheds light on women's traumatic experiences, and *9 Parts of Desire* is involved in historical and political issues in terms of this perspective. It also reflects diverse identity analysis with strong women characters. Thus, it can be seen as a perfect manifestation of Arab women in the aspect of feminism, and it is beneficial for the Middle Eastern Arab American Drama to understand the context of Arab American women's identities better. Raffo constructs a feminist and political perspective with her play, *9 Parts of Desire*.

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