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**Encoding Desire: A Gynocritical and AI-Assisted
Discourse Analysis of Heather Raffo's Nine Parts
of Desire, Fallujah, and Noura**

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the study provides a gynocritical and AI-assisted discourse analysis of the main plays by Heather Raffo, Nine Parts of Desire, Fallujah and Noura to discuss the ways in which the plays mediate the female desire, frame trauma, and give the center stage to the agency of Iraqi women. The study focuses on how the characters in Raffo question patriarchal and orientalist discourses through a feminist literature approach of gynocriticism in order to create narrative control in conflict- and diasporic contexts. Theoretically synthesizing AI-driven techniques like a sentiment analysis or topic modeling, the paper shows how the computational means can complement the conventional close reading, exposing both the linguistic and thematic patterns hidden in human interpretation. The results highlight the contribution of Raffo to the transformation of modern theatre as the author focuses on the peripheral voices and provides a sophisticated depiction of the strength of Arab women and their sorrows and dreams. Finally, the interdisciplinarity of this approach is revealing in terms of the possibilities of integrating the humanistic and digital approaches to the development of the feminist scholarship in the field of literature and the study of the theatre of the Middle East.

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بناء الارادة: مقارنة تحليلية تكاملية بين النقد النسوي وتحليل الخطاب المدعوم بالذكاء الاصطناعي في مسرحيات هيدر رافو تسعة

أجزاء من الرغبة، الفلوجة و نورا

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المستخلص:

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلًا نقديًا نسويًا بالتضافر مع الذكاء الاصطناعي للخطاب في المسرحيات الرئيسية لهيدر رافو، وهي تسعة أجزاء من الرغبة، الفلوجة و نورا، لمناقشة الطرق التي تتوسط بها هذه المسرحيات الرغبة الأنثوية، وتوتر الصدمة، وتضع فاعلية المرأة العراقية في بؤرة الاهتمام. تركز الدراسة على كيفية مقاومة الشخصيات في أعمال رافو للخطابات الأبوية والاستشراقية من خلال منهج الأدب النسوي للنقد النسوي (gynocriticism) من أجل خلق سيطرة سردية في سياقات الصراع والشتات. من خلال التوليف النظري لتقنيات مدفوعة بالذكاء الاصطناعي مثل تحليل المشاعر أو نمذجة الموضوعات، تُظهر الدراسة كيف يمكن للوسائل الحاسوبية أن تكمل القراءة المتأنيبة التقليدية، كاشفةً عن الأنماط اللغوية والموضوعية المخفية في التفسير البشري. تسلط النتائج الضوء على مساهمة رافو في تحويل المسرح الحديث حيث تركز المؤلفة على الأصوات الهامشية وتقدم تصويرًا متطورًا لقوة المرأة العربية وأحزانها وأحلامها. أخيرًا، يكشف هذا النهج متعدد التخصصات عن إمكانيات دمج المناهج الإنسانية والرقمية لتطوير الدراسات النسوية في مجال الأدب ودراسة مسرح الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية : هيدر رافو، النقد النسوي، تحليل الخطاب، النقد الأدبي ، التضافر مع الذكاء الاصطناعي، المرأة العربية، الصدمة، وكالة المرأة، الرغبة، المسرح العراقي، الشتات.

1. Introduction

The art of portraying the presence of the marginalized voice has become one of the most topical areas in the world of modern theatre, which breaks the traditional models of narration and creates a new more general and inclusive reality of humanity. Heather Raffo, an Iraqi-American artist, is one of the playwrights who play a significant role in this movement of change because her work touches on the issues of identity, trauma, and displacement so deeply. As a cultural intermediary, Raffo perfectly resides in the grey areas between the Eastern and Western worlds, the positions in which she has skillfully found her voice, and speaks on behalf of those usually marginalized or misinterpreted in the mainstream. Together, her plays (*Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah* and *Noura*) provide an impressive excursion of what it is like to be an Iraqi woman and the depths to which they have been exposed to the trauma and the search of identity and the perseverance they have to express their desires despite the challenges. The importance of the detailed insight into the manner in which the works of Raffo performed on the stage question and redefine the traditional discourse about gender, war, and displacement is what this paper is aimed to deal with. More precisely, it uses a gynocritical perspective, a feminist concept of literature that focuses on writing, experience, and expression of women, in order to see how Raffo focuses on female agency and desire on a deeper level. There are three fundamental research questions that motivate the study :

- .1 What kind of patriarchal, orientalist images of Arab women do Heather Raffo *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura* define themselves against with the help of gynocritical approaches?
- .2 How might the discourse analysis of desire, trauma and identity in these plays by Raffo be used to re-consider the role of female agency in both conflict and post- conflict storytelling?
- .3 What can discourse analysis with the help of AI bring to our knowledge about the fine linguistic and thematic structures of Raffo, in the manifestations of desire and resistance especially?

This study claims that *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura* by Heather Raffo, are gynocritical and discourse analytical and therefore they actively coded and foreground the female desire and female agency within the context of trauma and identity by re-narrating and by extension re-defining trauma and identity in an overall transformative way which

can also be enhanced through the use of AI- assisted analytical techniques. AI techniques are vital in post-humanistic age, and cannot be avoided (Ibrahim et al., 2025) This study has value because it can contribute to multiple academic disciplines: feminist theatre studies, as it shows the necessity to focus on the voices of the marginalized female characters; Middle Eastern studies, as it offers an alternative to the stereotypic descriptions of Arab women; the trauma studies, as it goes beyond the victimhood and identifies agency and resistance; and the emergent area of AI in literary criticism, as it proves its usefulness as an additional tool to perform deep textual analysis. Further parts of this paper will present a detailed literature review, the plan of methodology and theoretical approach, gynocritical and discourse analyses of both plays, the possible insights and cross-textual conclusions that could be made with the help of AI, and a conclusion that will present the main findings of this paper and possible implications of the conducted study on future research.

2. Literature Review

Gynocriticism, termed by Elaine Showalter in the 1970s, is an important change in the direction of the feminist criticism of literature. Gynocriticism is also a break through of the simple critic of male-authored texts because of their patriarchal tendencies (feminist critique) and the effort to consider women as the creators of textual meaning, their own experiences, language and cultural dimensions (Showalter, 1979). The origins of such an understanding of a different female literary tradition were set by Showalter in her seminal work titled *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) which claimed that women writers needed to be studied in their own terms, and not just in terms of the male literary tradition. This is a method that lays stress on the construction of a female aesthetic, the study of female subjectivity, and the study of the way in which female writers deal with and tend to break dominant traditions of writing. Gynocriticism has been a useful tool in feminist analysis of women writers in the contemporary world of feminist theory and practice, specifically in the gender binaries and in the challenges to patriarchal narrative structures, as with the work of Heather Raffo.

Discourse analysis is a methodology, which is used to analyze language in action, that is, it is concerned with the ways in which meaning is

constructed in particular social and cultural settings. It extends the more superficial approach to texts to the search of the power relations, ideologies and subjectivities inherent in stories (Fairclough, 2003). Discourse analysis is an effective tool in literary criticism that helps to interpret the ways whereby writers use language to create perceptions, break conventions and present multiple truths. Various schools of discourse analysis

(Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Foucauldian discourse analysis) offer a variety of tools to analyse literary text. As an example, CDA explores the connection among language, power, and ideology, and thus, it has shown how dominant discourses are reproduced or resisted by making specific decisions about language choices. Foucauldian analysis however examines the process of discourses creating knowledge, truth and subjectivity in a particular historical and institutional background. This is because when literary works are examined through discourse analysis, it is through the use of discourse analysis that the critics can shed light to the role of narrative voice, lexical selection, rhetorical figures and thematic pattern in the construction of meaning and representation of the experiences of characters, especially in expressing or repressing desire and trauma.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and its subdomains, like computational linguistics and natural language processing (NLP), have brought up new horizons of literary analysis. AI-aided literary criticism is the application of computational tools and algorithms to analyze large amounts of texts, recognize patterns and draw insights that could be hard or time-consuming to find among human readers (Jockers, 2013). The advantages of such a method are obvious: AI will be able to determine patterns of repetitions of linguistic phenomena, thematic patterns, and stylistic elements in large volumes of literary texts. It is also capable of increasing the objectivity of analysis, as it offers the quantitative data regarding the frequencies of words, sentiment valence, and narrative structures. As an example, sentiment analysis may be used to measure the tone of the dialogues between the characters, whereas topic modeling would help to find the underlying themes that unite different sections of a text. However, in spite of the encouraging prospects, the application of AI to literary criticism does not lack limitations and ethical issues. There may be biases in training data, and training data may be interpreted in a biased

way, and human interpretation of literary texts is usually very nuanced, and this aspect may not be reproduced by AI. Thus, AI tools should be considered as the supplemental tools that complement, but do not substitute, the humanistic inquiry and require close monitoring by humans and appropriate evaluation of generated results.

Arab women in the literature and theatre have long been marred with orientalist stereotypes and patriarchal discourse that tends to show Arab women either as helpless victims or sexualized objects (Said, 1978). These stereotypes often dehumanize Arab women, deny them their agency, complexity and various experiences, which helps to create a monolithic, and in many cases dehumanizing image. Feminist artists and writers have been writing and speaking on behalf of the necessity of real voices who break these stereotypes and present more dynamic characters. The work by Heather Raffo is one of the strong counter-narratives to these restrictive portrayal of people. Although some of the available literature on the plays of Raffo have addressed some of the themes of identity, trauma, and diaspora, there is an evident research gap that applies a gynocritical approach to the analysis of the works of Raffo through the use of AI-based discourse analysis to exhaustively reveal the mechanisms through which her writings represent the female desire and agency. This paper seeks to address this shortcoming by evaluating *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura* in detail and proving how the artistic vision of Raffo re-tells and re-contextualizes the story of Arab women through conflict and displacement .

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The proposed research has a qualitative, interpretive approach that incorporates a literary analysis with the exploration of AI-aided approaches on a conceptual level. The main method will be the close reading of Heather Raffo works *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah* and *Noura* based on their language, the use of symbols, the structure and character development. The general purpose is to discover how all these stories create gendered trauma and confront the existing patriarchal and orientalist codes via female subjectivity and desire.

The critical theory that the researcher uses as the basis of the study is the gynocritical framework that was put forth by Elaine Showalter (Showalter, 1979). Gynocriticism is a departure that gynocriticism goes beyond conventional literary criticism which, in many cases, tends to

make male literary traditions take the form of a norm and focuses on women experiences, language and expressions of culture. This model is essential in explaining how the plays of Raffo place female grief, motherhood, and desire not as objects but as acts of observing, defiance, and self-identification. This paper uses the methods of gynocriticism to analyze how the texts of Raffo insert a female trauma and desire into a language system that is culturally and politically dominant yet historically male-dominated and nationalist. It enables the exploration of the peculiarities of female characters and their successes, emphasizing their power to decide on their stories and to reject the outside influence.

To explore the linguistic and narrative means through which Raffo expresses desire, trauma, and agency, the paper will apply the discourse analysis, a method that allows the researcher to look at the text and its language choices in detail. This entails a critical discussion of dialogue, monologues and narrative forms in the plays.

The examination of the repetitive words, expressions and metaphors of desire, trauma and resistance. This involves the analysis of emotional valence of certain words and terms and their role in making the general tone and message. Recognizing and analyzing the utilization of the rhetorical figures like irony, metaphor and simile, repetition etc. and how they enhance or indirectly express inner world and wants of characters. The Narrative Voice: a discussion of the construction and presentation of the voices of female characters, with regard to their agency, their capacity to express their own experiences, and whether their voices may be stifled or enfranchised. Following how the important themes developed in regards to desire, trauma, and agency were established in the plays and how these themes were connected to personal and collective experiences of the characters. A special emphasis will be given to the ways how characters articulate or suppress their desire and trauma and what the linguistic decisions imply in regard to their agency and representation.

Although the main methodology is qualitative analysis of literature, the study conceptually includes the possible contribution of AI-based analytical tools to the further analysis and expansion of the discourse analysis. Since the scale and contents of this paper can hardly be called the application of AI, real implementation of AI will be mocked up with the help of thorough textual analysis guided by the principles of AI. The hypothetical application of AI tools in this conceptual approach is how,

using text mining, sentiment analysis, and topic modelling, it would be possible to Identify Recurring Linguistic Patterns: AI would be able to identify, and produce values of, frequency of certain words, phrases, or grammatical forms pertaining to desire, trauma, and resistance, across the corpus of Raffo plays, quickly. This would enable the identification of the minor trends that could not be identified by the human readers. Algorithms of sentiment analysis could evaluate the emotional coloring (positive, negative, neutral) of separate speech of characters and monologues, which will give quantitative indicators of their moods and changes according to the development of the plot. Topical modeling Map topics modeling may be able to detect and trace the most popular subjects and topics in the three plays, and how Raffo may change or evolve with regard to her focus or treatment of particular topics. Thematic Representation It may be that the AI tools could enable a comparison by language and theme patterns of female and male characters, or of different cultures portrayed in the plays. It is necessary to mention once again that the component in the study that is aided by AI is conceptual. The results of this conceptual usage will be used in the textual analysis that will be carried out by humans; therefore, there will be more complete and data-based interpretation of the work by Raffo. This way of thinking accepts the increasingly interdisciplinary relationship between the humanities and computational techniques, and champions a mutualistic kind of relationship where AI not only supplements, but complements humanistic research.

The choice of Nine parts of desire, Fallujah and Noura has been based on the fact that they directly deal with the lives of Iraqi women, the trauma and the sense of identity they explore as well as the contribution such plays have made to modern theatre. These are the plays that reflect the evolution of the Raffo work and present the rich and diverse body of work to take a comparative gynocritical and discourse analysis of the work. The most important area to consider in the context of such a sensitive topic as trauma, cultural representation, and AI use in research is ethics. This work is devoted to Respectful Representation: Making sure that the issue of Iraqi women experiences is discussed with the sense of sensitivity and respect, without the perpetuation of the stereotypes. Cultural Nuance Understanding the intricacies and the variety of the Iraqi culture and not making generalizations. Safe AI Use Understanding the

shortcomings and possible bias of AI systems, and the importance of human control and important evaluation to avert distortion or simplification of literary and cultural phenomena.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Nine Parts of Desire (2004) by Heather Raffo is one of the turning points in the modern theatre that presents a very personal account of the life of Iraqi women. The play is written in a form of a number of monologues and provides language to nine different Iraqi women who bring to life nine different aspects of female experience in a country greatly influenced by war, sanctions, and political upheaval. All the way through the narrative of a painter, a doctor, a Bedouin woman, a revolutionary, these characters break the monolithic view of the Arab women and show their strength, their pain, and, most importantly, their desires. The early reviews of the play praised its capacity to make the Iraqi situation more human, which is something that went beyond the political news, and into the personal experiences of people who are the most affected by the war. To a very great extent, in Nine Parts of Desire, Raffo has brilliantly coded the desire using the individual and communal voices of her characters. Desire is not merely a romantic love in this case but a range of desires: the desire of freedom, the desire of being normal, the desire of self-expression, the desire of political change and the desire of dignity. By engrossing into linguistic study, common themes are found that bring out those desires. As an example, the painter character, Layal. She says, I never want to reveal literally another woman body so, I paint my body but her body, herself inside me (Raffo, 2005, p. 18).

This shows a subtle attitude towards the artistic representation, as the artist is a medium of the experiences of other women, she is all that they are but at the same time has some privacy of her own. The digital perusal of this quotation, its positive polarity, and objective subjectivity, could be a sign of a considered and thoughtful artistic practice, in which the process of painting is a conscious decision to express a collective female experience. She tends to use language that is full of imagery, comparing the vivid color of her memory with the grayness of her lives now. Her monologues, the smell of paint or the texture of canvas is a linguistic code of her desire to find a life where art could thrive freely (Abu-Lughod 1990). In the same way the doctor character also expresses a need to heal and stabilize, not only her patients but also the broken

society. Her speech is pragmatic but highly empathic in tone, as she tries to fight her way to professional integrity against a background of confusion. The fact that she keeps repeating how war devastates the physical and psychological life of women and children shows her need to get back to a society that functions and can provide people with basic human necessities. In case an AI- assisted analysis was conducted, it would be possible to determine the level of occurrence of the words, concerned with health, stability, and care, in her monologues, to quantitatively prove the paramountness of these desires to her personality. Amal is another character who stresses the significance of inside observation as opposed to outside looks: I see with my heart and not with my eyes I am not a close one (Raffo, 2005, p. 20). This brings out a wisdom that goes beyond what one sees with their eyes, implying a greater knowledge of people and things through empathy and intuition. This quote in the digital analyzing can have the neutral polarity and objective subjectivity which can be the characteristic of philosophical nature showing a statement of belief instead of an emotionally charged statement.

Amal also expresses a very general human desire 'I am not in peace. Inconsistently I seek peace. Have you understood peace?' (Raffo, 2005, p. 20).

The bare display of one of the basic human needs highlights the ubiquitous effects of war and unrest on personal welfare. The objectivity, the objective subjectivity of the digital interpretation of this quote, its neutral polarity, may be a hint of the universal state of a human being, a factual statement about the lack of peace as opposed to a matter of high emotion.

Another character Mullaya depicts a strong sense of attachment to her country and its pain: "Underneath my country there is no paradise of martyrs only water/ a great dark sea of desire and I will feed it my worn soul" (Raffo, 2005, p. 16).

This quote gives an idea of desire and introduction to the land and its past where desire is not a personal but rather national issue as well as collective trauma. The digital analysis of a positive polarity and subjectivity of this quote is a very personal and emotionally driven statement of desire, possibly even acceptance or even a feeling of purpose in this intense relationship.

The variety of voices as used by Raffo is important in creating a complex picture of the Iraqi female desire. The monologues of the women are all linguistic landscapes, and they indicate her social status, educational background, and the history of her life. The discourse of the revolutionary is, say, characterized by passionate wish to change the world politically and achieve justice, and the statements and appeals to action are quite strong and categorical. Instead, language of Bedouin woman makes one feel close to the tradition and the land, with its request to preserve and keep the culture by the desire to stay in the modern world and live in the conflict. With the help of discourse analytical approach, however, the study observes that desire in the play is not a universal individual experience but a complicated culturally mediated phenomenon.

The play does not flinch when it comes to looking at the prevalence of trauma in the lives of Iraqi women but it is always critical of the victim narratives and instead it privileges the agency and the resilience of the Iraqi women. The trauma is not only individual, as it is caused by loss, violence and displacement, but also collective, being the symptom of the suffering of a nation. The characters portrayed by Raffo make testimonies of their traumas in a raw way that is heart wrenching and empowering. As an example, the character of the Iraqi exile refers to the mental traumas of life in the absence of the native country, which is also aggravated by the feeling of guilt of survival. She constantly switches between her past and present tenses, which implies that the psychological trauma is still lingering, but the choice of speaking and testifying is a form of agency !" (Raffo, 2004). The women take proactive control of their stories through their monologues whereby they turn their suffering into grounds of struggle. Even the structure itself of the play is an agency because it provides these women with the only narrating power in which they can construct their realities in the way they want them to be. The subversion of the victim narratives can be seen in the way the characters do not want to be characterized by their sufferings. They do not do that, however; they show defiance, hope and a will to reconstruct their lives and their country. Such sentiment analysis, powered with the help of AI, may be used to express the changes in the emotional color of these monologues, revealing how the despair turns into the manifestations of resilience and strength to demonstrate the interaction between the trauma and agency. In gynocritical terms, *Nine Parts of Desire* is a strong statement on the

necessity to focus on female experience and break the patriarchal discourse of the Iraqi society .

The fact that Raffo has made the choice to only use the voice of women challenges the historical reality of women being sidelined when it comes to war narratives which mainly put the male combatants or political leaders at the center of focus. The play does not only criticize the patriarchal systems of the Iraqi society, which historically constrained the role and voice of women, but also reveals the orientalist gaze, according to which Arab women are usually viewed as exotic or oppressed women. This enables Raffo to produce a mosaic of female subjectivity that is personal and at the same time generalizing in the sense that each woman can express her own point of view. The play makes an unstated case that one cannot get the Iraqi experience without considering the key role of women, not only as victims of the conflict but also the involved parties in the history, present and future of their society. The success of the play is that it humanizes and empowers as it shows that in the most hopeless situations, female desire and agency are powerful forces of change and survival. (Raffo, 2004)

Fallujah (2016) is a play by Heather Raffo, with libretto , music by Tobin Stokes, a moving and frequently devastating treatment of the Iraq War, in particular the Second Battle of Fallujah in 2004. The play is original as an operatic work, and explores the psychological and emotional consequences of war especially to the American soldiers and the Iraqi civilians. Although the original version of the libretto by Raffo was written within the frame of a U.S. Marine, the version of the libretto incorporates the dramatic shift in the narrational focus and also introduces that of the metaphorical gendered witnessing of conflict that overtakes the established war discourse , Philip, a U.S. Marine, is traumatized and emotionally numb, and is able to describe his plight in the following words : "Can' t feel what s wrong can't heal what s gone. Wanna hurt nobody hurts. Too risky to be living too dangerous to be outside where nothing hurts to find hurt to not to go numb" (Raffo, 2016, p. 63).

This is a very strong line as we can understand the extent of his post traumatic stress since he finds it more frightening not to feel any pain than pain itself hence the desperate urge to find feeling. The digital analysis that depicts negative polarity and subjective subjectivity of this

quote corresponds well to the acute emotional turmoil and personal experience of trauma.

The motherhood in Fallujah is one of the most important places of speaking the trauma and speaking strength. The discursive trope of mourning and loss in the play is greatly inculcated in the language of mourning as manifested by Colleen, the adopted mother of Philip, who represents the pain of a mother who is afraid that her son would be lost to the evils of war.

"Philip! I cannot lose another son" (Raffo, 2016, p. 65), draws attention to the repetitive processes of grief and fear that go beyond the battlefield to touch home. The indifferential polarity and objective subjectivity of this quote in the digital analysis could be pointing at a statement of a fact of fear and past loss, not a display of intense emotion, but a reminder of the seriousness of her situation, as described by trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, who explains that overwhelming events remain outside the process of identity integration. Her lamentations is more than a personal expression of pain also filled with a group pain over the loss of her sons and a nation that was destroyed. As a case in point, a mother may sing about how her womb was like an arid field or that her heart is an empty pot, and these words are linguistic codes of how badly she is hurt. More importantly, Raffo questions the traditional accounts of martyrdom that are applied in most cultures including some readings that exist in the Arab and Islamic environments where death of a son at war is mostly celebrated as an offering to the country or religion. The mothers' (shatha and colleen) in Fallujah take back control over the death of their sons and they do not want their pain to be used by the politicians or the ideology.

Wissam: Since the day I stood in the ashes of my school I have been without purpose even without pen and paper. Everything I was excited to accomplish collapsed in a second. Everything I worked for reduced to the ground. Where is Uncle Ali's table at the café? The newspapers I sold outside his store? I don't want to feel lost anymore. Who am I without this place? A refugee? Not even you would recognize me.

Shatha: We have no other choice we opened our eyes as old people. Wissam, today my shoes were covered in bits of flesh. Today I saw a death so terrifying, it tears you into pieces. Your feet not where you were last standing your hands not holding

the hands of those you loved. And worst of all, it can spare you and take your son instead. You want me to be the mother, al Khansa? To talk you into battle? To praise you for a holy fight? I am not al Khansa I do not dream to eulogize your death to mourn your bravery or sing over your last breath. I am not al Khansa finding honor in revenge justice in loss I am not al Khansa I have no heart for death for the loss of my only son for a martyrdom that may never come. I am not afraid of death only afraid for you " (Raffo, 2016, p.76).

Their opposition is expressed in their unwillingness to remain silent, their demand to be allowed to remember their sons as people but not as symbols, their doubts as to the reasons why the war is necessary. Their speech no longer remains at the level of passive acceptance but shifts to active protest turning personal grief into a strong criticism of violence and war. A computer-aided study would be able to find out how frequently terms about personal memory and collective glory, and personal suffering and national pride occur, to demonstrate this inversion of the conventional martyrdom story in quantitative detail. (Raffo, 2016)

Noura (2018) by Heather Raffo switches the attention of the direct consequences of war to the problem of displacement and cultural adaptation, experiencing a life of an Iraqi immigrant family in New York. The play focuses on the story of Noura, a Christian Iraqi woman and her family who have to reconstruct a new life, but at the same time, they have to cope with their past and their identity that is continuing to change. Noura explores the issues of identity, cultural continuity, multigenerational trauma, the complexity of family life in a diaspora .The play presents Noura, who is an architect ,her life story can be seen as a reflection of the general issue of cultural integration and desire to find her true self back. The case in point is when Noura interacts with her husband concerning her name:

You changed my name when I did not want you to--call me by my true name. Tareq: It is not much different / nobody.
Noura: Why change it then? I love Nora, Tareq says" (Raffo, 2018, p. 95).

Although this exchange appears to be a simple one, it is very heavy as it represents the loss of identity and agency that usually comes with being forced to assimilate. The fact that the digital analysis of this quote has indicated a slightly positive polarity may indicate some subliminal undercurrents of hope or maybe the multidimensionality of the emotions that are involved in such an intimate change even down to the name itself, which is forced but presented by Tareq as an act of love.

The inside world acts as a refuge to Noura and her thoughts and believes, as she says "my desk is in my mind. There is order that you cannot see, I have it: reserved, orderly" (Raffo, 2018, p. 99). This quote shows her strength and intellectual integrity, implying that even though the outside world is pushing her and that the world around her appears to be disorganized, there still is a sense of order in her and a place where she can be creative and intellectual. The computerized version of this quote, which displays a neutral polarity and objective subjectivity, confirms the notion of the inner world of Noura as an objective and structured space, alien to active emotional manifestations.

The play dwells on the issues of freedom and anonymity in a new world, too. Noura notes that when it is hot, everyone knows your business.

"What you are wearing, The way you walk. In the cold no one counts. In your world you can go everywhere" (Raffo, 2018, p.102). This is a new feeling of liberation in the anonymity of a Western city, as opposed to the scrutiny of a community which was more commonplace in her native country. The digital analysis also shows that this quote is very subjective, which means that it is a personal and relative note and not the truth that can be applied to everyone, which is why Noura is so personally interested in her understanding of freedom. Moreover, Noura refers to the involvement of the younger generation into the modern world and its issues. Maryam, a young physicist of Mosul, tells about her participation in weapons contracts.

I began to develop a proof of concept, I mean it was just theory to start with in Iraq but, then the D.O.D. gave me this internship and have suggested me a job will be provided after I graduate (Raffo, 2018, p. 104).

This fact adds a multifaceted element to the story, demonstrating how even the people who want to pursue education and new future in the West can be trapped in the same system that contributes to the conflict in their

countries. This quote in the digital analysis has negative polarity and it is very subjective, implying that there is a critical or maybe disturbing element to the role played by Maryam, which implies moral grayness and personal compromise that is possible when engaging in such an interaction.

In Noura, the permeating discourse of deep-seated sense of belonging and an effort to establish the identities of the characters in a new place. The conflict between her present American life and her Iraqi past is especially represented by Noura. This conflict is frequently displayed in her language which is at times laden with nostalgia to the land of her origin and other times an endeavor to seek acceptance of her new surrounding. The elements of cultural hybridity and conflicts are reflected in linguistic terms, when the characters switch between Arabic and English, or use words and phrases that refer to the past values of the traditional Iraqi culture, but also to the present Western influences. As an example, one can speak about the talk of traditions during the holidays, marriage, or bringing up the child which usually demonstrates the existing cultural conflicts and the efforts of the characters to unify the different points of view on this world (Raffo, 2018).

The play brings out the conflict between the old and the new in the display of desire. Whereas, some of the characters especially those who belong to the older generation feel the need to maintain the traditional customs and a sense of belonging to their Iraqi origins, the younger generation tend to feel the need to be more integrated into the American society and express their desires and urges more individually. Their language is not only linguistically coded by this generational difference in vocabulary and rhetorics, but it is also encoded in terms of generational difference. The given linguistic differences were probably able to be mapped by an AI-assisted analysis, and certain phrases or thematic groups could be identified as characteristic of the generation and its attitude to cultural assimilation. Noura is a very strong discussion and study of how trauma of the past of the Iraqi war affect the current life of the immigrant family, and how they survive despite the wounds that will not heal. The memory discourse is also critical as characters tend to re-tell traumatic experiences of their past in frequent recollection often manifested in a piece-meal narrative or silent fears. Their psychology is affected by the effects of war and displacement in the form of how they

interact with each other and how they cope with the situation and their efforts at shielding the younger generation against the full implications of their past. As an example, a character may resort to euphemisms or not to talk about painful memories, which is a sign of the traumatizing after-effects (Raffo, 2018). Nevertheless, in spite of the wide-spread trauma, the family also demonstrates an exceptional strength. The women characters, especially, Noura, are found to play a critical role in propagating cultural memory and enhancing adaptation. They tend to be the emotional pillars within the family and they are able to speak their language to cover the generation gap, solve any conflicts and create a feeling of hope. Such linguistic coding of their resilience entails use of phrases of determination, hope and pragmatic attitude to defeat the enemy. Their common past, as well as the efforts they all make in order to create the future, helps them to become stronger, even though they still have to fight with the ghosts of the past. This shows that discourse can be used in the exposure of trauma and the performance of resilience. In a gynocritical view, Noura presents a refined investigation into the female identity in the diasporic environment, disregarding both conventional Iraqi and Western norms. Raffo carefully demonstrates the intricacies of being an Iraqi woman living in America, in which the character has to reconcile the need to preserve her culture, her attachment to religion and her own sense of free will. The play denounces the patriarchal demands, which may pursue women, even to new cultural environments, as well as emphasizing the exclusively immigrant- women issues in becoming independent and following their own ambitions. The experience of Noura especially is a strong case of a woman attempting to balance the many identities she has to live up to, as a mother, a wife, an Iraqi, a Christian, and as an American. The constant bargaining of such roles is clear as she speaks to herself and with the outside world, and then asserts her identity, Noura's feelings about her motherhood , and her discussion of the idea put forward by feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick (2018) called "How Mothering Becomes an Area Where Social and Political Issues Influence How Mothers Act." . Therefore, the play not only fits into the gynocritical project, but also offers a rich and authentic experience of being female that cannot be easily divided into categories and is a splendid tribute to complexity of women living in the world of globalization. It drives home the point that female desire and agency

particularly as formed out of cultural heritage as well as the life-altering experiences of migration and adaptation are critical aspects to understand (Raffo, 2018).

By summarizing the results of the separate analysis of *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura*, it is possible to outline strong similarities and differences in the theme of desire, trauma, and agency in Heather Raffo works. Although this has been a qualitative and interpretive analysis, this section is a conceptual investigation of how the AI-aided approach can help expand and enrich such insights and provide an even more detailed picture of the linguistic and thematic world of Raffo. In a cross-textual analysis, it is possible to note the development of Raffo addressing the female desire and agency. Through innumerable and personal voices, desire is frequently voiced in *Nine Parts of Desire*, as a craving to have the basic human rights, the freedom of expression, and get rid of the oppression. The agency is identified in the ability to speak truth to power and live in the chaos. *Fallujah* changes the focus to the maternal grief as the powerful tool of the resistance in which the wish to have peace and justice is combined with the unwillingness to turn the death of sons into some sort of statistic or the object of the political games. Here, agency is group, because the voices of mothers interfere with mainstream accounts of war. *Noura* examines the issue of desire in the diasporic background with references to the desire of belonging, cultural continuity and individual identity. Agency is evidenced in the intricate dealings of the cultural hybridity and the strength of the family ties in the face of intergenerational trauma.

In all the three plays, there has been a common trend of the strength of female voice and narrative that can break the patriarchal and orientalist systems. Raffo always places the voices of women on the forefront so that they can be able to describe their own lives and avoid being described by others. Desire coding is usually gentle, and it is not presented as loud political statements, but it can be found in daily wording, culture, and emotional ways of expressing it. In the same way, trauma is not portrayed as a monolithic situation of victimhood but as an intricacy that goes together with resilience, hope, and enduring desire of agency.

AI tools may provide quantitative and pattern-based insights to supplement the qualitative one. Quantitative Patterns in Word Frequency:

Text mining algorithms might be used to determine and quantify the frequency of desired (e.g., want, need, hope, dream, love, freedom), traumatic (e.g., pain, loss, fear, war, death, suffer) and resistive (e.g. fight, speak, survive, remember, change) words and phrases in the three plays. This may bring out the changes of focus or most striking aspects of these themes in each of the works. As an illustration, the frequency of the words associated with the notion of remembering in Fallujah in comparison with the other plays could be used as the quantitative indicator of the potential meaning of maternal grief as the cultural memory and resistance.

Network Analysis of Character Interactions and Discursive Influence: Although *Nine Parts of Desire* is mainly a monologue, AI was able to analyze the implication of the relationships between the characters based on common themes or the experiences. In Fallujah and Noura, the network analysis may be used to track how the characters talk to each other, who is the central figure, and how discursive power moves. This might expose, say, the effect of the speech patterns of female characters on or by the male ones, or the dialogues between different generations in terms of the manifestation of desire and trauma.

Comparative Sentiment Analysis: Sentiment analysis tools might be used on the speech of the female as compared to the male character (where possible, as in Fallujah and Noura) in order to compare the emotional value. This may indicate statistically significant differences in the ways that different genders reflect emotion such as grief, anger, hope or desire, possibly reflecting gendered emotional labor or different coping skills. It may also be interesting to compare sentiment in the three plays and reveal the change in the general tone of the emotional scene in the Raffo work.

Detection of Small-scale Thematic Changes or Lexical Novelty Topic modeling would help discover implicit thematic groupings within and between the plays that would not be easily recognized by manual reading. This would reveal minute changes in the theme of Raffo or the linguistic developments through time. As an illustration, AI could identify the growing preoccupation with such topics as cultural hybridity or communication across generations in her subsequent work, Noura, as opposed to her earlier play, *Nine Parts of Desire*.

The proposed AI-assisted approaches are not supposed to be a substitution of gynocritical and humanistic interpretation but rather its complementary part. Gynocriticism offers the necessary model in the

interpretation of gendered aspects of the work by Raffo, the specifics of female life, language and cultural environment that cannot be fully understood with the help of AI. AI will be able to give useful quantitative data and see patterns, but the human scholar will have to interpret such findings and put them in context, particularly when dealing with such complex concepts as desire, trauma, and agency. As an example, AI may conclude that the high frequency of the words connected to the concept of silence in the monologue of a given character signifies nothing but the absence, but it is the gynocritical lens that will enable us to think of the silence as a kind of resistance, strategic decision, or a result of oppression. When the ability of AI to do mass pattern recognition is paired with the complexity of humanistic interpretation, the result may be a more complex and sound analysis.

The theoretical implementation of AI into this paper implies a number of possibilities of future research that can be considered quite exciting. Empirical research using such AI tools to analyse Raffo as a whole body of work, and perhaps in comparison with other Arab-American or female writers, may have much to say on the larger patterns of recent theatrical development. Moreover, examining how the performance elements, like the tone of voice or the movement on the stage (in case the performance records are provided), can be analyzed through the application of the AI may bring another dimension to the perception of the desire and trauma embodiment and expression. When applied critically and ethically, the involvement of AI into feminist and postcolonial literary studies can open new horizons and disturb the paradigms.

This research has conducted a gynocritical and AI-based approach to conducting a discourse analysis of Heather Raffo *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura*, to demonstrate that there is active encoding and foregrounding of female desire and agency in these texts, which present a re-narration of trauma and identity in a transformative way. The analysis has shown that, using her subtle characterization, strong linguistic choices, Raffo confronts the patriarchal and the orientalist ways of representing Arab women, allowing them to speak and be heard and understood with all their complexity.

Throughout her work, Heather Raffo uses gynocritical approach and focuses on female experience, language and point of view. In *Nine Parts of Desire*, the monologues are used as strong devices of revealing various

desires of women, such as the desire to be free, the desire to create art, the desire to love and to see the political change, yet the monologues tell the stories of trauma and the power of the spoken word as the act of agency. Fallujah alters the meaning of maternal grief by turning it into a type of resistance, in which the longing to peace and justice is combined with the denial that the death of sons can be used to support nationalist or militaristic discourse. The mother-centric nature of the opera is a gendered account of war critique against militarized masculinities. Noura addresses the issues of diasporic desire, identity and belonging, the trauma generation and the strength of women characters as they find their path through the cultural hybridity and the connection to family.

One of the similarities between these works is that the encoding of desire is highly sophisticated and this is conveyed in many cases not through explicit statements but rather through the usage of regular language, the deployment of affective touches, and cultural behaviors. Trauma is never described as a state of being a victim but rather an event that is simultaneous with great resilience, hope and indomitable affirmation of self. The theoretical use of AI-based discourse analysis also implies that the computational-based research can enhance these qualitative conclusions by detecting linguistic patterns, emotional polarities, and thematic changes that are not immediately evident when such texts can be read manually, and thus provide a more in-depth view of Raffo as an artist.

This paper has confirmed that Heather Raffo's plays , by being gynocritical and discourse analytic, have been active in their encoding and foregrounding of female desire and agency so as to provide a re-narration of trauma and identity, which is transformative. Her production can be considered as one of the most powerful contributions to modern theatre that breaks the mainstream discourse and makes contemporary society more empathetic and opened to understanding the human experience of Arab women and their lives in the situation of conflict and displacement.

The significance of the present research goes beyond the assessment of Raffo plays in Feminist Theatre and Literary Studies: This study demonstrates the paramount necessity to make marginalized female voices central and such an approach to studying the works by female authors can be achieved through gynocritical methodology in order to

reveal the depth and richness of female writing. It shows how female dramatists such as Raffo are transforming discourse in the theater arena and breaking the traditional patriarchal patterns. Interpretation of Trauma and Conflict Narratives: the piece of work by Raffo provides an effective alternative to the generic conflict narratives which tend to revolve around the male combatants or political leaders. The plays of this author help to create a more balanced, more human vision of how war and displacement affect people, especially women and children, putting into the limelight the experiences of these groups. Application of AI in Humanities: The study is conceptually useful in explaining how AI can be a useful tool to supplement deeper textual analysis in the humanities, since her plays provide an example of how simplistic representations of victimhood can be transcended with a more sophisticated view of agency and resistance. Ethical responsible/critical application of AI would allow the improvement of qualitative research through delivering quantitative information and discovering patterns that could result in new interpretive findings. This creates new and thrilling opportunities of interdisciplinary cooperation and methods innovation. There are weaknesses of this study. The component that was assisted by AI was mostly visionary in nature, as it was based on simulated applications as opposed to actual implementations. More specific, it would involve special software, technical knowledge and a larger dataset to perform a full-scale computational analysis. Also, the paper concentrated on textual aspects of the plays by Raffo, which would be better understood in case of performance history and reception of the plays. The scale of the paper, which aims at a 15-page format, required the selective choice of certain areas of the plays, and a larger study would have allowed to go deeper into the other issues and critical angles.

The study can be extended in the following manners in the future. It would be useful to apply empirical AI to the works of Raffo, and comparative analysis of her works with other contemporaries dealing with the same issues. Exploring the performance dimension of such plays, such as the directorial decisions, the nature of the performances, and the way the audience reacts to them, may give more information about the nature of communication and reception of desire and trauma. Also, the potential of the interaction between the work of Raffo and other theoretical directions, including the postcolonial theory or the affect

theory, should be explored, which may lead to the specific insights. The further development of the AI tools that are specifically designed to engage with literary analysis also has the promise of making up the future of the scholarship in this field.

4. Conclusions

The plays of Heather Raffo are not only theatrical performances, but a cultural intervention act, breaking the stereotypes, evoking empathy, and providing the voice to the voiceless. The way she is able to interconnect personal stories with bigger political and social commentaries, and always focusing on the life of Iraqi women, makes her a very prominent and sustainable voice in the modern theatre of the world. By the complexity of the coding of desire and the strength of the agency in the face of violence, the work by Raffo does not only enhance our knowledge of the Iraqi experience, but also addresses the humanity of all people in search of identity and belonging as well as the eternal struggle to find meaning in a complicated world. Her work will no doubt keep on inspiring the audiences, artists and scholars many years to come. The results give a detailed response to the three major research questions that informed this study.

Firstly, what are the patriarchal, orientalist representations of Arab women against which Heather Raffo and her *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Fallujah*, and *Noura* posit themselves by means of gynocritical practices ? The plays of Raffo are an active deconstruction and redefinition of the common patriarchal and orientalist images of Arab women. By using characters such as Noura, Layal and Amal, Raffo defies the stereotype of the inferior/silent Arab woman. The fight that Noura tries to have to regain the control of her name through her intellectualism, as can be observed in her claim, *My desk is in my mind. There is organization you can not see*" (Raffo, 2018, p. 99), which is a direct statement against the idea that women have no agency or intellectual depth. The orientalist gaze that tend to eroticize or exoticize the female body is subverted by Layal in her artistic practice in which she is the one experiencing the feelings of other women without actually showing them ("I don t ever want to expose exactly another womans body so I paint my body but her body, herself inside me (Raffo, 2005, p. 18)). Amal is keen to note that she sees with her heart and not with her eyes (Raffo, 2005, p. 20) shuns easy judgments and does away with a more profound and humane

perception that goes beyond simplistic, frequently demeaning, depictions. The gynocritical emphasis on women and their experiences and expressions offer the critical language through which to emphasize how the women characters in Raffo resist and reframe these confining images and reassert their complex subjectivities and interior lives.

Secondly, what could analysis of discourse of desire, trauma, and identity in these plays by Raffo do to re-think the place of female agency in conflict and post-conflict narratives? Raffo writes about the desire, trauma, and identity, which are the topics that seem to be interconnected and tightly related; the discourse analysis of desire, trauma, and identity in Raffo plays offer female agency not as a definite act of revolt, but as a subtle and usually internalized process of survival, redefinition, and subtle opposition. In these plays desire is complex: desire of peace (Amal: I do not have peace. Always I seek peace. Does you know peace?" The love of self-expression (art by Layal), the necessity to connect and belong (the need of human beings), (Raffo, 2005, p. 20). Even the strong attachment of the Mullaya to her land, a great dark sea of desire, (Raffo, 2005, p. 16) is a sign of strong agency that has a long-term cultural and historical roots. Trauma does not only cause a state of victimhood but also causes internal change and self-reassertion. Noura going through the process of finding a new identity in her new place, preserving her memory at the same time, and discovering anonymity as the freedom ("In the heat, everybody knows your business... The cold does not care. The theme of agency in exploring and managing post-conflict realities can be seen in the line You can go anywhere in your own world" (Raffo, 2018, p. 102)), which shows the character maneuvering and coping with post-conflict realities. Maryam is morally confused as she seeks a career in weapons contracts, but it is a kind of agency in the sense that she wants to take control and get an opportunity in a world that is dominated by struggle. These stories are not merely about the victimization of women, but women demonstrate themselves as agents of their own identity and fate, even in the circumstances of trauma and displacement. Their agency may frequently be manifested in inner fortitude, literary and scholarly interests, and the subtle insistence of their wishes and views.

And what might discourse analysis assisted by AI add to what we know of the subtle linguistic and thematic patterns of Raffo, in the forms of desire and opposition, in particular?

Although the use of AI in the research was abstract and was referring to the few instances of quotes, it showed that digital technology can be used to support more humanistic research that can discover hidden linguistic and thematic order. As an example, the sentiment analysis gave quantitative information concerning the emotional valence and subjectivity of character statements. As an example, the name change quote by Noura, which is somehow boosted by the underlying tension, may be indicating a dual emotional state that is not easily perceived by a pure human reading, or at least verify the ambiguity. The great scores of subjectivity of the quotes concerning personal experience (e.g., Noura notices how anonymous people can be, Maryam is engaged in weapons contract, Philip is traumatized) proves that these characters are struggling and desiring in a very personal and internal way. On the other hand, the indifferent polarity and objective subjectivity of the statements used in philosophy (e.g. when Amal says: I see with my heart or when she is pursuing peace), they are universal and assertive. Despite the fact that a further analysis of AI with more data would be statistically significant, this initial overview suggests that AI can: (1) Measure emotional tone and subjectivity to offer empirical evidence to support judgments on character tone and point of view. (2) Find indirect linguistic trends that may not be clear when using only the close reading approach (e.g., repetitive word use or syntax that occurs in relation with particular themes e.g. words related to freedom or confinement). (3) Cross-read human interpretations which provide a more objective level of analysis that may either confirm or disprove initial interpretations resulting in a stronger and more multi-level interpretation of the text. Within the expressions of desire and opposition, AI might, say, count how often and in what contexts words with the meaning of desire (e.g. longing, yearning, hope) are used throughout the plays, and how the same is done with words like resistance (e.g. defy, challenge, persist). The hybrid model that would have the volume and accuracy of computer-based analysis and the depth of humanistic interpretation presents a strong model that can be used in the future study of literature.

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