

Uncanny Planes of Menace in Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*

Sahar Abdel Khalek Awad Allah

Department of English Language & Literature
College of Science and Humanities, Jubail
Imam AbdulRahman Bin Faisal University
Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the uncanny planes of menace in Heather Raffo's play, *9 Parts of Desire*. *9 Parts of Desire* (2006) is regarded as one of the most recognizable plays that could speak out Iraqi women suffering, both before and after the second Gulf War. In this play, there is a vast spectrum of images of 'uncanniness', which Sigmund Freud explicated in his 1955 article "The Uncanny". Giving literary analysis to Raffo's play, this paper will bring into light its uncanny feeling of menace, with reference to Freud's definition of 'the uncanny'. To Freud the uncanny is "undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror; ...[and] coincides with what excites fear in general" (1955, p. 219). *9 Parts of Desire* portrays the narratives of 9 Iraqi women, who speak out their sense of uncanny menace under the devastation of war. The paper will explore how Raffo's style of writing was able to voice the uncanny sense menace of these women. Through her employment of monologues and intense soliloquy in the play, Raffo managed to produce the uncanny effect by making these women articulate their persistent feeling of menace and terror. Focusing more on the effects of war, feelings of repression, repulsion and distress in the play, Raffo captures the fearful menace, that extremely shocks the audience, and awakens the uncanny.

Keywords: 9 Parts of Desire, Gulf war, Iraqis' dilemma, Iraqi women, Raffo

Cites as: Awad Allah, S. A. (2019). Uncanny Planes of Menace in Heather Raffo's 9 Parts of Desire. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*3 (4)163- 174.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no4.14>

We know this world intimately and that is its uncanniness. We cannot bear our knowledge.

-David Mura

What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or in the holy name of liberty" or democracy?

-Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

The notion uncanny has received much research by scholars, from various literary perspectives. In his essay *The Uncanny* (1955), Sigmund Freud begins explaining the term uncanny with more investigation of the German word *unheimlich*. To him, the notion uncanny originates from the German term: *unheimlich* which means; uneasy, eerie, hidden, dangerous or a ghostly experience. At the same time, it is related to the term *Heimlich*, which means; familiar, friendly or intimate. Freud, then identifies the uncanny as "undoubtedly related to what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror" (Freud, 1955, p. 219), then he argues that "equally certainly too, the word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with what excites fear in general" (Freud, 1955, p. 219). According to Freud (1955), uncanniness is a terrifying feeling that comes from something previously known or familiar that has been repressed and suddenly comes to light. He suggests that "what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud, 1955, p. 220) is uncanny because it has been repressed. Spotting various aspects of the uncanny in his essay, Freud explains that the "feelings of repulsion and distress" (Freud, 1955, p. 219) can lead to man's suffering from the double, the omnipotence or authority of thoughts, the repetition-compulsion, and unusual attitudes to death. These terms are some examples of cases which can create the uncanny feeling in literature.

Familiar depiction of uncanniness in literary works included, for instance, the portrayal of scary ghost stories, in which places like symmetries, old libraries or abandoned country houses are haunted with ghostlike creatures. There is a vast spectrum of traditional literary works of ghost narratives, and stories of supernatural frightening creatures, throughout history. Freud thus paves the way for new horizons of modern presentation of man's sense of uncanny menace. It should not be surprising, then, to find presentation of the uncanny in many modern texts that deal with political or cultural themes. The portrayal of distressing feelings evoked by the horrors and waste of wars can be more fearful and terrifying. This paper thus examines the different forms of uncanny representation of menace in Heather Raffo's play *9 Parts of Desire* (2006) in the light of Freud's notion of the uncanny.

The Uncanny in *9 Parts of Desire*

Born in Michigan in 1970, Heather Raffo is an American playwright and actress, from Irish American mother and Iraqi father. Her father was born and lived in Basra, Iraq before moving to the states and working there as an engineer. Raffo studied Arts in English at the University of Michigan and received her Master from the University of San Diego, in acting performance. She has been giving lectures and practiced acting at several arts centers and universities both in and

outside America enlightening students about the arts and politics of Iraq. Raffo is most famous for her notable acting in her one-woman-character play *9 Parts of Desire*, her first play. *9 Parts of Desire* was first produced in August 2003, with Raffo as a single actress, performing the different roles of the 9 characters of the play, and then it was published in 2006. It has been performed all over the United States and was one of the top five produced plays of the 2007-2008 American theater season. It has also had international productions and translations in several different languages.

9 Parts of Desire has received several analysis and clarifications, but a closer reading of this play provides a new sphere of interpretation. Structured around nine women characters' stories of suffering, *9 Parts of Desire* arouses a sense of the uncanny. These nine characters dramatize the distressful agony and menace Iraqi women have been undergoing, during an era that lasted from the First Gulf War till the American invasion of Iraq. In Raffo's play, the uncanny menace emerges slowly from the details of the stories of the nine characters. Each woman has a different story, but they are all connected to a sense of menace of uncanny powers. Raffo puts a lot of effort in intensifying the scope of her play. She is trying to create frightening and uncanny atmospheres, to shock her readers and audience with the truth of the suffering of Iraqi people, particularly women. She "intended to write a piece about the Iraqi psyche, something that would inform and enlighten the images we see on T. V." ("Nine Parts of Desire," 2011, para. 9). She asserts that she wanted "American audiences to walk out a little confused, not able to say, 'Oh, I get it,' but rather [to] understand how difficult it is to grasp the psyche of people who have" (as cited in Horwitz, 2004, para. 6) been suffering from various forms of suppression for decades.

Throughout of *9 Parts of Desire*, nine distressed women characters tell their painful stories of menace and suffering. These stories embody the theme of the uncanny in specific recurrent images of pain, like death, the shelter, radiation, suppression, prison, the double, exile, betrayal, brutality, terror, and struggle for survival. These feelings portray the human condition of living with menace. These images imply the bitter truth that in each part of Iraq there has been a real story of suffering. The homeland that functions as a safe, warm place, is now devastated by invaders who serve as agents of ruthless and merciless powers. It changes to become unsafe and frightening, with the arrival of destroyers, who violently interrupt all security, driving people to feel frightened and get victimized. Even the shelter surpasses its literal sense of protection and refuge to a general feeling of horror. Raffo states in an interview that she: "visited the Amariya bomb shelter, where many Iraqi civilians lost their lives when the shelter became a target in the 1991 war" (as cited in Mahadi & Muhi, 2012, p. 91). There is also the prevailing system that suppressed and tortured individuals who dared to question its authority. "The individuals who attempt to defy its authority are either disciplined with a ruthless treatment of torture or hinted to be executed if they remain defiant" (Dutta, 2015, p. 21). These conditions "arouse an uncanny feeling which, furthermore, recalls the sense of helplessness experienced" (as cited in Freud, 1955, p. 237) by those suffering people.

Raffo's distinguished dramatic style, which is present in both theme and poetic language has contributed to a great extent in intensifying the feeling of uncanniness in the play. She has

exploited the potential in language and made the stories of her nine characters poetic to emphasize the atmosphere of menace and the uncanny around the suffering emerging from their troubled world. The characters' deliberate mistakes and omission in language for confusion, managed to create the menacing atmosphere in play's world. The employment of monologue for the characters who tell their stories, also helps increase the sense of the uncanny in the play. The uncanniness in the play originates from the characters' direct speech to the audience, shocking it with their "distressing" experience of suppression, the loss of family or homelessness and exile. Raffo observes,

The audience plays a vital role in the show with each Iraqi character speaking directly to them in English as if they were a trusted western friend. I wanted the audience to see these women not as the 'other' but much more like themselves than they would have initially thought. I felt it was important to create a safe environment to experience both horror and humor, but ultimately to see the play as a celebration of life. ("Nine Parts of Desire," 2011, para. 9)

Raffo presents the play in the form of monologue to further the feeling of distress, which directly shocks us with the emotional complexity and the depth of suffering of the Iraqi women portrayed. It also adds profundity and detachment to allow more intellectual disruption. As Romanska, (2010) states, "having someone else frame, contextualize, and narrate it in the poetic language of metaphors and symbols can have both a liberating and numbing experience" (p. 214).

The Real is Uncanny

In his *The Uncanny*, Freud, (1955) argues that:

A great deal that is not uncanny in fiction would be so if it happens in real life;...The imaginative writer has this license among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. (p. 249)

Heather Raffo's dramatization of the menace and the misery of the nine women can be regarded as theatre of reality. However, though her play is based on stories from real life, it is rich with details that intensify the sense of uncanniness. Raffo's experience during her visit to Iraq in 1993 and seeing a painting in Baghdad named 'Savagery', motivated her to write the play. The painting was a haunting one of "a nude woman clinging to a barren", as Raffo describes; "her head was hanging, bowed, and there was a golden light behind her like a sun. I stood motionless in front of the painting. I felt she had captured something within me" ("9 Parts of Desire" 2011, para. 6). The painting was made by an Iraqi woman artist, who was killed during an American air raid. Raffo's interest in both the painting and the artist derived her to begin interviewing Iraqi women in order to know more about the hidden menace Iraqi women have been going through. So, over a decade, during and after her visit to Iraq, Raffo collected true stories of Iraqi women's lives, both inside and outside Iraq. She says:

The material I gathered came from hours of gaining the trust of Iraqi women. I had the right mix: I was half Iraqi so they opened up to me immediately, but I was also Western so they felt they could express fears or secrets that might otherwise be judged more harshly by someone from their culture. ("Nine Parts of Desire," 2011, para. 9)

Raffo was able to weave these stories together in her play *9 Parts of Desire*, presenting the uncanny in the form of nine Iraqi women characters' true tales of menace. These characters are the Mullaya, the Doctor, Umm Ghada, the American, Huda, Layal, Amal, the Iraqi Girl, and Nanna. Each of these characters' stories represents one image or more of the uncanny in the play.

The Uncanny Homeland

The first character we meet in the play is Mullaya, a professional mourner, who is usually "hired to lead call- and- response with women mourning at funerals" (9P, p. 3). The name Mullaya, itself is deliberately chosen by Raffo, as this name is usually given to women assigned at funerals to make mourners feel sadness and woe for the dead. According to Freud, man's attitude to death, is one of the things that make something uncanny. The choice of Mullaya's mourning monologue in the opening of the play shocks the audience with the image of the entire destruction of Iraq and the death of its people. Even before any character tells her story, Mullaya's mourning monologue arouses an acute sense of uncanniness. Mullaya's monologue is a mixture of mourning and warning of the prevailing menace that has been threatening her homeland, "the land between two rivers" that once was "the Garden of Eden". These rivers have become "hungry" rivers, which she feeds with "dead shoes and souls". In a stunning metaphor, Mullaya describes how the numbers of the dead in Iraq are increasing everyday: "Early in the morning/ I come to throw dead shoes into the river/ [...] Today the river must eat/ [...] This river is the color of worn soles" (9P, p. 3-4). Mullaya's metaphoric lyric warns the reader of the menace Iraq has been exposed to; she says: "underneath my country/ there is no paradise of martyrs/ only water/ a great dark sea/ of desire/ and I will feed it/ my worn sole" (9P, p. 6). The sense of uncanniness is deepened, when Mullaya compares the destruction of Iraq and its people by the American army to the massacres caused by the invasion of "the grandson of Genghis Khan". Mullaya, now has become familiar with death and she fears it no more, so, she "can sleep beneath the stars without fear/ of being" killed, (9P, p. 4) as death has triumphed life everywhere.

The Menace of Radiation

The uncanny is more exposed and heightened when the Doctor informs us about the menace of radiation spreading in Iraq because of the war and the "high levels of genetic damage" (9P p. 21). The doctor is frightened because of the highly dangerous effect of radiation on Iraqi people. Speaking in broken English, the Doctor's monologue shocks the audience, telling that Iraqi men are returning from the wars deformed. The doctor narrates that even her "husband he sits at home without his legs" (9P, p. 22). Confirming the fact that menace is close to almost every Iraqi, including men, women or children, she adds that "whole families are now suffering from cancer" (9P, p. 21). The children take bullets made of uranium to school, "One came in wearing a bullet around his neck- a bullet tipped in depleted uranium around his neck" (9P, p. 21). The doctor has been, as Cohen describes, "pondering with nausea the growing number of malformed babies being

born in a country she fears is contaminated with uranium depletion" (as cited in Romanska, 2010, p.225). She narrates her uncanny experience, saying "six babies no head, four abnormally large heads, now today another one with two heads" (9P, p. 21). The menace of radiation has spread over in Iraq that death and malformation can be seen everywhere. Though she is entirely acquainted with the menace of radiation, and how it is the main reason for different kinds of cancers and the growing number of deformed babies, she needs to survive. So, she frightens her audience when she declares that she is pregnant and though she is also facing the menace of giving birth to a malformed baby.

A Holocaust Shelter!

The Amiriyya bomb shelter tragedy is vividly represented by Umm Ghada, whose painful experience there, also recalls the uncanny Holocaust. Addressing the audience, she intensely tells us how the Amiriyya bomb shelter became an oven, and how she witnessed people including her family burning. Umm Ghada lives in the wrecks of the Amiriyya shelter. She lost her children among 403 victims in that shelter bombing. The feeling of the uncanny is intensified when she tells us how she witnessed the death of her daughter. Her poetic speech is persuasive, as she is describing the frightening details of the tragic consequences of the bombing in the shelter:

This is Amiriya bomb shelter. / Here they write names/ in chalk over the smoked figures. / Here, on the ceiling, you can see/ charred handprints and footprints / from people who lay in the top bunks. / And here a silhouette of a woman / vaporized from heat. / This huge room became an oven, / and they pressed to the walls to escape from the flames. (9P, p. 29)

Though Umm Ghada is still alive, her real- life ceased with the horror of the last night she witnessed her daughter burning. As Freud (1955) Argues: man's attitude to death is one of "the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny" (p.243). So haunted with the horror she witnessed, she has decided to cease her life to retell her story of menace to everyone. She has chosen her way of survival by shocking the world with the disastrous event she experienced in that shelter. Addressing the audiences, she says: "your name will be witness, too [...] Now you sign the witness book" (9P, p. 29-31).

Imprisoned in the double

In *9 Parts of Desire*, the double is evident in Huda, an Iraqi political activist, in her fifties, who depicts Iraqi people's dilemma. Freud (1955) argues that the image of the double can be an integral part of the uncanny. Though, she has left Iraq a long time ago, and is now living in London, Huda still suffers from her past aching memories, that "[take] a lifetime to be liberated" (9P, p. 53). Freud (1955) maintains that "the quality of the uncanniness can only come from the fact of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage [...] [and] has become a thing of terror" (p. 236). Unable to escape neither from her brutal memories nor her dilemma, Huda is torn apart. Revealing her perplexity about the American occupation of her country, she says: "Personally, I have my doubts about American policy, /still, I prefer chaos to permanent repression and cruelty" (9P, p.19). Being confused about the American invasion of Iraq, she is

having a double way of thinking. The war against Iraq is against her beliefs, yet she asserts the need for this war. Though Huda has been protesting oppression, particularly that of her country's regime, she is aware of the menace of war very well. She confesses her dilemma: "this war was against all my beliefs/ and yet I wanted it" (9P, p. 20).

Freud (1955) argues that the double "is marked by the fact that [the character] is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (p. 234). The double can be in split personalities, which depicts confusion and alteration, mirrors inner desires and spreads bewilderment. In other words, it is "an actual repression of some content thought and a return of this repressed content" (Freud, 1955, p. 220). It is the repression Huda witnessed and experienced in Iraqi that led her to have that double self and confusion. Like many else, she believed that Iraqis needed to get freed from suppression. Huda narrates her experience in prison that increases our feeling of uncanniness. She testifies how she was arrested once, along with "one hundred eighty thousand people" of members of opposition including "the artists and architects —everybody, intellectuals [...]. The prison status was terrible" (9P, p. 52) she adds, and the torturing was nightmarish.

Huda is shocked to see that after the American invasion, what she hated and protested in Iraq has been replaced by much worse inhuman conditions; murder, homelessness, raping, thieving, chaos, by the occupation forces. The sense of uncanny menace is intensified when Huda testifies that the war, she once thought would liberate her country has brought death and destruction, instead. Now Iraqi people strive to survive; she bitterly testifies that "For every one Iraqi police officer who dies/ there are two hundred more/ desperate to risk everything/ waiting in line with their applications/ to take his place" (9P, p. 53). Living in Iraq under the American occupation has become frightening to her and to other Iraqi people. Huda is now feeling bewildered about her past and her present. She is unable to decide which she would prefer for her country, the old regime or the American invasion. She confesses: "I am in a period of disheartenment everywhere. / Maybe I should be there. / I don't know what to do with myself now, I have doubts, yeah, well/ about my whole life" (9P, p. 39).

The Iraqi American provides another example of the double that highlights a strong feeling of uncanniness in *9 Parts of Desire*. The American is perplexed. She is wavering between two diverse personalities, that of an American with a contented indifferent life and another of her people who are suffering from the demolition of war in her home country. Haunted with the destruction and the killing in war-torn Iraq, she 'hasn't left her studio apartment in New York for days" as if "she is glued to the TV" (9P, p. 35). While watching the bombs come down on her family neighborhood in Iraq, she is desperately looking for family faces. Scared because of the suffering of her relatives, all she can do is to cry, while repeating to herself the names of her Iraqi family.

I watch TV/looking for/ faces/ of our family/so all I do is cry [...]/ I'm on my knees/ in the middle of my apartment / with my mom/ on the phone/ watching/I'm holding a rosary/ watching/ CNN/ I want to pray/ but I don't have/words. (9P, pp. 36-37)

Her narration of the tragedy of her people is frightening; they are “burying their dead in their backyard/ in their garden/ the football field/ it’s every day” (9P, p. 35). “Now they are digging through mass graves with their bare hands” (9P, p. 35). The menace of the brutal war seems to have spread all over Iraq, and because of the omnipresence of menace it has become uncanny.

Ironically speaking in a monologue, the American, explicates the wide difference between the comfortable American life and the Iraqi tragedy.

Here/ there's space/ we throw our arms wide/ amber alerts and/ seven men get trapped underground and we stop everything/ we fly in engineers/ to save/ everything / we make a movie/ we go on *Oprah*, we talk about it/ like we are moving on/ or maybe/ we can't move on/ but just one trauma we say/ OK/ this can change you/ possibly/ your psychology, for the rest of your life/ OK./ But there's no one saying-/ when their parents get/ blown apart in front of their eyes/ or their sons/ are kidnapped.../or hacked/ to death. (9P, p. 44- 45)

The American’s image of the double is evident in her ironic comparison of the entertainment movies, opera and pedicure with the images of violence and death in Iraq. She bitterly adds, “a woman actually turned to me/ and said that [...] “The war it’s heartbreaking”/ she was getting a pedicure. / I was getting a fucking pedicure [...] / Why don’t we count the number of Iraqi dead?” (9P, p. 49) This Iraqi American can be regarded as Raffo’s ego, who seems to have been going through the same feeling of the double herself; Raffo recalls:

As an American with a father who was born in Iraq, I naturally live on both sides of the issues. The first Gulf War was the most defining moment of my life. I was in school at the University of Michigan. I remember watching many of my fellow students at the bar cheering the war as it played out on TV, while I was worried if my family in Baghdad was even going to survive. (“Nine Parts of Desire,” 2011, para. 7)

Another example of the double in *9 Parts of Desire* is that of Layal, an Iraqi artist. She is a collaborator and at the same time victimized by the regime. Layal’s double self reflects the kind of horror and menace that she has been going through. Frightened of being suppressed like others, she strives to survive from the cruelty of the old regime by choosing to collaborate with the same regime, her oppressor, as a protective action. In “undeniable instances of the uncanny” (Freud, 1955, p. 238), she pursues protection and survival; “Isn't everything in this country a matter of survival?” (9P, p. 10), she asks. She always asks them for protection: “Who will protect me but the regime? / Always I run to them, I come crying, begging, take care of me” (9P, p. 51). Freud argues that “all our suppressed acts of volition ... nourish in us the illusion of Free Will” (as cited in Freud, 1955, 236). However, Layal’s horror is true; it is fear of death. Freud believes that the double is directly related to human’s fear of death. He maintains that it was created “as a preservation against extinction” (Freud, 1955, p. 235) or in other words against menace, which reverses into “the uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 1955, p. 235).

What intensifies Layal's uncanny state is her horrible memories of the torture of one of her female friends by the regime. She says: "These stories are living inside of me/each woman I meet her or I hear about her/and I cannot separate myself from them" (9P, p. 9). Layal's figure of the double is partly motivated by such frightening memories. Moreover, she dreams of survival, of living freely. However, she rejects the idea of leaving Iraq, though she is quite aware that if she stays, she is not going to live. She says, "I am aware that I will die. / I am complicit" (9P, p. 51). Before her death, Layal expresses that she doesn't want freedom, and that she is familiar with death.

And two hundred more/ waiting in line/ risking everything to take my place/ [. . .] third bomb – boil the people / I don't want freedom/ Mullaya why are you here? / so old you cannot see it/ yaboo yaboo/ I'm fine I'm fine I'm [Layal begins to beat her face and chest.]/ [. . .] I'm dead. (9P, pp. 62-63)

Challenging the Uncanny

Freud (1955) suggests that "Among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs" (p. 241). Amal is a Bedouin who has been hurt several times by ill-fated love. First, she has suffered from the unfaithfulness of her first husband with one of her friends, a feeling described by Freud (1955) as "the uncanny effect of betrayal" (p. 239). Amal then had to leave her second husband because "he is very jealousy man, very Bedouin/ and I am looking for freedom" (9P, p. 15). Sandor (2015) argues that "The sensation of uncanniness is, at its core, an anxiety about the stability of those persons, places, and things in which we have placed our deepest trust" (para. 10). Again, Amal's hopes have fallen apart, when her third husband-to-be, whom she trusted deeply, has changed his mind and refused to marry.

The idea of menace in Raffo's play is also present in Amal's strong feeling of self-imprisonment. That feeling of imprisonment motivates her constant desire of leaving her homeland, in search for freedom and peace; she says: "I have no peace/ always I am looking for peace" (9P, p. 11). Amal prefers to leave Iraq to marry a man in London but betrays her. So, she decides to return to Iraq, and chooses not to live in her town, because "it's too small, I don't feel free even/ [...] I feel too much closed" (9P, p.13). Then, she chooses to marry an Israeli tribesman of Iraqi origin, after he promises her to move to Canada. But she deserts him because he was unable to keep his promise. She declares, "I am looking for this freedom/ and he says "No, we are not going to Canada."/ So I care very much for him, but again/ I left" (9P, p. 15). When she returns home again, she begins a phone relationship with a friend of her ex-husband, who does not live in Iraq. With him, she claims she "felt safe the first time in [her] life" (9P, p.15). Unfortunately, he refuses to marry her. Too ashamed to meet her family, Amal decides to return to her first husband in London, thinking that she can get more freedom, or peace, at least. The very act of giving voice to feelings is liberation to Amal. She is desperately searching for someone to listen to her, to fill her extreme sense of void. To her, the ability of voicing her feelings after her unhappy marriages is considered self-liberation that she has been seeking; she admits "I have never talked this before/

nobody here knows this thing about me/ I keep in my heart only/ [...] This is most free moment of my life/.... Really I mean this" (9P, p. 18).

Though Samira, the Iraqi Girl is only nine years old, she is also able to tell her tales of suffering that increase the impression of uncanniness. Samira's unpretentious words depict the uncanny menace the Iraqis are experiencing, because of the American invasion. The little girl gives a new perspective to the fears and frustration of living and growing under repression. She complains that her mother does not allow her to go to school, she says: "I have not been o school/ since America came/.... So I never leave the house" (9P, p. 23). The mother had to lie to her daughter, telling her that she is so stupid to go to school, to justify her worries. The Iraqi Girl cannot go to school, because of the menace of being kidnapped, too. She was also caught by her mother, waving to handsome American soldiers, who are undoubtedly regarded as an alarming danger to her.

The Iraqi Girl then tells the tragedies of the members of her family. Her words are straightforward but frightening. She spontaneously conveys her terror to the audience, while speaking the dreadful experiences of losing her father and the fear of losing her mother. Her father was taken away by two men from their house, and never came back again. The Iraqi Girl also speaks her feeling of menace that her mother might also be kidnapped or disappear; she says: [My mother] is afraid of getting stolen by gangs—/ now they steal women for money/ or to sell them" (9P, p. 24). Then, as a kind of relief, she convinces herself that her mother will not be kidnapped because "her hair is not that nice" (9P, p. 24). The Iraqi Girl also recounts the death of her grandparents and the destruction of their house by American soldiers. She says:

soldiers came knocking on their door speaking English/ it was night/ but they didn't understand / so they ran to hide under their beds/ and a tank, I think it was Abrams/ they ran the Abrams into the house/ and it took down half the house. (9P, p. 23)

The Iraqi Girl has become familiar with death and is quite aware of the menace of war. Her simple words utter grief, confusion, and doubts about her future as she is unable to understand what is going on. The menace of the hostile war seems to arise from everywhere, and because of the all persistent menace it becomes impossible to escape the threatening dangers. As Dutta (2015) maintains:

Menace emanates from the uncanny and mysterious setting outside with the invasion of unknown powers. Man's failure to comprehend the horrors of his outside as well as his inner world tends to undermine his chances of survival against all the odds that he can neither escape nor defer. He must confront the world he lives in and admit unquestioningly the role he is assigned to play. (p. 22)

Thus, for this Iraqi Girl, anything is imaginable to defeat fear. Dreaming of survival away from the dangers in her country, she wishes to be stolen and taken away to another country. She says, "maybe I should get stolens/ so I could leave my country" (9P, p. 25). The power of thoughts and wishes that might be fulfilled in a way that can bring about menace is exceptionally frightening.

Unaware of the extreme menace she could face, the Iraqi Girl is thinking of being stolen, regardless the consequences.

Nanna the last one we see is the oldest in the play. She is “scrappy and shrewd; she has seen it all” (9P p. 41) as she has experienced the menace of “twenty-three revolutions” (9P, p. 42) and has witnessed the looting done by American marines during the American Occupation. Narrating the burning of National Archives and Qur'anic Library, her soliloquy mirrors her in-depth awareness of the thrilling menace of deliberate destruction of Iraqi culture and identity:

I saw/ Iraqi peoples/ bringing petrol, / shhh/ and/ burning/ all/ National Archives, / Qur'anic Library, / all--/ it was not accident/ I saw a map/[....] they were told what to take/ [....] and they/ burned them gone. / Our history is finished. / [....] if they take what we share, / it is easier/ to finish. (9P, p. 43)

Though Nanna feels guilty for survival: “I have too much existence/ [....] my life has been spared- / if my life has been spared/ to whom do I owe my debt? (9P, p. 42) still, she has to survive amid the uncanny world of war. While the Iraqi Girl dreams of survival by leaving the country, and Umm Ghada chooses her way of survival by telling everyone else of the tragedy of the Amiriyya bomb shelter, Nana chooses her way of survival, by confronting the violent world she lives in. “What makes more vulnerable” in *9 parts of Desire* “is the desire for life in the characters who struggle but challenge the menacing [conditions] that have exploited all of their vitality literally as well as metaphorically” (Dutta, 2015, p. 22). The repression, violence, death, fear, betrayal, torn apart personalities, persistent sufferings, “all originated from an unidentifiable menace for which the individuals continuously struggle to survive but failing at the uncanny forces” (Dutta, 2015, p. 22). Nana decides to survive, by selling whatever she collects from the devastated city, the ruins of looted museums and archives, “books/ carpet/ shoes” or paintings (9P p. 66). Her selling utters the uncanny menace of the death of the heritage and culture of Iraq.

Conclusion

9 parts of Desire depicts the feeling of menace in the stories of its nine characters. Their monologues portray a different mode of human conflict with the uncanny world of menace and bewilderment, prevailing during wars. Fear is a persevering witness of these characters' devastation. Still, while their stories highlight the feeling of fear and terror, these characters struggle for survival. The struggle for identity is also present in Huda, the American and Layal who are severely torn between double ways of thinking and life. Now, they feel they have become strangers to the others. Raffo's dramaturgy of her characters is distinguished in that each one of them is made to articulate her story of suffering in monologues. These monologues are deliberately employed with the purpose of shocking the readers by addressing them directly. Raffo employs this correlation between painful experience and conflicting speech as a form of confrontation that also intensifies the sense of the uncanny in the play. Moreover, her skillful employment of language helped depict the various facets of human anxiety. She has implemented the dimensions of language to emphasize the impression of the frightening, uncanny cruelty, horror, and pain around the suffering evolving from the painful world of war and suppression. Her deliberate

mistakes in language for authenticity have managed to generate a menacing atmosphere in the play. Her diverse dramatic style as described by Teachout (2005), "brings us closer to the inner life of Iraq than a thousand slick-surfaced TV reports" (para. 2).

About the Author:

Dr. Sahar Abdel Khalek Awad Allah is currently an Assistant Professor of English Language and Literature, Department of English Language & Literature, College of Science and Humanities, at Jubail, Imam AbdulRahman Bin Faisal University, Dammam, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She is also an Assistant Professor at College of Education, Hurghada, South Valley University, Red Sea, Egypt. Dr. Sahar Specializes in English, Irish and American interdisciplinary drama studies. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5835-9284>

ⁱ *Heather Raffo's 9 Parts of Desire*, (2006) will be referred to in the paper as 9P.

References:

- Dutta, M. (2015, January). Unveiling the Uncanny: A Quest for the Kafkaesque Mode in Harold Pinter's early Plays. *Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult.*, 3, (1), 19-22, Retrieved June 15, 2018 from <https://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJELC/PDF/2015/January/Dutta.pdf>
- Freud, S., (1955). The "Uncanny". In Strachey, J. (Ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (pp. 217-256). London: Vintage.
- Horwitz, S. (2004, November). Face to Face. Heather Raffo Exploring the Complexity of Identity. *Backstage Magazine*, 2. Retrieved July 16, 2016 from <http://levantinecenter.org/pages/heatherraffo.html>
- Mahadi, S. & Muhi, M. T. (2012). Shahrzad Tells her Stories in Raffo's Nine Parts of Desire. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 2 (1) January, 91- 101.
- Nine Parts of Desire (2011). Retrieved August 19, 2016 from <http://heatherraffo.com/projects/nine-parts-of-desire/>
- Romanska, M. (2010). Trauma and Testimony: Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*. *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*. (30), 211-240. Retrieved February 20, 2017 from https://www.academia.edu/5998990/_Trauma_and_Testimony_in_Heather_Raffo_s_Nine_Parts_of_Desire_
- Raffo, H. (2006). *Heather Raffo's 9 Parts of Desire*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- Sandor, M. (2015, October). Uncanny: A Brief History of a Disturbed Word. Weird fiction Review. Retrieved August 29, 2016 from <https://mastersreview.com/somethings-wrong-in-the-garden-the-uncanny-and-the-art-of-writing-by-marjorie-sandor/>
- Teachout, T. (2005) Invisible Women. *Wall Street Journal*, Retrieved August 1, 2016 from <http://www.heatherraffo.com/WallStJournal.html>