



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>



Motherhood and Martyrdom: Rewriting Gendered Trauma in Heather Raffo's *Fallujah* through a Gynocritical Lens

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Received: 12/6/ 2025, Accepted: 7 /7 /2025, Online Published: 30/9/2025

Abstract

This paper explores Heather Raffo's *Fallujah* as a performative intervention that rewrites gendered trauma by reconfiguring the entwined tropes of motherhood and martyrdom within the context of post-war Iraq. Anchored in gynocriticism, Elaine Showalter's feminist literary framework that centers women's writing, experience, and expression, this study argues that *Fallujah* resists patriarchal and orientalist portrayals of Arab women as passive victims by foregrounding their emotional, maternal, and political agency amid devastation. The research aims to investigate how Raffo crafts female subjectivities that defy hegemonic discourses of martyrdom often shaped by male-dominated cultural, religious, and political narratives. Key questions driving the analysis include: How does Raffo represent maternal grief as a site of resistance? In what ways

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does *Fallujah* subvert traditional symbols of sacrifice and honor through its female characters? And how does the dramatization of trauma challenge silencing mechanisms in Arab and Western discourse alike? Methodologically, the study undertakes a close textual analysis of Raffo's *Fallujah*, examining narrative structure, monologues, imagery, and character development through a gynocritical and trauma studies lens, particularly drawing on the works of Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth on trauma, and Showalter on women's literary voice. Findings suggest that *Fallujah* portrays motherhood not as a reductive role but as a politically charged identity that reclaims the right to mourn, to remember, and to critique. The play's maternal figures articulate loss and trauma in ways that both disrupt nationalist martyrdom and challenge the militarized masculinities that sustain war narratives. By writing back to patriarchal taboos, Raffo carves a space for a gendered witnessing of war, positioning women not as peripheral casualties but as central agents of cultural memory and resistance.

Keywords: Heather Raffo, *Fallujah*, gynocriticism, motherhood, martyrdom, gendered trauma

الأمومة والشهادة: إعادة كتابة الصدمة الجندرية في مسرحية *فلوجة* للكاتبة هذر رافو من خلال عدسة النقد النسوية

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة مسرحية *فلوجة* لهذر رافو بوصفها نصاً أدائياً يعيد كتابة الصدمة الجندرية من خلال إعادة تشكيل التداخل بين ثنائيتي الأمومة والشهادة في سياق ما بعد الحرب في العراق. وانطلاقاً من النقد النسوي (Gynocriticism)، وهو الإطار النقدي النسوي لإلين شووالتر الذي يركّز على كتابة المرأة وتجربتها وتعبيرها، تتحدث الدراسة عن كيفية تناول مسرحية *فلوجة* لسلطة المجتمع الأبوية والاستشراقية للنساء العربيات كضحايا اخترن السلبية تجاه ما يعانين من خلال إبراز

الجوانب العاطفية والأمومية والسياسية وسط الدمار. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن الكيفية التي تصوغ بها رافو ذواتاً نسوية تتحدى الخطابات المهيمنة حول الشهادة التي كثيراً ما تُشكّلها السرديات الثقافية والدينية والسياسية الذكورية. من بين الأسئلة المحورية التي توجه هذا التحليل: كيف تمثل رافو حزن الامهات كموقع للمقاومة؟ بأي طرق تُقوّض مسرحية *فلوجة* الرموز التقليدية للتضحية والشرف من خلال شخصياتها النسائية؟ وكيف تتحدى دراماتيكية الصدمة آليات الإخراص في كل من الخطاب العربي والغربي؟ منهجياً، تعتمد الدراسة على تحليل نصي دقيق لمسرحية *الفلوجة*، يتناول البنية السردية، والمونولوجات، والصور الرمزية، وتطور الشخصيات من خلال عدسة النقد النسوي ودراسات الصدمة، لا سيما من خلال أعمال جوديث هيرمان وكاثي كاروث حول الصدمة، وإلين شوالتر حول صوت المرأة الأدبي. تشير النتائج إلى أن *فلوجة* تصوّر الأمومة ليس كدور اختزالي، بل كهوية مشحونة سياسياً تستعيد حقها في الحداد، والتذكّر، والنقد. فالشخصيات الأمومية في المسرحية تتطرق بالخسارة والصدمة بطرق تقوّض خطاب الشهادة القومية وتتحدى الذكورة العسكرية التي تغذي سرديات الحرب. ومن خلال الكتابة المضادة للمحرّمات الأبوية، تفسح رافو مجالاً لشهادة نسوية على الحرب، وتقدّم النساء كفاعلات مركزيات في الذاكرة الثقافية والمقاومة، لا كضحايا هامشيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هنر رافو، *فلوجة*، النقد النسوي، الأمومة، الشهادة، الصدمة الجندرية

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary war literature and drama, representations of Arab women often oscillate between two extremes: the silenced victim and the glorified martyr. This binary not only simplifies the complexity of women's experiences in conflict zones but also reproduces patriarchal and orientalist narratives that erase female agency. In her opera *Fallujah* (2016), American-Iraqi playwright Heather Raffo challenges these limiting portrayals by foregrounding the voices of mothers who have endured both personal and national trauma. Through a gynocritical lens, which seeks to re-center women's writing, experiences, and emotional vocabularies in literary analysis (Showalter, 1977), *Fallujah* becomes a powerful site for rewriting the intertwined narratives of motherhood and martyrdom in the aftermath of war.

Heather Raffo, born in Michigan to an Iraqi father and American mother, is a prominent playwright and performer whose work engages deeply with issues of identity, gender, trauma, and diaspora. Her seminal play *9 Parts of Desire* (2004), based on interviews with Iraqi women, received critical acclaim for giving voice to women often marginalized in both Western and Arab discourses (Iskandar, 2011). As a cultural bridge between East and West, Raffo has consistently used her platform to humanize Middle

Eastern women's experiences in a post-9/11 context. Her authorship is marked by an unapologetically feminist ethos, creating layered female characters who express vulnerability and defiance in equal measure (Nadje Al-Ali, 2018).

In *Fallujah*, an opera inspired by the real-life experiences of U.S. Marine Christian Ellis and set during the Second Battle of *Fallujah* (2004), Raffo contributes the libretto, weaving together stories of American soldiers and Iraqi civilians. While the original narrative focused on the psychological trauma of American veterans, Raffo's intervention inserts maternal grief, cultural devastation, and the psychological wounds of Iraqi mothers, thus shifting the lens toward a gendered witnessing of war (Raffo, 2016). Her treatment of motherhood as both a biological and political condition interrogates traditional martyrdom narratives in Arab and Islamic culture, where the mother of a "martyr" is often celebrated while her suffering is overlooked or glorified.

This study aims to analyze how Raffo reclaims maternal voices and reframes martyrdom through a gynocritical framework that foregrounds women's experiences, emotional resilience, and cultural resistance. It will draw upon feminist trauma theory, particularly the work of Judith Herman (1997) and Cathy Caruth (1996), to examine how *Fallujah* dramatizes both individual and collective trauma.

In answering the raised questions, the paper contends that the play not only complicates the depiction of Arab women in war narratives but also affirms Raffo's commitment to political theatre as a form of healing and resistance. By situating motherhood at the heart of trauma and transformation, Raffo challenges the gendered silencing of wartime suffering and reimagines martyrdom as a space of protest rather than passive sacrifice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The interplay between gender, trauma, and identity in dramatic literature has long been a subject of critical discourse, particularly within feminist and poststructuralist frameworks. Scholars have increasingly turned their attention to how female-authored texts and performances mediate gendered trauma, resistance, and subjectivity in contexts of war and socio-political upheaval. This review situates *Fallujah* by Heather Raffo within the emerging interdisciplinary conversations around gynocriticism, trauma theory, and gender performance in drama.

Elaine Showalter's foundational theory of gynocriticism calls for a critical approach that centers women's writing and lived experience, departing from male-centered literary traditions (Showalter, 1977). This lens has proved vital for exploring works that challenge gender binaries and disrupt patriarchal narrative forms. Abdullah and Khalaf (2021) offer a feminist critique of Eugene O'Neill's plays, highlighting how dramatic structures reinforce patriarchal norms while suggesting the necessity for more nuanced representations of female subjectivity in theatre. Almaarof (2024), in her analysis of Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*, demonstrates how female characters navigate and resist institutional power structures, thus offering a methodological blueprint for exploring similar dynamics in *Fallujah*.

Trauma theorists such as Caruth (1996) and Herman (1997) emphasize the fragmented and deferred nature of traumatic memory, especially in the aftermath of political violence. While much trauma literature focuses on male combatants or generalized victimhood, the gendered dimensions of trauma, particularly maternal trauma, remain underexplored. Almaarroof and Rostam (2023) contribute to this conversation by examining the interrelation between memory, imagination, and identity through the framework of attachment theory. Although their study focuses on short stories, the psychological mechanisms they uncover are directly applicable to Raffo's portrayal of maternal loss and its enduring psychological residues.

Further extending the trauma-memory nexus, Jassim and Almaarroof (2024) explore how soft power constructs gender attitudes in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*, suggesting that ideology, gender, and memory are entangled through performative structures in drama. This analysis is useful in understanding how *Fallujah* challenges dominant cultural scripts by reimagining motherhood not as passive mourning, but as active resistance.

Judith Butler's (2004) theory of gender performativity underlines how gender is produced and maintained through repeated acts within socio-cultural contexts. Num'an and Almaarroof (2023) extend this insight in their dual articles on *Some Girl(s)* by Neil LaBute, demonstrating how gender identity is a site of constant negotiation. These studies highlight the instability of masculine authority, a theme Raffo confronts in *Fallujah* through the subversion of martyrdom tropes, often coded as masculine, and reassigning them to female characters through maternal grief.

Moreover, Abdullah, Suood, and Mohamed (2024) investigate how soft power and media, specifically Walt Disney animations, affect children's value systems. Although focused on children's media, their findings reinforce the broader argument that cultural products subtly encode and transmit gendered ideologies. *Fallujah* functions similarly, but subversively, by disrupting the gendered assumptions embedded in wartime narratives.

Almaarroof and Madhi (2024) address identity crisis through a postmodern eco-critical lens, linking psychological alienation to environmental and sociocultural dislocation. This idea parallels the psychosocial fragmentation seen in *Fallujah*, where identity, place, and motherhood collapse under the pressures of war and diaspora. Their interdisciplinary model affirms the necessity of reading female trauma not in isolation but as embedded in broader ecological and political landscapes.

Despite the rich and evolving body of feminist and trauma-informed criticism in drama studies, there remains a critical gap in scholarship addressing: The intersection of motherhood and martyrdom in Arab-American or Middle Eastern diasporic theatre. The application of gynocritical theory to female-authored war narratives, particularly those that centre maternal subjectivities as acts of resistance. A feminist trauma reading of *Fallujah*, a text that uniquely foregrounds the Arab mother as both a bearer of loss and a political agent, is noticeably absent in current literature. This study fills the gap by combining gynocriticism, trauma theory, and gender performance to foreground how *Fallujah* reclaims the maternal body and voice as sites of memory, resistance, and

cultural critique. In doing so, it offers a model for reading female-authored trauma texts beyond Euro-American contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in feminist literary criticism, particularly gynocriticism and trauma theory, to examine Raffo's play. The analysis draws on close reading as its primary tool, focusing on language, symbolism, structure, and character development in the play's libretto. The aim is to uncover how the narrative constructs gendered trauma and challenges prevailing patriarchal norms through maternal subjectivity.

The gynocritical approach, as formulated by Elaine Showalter (1977), moves away from analyzing women writers through male literary traditions and instead centers women's experiences, language, and cultural expressions. This framework is crucial for understanding how the play positions female grief and motherhood not as passive states but as active forms of witnessing and resistance. Gynocriticism allows for the exploration of how Raffo's text inscribes female trauma into a cultural and political discourse often dominated by male voices and nationalist ideologies.

To deepen the exploration of trauma as it is gendered and narrated, the paper also incorporates key insights from feminist trauma studies. Judith Herman (1997) identifies trauma as not only a psychological condition but also a narrative rupture that demands both testimony and recognition. In war literature, such ruptures are frequently associated with the male soldier's psyche; however, this study shifts attention to maternal trauma, engaging with Caruth's (1996) notion of trauma as "an overwhelming experience that resists full integration into consciousness or narrative." This theoretical lens is critical for analyzing how Raffo crafts maternal voices that simultaneously convey pain, resistance, and memory.

The intersection of gender, war, and narrative is further examined through postcolonial feminist theory, particularly in relation to Arab and Muslim women's representation in both Western and Middle Eastern discourses. Scholars such as Nadjie Al-Ali (2018) and Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) caution against homogenizing portrayals of Arab women as either victims or heroines, arguing instead for complex, situated readings of gender in contexts of conflict. By foregrounding Iraqi women's voices in *Fallujah*, Raffo disrupts these binaries and constructs what Abu-Lughod (2002) calls a "politics of partiality," in which local histories and emotional truths complicate global narratives of war and liberation.

Combining these theoretical strands, the methodology enables a critical reading of *Fallujah* that reveals how Raffo uses maternal characters and motifs to rewrite the dominant narratives of martyrdom, memory, and national trauma. The analysis engages both textual evidence from the libretto and contextual knowledge about the Iraq War, emphasizing how literary form and political content intersect to produce a feminist counter-narrative to patriarchal taboos. i.e., the study presents another point of view rather than the patriarchal one.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Raffo's *Fallujah* reorients the lens of war trauma from the traditionally valorized male soldier to the silenced Iraqi mother, effectively subverting dominant patriarchal narratives of martyrdom and national sacrifice. While the opera initially centres on the psychological breakdown of the American Marine Philip, Raffo's libretto introduces a pivotal female figure, the Mother, who bears witness to the intimate destruction of her family and homeland. Through this character, Raffo constructs a maternal voice that is both emotionally raw and politically conscious, emblematic of what Elaine Showalter (1977) defines as a "female subculture" within literary production, one rooted in shared experience, silence, and resistance.

The Mother's opening lines are imbued with a mournful defiance: "My son did not carry a gun. He carried the oud. The last thing he played was a lullaby." (Raffo, 2016, Scene 3). This lyric immediately establishes a counternarrative to martyrdom: the son is not a fighter but a musician, and his final act is not one of violence but of creation and comfort. In contrast to traditional narratives where the martyred son embodies national heroism through bloodshed, here the maternal memory resists sacrificial logic. The oud, a symbol of cultural continuity and tenderness, replaces the weapon, thereby dismantling the heroic frame imposed by both Western and Middle Eastern nationalist discourse.

Raffo's characterization aligns with Caruth's (1996) theory of trauma as a "speechless terror" that must be transcribed into narrative in order to be processed. The Mother's monologue becomes this act of narration. However, her trauma is not only psychological but also socio-political. As Judith Herman (1997) argues, trauma in war is compounded for women because their suffering is often privatized or denied legitimacy in public remembrance. The Mother refuses this erasure: "He is not your shaheed. He is not your war. He was mine." (Raffo, 2016, Scene 7). Here, the possessive pronouns "yours" vs. "mine" enact a powerful rejection of collective ownership over individual sacrifice. The statement destabilizes the masculine-nationalist framing of martyrdom (often glorified in both Western media and regional religio-political rhetoric) and reclaims maternal grief as a political act. It echoes Lila Abu-Lughod's (2002) argument that Arab women must be read not through a savior/victim binary but through the complexities of situated knowledge and embodied memory.

From a gynocritical perspective, the Mother's voice performs what Showalter (1977) identifies as "the double-voiced discourse" of women's writing: simultaneously engaging with and subverting male-dominated narratives. Raffo constructs her as a character who speaks not only as a grieving mother but also as a cultural subject aware of how her son's death will be co-opted: "They will use him. His death will be their story, not mine." (Raffo, 2016, Scene 8). This line resonates with trauma theorists like Herman (1997), who insist that the struggle over narrative is central to the healing process. The mother's awareness that trauma will be re-narrated through the lens of nationalism, martyrdom, or religious valorization reflects the broader feminist concern with narrative ownership. Her speech is an intervention, a way of resisting both silence and distortion.

Moreover, Raffo repositions motherhood as an act of insurgent memory. The play does not offer redemption, closure, or forgiveness, often expected outcomes in male-authored war narratives.

Instead, it centers what Cathy Caruth (1996) calls the “unclaimed experience” of trauma, unresolved and recursive, yet vital in its retelling. The Mother does not seek to forget; she seeks to speak, even when her speech is fragmented or ignored.

Another symbolic scene reinforces the contrast between militarized masculinity and maternal mourning. As Philip’s trauma crescendos, the opera juxtaposes his violent hallucinations with the Mother’s calm but harrowing refrain: “Who teaches the mother how to bury her child?” (Raffo, 2016, Scene 9). This rhetorical question is not simply an expression of grief, it is a political accusation. It indicts systems that normalize violence while offering no language or ritual for maternal suffering. In this sense, the play aligns with feminist scholarship that sees mourning as an ethical and political act (Butler, 2004). By posing motherhood as a lived site of trauma and resistance, Raffo breaks with patriarchal scripts that devalue female pain and silence maternal protest.

The opera’s structure itself supports this re-centring. While the soldier’s psychological descent is linear, the Mother’s narrative is cyclical, marked by repetition, fragmentation, and lyrical recurrence, forms often associated with feminine expression in literature (Cixous, 1976). Her voice does not conform to Aristotelian catharsis but rather inhabits what Showalter (1981) describes as the “female sentence” which means a syntactical and stylistic mode of writing that reflects women’s embodied experience, often marked by emotional intensity, circularity, and resistance to rigid, patriarchal narrative forms. It is emotive, intuitive, and disruptive to male-centric narrative norms.

Through *Fallujah*, Raffo thus stages a radical reimagining of motherhood, not as passive endurance but as active witness and cultural intervention. By linking maternal identity with political consciousness, and by challenging the glorification of martyrdom, the play performs a gynocritical act of rewriting gendered trauma. It recasts the mother not as the background mourner of war, but as its central voice of moral reckoning.

Raffo’s dramaturgical technique of juxtaposing the disintegration of the American Marine’s psyche with the stoic endurance of the Iraqi Mother highlights the asymmetrical burden of war. Yet it also disrupts the Western war narrative where Arab suffering is often rendered as background to Western trauma. The Mother’s grief is not an exoticized tableau; it is a narrative axis that exposes the uneven distribution of grievability, a term Judith Butler (2009) uses to describe the socio-political frameworks through which certain lives are deemed worthy of mourning, while others are systematically devalued or rendered invisible. In the context of *Fallujah*, this concept becomes a searing critique of war politics and imperial violence. The opera dramatizes how U.S. military narratives often center the trauma of American soldiers while neglecting or erasing the suffering of Iraqi civilians, particularly mothers. By giving voice to the Mother’s persistent mourning, Raffo challenges this ethical asymmetry and reclaims the Arab maternal body as a subject of grief, not a background to someone else’s war story. Her grief becomes a form of political resistance, insisting that Iraqi lives, often ungrieved in global media and military discourse, are not only mournable but central to any just reckoning with war.

Indeed, martyrdom in *Fallujah* is not glorified. Rather, it is portrayed as a cruel erasure of youth and future. The repeated motif of the oud, an instrument of culture and continuity, serves as a counter-symbol to the weapon. The son's final lullaby, recalled by the Mother, functions as both an elegy and a metaphor for interrupted generational inheritance. This aligns with Caruth's (1996) notion of trauma as an interruption of temporal continuity: "Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it was precisely not known in the first instance, returns to haunt the survivor" (p. 4).

The Mother, then, becomes not just a figure of mourning but of transgenerational trauma, carrying memory and rupture across temporal lines. Her refusal to forget is, in itself, a form of resistance. As she says: "I count the days by absences, his footsteps, his oud, the words he never said. You want me to be quiet? But he's still here, in the silence you gave me." (Raffo, 2016, Scene 10). This eloquent defiance mirrors Herman's (1997) view of recovery as a reclamation of voice and narrative. The silence imposed on the mother is not passivity; it is a culturally sanctioned form of erasure. By vocalizing what remains unspoken in nationalist mythologies, namely, the intimate cost of war for women, Raffo stages what Showalter (1981) calls the wild zone—a space of female experience and creativity that exists outside male-defined language and symbolic systems, enabling forms of expression inaccessible or illegible within patriarchal discourse.: an area of narrative that resists assimilation into patriarchal paradigms.

Additionally, *Fallujah* engages with the Orientalist gaze, not through confrontation, but subversion. The Mother is not a veiled object of pity, nor is she framed through sensationalist imagery. Instead, she possesses emotional and intellectual depth. This nuanced representation responds directly to critiques by Nadjie Al-Ali (2007) and Abu-Lughod (2002), who argue that representations of Middle Eastern women in Western art often oscillate between invisibility and fetishism. Raffo resists both. She constructs a maternal consciousness that is both culturally specific and universally resonant, embedding Iraqi motherhood within the shared human condition of grief, dignity, and remembrance.

Crucially, the play refuses a redemptive arc. Unlike classical tragedy or therapeutic drama, there is no closure, no reconciliation. Instead, the opera play offers emotional complexity: rage, tenderness, fatigue, and pride. The Mother does not find healing in forgiveness, nor does she become a vehicle for a Western soldier's redemption. Rather, she becomes a persistent voice of ethical accountability, as seen when she addresses the soldier directly: "You walk away with ghosts. I sleep with a grave in my bed." (Raffo, 2016, Scene 12). This line not only collapses the private/public binary, drawing the war into the domestic space of the maternal bed, but also indicts the unequal distribution of trauma.

The Western soldier may suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but the Iraqi mother suffers ongoing traumatic stress: a grief without end, without recognition, and without societal support. Her trauma is not post- but present, a condition absent from Western psychocentric models of healing.

Furthermore, the opera's lyrical fragmentation and musical interruptions mirror the psychological fragmentation of the Mother's mind, reinforcing trauma theory's assertion that trauma resists coherent narration (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1997). The non-linear structure, repetition of images (the oud, the lullaby, the grave), and lack of narrative resolution reflect what feminist trauma theorist Dori Laub (1995) describes as bearing witness to an event that has not yet ended. Through this layered strategy, Raffo enacts a gynocritical poetics of pain and protest. The Mother's language, rich in metaphor and musicality, resists the clinical, linear discourse often used to categorize trauma in male-centered war narratives. It instead exemplifies what Hélène Cixous (1976) describes as *écriture féminine*, a form of feminine writing that emerges from the body, emotion, and unconscious, privileging fluidity, intuition, and non-linear expression over phallogocentric logic and structure. Her voice becomes not only a character in the opera but an aesthetic principle, reshaping the dramatic form around maternal witnessing.

In sum, the play resists the silencing tropes of both patriarchy and orientalism by allowing the mother to speak her trauma, not as an emblem but as a narrator. Raffo's gynocritical intervention insists that martyrdom is not noble but violent; that motherhood is not passive but political; and that trauma, when voiced by women, becomes a radical act of cultural survival. The opera, therefore, does not just tell a story, it demands a new ethics of listening, one attuned to the gendered sounds of war.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Heather Raffo's *Fallujah* rewrites the gendered experiences of war by repositioning motherhood not as a sentimental trope but as a politically charged site of memory, grief, and resistance. Employing a gynocritical framework, in conjunction with trauma theory and postcolonial feminist thought, the analysis has revealed how Raffo reclaims maternal subjectivity from the margins of martyrdom discourse and foregrounds it as a source of narrative authority and ethical resistance.

Through the character of the Mother, Raffo challenges the hegemonic war narratives that valorize male sacrifice while rendering female grief invisible or apolitical. The maternal voice in the play does not seek redemption or resolution; rather, it insists on the right to narrate trauma outside patriarchal, militaristic, or nationalist frameworks. This textual and theatrical intervention disrupts both Western narratives of the "liberated" Arab woman and regional constructions of maternal martyrdom, allowing for a more nuanced and embodied portrayal of Iraqi womanhood in wartime.

To return to the core research questions and answering them the paper shows that Raffo constructs the Iraqi Mother as an emotionally rich, narratively central figure whose trauma is ongoing and intergenerational. Her voice directly contrasts the linear arc of the American soldier's psychological breakdown, presenting trauma as a cultural wound rather than an individual pathology.

The Mother's refusal to let her son's death be claimed by religious or nationalist rhetoric reframes martyrdom as a site of loss, not heroism. Her voice critiques and undermines the

glorification of sacrificial motherhood, instead offering an alternative ethics grounded in remembrance, rage, and cultural survival.

By applying gynocriticism, this study has demonstrated that *Fallujah* constructs a “female sentence” (Showalter, 1981), nonlinear, cyclical, and emotionally textured, that resists the dominant narrative closure of male war stories. Raffo’s aesthetic choices allow for a distinctly feminine expression of grief and witness, embedded in lyrical language and symbolic resonance.

Methodologically, the paper combined close textual analysis with trauma theory (Caruth, Herman, Laub) and feminist literary criticism (Showalter, (1977) Cixous(1976), Abu-Lughod(2000)), enabling a multilayered understanding of the opera’s portrayal of motherhood. This interdisciplinary approach revealed how Raffo’s work resists the dual silencing imposed by Western orientalism and local patriarchy, offering instead a resilient, grieving maternal subjectivity that reclaims both narrative and memory.

In broader terms, the play contributes to feminist performance studies by cantering Arab female subjectivities in the global theatre of war. It invites scholars and audiences alike to recognize the ethical imperative of listening to maternal voices, voices that hold the tension between personal love and collective suffering, between silence and testimony.

Thus, Raffo’s play is not merely an opera about war, it is a radical feminist intervention that rewrites the very grammar of trauma and the gendered politics of remembrance.

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