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**Raffo stirringly documents the 'collateral damage' in Iraq****NINE PARTS OF DESIRE**

By Heather Raffo  
 Manhattan Ensemble Theater  
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**SMART BOMBS**

The stage of the shoebox-shaped Manhattan Ensemble Theater looks as if it's been bombed wide open and downtown Baghdad lies somewhere beyond. Sandbags seem to hold the walls in place. And in a deeply unsettling moment—one of many in Heather Raffo's one-woman show *Nine Parts of Desire*—a soft-spoken old Iraqi woman climbs the sandbags and points a flashlight into the darkened theater. We are in the Amiriya bomb shelter, she tells us, where the U.S. dropped a smart bomb during the 1991 war. "Here on the ceiling you can see charred handprints and footprints," she says, "and here a silhouette of a woman vaporized from heat." And soon the bombs start falling again.

Raffo, an Iraqi American actor, spent a decade interviewing a cross section of Iraqi women in and out of the country. She plays more than a half-dozen characters in varying states of oppression—an overwhelmed trauma doctor, a giddy teen with a crush on \*NSync, an anxious exile watching the nighttime raids on CNN—switching from one role to the next simply by shifting the *abaya* on her body. "God created sexual desire in 10 parts," the titular Islamic proverb claims, "then he gave nine parts to women and one to men." But that's not always evident here, except for Layal, a sexy, free-spirited artist who once painted monumental portraits of Saddam and now draws a student whom his goons killed: "They stripped her, covered her in honey, and watched his Dobermans eat her." In London, a hard-drinking intellectual shares similarly graphic tales of torture as proof that the current war was necessary. "How could these people have liberated themselves?" she asks her interviewer. Raffo offers no answers, only the anguished voices of a nation torn apart by decades of repression, violence, and war. **JORGE MORALES**