

Analyzing Hazza Al-Barari's Play *Blood Necklace* Through a Feminist Literary Lens

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Abstract—Known in Arabic as *Qiladat Aldamm*, *Blood Necklace*, a 2007 play written by the Jordanian playwright Hazza Al-Barari, is an exemplary model of feminist theater in Jordan. The play's heroine, Wafaa, depicts the internal and external conflicts experienced by women in a patriarchal society created by the troubled reality in which she lives. To trace the manifestations of feminism in *Blood Necklace*, the paper employs the feminist critical approach, which entails tracking, describing, and analyzing women's issues and concerns. Furthermore, it also examines the idea of feminist theater and highlights the Jordanian theater's experience in addressing women's concerns. The textual analysis demonstrated that theater written by men can explore women's inner selves and discuss their concerns and hopes, rejecting the notions that call for gender-based discrimination in writing. Finally, this paper contributes to the art of theater in general and feminist theater in Jordan in particular.

Index Terms—feminism, gender, patriarchy, society, theater

I. INTRODUCTION

Women's issues and their diverse manifestations in art have long been a focus of interest for critics and researchers, with theater emerging as a leading form of art that reflects the transformations in women's roles and social status (Autoom & Alkam, 2017). In this context, the problem of classifying theatrical works performed by women or addressing women's issues arises, specifically the subtle distinction between the concepts of “women's theater” and “feminist theater.” Despite this clear distinction, the two concepts intersect in their focus on women. Though women's theater focuses on *who* produces the work, emphasizing women's participation in all aspects of production, whereas feminist theater focuses on what the work presents, highlighting the adoption of women's issues and the defense of their rights (Al-Ghammaz, 2023; Aston, 1999; Hamidish & Arewat, 2021).

Feminist theater focuses on women's social and political issues, their history and achievements, and the systems that oppress them. It seeks to change society's perception of women by presenting leading and active female characters, rather than merely passive roles. It also highlights various women's issues, such as violence against women, gender discrimination, deprivation of rights, and social injustice (Qutami, 2022). Feminist theater seeks to change the stereotypical image of women in society by presenting strong, independent, and influential female characters. Moreover, feminist theater provides a space for women to express their experiences, opinions, and feelings, enhancing their voice and presence in society (Al-Ghammaz, 2023; Tahir et al., 2025).

Furthermore, feminist theater challenges patriarchal authority in society and the theater itself and seeks to achieve gender equality. It is sometimes characterized by open-ended texts and circular stories, which encourage critical thinking and reflection (Abd-Rabbo, 2019). It also tends to present collective heroism, in addition to building a single heroine, reflecting the importance of collective work and women's solidarity. Additionally, feminist theater is essentially humane, striving to achieve justice and equality for all. It includes various forms, such as documentary theater, body theater, forum theater, and other types of theater. Moreover, there are numerous Arab feminist theatrical experiences that discuss women's issues and seek to achieve the goals of feminist theater, such as *Three Tall Women*, *Women's Talk*, and *Secret Talk*.

Within this theoretical framework, this study explores feminist theater through an analysis of the play *Blood Necklace* by Jordanian writer Hazza Al-Barari. This paper, while making an analytical study, gives textual focus to the play *Blood Necklace*, addressing feminism manifestations as one of its key literary features. Furthermore, this paper aims to enrich modern scholarship and libraries about the play by furnishing a more detailed textual analysis of it. Even though much

has been written on other personal, social, and political themes in Al-Barari's *Blood Necklace*, nothing has been written on the manifestations of feminism and theater in the play.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Past studies and research work have addressed feminist manifestations at the world level in general and the Western world in particular. However, feminist manifestations are still insufficiently addressed at both the Arab and Jordanian levels. In an academic study, Abdul Karim (2019) provided an in-depth analysis of women's worldviews in Egyptian feminist theater, focusing on the works of director and playwright Dalia Bassiouny. The study sheds light on the aspirations of Arab women and attempts to share their vision of their own world and their relationship with the outside world, which has often contributed to shaping and presenting it from a male perspective. The study also analyzes how women have been creative in a world subjugated by male dominance and how they have nevertheless achieved excellence in many scientific and literary fields.

Furthermore, Abdul Karim's (2019) research focuses on Arab women's wishes for new venues where they may express their objectives and desires while also sharing their views. Regarding women's participation in theatrical production, the study discusses women's participation in theatrical production, both as writers and directors, and how this participation was sometimes correct and contributed to their self-affirmation through their work. The study examines the distinctiveness of feminist writing in the Arab world and the extent to which the author accomplishes it. Moreover, the research problem lies in obtaining some of the author's theatrical texts for the study and analysis model. One of the objectives is to present a practical model of feminist theatrical creativity for a new generation seeking greater independence, breaking away from male dominance, and asserting themselves through their theatrical writing and directing. Taken together, the study offers an important critical perspective on the role of women in Egyptian theater, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and achievements faced by female creative playwrights in this area.

In an article on the Iraqi feminist theater and the challenge of male oppression, Ali (2018) presents an analysis of Arab feminist theater, focusing on the challenges it faces in confronting male oppression. The article highlights the distinction between the terms "women's theater" and "feminist theater" and provides examples of Arab theatrical experiences that represent feminist theater. Distinguishing between women's and feminist theater, the article explains that women's theater refers to theatrical activity carried out by theater groups run by women, while feminist theater refers to theatrical experiences that embrace purely women's perspectives or are based on feminist theory. Regarding the production of sensory theater, the Iraqi-based article indicates that feminist theater aims to produce a theater of the senses by focusing on the body as a basis for visual and directing vision and an expression of women's feelings and consciousness. The article also presents examples of Arab theatrical experiences that represent feminist theater, such as *Three Tall Women* by Randa Al-Asmar, *Women's Talk* by Lina Khoury, and *Secret Talk* by Ezz Darwish. These experiences demonstrate how women's issues are boldly addressed and how social taboos are broken. Exposing male oppression, the article emphasizes that feminist theater seeks to expose male oppression, present a feminist vision of the world, and stimulate debate about women's issues in society. This article offers an important critical perspective on Arab women's theater and contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and achievements faced by creative women in this area (Al-Ghammaz, 2025).

Addressing both the feminist and women's theaters in Al-Rai Newspaper in 2019, Ali explains the difference between the terms "feminist theater" and "women's theater" and provides examples of Arab theatrical experiences that represent feminist theater. The article also explains that women's theater refers to theatrical activity carried out by theater groups run by women, while feminist theater refers to theatrical experiences that embrace exclusively female perspectives. Moreover, the article presents examples of Arab theatrical models that have emerged over the past two decades, representing feminist theater. Most of these models address the female body, either as oppressed or as a creator of beauty, besieged by taboos, or liberated from restrictions.

Similarly, the article underlines that Arab feminist theater is a social movement that tries to transform women's lives in society, and not only an artistic one. Theater exposes male oppression, presents a feminist worldview, and sparks debates on women's issues. Likewise, this article provides a brief and useful overview of Arab feminist theater and contributes to a deeper understanding of the difference between women's theater and feminist theater. The prior literature survey shows that feminism and theater have been discussed in Arab studies, emphasizing the critical need to explore these expressions in Jordanian modern literature.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist theater is a form of theater that primarily focuses on addressing women's issues, defending both their existence and their rights, and documenting their diverse human experiences. Feminist theater not only highlights the injustices faced by women but also seeks to advocate for full equality in rights and opportunities between women and men, presenting profound feminist perspectives, regardless of whether its creator is a woman or a man (Aston, 1999). Feminist theater takes a more specific and ideological approach, not only emphasizing women's presence in the creative process but also making the stage a platform for addressing women's issues from a feminist perspective.

Furthermore, feminist theater aims to dismantle social and cultural structures that perpetuate women's inferiority or limit their effectiveness, calling for gender equality (Goodman, 1993). Feminist theater is drawn from purely feminine

perspectives or the principles of the organized women's movement, which aims to champion women in all fields and eliminate forms of gender-related oppression (Ali, 2016). Feminist theater is distinguished not only by its essential characteristics, which differentiate it from other theatrical forms in terms of the topics it addresses, but also by the way it portrays women in a different way, free from the stereotypes perpetuated by traditional society (Alhawamdeh et al., 2025).

In the same vein, feminist theater works to present strong, complex, and multidimensional female characters who challenge preconceived roles and break the stereotype of the familiar, submissive woman (Dolan, 1988). Feminist theater and playwriting place particular importance on exploring the nature of relationships, such as motherhood, friendship, and rivalry, between women themselves, adding depth and a human dimension absent in many traditional theatrical works (Case, 1988). Feminist plays are not just words or performances starring a female character, but rather an artistic and critical discourse that aims to reconsider existing cultural structures (Alshraa, 2025).

Of note, women are not often passive representational beings but rather an active subject presented with their own experiences, sufferings, and perceptions of life and the world (Case, 1988). Feminist plays are primarily concerned with dismantling the stereotypical image of women by presenting strong, contradictory, and complex female characters, contrary to what is found in traditional writings that confine women to the binary of the sacrificial mother or the submissive lover (Dolan, 1988). Moreover, feminist writing is not necessarily concerned with defining women's relationships with men; rather, it rethinks the bonds between women, such as motherhood, friendship, and competition, and places them in a new context that challenges traditional stereotypes, far removed from the negative competition fostered by patriarchal authority to keep women divided.

Regarding the most prominent plays that can be approached from a feminist perspective, it is important to distinguish between plays written with a clear feminist intention and those that have become the subject of feminist critical readings. A prominent example is Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), a play considered a foundational text in the history of feminist theater. Although Ibsen denied being a feminist, the character of Nora Helmer and her revolutionary departure from the marital home became a symbol of women's liberation and their search for self. The other example is Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), which is a striking example of contemporary feminist theater that breaks taboos and addresses women's lives, bodies, and sexual experiences directly and explicitly, transforming the private into a public political issue. However, Sophocles' *Antigone* (442 BCE) is not classified as a feminist play in the modern sense, but it has become a pivotal text for feminist critical readings. The character of Antigone, who challenges the authority of the state of Creon in the name of divine law and personal morality, has been read as a symbol of women confronting patriarchal authority.

Moreover, women's theater is defined as theatrical activity in which women assume key production roles, such as writing, directing, and artistic management, with an emphasis on their active presence as creators of theatrical action, regardless of the work's ideological content (Aston, 1999). This term is defined as theatrical activity undertaken by women-run theater groups, even if their composition and audience are mixed gender. The majority of the works created by this group are theatrical performances written by female playwrights and directed by renowned female directors. This concept is based on these theatrical companies' attitude to work and administration, which is what happens behind the stage rather than what is performed on it.

Unlike feminist theater, which is primarily directed by women, women's theater does not necessarily carry a clear critical feminist discourse at the level of the text or performance. Rather, its name derives from the female actor in the production of the theatrical performance, rehabilitating women as bearers of an artistic theatrical endeavor rather than contributors to it. However, confining the term to the context of production as a criterion may limit its prevalence, given the changes in feminist discourse. Therefore, linking women's theater to the methodology of the work and ignoring the content aspect may detract from the feminist dimension of the analysis, especially in cases where the content is traditionally conservative.

Furthermore, women's theater can be defined, in one of its procedural dimensions, as one in which women take the reins of the creative process to present their vision and being, whether at the level of writing, directing, or acting. A women's theater does not have to address women's issues exclusively but may expand to include women's views of the world or of life in general. Over the past two decades, numerous Arab theatrical models have emerged that represent this trend, with women leading the artistic project, revealing personal visions and profound feminist issues. In his study on the manifestations of modern women's theater, Ali (2016) presents three prominent models that embody this concept:

1. The first model is *Three Women* (2000), a play adapted by Lebanese writer Randa Alasmar from Edward Albee's *Three Tall Women* and directed by pioneering actress Nidal Al Ashkar. The play analyzes a woman's life journey through three stages—past, present, and future—revealing the deep sorrow women endure, especially when their life experiences fall outside of traditional frameworks.
2. The second model is *Women's Talk* (2006) by Lebanese writer and director Lina Khoury. This work was considered quite a surprise in the Arab theater scene, as four actresses present a series of bold and direct monologues about the reality of women in Lebanon. Ali (2016) describes the show as a magnifying mirror on the stage, forcing society to confront its contradictions and shortcomings in dealing with women's issues.
3. As a third model, *Secret Talk* (2007) is an Egyptian work adapted by writer Ezz Darwish from *Women's Talk* and directed by Reham Abdel Razek. This dramatic show presents an approach to the concerns and issues facing

Egyptian women through a narrative of the lives of three women and their experiences of marginalization and injustice, relying heavily on the power of words and gestures to express women's visions of themselves.

These examples demonstrate how the concept of women's theater is embodied in practice when women lead creative projects to present an artistic vision that reveals feminist issues through a purely subjective perspective.

Although women-led theater is still in its infancy in the Arab world, its presence has sparked a critical debate about its nature and specificity. A group of critics believes that there is indeed female writing for the theater that is qualitatively different from that of men. For instance, theater critic Ibrahim Al-Husseini asserts that women's treatment of their issues is characterized by "elaboration and revelation" in a way that men cannot, no matter how precise they are. Critic Rasha Abdel Moneim elaborates on this distinction, noting that women's creativity is characterized by addressing intimate issues related to their feminine nature, such as female circumcision and childbirth, and by celebrating the body away from the male perspective of pleasure. In addition, women are declaring solidarity and loyalty among themselves and a strong tendency toward narrative and autobiographical forms as a means of enlightenment (Al-Ghalith & Al-Sayyid, 2023).

On the other hand, another group rejects these classifications on the grounds that they perpetuate gender discrimination. This view is led by theater director Abeer Ali, who objects to the term "feminist theater." Simply put, Abeer compares the issue to minority arts in America, explaining that a particular group's interest in its own issues does not necessarily mean creating its own theater. Rather, it is a theatrical art concerned with specific issues and embodying the characteristics and taste of those who create it. She adds that the goal is to present humanity on stage and that the new female directors are presenting art that concerns all segments of society, not just women, making it unfair to confine their creativity to a narrow category based on their gender. Accordingly, this study gains its significance and moves away from the term "feminism" to focus on feminism in theater.

IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Hazza Al-Barari's *Blood Necklace* is a powerful example of the presence of women's concerns and issues in Jordanian theater. Through the play's heroine, Wafaa, internal and external conflicts that women may face in a patriarchal society created by the dire reality they live in are revealed. Wafaa found herself alone after the death of her father, who left her with many memories, a dilapidated hotel, and a pain that unearthed many of the personal, social, and political issues that women in general suffer from.

A. *Loss of Identity and Alienation From Self*

From the opening of the play, the writer introduces the voice of his heroine, Wafaa, without her appearing, saying, "The place is empty except for the voice of a woman, and in her voice there is something of a complaint as her image appears without her appearing" (Al-Barari, 2007, p. 91). Perhaps this absence of her external appearance is a manifestation of her lack of identity, which is further evident in her inability to look in the mirror. The writer alludes to this through her conversation with her lover, Mansour, who tells Wafaa, "Look at yourself. Why did you let time ruin this beauty? Don't you have a mirror and a comb?" (Al-Barari, 2007, p. 112). She answers his question by responding to her father when he repeats the same question, "I haven't had a mirror for a long time... I forgot" (p. 113), confirming the heroine's self-denial and her fear of confronting herself.

Equally, Wafaa does not want to delve into her past filled with memories rooted in the state of weakness, helplessness, and oppression that she has been living in. Wafaa's miserable past started with a father who did not hesitate to impose his authority over her marriage decision, refusing to marry her to the man she loved, and whose reckless behavior led her mother to her death in a horrific car accident. As her father says, "It was an accident. The bus hit us. What were you thinking? A bus the size of a building hit you. Were you flirting with her? I didn't do anything. I was driving... just driving" (p. 102).

In contrast, Wafaa's miserable past ended with a lover who left her waiting and lonely: "In this place that resembles a carcass, I sat chewing the seconds, hours, and years waiting for the revolutionary writer to return. The revolution ended, and he has not returned" (p. 114). As previously gleaned, waiting steals life, as age has a special status for women in particular. Wafaa, now in her 40s, reflects the social indicators that this number carries, which deprive women of their chances of love and marriage and "render her a spinster, often vilified for even thinking about marriage and love" (p. 167). Moreover, on the subject of marriage and love, Wafaa says, "I'm talking about marriage. Oh, Dad, even though you're dead, you don't want to give up your role as a father. You want to marry me off. Who would marry whom? I'm like a dry reed, emptied of life" (p. 167).

Undoubtedly, this dialogue between the heroine and her father carries within it the most important themes highlighted by feminist theory in its discussion of male dominance and patriarchal authority, which places women in a lower status than men. Despite democratic developments, women are still subject to coercion through the gender role system they have been subjected to since previous eras (Hafnawi, 2015). Therefore, women were urged to rid themselves of these acts of coercion and marginalization. These calls are represented in the text by Mansour, the "lover"; the father; and the hotel guest, Souad, who asks Wafaa to look in the mirror and brush the dust off her heart, for she is still beautiful and deserves a better life, saying, "Your features haven't changed much, despite all the scribbles of time on your face, hands, and hair. The extinguished sparkle in your eyes is still capable of being rekindled" (p. 108).

Similarly, it is also necessary to point out the hotel guest, Souad, who rejects the name Saada, chosen for her by her family, and calls herself Souad. This is a clear indication of the need to reject the restrictions imposed by society on women and a subtle invitation for Wafaa to confront her past and live a better reality, saying, “My name is Suad; you should realize that very well. You're Saada in the hotel records. Oh, Wafaa, life is different from these shabby records. What's with the name Saada? This name doesn't suit me. I don't know where people get these names from!” (p. 95). Alienation reaches its peak when it becomes synonymous with death, as a person becomes a stranger to the life they live and forcefully denounces it, as Souad says, “Wafaa, my heart has become a desolate graveyard, uninhabited by all creatures, an ancient warehouse long forgotten” (p. 93). In addition, it is noted in another place, “We live dead and die alive” (p. 117).

Moreover, when life and death become equal, it is natural for a person to lose passion, the foundation of survival, as seen in Wafaa's words, “Over time, I lost my ability to do anything, as getting used to certain things is crueler than actual death” (p. 94). The truth is that the reader cannot find an explanation for the multiple and varied manifestations of alienation that do not point to the psychological and existential rift that death caused in Wafaa's character, who lost her family and her beloved and was forced into isolation in her father's hotel, every corner of which reminds her of death. As a result, these horrible conditions made her delirious in her recounting of the events she'd experienced, making various assumptions about the simplest things, as if she'd gone insane: “They say I'm crazy. Madness is the natural state for a woman like me. The outcome is inevitable” (p. 158).

B. *Marginalization and Social Isolation*

The issue of marginalization and social isolation is prompted by the issue of loss of identity and alienation from oneself. Wafaa lives in a hotel that has become almost deserted, inhabited by dust and inanimate objects. Wafaa says about marginalization and social isolation, “Oh, this miserable hotel. It has become a desolate cemetery uninhabited by creatures. Even the owl and the bat couldn't bear to stay there” (p. 93). Indeed, the playwright succeeds in dedicating the setting to a place that evokes loneliness and marginalization. On the surface, the hotel appears to be a social place where people from different cultures meet, get to know each other, and engage in dialogue.

However, in the play, it transforms into empty apartments inhabited only by three residents forced to live there due to their financial and living circumstances, a dilapidated hotel with old furniture eaten away by dust. Wafaa says, “Dust is dust. It's the creature that refuses to depart” (p. 91). It is also clear that Wafaa was a victim of this hotel, having spent her youth faithful to the legacy of memories she experienced in this hotel, which, like its owners, has become dead: “The cursed dust is the features of those who died...their last breaths before they were extinguished...their silent images as they bid farewell to life and memories” (p. 93). Therefore, we find her asking Souad for things she herself is unable to do because she does not want to be a replica of herself, summarized as the woman “abandoned in her youth and attacked by premature aging. Go away, Souad! Don't stay here too long. I fear for you in this place” (p. 28). Taken together, this reinforces the call to support women's right to reject their marginalization and isolation from their right to participate actively in their communities (Alkam & Saleh, 2020; Myersback, 1991).

C. *Sacrifice, Bearing Responsibility, and Ingratitude*

Because it means “faithful” and “loyal,” the name the playwright chose for his main character and heroine in the play, Wafaa, supports her loyalty to her memories and the sacrifice of her youth by living in a nearly deserted hotel filled with memories of the loss of her father, her mother, her lover, and her guests. Like many women who lost their loved ones to war, she waited for his return until her life was lost, and she became weak and exhausted. Thus, she harshly blames him for his return, reminding him that women are the most affected in these wars. They also lose their loved ones and relatives, becoming lonely and victims of ungrateful people who only think of themselves. To show how bad the impact of war is on women, she addressed Mansour, saying, “You did not write about love...about lonely women...you did not write about me...war is that woman who divides wives from their husbands and is killed by loneliness. What is the fault of women who were born in a time of so many wars? We grow old while we are still young...our femininity melts away in the mire of waiting” (p. 128).

Further, it is noteworthy that the homeland has become a negative space for Wafaa, robbing her of her dreams and love and waging wars that have left behind “children and loved ones dying a thousand times a day” (p. 129) and turning her into a victim like “a tombstone... ugly and terrifying... with pale features and also leaving behind women paying the price without morals or dignity” (p. 130). This statement reveals the flaws of patriarchal society's treatment of women, as it views women's bodies as nothing more than a commodity to be bought and sold. This view strips women of their humanity and dignity, rendering them victims of its sexual superiority.

Accordingly, we can conclude that feminist theater is enlightening theater. In the play *Blood Necklace*, women become a central subject, not a marginal entity, raising their own issues and expressing their concerns in their own words, without letting men speak for them. For example, Wafaa was the strong, clear, and questioning voice throughout the pages of the play. As her father says, “Since you were born, you've been asking difficult questions” (p. 168). This is a clear cognitive challenge to its hegemony and laws and a serious attempt to break out of the power system entrenched by the inherited male narrative. Hence, women's theater is described as a democratic awareness theater that aspires to achieve social justice that guarantees a better future for everyone.

V. CONCLUSION

In sum, a thorough review of the feminist manifestations in Al-Barari's play *Blood Necklace* reveals that the text could reveal the secrets of women's inner selves, their states of isolation, loneliness, alienation, and shattered dreams, using eloquent poetic language. Results also show that the text affirms the author's ability to explore women's reality and concerns with a skill that matches that of a female writer. Despite societal development, the expansion of democracy, and women's entry into the labor market, women remain hostage to the patriarchal ideology imposed by societal authority, limiting women's freedom and their right to a decent life. Importantly, theaters in general, particularly the theaters in Jordan, are one of the most valuable literary arts, providing a space and freedom to confront oneself, something that is absent in reality. That said, the study recommends the urgent need to pay attention to theater in general and women's theater in particular, as studies in them are still few.

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