

Self-Reliance, Determination and Home-Attachment in Lutfiya Al-Dulaymi's Hayat's Garden

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ABSTRACT:

This present research deals with the novel *Hadiqat Hayat, Hayat's Garden*, (2003) by the Iraqi female author Lutfiya Al-Dulaymi (1939 -). The discussion focuses on the struggles the main character Hayat undergoes while confronting the debilitating circumstances of the wars and the anguish of waiting for the absent husband. While analyzing the character of the protagonist, Hayat, specific features are illustrated and highlighted such as; her self-reliance and independence, firm resolution to overcome difficulties, and her strong attachment to her house specifically her garden. The personality of the single mother, which is caught in the protagonist Hayat, breaks the stereotypical image of the helpless widow as it reveals a strong character capable of conquering the social restrains and the economic challenges with her inner vigor, determination and optimistic soul. On the symbolic level, Hayat gains another dimension of reference through her name, which means *life*. In this way, she becomes an embodiment of the country, Iraq, itself while confronting the calamities of wars symbolizing its survival and its continuity.

Keywords: Wars, Self-reliance, Determination, Home-attachment and the wait for the absent husband

I-Introduction

I-1 Plot Summary:

The setting of the novel is Baghdad during the nineties, the period of the economic sanction on Iraq. During this period, the country struggles because of the heavy impact of the economic embargo with its deteriorating consequence. (Greenwood, 155). Though the novel covers the period of the 1990s in Iraq, some of the events go back to the eighties. Hayat's husband Ghaleb was a soldier in the Iraqi army during the war with Iran (1980-1988) who was registered as 'missing-in action'. This war which lasted for eight years resulted in a high number of casualties, deaths and missing soldiers. (Marr 175)

Many incidents in this text, are depicted with psychological and emotional complexities. Sabry Hafiz, a literary critic, comments on this feature '[the]actual happenings were not significant in themselves but only through the reflections of the individual upon them'. (Hafez 303) Chapter one opens with a description of the turmoil Maysa goes through while suffering the absence of the father, Ghaleb. She is (24) years old studying music and admirably plays the western musical compositions on her violin and performs music at the music halls in Baghdad. The chapter unfolds details about Maysa's finance Ziyad. who has immigrated to UK writing for the stage and presenting theatrical performances there. Section two of chapter two unfolds the story of another female character Anesa, Hayat's sister-in-law. A timid calm woman who is very soft and amiable, yet Anesa looks feeble and lost as she struggles with a fatal disease, liver cancer. Though Hayat seeks to find cure for her dying relative, her attempts were in vain.

In chapter three, much of the plot narrative revolves around the protagonist Hayat. Though it has been many years since Hyata's husband was reported missing in the Iran-Iraq war, still she refuses to be called a 'widow' and furiously rejects her relatives' proposal for marriage.

Chapter four narrates the story of Hayat's close friend Suzan. A beautiful wealthy woman who has inherited her father's fortune. Still her life is gloomy as she married a wealthy business man Abdulmaqsud, whom she later discovers that he is after her money. Going through the divorce is another ordeal for Suzan as her husband demands half of her father's mansion to set her free. In the last chapter, Abdulmaqsud is mysteriously killed and Suzan was left to bafflement not knowing whether to be horrified with such an end or to celebrate it. The narration discloses details about Ghassan, an artist to whom Suzan was once engaged to. The novel gives various references to the possibility that Suzan and Ghassan might revive their love relationship. Chapter five is narrated by the spirit of Ruwayda, Hayat's neighbor, who with her family were killed in a harsh air raid on Baghdad. While Chapter six returns to Hayat and her speculations about the fate of her husband as many of the war prisoners are coming home.

Chapter seven goes back to Maysa and her fiancé Ziyad. Through their letters, we come to know that their relationship is heading to a dead end. In the final chapter, chapter eight, Hayat holds an exhibition for Ghassan's paintings in her large garden and one of the paintings he displays shows a portrait of homeless man whom Ghassan has accidentally met in a street. The man, in the painting, bears a strong resemblance to Ghaleb. Hayat inquiries about the identity of the man. Not knowing who he is, Ghassan suggests to search for him in the place where he first found him. This open ending of the novel permits the possibility that Hayat might have found her long absent husband.

I-2-Hayat's Garden: The Novel, Its Structure and Narrative Methods:

Hayat's Garden is divided into eight chapters, six chapters narrate specific events in the life of the protagonist Hayat, her daughter Maysa and her sister-in-law Anesa. While two chapters center around her two friends; Suzan and Ruwayda. Despite the division of the narrative accounts among these characters, the narration and the attention are recurrently placed on Hayat. The other female characters are portrayed, in many scenes, through their

connections, meetings, and dialogues with the protagonist. For instance, Anesa's section is embedded within the chapter about Hayat and the former's struggle with cancer is only portrayed through the conversations between the two. In addition, those characters often seek Hayat's consultations and advice admiring her inner vigor and sturdiness. In this manner, Hayat emerges as the central power that pulls, strengthens and guides these women. al-Dulaymi, adroitly balances the perspectives in the novel through a tuneful blend of narrators; the third person narrator relating the story of Hayat and of Suzan, the second person narrator with the diaries of Maysa, this part comes with the title 'Diaries of Maysa', and the first-person narrator when the spirit of Ruwayda, in chapter five, becomes the narrator of this part.

It is worth mentioning that the novel renders a limited space for the male characters Ghassan and Ziyad to act and to speak directly in the novel. Ziyad's voice is heard in the letters he sends to Maysa, while Ghassan's dialogues come in many scenes as part of Suzan's conversations. The reason might be owing to the author's tendency to emphasize the roles of the females in this novel without overshadowing her characters with the male ones. It is relevant to assert that the discussion, in this research, steers away from the term 'feminist' while describing Al-Dulaymi's *Hayat's Garden* since the author refuses to define her work as such. Al-Dulaymi believes that the main criteria for the use of the term 'feminist' are biological and gender-based, rather than standards of creativity. For her there are only good novels and bad ones. (Al-Dulaymi 2018)

II- Self-Reliance, Determination and Home-Attachment in Lutfiyah Al-Dulaymi's *Hayat's Garden*

Contrary to the stereotypical image of a helpless widow, the protagonist Hayat discloses a sturdy personality with a firm resolution to overcome the hardships she encounters daily. (Fayiz 44) Maysa describes her mother as 'a woman who despite her deep grief, still able to offer great love to the world around, she refuses the help of anyone, any person' (*Hayat's Garden* 82-85) Whereas Suzan often compares her own fragile nature to Hayat's strong personality wondering at her inner vigor 'You are strong Hayat, you can endure all what can happen to you'. (*Hayat's Garden* 252) Hayat's self-assurance, determination and hope render her into what Sheldon Sacks defines as 'walking concepts. These are types of characters who 'act as articulated spokesmen for the position represented by their own labels'. Sacks argues that in the fictional world certain characters are given labels that subtly and initially affect the reader's evaluation of them, an evaluation that, in most cases, doesn't undergo any change. (Sacks 167). Also, the choice of the name of the protagonist, Hayat means *life*, is another positive indication to the will of survival this character constantly demonstrates.

In no place in the novel, Hayat is called by the label *Um* Maysa, Maysa's mother, rather she is often called *Sit* Hayat, as *Sit* is a title noun which refers to a female teacher. Through the recurrent use of this title, Al-Dulaymi's emphasizes the character's independence and career position, being a school teacher, rather than family roles and domestic features which can be indicated by the label *Um*.

'The widow' is another adjective Hayat abhors, renounces and denies holding to the conviction that her missing husband is alive. She stiffly answers a relative who comes to propose to her 'I am not a widow...Ghaleb did not die and I am waiting his return' (*Hayat's Garden* 213). In another occasion, Maysa reports her mother's courageous reply to those who call her a widow 'I am not a widow and I won't wear mourning clothes'. (*Hayat's Garden* 88).

Hayat goes in life in a hopeful wait for the return of her husband who was declared as a 'missing in action soldier' since years.

Hayat is seen not only in a possession of a firm self-resolution, but also a clear sense of defiance. She challenges the social norms and values of her society when she encourages her daughter to pursue her career as a musician. Through the third narrator, a dialogue between two neighbors is reported "What a vain woman! Encouraging her daughter to play music while she can hardly provide their morsel [...] Who would marry this girl...the musician? If my son proposes to her, I will banish him to the end of the world...marrying a musician! But she [Hayat] does not care what the women think. She knows what she wants and does what she believes in. (*Hayat's Garden* 70)

Being the only bread winner of the family, Hayat is seen immersed in various duties; grading her students' homework during the day, sewing baby clothing and beddings for a local sewing group and baking bread for the next day at night. Surprisingly, the more burdens Hayat handles, the more vitality she absorbs. Life duties and family responsibilities grant her a sense of purpose and assist her to endure the agony of the wait for her husband "When Hayat finishes grading the students' homework, she spends two hours at *Um Noor's* sewing-group making clothes for newly born babies. At midnight, Hayat begins baking bread for the next day [...] She prays day and night to remain healthy until the return of her husband" (*Hayat's Garden* 43-44)

Hayat's general attitude illustrates how women deal with the degenerating war circumstances in a manner that promotes self-assertion, determination and firm resolutions. These women tend to develop a sense of independent self by ceasing to be 'mirror or other to a male that the war had distanced'. (Cooke 167)

In Huda Hussein's novel *Riyam wa Kaffa*, *Riyam is Enough* (2014), the protagonist, Samar, demonstrates a close likeness to Hayat. She is a self-willed single mother with three daughters, she provides for her family through her intensive work as a tailor. In spite of the difficult economic conditions the family struggles under, the mother is often seen cheerful and optimistic. The narrator, the daughter Riyam, describes her mother "We know her in the hard times, she is always tough and patient. She would hide her pain and gather her wits telling us 'Oh my butterflies, we have to overcome the grief'. (*Riyam wa Kaffa* 109)

Another evident feature in Hayat's personality is her strong home-attachment. For the protagonist, the notion of leaving her house even temporary is strictly rejected, a position caught in the dialogue with her neighbor Ruwayda after a rough night of intensive air raids "Ruwayda: They all left Baghdad no one in the houses, it seems they departed at night. Are you staying here Hayat? We are staying too. Hayat: Whatever happens, I am not leaving. Where shall I go? And why?" (*Hayat's Garden* 75)

Evidently, there is a fatal risk in this arduous choice of staying in the city of Baghdad during the air raids, Ruwayda, her husband and her two children tragically died when a missile hit their house. The spirit of Ruwayda narrates 'I am Ruwayda, death took me...death kept me, death gave me a voice of air' (*Hayat's Garden* 169) Still, Hayat is determined not to leave her house, the place to which, hopefully, the husband will return one day. Hayat's voice is among the compelling voices, in this novel, which exhibits an unaltered stand to stay in her only haven, her house. The character's firm home-attachment finds its exquisite description in Ghassan's words when he comments 'Tender attachments to places, scents and seasons and to the undying hope'. (*Hayat's Garden* 164) Hayat's resolution to wait and endure is invigorated through her soothing contact with nature. The garden is for her a place of peaceful

sensations and tranquility finding an inner delight in the riot of colors and bursting fragrance of the flowers. The effect of the place is noticeably caught in the scene describing her joyful moments while taking care of the shrubs:

Hayat is ready for the challenge, willing to do each morning what she feels always eager for, to move forward, no retreat. She won't ask any one for a help. A woman can be just as a group of men and steer her life ahead. She will be the help of herself in the way she always wishes to be. She bended down and cut a twig with pointed leaves and yellow flowers. The smell is fascinating. Hayat could not remember the name of the bud, but the nectar was intense and joyful. (*Hayat's Garden* 73)

Hayat's vigilant efforts to clear the weeds away from the tea roses, daffodils and geranium emphatically attest what Stephen Siddall argues about in *Landscape and Literature* (2009) "The rearranging of nature may perhaps provide a setting for a myth, or idealize a lost world. It may demonstrate nature's power or delicacy or create a shock or wonder. It may give contextual meaning to the characters in the foreground of the story." (Siddall 9) It is obvious that the power of nature reassures and pacifies Hayat's inner self "She cut leaves of wet grass feeling the soul of the delicate leaves embracing her soul [...] the scent of the grass opened gates inside her for the human soul to soar high and high." (*Hayat's Garden* 72)

Throughout many scenes in the novel, the connection between Hayat and the garden is emphasized to show that the garden has a healing power for the protagonist's sorrows. Ignadhitya Herdiana in her article "Nature's Role Toward Mental and Physical Healing Reflected on *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett: An Ecocritical Reading" emphasizes that the relationship between nature and man can be reciprocal as nature heals the mental and psychological troubles, humans contribute in its growth and flourishing. (Herdiana) Hayat vivaciously appreciates the tranquilizing effects of the garden on her soul, an appreciation clearly seen when she rejects to sell the garden to the owner of the nearby restaurant despite the tempting price and her extreme need for money. This is caught in the scene when the narrator relates the dialogue between an investor, who comes to buy the garden, and Hayat "The investor tells her: I will offer you a price no one believes it...I will give you a small elegant house in Al-Amirat Street...or a modern apartment...all in return for this garden. Forget it...I will not sell. The subject is not for discussion." (*Hayat's Garden* 120)

The bond between Hayat and the garden unveils the value of the place not only as the source of joy and tranquility, but also, on the metaphorical level, being the place where Hayat grasps a clue to her long absent husband. The art exhibition, Ghassan holds at Hayat's garden, presents a painting of a man who is, with a thrill, recognized by Hayat as her husband. It is a portrait of a homeless man, but it carries a close resemblance to Ghaleb "Hayat is choked with surprise, she could only mutter: Ghassan...It is him...Where did you find this man? Who? The man in the painting? I don't know. How? I truly don't know...Why do you care for him? I'm telling you...It is Ghaleb...Ghaleb..." (*Hayat's Garden* 170)

During the nineties, many war prisoners returned home, some of whom had severe mental illness while others suffered from the loss of memories. This reality lends a ground of plausibility to the owner of the painting being Hayat's husband. The closing scene in the novel is an open ending, but evidently promising. With determination and will, Hayat informs her daughter that she is going to sweep the streets of Baghdad in search for her husband "Where to search? Maysa asks. In our city. We will sweep it one street after another and one alley after another. How much time this

will take? It could take one hour or one year. I don't care, the important thing is to find him. Hayat adds: We will find him...I felt him yesterday near me...I shivered...I quivered...my soul fluttered (*Hayat's Garden* 171)

It is relevant to mention that in Al-Dulaymi's other novel *Sayydat Zuhal, Sirat Nas wa Madina* (2009), *Women of Saturn, A Tale of People and a City*, one of the leading characters is called Hayat al-Babili who, similar to Hayat, dauntlessly encounters the anguish of wait to be reunited with her lover. Both narratives seem chronicles of 'the lives and stories of Iraqi women trying to live in war-torn Baghdad and the men that are and are not present in their lives. (Kashouh 136) In these texts, the author indicates, through the protagonists' names, the survival of the country while withstanding the turmoil of the wars and their debilitating consequences.

III-The Conclusion

Al-Dulaymi's *Hayat's Garden* focuses on the theme of withstanding the dilemmas of wars through fortifying one's inner resolution, vigor and sturdiness. This theme is explicitly viewed in the specific portrayal of the protagonist Hayat. Her general conducts illustrate how certain women deal with the degenerating war circumstances in an unprecedented manner that promotes self-assertion, determination and firm resolutions. For those features, Hayat becomes a source of inspiration to those close to her, daughter Maysa, sister-in-law Anesa and her friends Suzan and Riwayda.

Home-attachment is another significant feature demonstrated through the conducts of Hayat. For this character, the house, specifically the garden, is not a physical location rather a living entity telling of precious memories and smelling of fragrances of flowers. It is the home to which, Hayat hopes, one day her husband will return to.

In this novel, the author adroitly interweaves the personal story of the protagonist with the story of the country while passing through the plight of the wars and the economic sanction. Thus, the personal story seems to mirror the national one testifying to Virginia Woolf's assertion "Fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners." (*A Room of One's Own* 35)

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الاعتماد على الذات، الإصرار، والتعلق بالمنزل في لطفية الدليمي حديقة حياة

ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث رواية حديقة حياة (2003) للكاتبة العراقية لطفية الدليمي (1939-) ويركز التحليل على المصاعب التي تمر بها الشخصية الرئيسية حياة وهي تواجه ظروف الحرب المروعة والانتظار المؤلم للزوج الغائب. هناك عدة صفات في شخصية حياة يتم التركيز عليها وتوضيحها أثناء تحليلنا للشخصية الرئيسية وهي: الاعتماد على الذات الاستقلالية واتخاذها القرارات الحاسمة لتجاوز الصعوبات وكذلك ارتباطها الوثيق بالمنزل وبالخصوص بحديقته. ان شخصية الام الوحيدة التي تتجسد في البطلة حياة تكسر الصورة التقليدية للأرملة الضعيفة لأنها تظهر بشخصية قوية قادرة على تخطي القيود الاجتماعية والتحديات الاقتصادية بعزيمتها وإصرارها وروحها المتفائلة. وعلى المستوى الرمزي فإن حياة تعبر عن بعد دلالي اخر من خلال معنى اسمها والذي يرمز الى الحياة وبهذا التعبير تصبح هي تجسيد لدولة العراق وهو يواجه مآسي الحروب مشيرة الى بقاء الدولة واستمراريتها .
الكلمات الدالة: الحروب، الاعتماد على الذات، الإصرار، والتعلق بالمنزل وانتظار الزوج الغائب.

پشت به ستن بخو، به رده وامی، گریدان پمالقه دناڤ (لوتفیا دلیمی) (باخچی ژیاڤی)

کورتیا فه کولینه بزماڤی کوردی

ئه فه کولینه لسه ر روماننا باخچی ژیاڤی (۲۰۰۳) یا نغیسه را عراقی (لوتفیا دلیمی) (۱۹۳۹) وئه فه کولینه خه ستن دده ته سه ر ناسته نگین که ساتیا سه ره کی (ژیاڤی) تیدا دبوریته به رامبه ر با ردوخی شه ری یی خراب و چافه ریکرنا ب نازار بو هاوسه ری نه دیار. گه له ک تاییه تمه ندیین که ساتیا ژیاڤی ووردیه ک دکه قیته سه ر وروونکرته ک ده می فه کولینا که ساتیا سه ره کی و ئه وژی خو به سه ستن بخو، سه ر به خویی، ودانا بریارن گرنگ بو تیپه رینا ناسته نگا، و هه ر وه سا گریدانووی یا توند بمالقه وئیکجاری باخچی وئی. که ساتیا دایکا بتئی ئه و دیار دقاره مانا رومانیا (داژیاڤی). دشکینیت وینی ئاسایی یی بیوه ژنا لاواز ژ به ر دیار دبیبیت ب که ساتیاکا بهیزدشیت سه ر دابونه ریتن کومالا یه تی بسه ر که فیت و به رهنگارییا دوخی ئابوری ب زیره کی و ببه رده وامی وروحووی یا گه شیبین. ولسه ر ناستی سومبولی (ژیاڤی) دیراتیه کا دی یا سومبولی ده ر دبیریت ژامانا ناڤی وئی کو سومبولی ژیاڤی یه و بقی ده ر برینئی ئه و دبیته که ساتیا ولاتی عراقی به رامبه ر تراجیدیا شه ران. ئه و نیشان دده ت مانا ولاتی و به رده و امیا وئی.
په یغن کلیل: شه ر، پشت به ستن بخو، به رده وامی، گریدان بمالقه، چا فه ریکرنا ها وسه ری نه ناماده.