

## Employment of the Question as a Transition Mechanism from the Existing to the Desired in Rawiya Jarjoura Burbara's Collection of Short Stories: *Lā 'Urīdū 'an 'A 'tāda A 'laika/ I Don't Want to Get Used to You\**

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<p><b>Received:</b> 04/05/2021</p> <hr/> <p><b>Accepted:</b> 06/06/2021</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Literature of questions, realistic literature, getting used to, familiarity, unfamiliarity, realistic literature.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Abstract</i></p> <p><i>This study introduces a critical analytical reading of Rawiya Jarjoura Burbara's collection of short stories, <i>Lā 'Urīdū 'an 'A 'tāda A 'laika / I Don't Want to Get Used to You</i>, published in 2020, a year after the outbreak of the Coronavirus in November 2020. The collection consists of 23 narrative texts that are classified into three chapters. The first chapter is called, <i>A 'la -al-Ṭarīq- M'a al-Nās/ On the Road-With People</i>, which is the largest chapter and includes 10 short stories; the second chapter is called, <i>A 'n al-Nās – Habl al-Kadib/ With People-the Rope of Lies</i>, which consists of 7 short stories, and the third chapter, which is called <i>Ma 'ahu-Tuffahat Adam/ With Him – Adam's Apple</i>, which consists of 6 short stories. The study attempts to highlight the theme of the 'Question' in the collection, as the texts, in general, fall in the genre of 'Literature of Question'. Throughout the collection, the writer raises daily life human questions that express her refusal acceptance of matters as they are and getting used to for granted matters as if the possibility of changing them does not exist anymore. The writer introduces questions that are likely to awaken the reader from his hibernation and wake the human beings, in general, to start thinking, questioning, changing, and getting out of the circle of accepting things as for granted and getting used to them. The writer, represented by the Narrators of her stories, refuses to get used to several social, psychological, political, and human life matters.</i></p>
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 is considered a year of upheavals in all the accepted concepts, axioms and standards because of the conditions of doubt, queries about the unknown, queries about the identity of the virus that turned into a pandemic that dominated the world, paralyzed the life movement, suppressed the souls of people and hit them with a state of horror, fear, and skepticism. Against all that ambiguity that this year carried, nothing has been left for the human being except anticipation in silence and raising questions, and thus, we have found ourselves dealing with the text of 'question' and 'doubt' more than the text of 'certainty', and we daily follow the answers to the queries regarding the extent of proliferation of the disease, the percentage of proliferation, finding a vaccination and the effectiveness of the vaccination.

Thus, during this epoch of Corona, we started a new era of doubt, questioning, and incredulity. Besides, we started considering this epoch a diving line and began measuring the occurrences of our life events as 'Pre-Corona' or 'Post-Corona' ones. Our concepts, expertise, and skills have been turned upside down, and all the barriers of expectation and logic have broken down. This sudden change created a new strange and different reality, a new

generation, and new literature of questioning and incredulity. Several researchers have pointed out this relationship between literature or the author and his society. Ibrahim Mohammad said that one of the characteristics of literature is that it is a reflective art in which the author reflects the experience of his era<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, language, which is a means of communication in literature, will inevitably have to meet the developments and show the extent of its flexibility, its capacity to accept any new thing, and its ability to express them. Language changes according to the fluctuations and confusions that society undergoes. Besides, the contents, themes, styles, the structural and functional architecture of literature will have to change in its various forms. Through its involvement in the social daily life developments, this language expresses its being as "the practical consciousness of society"<sup>2</sup> and man's awareness of his existence through his belonging to a specific environment and his difference from other living places. Though we live a state of confusion, unfamiliarity, intensive questioning, and incredulity on the daily life level, the author, who is aware of the concerns of his society and lives the same condition, will inevitably express that condition in his texts and literary products through his special depth and his private perspective. This is exactly what the writer Rawiya Jarjura Burbara does in her collection of short stories *Lā Urīdū 'an 'A 'tāda A 'laika / I Don't Want to Get Used to You* and expresses her refusal to go on accepting such conditions. The question that arises here is "Why does the writer refuse habituation?"

## **2. THE STUDY**

### **2.1 The Title of the Collection "*Lā 'Urīdū 'an 'A 'tāda A 'laika / I Don't Want to Get Used to You*"**

In his novel *al-Sarab/ The Mirage*, Najib Mahfouz says: "May God fight the habit; it kills the spirit of wonder and admiration in us,"<sup>3</sup> confirming by that the negativity of habituation and getting used to something constantly because the 'habit' makes the human

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\* Dr. Rawiya Jarjura Burbara is a novelist, a short story writer, and a critic. She was born in Nazareth in 1969. At present, she lives in Abu Sinan Village in Western Galilee. In 2004, she got her M.A. degree in Arabic with distinction on her research on the collection of poetry by Emir Tamim ibn al-Mu'iz the Fatimid. In 2011, she got her Ph.D. degree in Arabic Language and Literature on her research on the Fatimid poetry between religious and secular meanings. She got both degrees from the University of Haifa. Dr. Rawiya occupies several jobs and positions: a lecturer and researcher at Oranim College of Education, at Yad Natan College, and the University of Haifa. She is also a member of the Minor Board of Maktoub, a group of translators of Arabic literature into Hebrew, a member of the Research Committee for the development of Teaching Arabic at the Pedagogical Secretary in Jerusalem, and a member of the Administrative Board at Mahmoud Darwish Association. Besides, she is an inspector of the Arabic Language and Literature in the Arab Sector at the Ministry of Education, a Coordinator of the Teaching Curriculum at the Arab elementary schools, junior high schools, and secondary schools in the Arab sector in Israel. So far, she has written a large number of critical studies and published ten books. In 2009, she received the Award for Creativity from the Ministry of Education. In 2014, she was chosen as the 'Personality of the Year' for Literature. Furthermore, she has participated in several local and international conferences. This study deals with her collection of short stories called: *Lā 'Urīdū 'an 'A 'tāda A 'laika / I Don't Want to Get Accustomed to You*, published by Dar al-Huda, Kufr Qari in 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Ibrahim, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Ismail, 1985, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Mahfouz, N., 2017.

being a hostage to a certain single type of behavior that he would not be able to break or change later, and consequently, he becomes a prey to the shortcomings of habituation, familiarity and getting used to that behavior, even if it is to positive matters. The Palestinian writer Samah Dhefallah al-Mazin says that habituation is a prison, even if it is a scales"<sup>4</sup>. This negative view about habituation is repeated in literature and in other fields, but it is often associated with inactivity, routine, stagnation, and boredom.

## 2.2 Habituation as a Phenomenon

Psychology defines 'habituation' as a psychological and bodily phenomenon that happens to every living creature when he is exposed to the same lot of 'stimulus' for a long period. In the course of time, the reaction of this creature to the 'stimulus' is lost and, simply, it becomes useless because the creature gets used to it. In other words, habituation, from the point of view of psychology, is *lack of reaction by the living creature to the stimulus; or the process through which the creature stops reacting to the stimulus*<sup>5</sup>.

If so, some questions arise: Does the writer Rawiya Jarjura Burbara declare that she does not want to get used to depending on this logic? Is it because she does not want to lose her reaction, and does not want to kill in herself the spirit of wonder and admiration, and does not want to become a captive to the habit?

The **title** of the collection also draws the reader's attention and raises several queries, not only because the writer declares that she refuses to 'get used to' but because of the ambiguity that follows in the diacritical sign on the last word in the title "alaik/ to you"? Should we read it as "alaika / عَلَيْكَ / " (for the masculine in Arabic), or "alaiki/ عَلَيْكِ (for the feminine in Arabic)? Why wasn't she content with the use of the noun (I'ttiyad/habituation/ الاعتياد), and in this way she could make the meaning clearer? Or does she refuse 'habituation' in general in all its forms and dimensions? Why didn't she add the diacritic sign, kasra (◌ِ) for the feminine gender, on the letter (k/ ك), and thus, the reader would adopt the first interpretation of the title? If the reader reads the title with the *fatha* sign (◌َ) (alaika/عَلَيْكَ), he will understand that the writer refuses inactivity and stagnation in the man's relationship with the woman and that she is seeking a renewed life that is full of vigor and excitement, desire and response, but if he reads it with the kasra sign (◌ِ) as alayki/عَلَيْكِ, he will understand that she refuses the 'get used to' the image of the peaceful submissive woman to a patriarchal masculine society and its destructive norms.

Is this what the writer wants to imply: confusing the reader and camouflaging the indication? Or does she probably want to enrich the interpretation of the title by making it more comprehensive, deeper, and higher? Whatever lies behind this fogginess of the title, the choice is not random, and it stems out of the writer's awareness of the role of the title and its being, according to the words of the Moroccan story-writer I'mad al-Wardani, "a mine that does not explode unless the meaning opens its sails for interpretation, and when it explodes on its reader, it first explodes on its creator"<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Samah Dhefalla al-Muzayan is a Palestinian writer from Gaza Strip. She has a B.A. degree in Librarianship and several certificates in Language, Media, and Technology. She writes on a constantly to *Majallat al-Shabab* in Gaza Strip and on Bassa'ir Electronic Website. She is a member of the Editorial Board of the Official Magazine of the Ministry of Education in Gaza -*Majallat Madarat*. She is also a member of the Youth Shura Council at the Ministry. So far, she has published two books: *Watan Tadaffa'a bi al-Qassid* (poetry), and *Thinyat Dafira – Hikayat wa Rasael*. <https://basaer-online.com/author/samah-mazyran/>

<sup>5</sup> Kendra, 2020. <https://basaer-online.com/author/samah-mazyran/>

<sup>6</sup><https://alarab.co.uk/%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B6%D9%85%D9%88%D9%86>

Among the functions that are given to the title in the literary text, I tend to consider the title in its dual interpretation, namely, the masculine and the feminine references (alaika عَلَيْكَ and alaiki عَلَيْكِ) an integral part of the texts of the whole book. It is a summarizing indicative title, or, in Nawal al-Maḍī's words, an emphatic and focalized title<sup>7</sup> that summarizes the main idea of the whole collection, and ultimately, the writer's thought. This title is an essential one in which the sender's (writer's) thought is poured, and the sent content (the narrative texts) and the receiver's reaction (the reader) at the same time. The writer declares openly that she is a woman who is against 'habituation'. If so, what are the things that she refuses to 'get used to'? And who or what does she intend by the (ka كَ) or (ki كِ)?

The first reading of the collection is sufficient to give answers to this question. The patient reader of the texts sees that refusal of habituation is the focus around which all the stories and their issues revolve.

### 3. HABITUATION

#### 3.1 Refusal of Habituation to Oppression of the Arab in Israel

The collection of Burbara's stories refers to the swaying reality that the Arab citizen lives in Israel, and the state of instability and uncertainty on the level of identity, affinity, life, security, destruction and safety. This citizen is the person who faces a reality of violence, destruction, and murder, finds himself under the weight of the Jewish ruler, who classifies and stigmatizes that Arab as a terrorist who adopts the 'knife' as a tool for fighting. For example, in the story "Malik of al-Hazīn/the Sad Heron", the Narrator goes out with her daughter on a train trip to the Zoo in Tel Aviv to see how the heron stands on one leg but they are exposed to a situation of offense and insult. A lady gets on the train with her granddaughter and her dog. The lady was unhappy when the Narrators asked her to keep the dog away but the lady-with-the-dog starts insulting her with curses and questions such as: "Who do you think you are, you low Arab? The dog is more honorable than you; the dog is cleaner than you..."<sup>8</sup>

Then, she shouts with a tone of accusation: "Security? Ya Ḥamās! You are Ḥamās... Ḥamās... Ḥamās"<sup>9</sup> During these offensive moments, the Narrator wonders: "Where did the Arabs on the train disappear? No one is here on my wagon to defend me and my Arab nationality... where did the humanitarians disappear; are they afraid? A country that lives on fear and anxiety, and a short time ago, the watchman thought that I am a Russian; suddenly I became a 'terrorist' from Ḥamās movement..."<sup>10</sup> These words express a condition of habituation to the submission that the Arab citizen lives in this country. He is a submissive person who stands idly by, watching what is happening to him, and feels accused. He tries to calm down from the repeated strikes, as the Narrator states at the end of the story.

This expression about this reality is more open in the story that follows the story of "Malik al-Hazīn/ the Sad Heron", which is called: "al-Mawt li al-A'rab/ Death to the Arabs", which narrates the event of burning a church in the Galilee. The event enrages the people of the village and the neighboring people, both Christians and non-Christians. They decide to go out in buses to demonstrate in front of the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. That sounds as if free expression is not for them, and raising placards that denounce racism is not their right. As soon as the demonstration started, the crowds showed up from every side and street

<sup>7</sup> This classification of the 'Title' in this form depends on research conducted by al-Maḍī, Nariman (2005). *al- 'Unwan fi Shi'r ' Abd al-Qader al-Janabi*, which deals with the classification of titles, their significance and types in the poems of ' Abd al-Qader al-Janabi, p. 15-27.

<sup>8</sup> Jarjura-Burbara, Rawiya., 2020, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 31-32.

and the Jews hastened to resist the demonstration, ask about its cause, and try to confront the demonstrators:

"He looks at the street behind them and sees crowds of people flocking; here is someone who asks about the cause of the demonstration, some whistles support it and others object to it; some people pass by and raise their middle fingers; others shout "boo", and the young people get ready to face them; the policemen who are riding horses get ready to attack, and the priest feels as if he were Tariq Bin Ziyad, who said: "The sea is behind you and the enemy is in front of you"<sup>11</sup>.

Amid of this pandemonium, the Arab, again, takes the role of the accused person who tries to avoid the strikes by submission and surrender, which is reflected in the attitude of one of the village dignitaries (Rijal al-Balad), who feared that their young men would be killed. He asked for the microphone from the Priest and asked the demonstrators with him to repeat what he says; he raised his voice through the loudspeaker, saying: "al-Mawt li al-A'rab! al-Mawt li al-A'rab /Death to the Arabs/ Mavit la A' ravim..."<sup>12</sup>. The Narrator says:

"The shocking surprise was that the young people were shouting behind the Village Dignitary; the religious Jews were shocked and started retreating; it seems they did not know that they were Arabs; it seems that they did not know who was demonstrating, and the Arabs on the street thought that the religious Jews were demonstrating against the Arabs, and they were used to this type of racial demonstrations; they started gathering to react, and the Jews started dispersing because of the call of "Death to the Arabs!". In few minutes, the shouting subsided, the clash subsided, and the street subsided"<sup>13</sup>.

This event does not reflect submission or habituation only, but a submission that amounts to the degree of self-denial. This elite group, who got on buses and traveled to demonstrate, chose to take part in the demonstration willingly and without coercion by anyone. We did not expect any of them to call "Death to the Arabs", just because they heard that a group of religious Jews disagreed with the demonstration. This indicates the Arab citizen's feeling of loss in advance, and whatever he does and whatever he will do, will be in vain, and no one will grant him a decent life to which he aspired. On the contrary, he is likely to lose his life in a second. No doubt, habituation is the main reason that made the Arab citizen and the Christian citizen reach this level of inactivity, and preparedness to surrender. If he remained in the frame of his addiction to this habit, this would be considered clear-cut evidence to one's end, spiritual death, intellectual death, and national death, which is fully rejected by the author of the stories.

### **3.2 Refusal of Habituation to Corruption**

Through some of her stories, the writer Rawiya Jarjura Burbara expresses her skepticism about the relationship between the individual and his society or state and considers this relationship a condition of uncertainty, non-trust, and lack of desire. The individual, especially the Arab citizen, sees the ruling authority as a mass of racism, aggression, and arrogance. Besides, he sees himself as valueless because of the inaction of the police system to defend him and provide him with security and safety, which is the least

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

of his human rights. This confusion in the relationship between the individual and the ruling authority appears in the events that take place in the story of "La A'za' li al-Rejāl", which deals with the frequent events of violence and murder in the Arab society, which turn children into orphans, and mothers into widows. Each one suffers extremely through her struggle to "bring up her families alone, cry alone; she does not enjoy her life neither on her own nor with others and tries to cure the wound of orphans, who know that there is no safety in this world, because the father, who was supposed to protect them, could not protect himself from arbitrary murder that harvests their men nonstop throughout the years<sup>14</sup>.

In this attitude, the Narrator introduces several questions through which she criticizes all kinds of murder, its categories, and causes. The Narrator attributes the first cause behind the violence to education and morals. She says to her people: "If you gave up your Jahiliya, we would not reach this number of widows and orphans; you are a society that turns its sons into orphans in the name of money, love and honor and shit, and turns its daughters into widows in the name of 'manliness'<sup>15</sup>.

In the story "al-Ḥaditha Raqm 5/ Event N0. 5", the Narrator considers the police to be the main body that is responsible for the proliferation of violence because they receive notifications about different violent acts and come to the scenes of events but do nothing about it. They only record the notification and wait for the complainant to identify his rival and bring evidence that helps them to arrest him and hold him accountable. In the shadow of such inaction, violence escalates, gangs proliferate and take for themselves a space of freedom as no one who watches or holds them accountable. The police do not care and the poor individual fears to pay with his life for informing about them. In this way, most of the cases are closed against an 'unknown' person, who continues to destroy, steal and murder, and live at the expense of others. The Narrator, who called the police to investigate who threw a bomb at her home, says angrily:

- Excuse me! this is not the first time a bomb is thrown at our home.
- Yes, we know, and you have to identify your enemy and inform us about his name; otherwise, how can we act?
- His name? No! We have no enemies.
- Well, why, my lady?
- You know better, *the worm of the wood is from it and is in it*, as the proverb says!

Will she inform him that it is the war of gangs in the Arab villages and cities? Will she remain alive if she mentions the name of anyone? How will she protect her son from their evil? They enter her clothing shop and ask for 'protection money' and woe on her if she does not pay, and woe on her if she pays!<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, this flurry of questions expresses the Narrator's submission and expresses the feeling of injustice that every Arab citizen is living. The Narrator mentions real events of murder where the attitude of the police was neutral and they did not make any effort to find out the criminal such as the murder of Yara, the girl from Jish village in Galilee. The criminal is still free<sup>17</sup>. Another event is the murder of a girl from Lod city, where the murderer is still free and not arrested<sup>18</sup>. What is worse than that is that sometimes, the police contribute to the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 127-128.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> al-Jish is a small Arab village in the Galilee, the northern district of Israel

<sup>18</sup> It is one of the largest and oldest historical cities in Palestine. Today, it is located in the middle district of Israel, 38 km. away to the north of Jerusalem. The city was established by the Canaanites in the fifth century B.C. The city was mentioned in several historical sources. Lydda is located 16 kms. away to the East of Jaffa, 5kms East of Ramleh. In the past, the city controlled the main road and Jaffa-Jerusalem railway. Its area is about 12.2 km<sup>2</sup>. Today, its population consists of Jews and Arabs, after the evacuation of its Arab citizens in 1948.

murder. Once, they handed a girl to her family, who murdered her because she refused to marry one of the tribe members. Here, the Narrator wonders about the cliché: "The police's eyes are vigilant!". The Narrator asks: Who are they vigilant about? Who are they guarding? Why don't they solve any problem and don't find any criminal?"<sup>19</sup>

The police do not deny the anger and accusation that are directed at them, but they repeat their blame on the complainants who know their enemies. They have surveillance cameras, but they are afraid to admit, and so, they lie by saying that "We have no enemies" or "The cameras are broken". Consequently, they surrender to their fear and curse the police, the authorities, and the dignitaries, as the Narrator does at the end of the story: Damn you, damn them and their chairs; damn their positions, their troubles and, a leadership that does not protect their citizens, and a country where the powerful swallow the weak..."<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3 Refusal of Habituation to Preconceived Ideas

Among the thoughts that the writer surprises us with is the refusal of habituation to "The image of the Jew as the Other, who is the enemy and the murderer". Despite the descriptions that the stories introduce about the Jew, especially the religious one, as a racial aggressive person who does not accept the Other/ Arab who lives with him in the same country, the writer points out in one of her stories called "Utrukuhu Na'iman/ Leave Him Asleep", that the Jew lives a life of submission to matters that are imposed on him, and describes his confused human side. She says:

"It is so hard that they decide for you to be a soldier! Is it reasonable that compulsory service should be suitable for everyone? Did they ask this sleepy oblivious one beside me about his opinion? Why should I occupy my mind and thoughts with him? Should I pity him? Should I blame him? How do I know what kind of a soldier he will be? I see him now in his full defeat, in his full humanity, in his full nap, which did not last long..."<sup>21</sup>

It seems that the writer in this quotation and questions that are introduced in it point out that the Jew also lives in a state of habituation. Probably, he is against the war or carrying weapons, against fighting and murdering, but he is submissive and is subject to the laws of a state that leaves no opportunity for choice or expression of opinion. Thus, he leaves his thoughts and associations to his dreams with which the Narrator soars as they like or as her imagination likes:

"He will certainly dream about his sweetheart with the end of the war by victory over the other... on the Self... in the coming days..., probably in the coming war, the previous war, the outdated war, by al-A'rab al-Ā'riba and the Arabized Arabs... about the war in which his Dad participated, the war that will break out and he will take part in it, or that remote war in which his son will take part.... the war will take place relentlessly. Were those his dreams, or my fantasies...?"<sup>22</sup>

Then, she introduces a flurry of consecutive gasping questions, trying to give justice to this soldier and put him outside the circle of war and decision-taking that concern her:

<sup>19</sup> Jarjura Burbara, R. 2020, p. 151.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

"And what is your fault? Is it you who declared war? Is it you who chose the clothes, the mud, the knapsack, and the rifle? If they asked you to choose, would you choose them instead of your choices?"<sup>23</sup>

The writer does not look for information through this kind of question, but she expresses her refusal to preconceived thoughts and our custom to judge matters externally, and accept things as they are, even though they appear certain. In other words, the weapons that the soldier carries and the mud that accumulates on his shoe were probably not a personal decision or choice, and therefore, we have to keep away our habituation to this dark image of the other.

### **3.4 Refusal of Habituation to the Level of Man's Relationship with the Woman**

The last part of the collection has the title Ma'ahu – Tuffaḥat Adam/ With Him – Adam's Apple, and it embodies the nature of the swinging relationship between attachment and revulsion, desire and boredom, certainty and uncertainty, habituation and non-habituation in the relationship between the man and the woman. This sway is obvious in a special way in the stories that were written in the Corona period during the intervals of home quarantine, where all the family members are committed to stay home and live together all the time as if they were under a microscope. Will their agreement, love, and harmony or conflicts be their way of life or will they be conflicts, complaints, and aversion?

In the story of "Adam wa al-'Arika/ Adam and the Sofa", which is the first story in the Third Part, we read that the wife welcomes her husband, who comes back home in order to be confined in it because of the Coronavirus. She makes fun of his return despite him, chuckles, and returns in her laughter to years ago when she used to laugh from the bottom of her heart. This beginning points out the boring lukewarm relationship of the couple that results from its routine repetition and getting used to doing the same thing repeatedly. The husband hardly stays at home and the wife's heart loses room for joy due to the pain that her husband caused to her over the years. Probably, this pain was caused by the accumulation of years and the couple's engagement, like every couple, with the children, work, and school. Under this habitual engagement, the man sneaks out from her heart and his responsibilities and finds other hearts to lie in. The Narrator says in her evaluation of the matrimonial relationships: "Sometimes, the relationships need ceasefire and peace agreements, and she has made such agreements with him and with herself, but how many times were these peace agreements broken?"<sup>24</sup>

In this house, where the relationships have become semi-disconnected, Corona has created a new reality. The first week of that reality was full of enthusiasm regarding the introduction of new changes to the décor of the house such as the curtains, the place of the salon set, the dining room, the wardrobe, the place of the television set, and other things:

"The first week passed and the house turned into a paradise, the renewals were in full swing; the music played on the mobiles, the tastiest dishes, the tastiest sweets, all kinds of baked foods and tarts, the YouTube does not stop giving bits of advice, the WhatsApp groups post photos of lunches and dinners and recipes, and everyone was eating as if tomorrow would not appear again, and everyone was eating lest he would die craving for a rolled stuffed vine leaves dish, or cubage or *Maqluba* dish... and other gardens of Eden under which rivers flow..."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 173.



However, this Paradise does not last forever as if the human being does not like to get used to it because his nature, which is characterized by over-boredom, would not allow him to get used to it. This man, and though the whole house does not allow him to behave as he likes; the renewals and changes are performed as they were prepared, but he would soon feel bored by closure and adherence:

"Another week passed; boredom started sneaking into his heart; the smells, the smell of cooking, baking and cake-making bother him; the sounds of songs and news are heavy on his ears; the sun does not enter from anywhere except through the window; the air that is full of the Dettol smell and disinfectants ... he is suffocated, suffocated...

Life has become narrow for him; two weeks have passed but he did not see the one he loved; he could not see his heart's passion; he got bored with these 'rivers' and 'milk' and 'cheese' and the beautiful mermaids; he wanted another place; he wanted a more challenging place; more secure, more conflicting and messier..."<sup>26</sup>

"Here.

No. There!

No! Here is better.

There is better.

You always do what is on your head!

And you always oppose... the debate got heated as he was dragging the sofa, moving it, pushing it, returning it, without knowing what to do with it; he moves it to the left, to the right, to the left, there, here... she does not settle with him in any place; there is no one paradise, nor two; *So, which of your Lord's marvels will you deny?* he shouts: Give me the apple... an apple..."<sup>27</sup> .

The human being expressed his strong desire to get out of Paradise as if his encounter with the Corona and all the feelings of anxiety, instability, uncertainty, and fear of the disease and its associations remain a lot easier than facing this 'home captivity' and encounter with the past, present and future stories. The past with the soft mutual love that characterized it has already passed, and the present, with the stagnation that characterizes it, is not easy to change; and though the features of the routine landmarks have changed, they still stir one's yearning for a short time, a week or two, which will soon lose their attraction and confirm their failure to affect our souls, to return our past, to reinforce our love, or separate the human being from his external world and persuade him of his safe 'paradise/ home', which will protect him from his mixture and sickness. Thus, uncertainty, danger, possibility of being sick, are preferred to living our daily disputes. These disputes, with which the story "Adam wa al-'Arika" ends, are the same disputes with which the story "Adam wa al-Ṣammam/ Adam and the Valve" begins, which tells the reader to continue from the same point at which he stopped:

"They disagreed... they disputed... he is opinionated, and she is opinionated ...

His voice was raised; her blood pressure was raised...

When will they stop? Who is right?

Will he beat her by his power? Where are her subtlety, intelligence, and power, which lies in her weakness, as he says? Each time they disagree, debate, keep

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

away from each other, and ignore each other, they discover after a few days that there is no way to continue that way. So, they start negotiating and give concessions and restart their argument and dispute..."<sup>28</sup>

So, this relationship that is based on convergence and divergence, disagreement and agreement, suspicion, and certainty is seen by the woman Narrator as a natural feature in her relationship with the man. Through her description of her relationship with the man from her feminist perspective, she expresses her support to the woman, expresses her ability to forbear, and her ability to play several roles in order to make the man admit that she is an extraordinary woman. She is that woman who climbs the clouds so that their face will shine as it grasps the dew; she is that woman who clings to love, though she considers it a sin; she is that woman who enjoys her pride; she is that marine woman, the raging and silent woman, whom he has to make a lot of effort to reach, as she says in her story "Nabishat al-Dikrayāt/ The Digger of Memories": "That one, who, if you love her, you should be a skilled swimmer, a patient hunter, and a permanent traveler..., a sitting, satisfied, emigrating and staying man...and it is hard to find her between your hands... because you will drown in her"<sup>29</sup>.

The woman Narrator in the stories of the collection goes beyond the border of the extraordinary description of the woman to a degree that shakes the axioms and the details of the story of creation, which is accepted by all the versions of the creation of Adam and then Eve. The woman in the story of "Adam wa al-Şammam/ Adam and the Valve" insists on tipping the scales upside down and makes Eve's creation precede Adam's creation. Then she defines the manner of his creation by saying that God chose an extra part that is specific to blocking the push of feelings and excitement:

"He approached the valve, took it, blew life into it ... the part that bans feelings became a 'man' who can be cruel, can fight, and can decide when to cry and to be sad, and when to rejoice and love...

From the valve of her heart, God created Adam, and she remained a mass of feelings that do not subside, do not settle down except when he rests on her heart..."<sup>30</sup>.

The most important feminist features are reflected in this description: "domination of the female character, employment of the female Narrator, domination of the female language, intensification of intertextuality, and undermining of the literary male norms".<sup>31</sup> The woman Narrator in the above quotation dominates the events. She narrates from her point of view, violates the norms, and creates a new world and a new outlook, as she cries about the man's cruelty and his inability to activate feelings or express them. However, and despite that, and through her human nature, she seeks to preserve her relationship with him, and does not hesitate to express her anxiety about his absence... and by this fact, the Narrator ends her narration in the story "Adam wa al-Şammam/ Adam and the Valve". She says: "She got tired of her dreams, of him, of her loneliness, of his existence in her life, of his absence ... she woke up frightened and looked for him, for the safety-valve to be a person of depressed feelings!"<sup>32</sup>

This anxiety about the loss of a man as a companion to the woman remains in more than one story and more than one attitude and event. This fear of the unknown and uncertain future keeps the woman in the circle of anxiety, doubt, and wondering. The reader sees her

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>31</sup> Saffouri, M., 2017, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

telling the man about that frankly in the story "al-Hazīma/ the Defeat", and she asks him openly:

"And you? Will you hold on to me?"

He looked at her without answering; his eyes made a round of dreaming into an indefinite place; there was no meaning in them, and she did not know how to read them; should she repeat the question? She was not so stupid and he was not so dumb; he heard her, and if he wanted to answer, he would..."<sup>33</sup>

This neglect to her anxiety accompanies the story throughout the trajectory of the event, which appears at first glance, simple and transient; a wife is co-sitting with her husband; they talk as he was biting an apple; a simple dialogue takes place between them; she tries through it to sense his future intentions and the extent of his love to her, and if he was still in love with her as in previous times when she used to share him the bite and he was flirting with her and comparing her to an apple, and promising to protect her. She wonders about the brilliance of his eyes, which disappeared; his silence and occupations and neglect to her question worried her and aroused her doubts:

"Each time, the days proved to her the truth of her intuition... In this situation, he disappears, and in the other, he keeps silent, and there, he has no opinion, and here he wants her without an opinion, and he fluctuates in all seasons; in August, he is similar to October, and in April, he is very similar to February; "He always changes"... and the feelings play their game...she left him with his apple and withdrew; over the days, withdrawal has become her game, and keeping silence was his reply"<sup>34</sup>.

This withdrawal is certainly an expression of the condition of disappointment which she reached, and this is confirmed in her words: "I decided that I should not look for manliness in anyone after today; I am a realistic woman, and manliness in its concept that I love, is a fantasy"<sup>35</sup>.

In the story "al-Hazīma/ the Defeat", the woman is like a swallow in the following story, "Qash al-Aḥlam/ The Straw of Dreams". She looks for the swallow that he left to bring up her dreams alone, and she, in vain, wondered where his place is, and tried to find him till she gave up and declared her disappointment...

"The tempest blew lashing; it flew and maneuvered; it extended its wings upwards; it prepared itself and extended its neck; where did he leave her? This swallow that nests in the terrains of the place, won't he bring up the dreams with her? Where did he go now? Is he playing with his long cleft tail? Some straws flew here and there, the dreams flew..."<sup>36</sup>

Employment of the 'question' appears intensively in the above quotation. The Narrator introduces the successive intermittent gasping questions like the breaths of a she-swallow who is looking for the he-swallow that left her and disappeared with no warning. The role of the 'question' is ascertained here in expressing anxiety about the unknown, uncertainty, and swinging of the relationship between the man and the woman. It also expresses the capacity of her pain, the capacity of her forbearance, and the capacity of her tolerance. Despite the pain that the man causes to her, she seeks to preserve her relationship with him, and not hesitate to express her anxiety about his absence.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 188-189.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

If we try to evaluate the relationship between the man and the woman as the stories introduce them, we notice that it is based on the dialectic of the past, present, and future. In the past, (at the beginning stage), the relationship was characterized by yearning, concern, love, and attachment, while in the present, (after some time), the relationship changes under the effect of habituation and getting used to each other into something that sounds like a dispute, aversion, and lukewarmth to such an extent that makes the two seek to keep away from each other, give up love, and get engaged with other daily life matters. The future can be explained here on two levels: *first*, something that the woman expects to happen as a result of the man's disappearance and his insincerity in his relationship, and, *second*, something that the woman dreams about in her husband, namely, to be a strong loving lion, and support to her. About this image that the woman imagines and dreams about, we read the following description in the introduction of the third part:

"In her heart, she sees you a child; he can lay his head in her lap and sleep...he can laugh with no reason, he can look for her hand to feed him and show him the way; and in her eyes, she sees you a lion who protects her from life by his roar and power, and seizes her hand to lead her to the road"<sup>37</sup>.

Thus, the Narrator refers to the Utopian relationship that she dreams about, that relationship that is based on stability and certainty, and not on instability and uncertainty; that relationship that is based on glow and not on habituation and familiarity because that habituation kills the relationship. As the Narrator of the story "Khubz wa Wurud/ Bread and Roses" says: "I told you I don't want memories with you as memories kill me and bring me back to life; I don't want to get used to you... I am afraid that if I get used to you, the roses will wither"<sup>38</sup>

#### **4. DIMENSIONS OF THE QUESTION IN THE NARRATIVE**

In view of the above, it is possible to say that this collection of short stories, which was published during the Corona pandemic and created a state of confusion and uncertainty, and broke all the for granted daily life habitual actions are nothing but a narration of this habituation that arouses questions, provokes meditation and introspection, and raises doubts and questions. Therefore, we can say that this literary collection introduces a 'literature of questions' and queries, and raises doubts and uncertainty. I may not be exaggerating if I say that uncertainty, doubting, and questioning constitute three-dimensional axes around which the three parts revolve in such a way that we cannot find even one story that does not include these dimensions.

##### **4.1 The Question as a Subject-Matter**

The reader feels that the writer hints at that as she chooses to start the book with a story called "Su'āl fi al-Asima/ A Question in the Capital", making the question the subject-matter of the story, and declares, through the Narrator, in the second line of the story, that she is a lady who is concerned with questions and is tired of unexpected issues: "the unexpected suffocates me; I open the car-window...".<sup>39</sup> She continues to say: "Questions insist on me and I'm deeply concerned"<sup>40</sup>

The Narrator reaches a Romanian city and does not stop introducing questions that raise doubts about everything that she sees to be realistic and true such as buildings, the shape of streets, the nature of laziness, and the shape of people. She tries to look for certainty, the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

cause of change, its time and type, and if the appearances and life as she sees them now are better or not than in the time of the socialist system.

The Narrator repeats the question word in this story several times, which reflects her psychological confusions and her desire for knowledge and refusal of for granted matters. The Narrator says "the taxi-driver is not excited by the scenes. Are senses tamed? I **asked myself**. Tiredness appears on his face in this cold dawn. I **asked him** if he speaks English and he nodded by what implied negativity mixed with positivity..."<sup>41</sup> Then she adds: "I repeated my **question** in English; I will not reveal to him my identity nor my thoughts"<sup>42</sup>.

In another place, she says: "On our way to the university, my thoughts were tossing me here and there... I will not **ask** again; what is occupying my mind? And why should I **ask** people, anyway",<sup>43</sup> and then she adds: "I will not **ask**. I will live my moment like my friend and enjoy the existing things; I will not **ask**".<sup>44</sup> She repeats somewhere else: "The **question** insisted on me... I will **ask**; I will not **ask**; I will **ask** her; she is an educated lady, and will answer...I will **not ask** her; I should take care of my papers and lecture..."<sup>45</sup>. The interesting thing here is that this story also ends with the word '**question**', as if, by that, she would close the circular structure of the story and takes us back to the title:

"Should I ask again?"

I looked at my friend who said to me: we arrived; there is no need to ask"<sup>46</sup>

In this way, the '**question**' is embodied literally and actually in the story. The Narrator does not stop posing questions about what she sees each time, as if she were facing crises by questions, search, and expression, though the titles of the other stories do not refer to the word 'question'. However, all the texts depend on posing questions and questioning everything at all levels.

The Narrator asks about places, history, and events. Besides, she asks about everything, the meanings of words, which implies that '**language**' in this collection adopts a different turn and direction from her previous works. Language is not artificial, ornamental, or based on intertextuality and rhetoric. The language of Rawiya Jarjura Burbara is not the *hero* anymore, as Mohammad Saffouri argues in his analysis of Burbara's previous language of literary writing. Actually, the language changed from its being the *hero* into its being a *material* of narration. Through the writer's engagement with the language, her questioning and doubt about the meaning of words, her refusal to certainty and for granted matters, we see that in a number of her stories, she looks for the origins and roots and meanings of words and the relationship between them. For example, in the first story, the Narrator discusses with her friend the origin of the word (Lamama), which is the name of a Romanian restaurant, and they try to find an equivalent meaning for it in Arabic:

"Lamama"? the name of the restaurant?

Yes. it can be the definite article (la) + the word (mama).

and it can be (l.l.m)"<sup>47</sup>

In the story "Aḥlam al-Fuqarā' / Dreams of the Poor", the name 'Abu gosh' occupies her mind. "The word 'gosh' sends me to the dictionary to find out that its origin is Persian, which means "a kind of solid wood from which arrows are made". The debate between us

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 17-18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 21-22.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

gets heated; one says that it is an Arabic word and the other says that it comes from the Caucasian origin, and I attributed their lack of mastery of Arabic to this historical mixture in the mother tongue, but the debate does not end"<sup>48</sup>

#### 4.2 The Question as a Means of Knowledge Acquisition

In her story "Ya Yabūs/ O Yabūs/ Jerusalem", the writer discusses proverbs about 'travel', and the meaning of the last word and its uses. In her story "'Ulamlimū Dikrayatī Ma'ak", she discusses the cause of calling *al-fusayfisa* 'mosaic' with this Arabic name, and asks: Is it an Arabic word or not? Does it refer to the small size of 'stones' and their attachment to one another? She also wonders if the word *mfasfis*, which is used in colloquial Arabic to refer to something that is 'very small', has any connection to the word *fusayfisa* (mosaic) and the small bird in Arabic *al-fisfis*? Did it take its name because of its small size?

In this way, the Narrator pours her questions in order to acquire knowledge about the etymology of words. In the story "al-Mujtāh/ the Conqueror", new expressions, which imposed themselves on our reality and era, attract her. Such words include *al-balā*, and *al-jāiḥa*, which makes her dive into language dictionaries, where her journey of research starts:

"While I was searching in dictionaries about *jaha / yajuh, jawaha/ yajuh*, I wondered if *ijtaḥa* is from *jaha/yajuh* and the same root. The dictionaries take me on a journey about the roots of the word, and I enter the section of "Say" and "Do not say"<sup>49</sup>.

From this beginning, the story flows in a beautiful way through which the writer connects between the invading virus and that persistent agent from the insurance company who invades her engagement to introduce to her some details which are likely to insure her life and her health condition, especially during the time of Corona. Through their dialogue, she cannot fully stop her linguistic interest, and therefore, she again asks how the Arabic word '*ja'iha*' (virus) conquered the world within a few weeks, though it was not familiar previously. Thus, while the insurance agent focuses on his task, she focuses on her language; he talks about insurance in case of death, and she replies through thinking about lines of poetry by Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, Abū al-'Atāhiyah and others in this field: "I remembered Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī" and Abū al-'Atāhiyah. Abū al-'Alā' says:

"غَيْرُ مُجِدِّ فِي مَلْتِي وَاعْتِقَادٍ  
شَبِيهَةٌ صَوْتِ النَّعِيِّ إِذَا قَيْسٌ  
نَوْحُ بَاكِ وَلَا تَرْتَمُ شَادٍ  
بِصَوْتِ الْبَشِيرِ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ"

(Tr. In my faith and belief, moaning of a weeper or singing of a singer are futile  
The voice of a caller of obituaries is similar to the voice of a harbinger in every vale)

Ah! Now I understand what Abū al-'Alā' said; "This one on the line has a voice which is similar to the voice of a bad omen harbinger and the voice of a good omen harbinger..."<sup>50</sup> Thus, the words and vocabulary in the writer's environment turn into material that evolves into a narrative text.

#### 4.3 The Question as a Means of Doubt-Raising

Probably the story "Bayt al-Qassid/The Bottom Line" is the best representative of this linguistic doubting and unacceptance of the certainty of meanings. It is a story whose events happen inside the car on which the Narrator rides off in order to observe one of the practical lessons at a certain school. On her way, she uses the Waze application to locate and find places. She refers to it as a feminine noun and calls it 'Mrs. Weza'. One time, she blames

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

her, and plays with her; the other time, she quarrels with her. At other times, she argues with her when she mentions the names of the streets and their places using her Hebrew that violates the Arabic pronunciation. For example, she pronounces the name 'Ibn Sina' (Avicenna) as "Even Sina". The same happens when she pronounces the name Ibn Battuta and Ibn Rushd, which arouses the Narrator's anger because "Even" in Hebrew means "stone" and she does not want these names to fossilize. Her anger rises when the Weza says "Makhmoud Darwish" instead of "Maḥmoud". The Narrator wishes to silence her if it were not for her need to it. 'Makhmoud' in Arabic is derived from the verb "khamada", which means 'suppressed' and 'covered', but it is impossible to use this verb when talking about Maḥmoud Darwish, the poet who twirled and swirled and established a school of poetry.

This event, which can be seen by any person to be a for granted event, is treated by the writer as doubtful material and a reality that is subject to refusal, debate, and questioning. From this transient attitude, and through her listening to an ordinary expression in a Hebrew pronunciation, which might not draw our attention, the writer creates a text that is full of cultural, religious, and literary allusions. Lots of information from various fields overlap and harmonize with the song that her voice resonates with on the radio about the places to finally pour together in a section that emphasizes Maḥmoud Darwish's affinity and identity, which gives the story another nature and moves with them into another direction, which is more than a mere debate about a word or language or vocabulary.

"You reached your destination; it is on your right.

I suppressed it without thanks or a wish of good health; I entered the 'destination' and the echo of Mahmoud Darwish's poem lulls in the echoes of the soul:

"If you cry with all your power; and the echo replied

(Who's there?), Say to the identity: Thank you!"<sup>51</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

This collection of short stories is nothing but a thought-provoking question that calls for introspection and getting out of the circle of surrender and habituation. Through her historical, philosophical, human, and social questions, the writer expresses her desire to come up against habituation and surrender to routine, and content with familiar things, thoughts, and relations. If surrender means stagnation of relationships and fossilization of ambitions according to the change of things, then it is no wonder that Rawiya Jarjura Burbara employ a title in which she declares that she *does not want to get used to* things and closes her collection with the words: "The best thing that I got used to is not to get used to anyone or anything".

The reader of the collection finds Rawiya Jarjura-Burbara, **the human being** who is occupied with the concerns of the human being. She introduces questions in order to call the reader to come up against the habituation of the poor person to injustice, habituation of good people to the authority of bad people, habituation of people to desecration and profanity of the holy places of minorities, and habituation of people to oppressive political unjust regimes.

In this collection, the reader also follows Rawiya Jarjura Burbara the **researcher** who is upset by history. She asks questions to provoke rethinking and expression of refusal to habituation to facts, whether they are positive or negative. She also roams places asking about characters and events to revive life to ancient monuments and antiquities.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

The reader follows Rawiya Jarjura Burbara the **inspector** of Arabic, her mother tongue, about which she is worried. She poses frequent questions, refusing habituation to the backwardness and underdevelopment of her society, and roams the length and breadth of the country to strengthen the confidence of her society's children in their language and dreams.

In this collection, the reader rejoices with Rawiya Jarjura Burbara, the **author**, her fascination with the language, and sees how she refuses to get used to meanings that have one semantic indication. She raises doubt and questions about every statement and utterance and lexical item. She asks and searches for new meanings to make them a new material for research and creativity. She does not calm down till she puts out the fire of doubt by the water of certainty.

In this collection, the thought of Rawiya Jarjura Burbara, **the woman**, lurks for us. She is the woman who aspires to achieve perfection and refuses to get used to routine relationships for fear that the roses will wither. She fights the intellectual, social, moral, and political crises through a flood of nonstop questions and practices her right in destroying things in order to revive them and flower again.

In his article "Lā Urīdū 'an 'A'tāda A'laika " in *al-Ittihad Literary Supplement* (March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021), critic Nabih al-Qassem quotes Rawiya's description of her experimental work: "Sometimes, experimentation is better than following the traditional norms," and therefore, she breaks the logical barriers and goes beyond them<sup>52</sup>. al-Qassem adds wondering: "The writer in her texts entered the experience of experimentation, and this step involves risk and an initiative...Will her experience become a role model"<sup>53</sup> for some contemporary and future writers?

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<sup>52</sup>al-Qassem, Nabih (2021). "Rawiya Burbarafi Iba'iha al-Jadeed. *Lā Urīdū 'an 'A'tāda A'laika* ". *al-Ittihad Literary Supplement* on 12/3/2021, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



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