

## Middle Eastern Culture in *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*: A Cognitive Corpus Stylistic Study

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**Abstract: Background:** Understanding Middle Eastern Culture in literature is essential for engaging readers worldwide. A society's culture can be reflected through literature. To this end, this study aims to identify the stylistic patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture in the selected data and to examine how the multilevel approach of this study helps to locate these patterns. Ibtisam Barakat's *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* (2007) memoir is selected as the data of the study. **Methodology:** the cognitive corpus stylistic approach is applied to identify language patterns and stylistic features in the selected data. The multilevel method targets the language patterns that reflect the culture of the Middle East in the book, as well as the stylistic features of cultural constructions and examine how they are linguistically and cognitively encoded in the text, so that the gap found in the literature can be filled. **Results:** The findings of this study show that the frequent use of particular language patterns related to religion, food, and traditions in the text reflects the culture to global readers. **Conclusion:** The cognitive corpus stylistic approach is employed to analyze the data and achieve the intended objectives. Corpus stylistics plays an effective role in supporting and providing insights that strengthen the cognitive stylistic analysis. AntConc software helps to find textual evidence to support the analysis. Consequently, integrating bottom-up (quantitative analysis utilizing corpus tools) and top-down (qualitative analysis) methodologies yields a thorough and nuanced examination of the data in question.

**Keywords:** Middle Eastern culture, cognitive stylistics, corpus stylistics.

### الثقافة الشرق أوسطية في كتاب "تذوق السماء: طفولة فلسطينية": دراسة أسلوبية ادراكية مدونة

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**المخلص: خلفية البحث:** يُعدّ فهم ثقافة الشرق الأوسط في الأدب أمراً أساسياً لجذب القراء في جميع أنحاء العالم. إذ يمكن أن تتعكس ثقافة أي مجتمع من خلال الأدب. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد الأنماط الأسلوبية التي تعكس ثقافة الشرق الأوسط في البيانات المختارة، ودراسة كيفية مساهمة المنهج متعدد المستويات في تحديد هذه الأنماط. وقد تم اختيار مذكرات إبتسام بركات "تذوق السماء: طفولة فلسطينية" (2007) كبيانات للدراسة. **المنهجية:** تم تطبيق المنهج الأسلوبية المعرفي لتحديد الأنماط اللغوية والخصائص الأسلوبية في البيانات المختارة. ويستهدف المنهج متعدد المستويات الأنماط اللغوية التي تعكس ثقافة الشرق الأوسط في الكتاب، بالإضافة إلى الخصائص الأسلوبية للبنى الثقافية، ودراسة كيفية ترميزها لغوياً ومعرفياً في النص، وذلك لسدّ الفجوة الموجودة في الأدب. **النتائج:** تُظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الاستخدام المتكرر لأنماط لغوية معينة تتعلق بالدين والطعام والتقاليد في النص يعكس الثقافة للقراء العالميين. **الاستنتاجات:** يُستخدم المنهج الأسلوبية المعرفي القائم على تحليل النصوص لتحليل البيانات وتحقيق الأهداف المرجوة. يلعب علم أسلوب النصوص دوراً فعالاً في دعم التحليل الأسلوبية المعرفي وتقديم رؤى تُعززه. يُساعد برنامج AntConc في إيجاد أدلة نصية تدعم التحليل. بالتالي، يُؤدي دمج المنهجيات التصاعديّة (التحليل الكمي باستخدام أدوات تحليل النصوص) والتنازلية (التحليل النوعي) إلى فحص دقيق وشامل للبيانات قيد الدراسة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الثقافة الشرق أوسطية، والأسلوبية الإدراكية، وأسلوبية المدونات اللغوية

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## INTRODUCTION

Middle Eastern culture (henceforth, MEC) can be reflected in literary or non-literary works through specific linguistic features. MEC can be constructed through themes, characters, and stories that reflect the culture, history, religions, and traditions through stories, novels, and children's books. Furthermore, literature is a valuable tool for communicating social and humanistic ideals, and it interacts with culture since culture is involved in many aspects of life, including customs, ideas, and human viewpoints. Literature and culture have a reciprocal relationship ([Özalp, 2011](#)). Thus, writers reflect the components of culture in terms of customs, values, and beliefs that produce literary works of great value, thereby contributing to the development of a culture. Thus, readers find literature as a way for a community to self-govern its culture. Literature and culture are directly related to one another and complement one another. The ideals and beliefs of society are embraced by the culture, while they are expressed in many literary forms by the literature ([Saloul, 2012](#); [Akhter & Lamba, 2022](#)).

MEC can be reflected through literature, which refers to written texts produced for readers for entertainment and educational purposes. Literature involves various works, such as memoirs, stories, poetry books, and novels (Fadiman, 2024). Moreover, literature is the mirror of society's culture ([Akhter & Lamba, 2022](#)). A cognitive corpus stylistic approach is particularly useful for analyzing this text because it combines the systematic identification of recurring linguistic patterns with insights into how readers mentally construct cultural meaning. Integrating corpus-based evidence, such as keywords, collocations, and concordances and cognitive stylistics tools, such as schema, can be powerful to achieve the goals of this study. To this end, the study aims to identify the linguistic patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture in a selected text through a cognitive corpus stylistic approach. It also aims to investigate the stylistic features by applying corpus stylistic tools to reveal cultural cues of

the Middle East in the selected data. Furthermore, the study seeks to answer the following two questions: 1) What are the stylistic patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture? 2) How does the cognitive corpus stylistic approach reveal Middle Eastern culture in the selected memoir?

### Data and Methods

The selection of the data of the study is not random. Barakat's book *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* was published in 2007. It received the Arab American National Museum Book Award for Children's/YA Literature. The text comprises 41,709 tokens and was selected to achieve the objectives of the study. It describes events in the author's life that occurred during and after the 1967 Israeli-Arab War in Palestine. Barakat begins her book by describing the young girl's feelings of terror and disorientation during a time of conflict and war. The book's later chapters cover Barakat's life as a refugee in Jordan, her return to the occupied West Bank, and her early school experiences ([Alnwairan & Al-Jarrah, 2022](#)).

It is worth noting that memoirs can often reveal Middle Eastern culture more directly and authentically than fiction. Memoirs are rooted in lived experience, offering autobiographical accounts of family life, traditions, language, and socio-political realities. Because they are nonfictional, they tend to foreground real practices and worldviews, which can make them particularly valuable for linguistic and cultural analysis. The book is written in a unique style, it contains various discourse features and a range of recurring prominent language patterns, for example, culturally salient vocabulary, and figurative devices that make it suitable for the cognitive corpus stylistic approach. It provides valuable insight into the Palestinian experience from a child's perspective. The above reasons form the criteria of the data selection.

Methodologically speaking, the current study uses a mixed-methods approach to conduct the analysis. This approach helps to gain deep insights and attain a deeper comprehension of the data. The selected text is examined through two levels of analysis. The cognitive and the corpus levels enable examining textual language patterns that engage readers from different cultures. These tools help to test cognitive poetic claims about texture and validate, reject, or update such claims. This crucial aspect emphasizes how claims about cognitive stylistic tools are supported by corpus methods ([Mahlberg et al., 2016](#)).

Furthermore, cognitive poetics' fundamental tenet is that top-down and bottom-up processes cooperate. Recent cognitive poetic approaches in literary linguistics highlight the link between top-down and bottom-up processes in producing textual meanings and aesthetic effects ([Mahlberg et al., 2016](#)). Thus, combining bottom-up (quantitative analysis using corpus tools) and top-down (qualitative analysis based on researchers' reading) processes provides a rich and comprehensive analysis of the data under investigation.

The study is conducted following a cognitive corpus stylistic approach to achieve the aims. The model of this study is based on [Stockwell \(2020\)](#), [Mahlberg and McIntyre \(2011\)](#). Cognitive stylistics is an integrated approach that combines insights from cognitive linguistics and stylistics to the analysis of literary texts. It is used to comprehend the cognitive processes involved in the creation and reception of literary language and the construction of worlds in readers' minds ([Stockwell, 2020](#); [Jaafar, 2020](#)). Two cognitive devices (Schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory) are used in this study: First, [Semino \(1995\)](#) defines schema theory as the broad term for prior knowledge and comprehension. The main source of schema theory goes back to the work *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (1932), written by psychologist [Bartlett](#) ([Semino, 1995](#); [Xiao, 2024](#)). Generally, a schema can develop in three different ways: accretion (the addition of new details to the schema), tuning (the

development or adjustment of facts inside the schema), and restructuring (the generation of novel schemas) ([Stockwell, 2020](#), p. 106). This concept is connected to what [Cook \(1994\)](#) refers to as discourse deviation, which holds that a narrative becomes literary if it can "bring about a change in the schemata of a reader" ([Cook, 1994, p. 182](#)). It presents a challenge to the reader's schemata (schema disruption). Accordingly, non-literary discourse (for example, everyday discourse and advertising) is only schema-preserving or schema-reinforcing. In contrast, literary discourse is schema refreshing, where readers update, modify, or transform their schemata (plural form of schema) through the reading experience ([Stockwell, 2020](#); [Semino, 1995](#)).

The second cognitive stylistic device is conceptual metaphor theory. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy. Metaphors can be visible or invisible ([Stockwell, 2020](#)). Moreover, the metaphor's foundation (the common ground) is the shared qualities of the two elements. For example, 'X is Y' is a visible and direct metaphor between two domains, the source domain (vehicle) and the target domain (tenor), which are the basic foundation of metaphorical mapping. The two domains' constituent elements relate to one another in a methodical manner known as mapping. Understanding one domain (usually abstract) in terms of another (usually concrete) is one of the most often-held conceptual metaphor viewpoints ([Abdulhusain, 2024](#); [Lin, 2024](#); [Kövecses, 2017](#); [Stockwell, 2020](#)).

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods is what makes the analysis of the data more rigorous ([Jaafar & Jasim, 2022](#); [Essa & Jaafar, 2024](#)). Quantitative analysis asserts objectivity, which complements the qualitative manual analysis ([Mahlberg & McIntyre, 2011](#); [Cermakova & Mahlberg, 2024](#)). The analysis of "long" texts, such as a single novel, is facilitated by corpus stylistics, as contrasted with small extracts. This also underscores the fact that corpus stylistics contributes innovation to both corpus linguistics and literary stylistics ([Mahlberg & McIntyre, 2011](#)). AntConc software is used

to identify word lists, frequencies and concordances in the data.

## Literature Review

In this section, previous studies that are relevant to the current study are presented. For example, [Alhamshary \(2022\)](#) addresses a functional corpus-based stylistic study of a novel in which the author depicts the social and cultural aspects of the text through the use of linguistic patterns that include adjectives, nouns, conjunctions, and sentence complexity. The primary goal is to examine the linguistic patterns to demonstrate how specific stylistic devices combine to represent particular social life viewpoints and the author's ideology. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to stylistically examine the lexical and semantic characteristics and techniques in the selected data. Moreover, the text was examined using AntConc software (version 4) ([Anthony, 2023](#)). As a result, the distribution of content words reveals that verbs are the most commonly used component of speech, followed by nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. The writer's writing style is distinguished by its use of basic words in short sentences. Furthermore, [Ghani \(2016\)](#) describes how readers bridge the gap between their reality and the author's world to understand literary texts. It examines cognitive stylistics in a chosen poem by Emily Dickinson to demonstrate how various cognitive stylistic devices particularly the usage of mental spaces affect meaning interpretation. Thus, the analysis has shown that cognitive stylistics is a tool used to explain how these interpretations are represented in discourse structure and to offer a methodical and scientific approach to discourse writers' and readers' comprehension of the world. One of the findings is that authors utilize metaphor as a technique to

## Analysis

The analysis was conducted at two levels: cognitive stylistic and corpus stylistic levels. Thus, this analysis provides a rich comprehension of how Middle Eastern culture is reflected in the selected data. First of all, the

conceptualize their experiences in order to transfer, alter, or combine mental constructs. Lastly, [Jaafar \(2020\)](#) examined schema theory and text worlds in literary texts through a cognitive stylistic perspective. Her study aimed at analyzing literary language by using two cognitive tools, which are Schema and Text World Theories, to show how these two cognitive theories can be helpful in the analysis of literary texts. The study found that they can create meanings that can be changed based on readers' schemata. This cognitive ability is an essential aim in cognitive stylistics (cognitive poetics).

The same data has been analysed from a different perspective. For example, [Alnwairan and Al-Jarrah's \(2022\)](#) paper analyses how Ibtisam Barakat's work, drawing on postcolonial ideas of trauma, diaspora, and memory, as well as oral narratives. They argue that Barakat's work is not just a reflection of historical events but a reconstruction of them. By centring on trauma, the memoir creates a healing narrative that reimagines both individual and collective experiences of loss. This feminine memory is expressed through the domestic sphere, the female body, and women's language.

Reviewing past studies reveals a methodological gap and a subject matter gap. No study tackles Middle Eastern culture from a cognitive corpus stylistic point of view. To this end, Middle Eastern culture in literature needs to be examined. Thus, this subject is tackled from a cognitive corpus stylistic perspective to reveal Middle Eastern culture and identify the language patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture in the selected text as well as the stylistic features to fill these gaps in the literature.

first part of the title, "Tasting the Sky," is stylistically foregrounded. The odd collocation of the words 'taste' and 'sky' is highly symbolic. The sky here represents freedom (tasting life beyond trauma). It is a qualitative

analysis of *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood* memoir which is based on the researchers' reading of the text. Throughout the book, the author refers to language patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture. Some elements are related to food, names, certain behaviors, costumes, and religion:

### 1. Middle Eastern Traditional Food

Barakat included cultural language patterns in her narrative. These include references to traditional food or pastries like basbooseh (semolina cake), kullaj (crispy pastry with sweet nuts), and kunafah (layers of crispy pastry and sweet cheese soaked in syrup), Kunafa and basbooseh are popular Middle Eastern desserts, “*This tray holds baked-to-golden-perfection basbooseh,*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 44), “*My father brought home kullaj and kunafah pastries to celebrate my brothers’ success*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 80), falafel balls “*The exception was the falafel balls and sesame bread*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 56), and mansaf (a traditional dish that is made up of layers of bread, rice, and juicy slices of lamb served with a unique yogurt sauce).

*The women made mansaf, the customary meal served at weddings and circumcision celebrations. On a large tray called seder, they spread fresh flatbread, layered with yellow saffron rice. They soaked the rice and bread with jameed yoghurt, then topped it all with meat, pine nuts, and almonds* (Barakat, 2007, p. 92).

Middle Eastern readers may activate the schema of traditional food served at celebrations according to their prior cultural knowledge of Middle Eastern food (see, Figure 1). The way of serving “mansaf” is written as a sequence of events (script) that enables the readers to comprehend the image more effectively. Thus, their schemas are preserved and reinforced as they recognize the text. International readers, on the other hand, may not be familiar with some of the concepts mentioned, such as seder or jameed yoghurt. Thus, their prior cultural knowledge (schema) about the food served in Middle Eastern celebrations may be disrupted because of the new information they encounter and needs to be restructured.



Figure 1. Food Words in the Book

### 2. Names

The names used in the novel are significant in reflecting Middle Eastern culture. For example, Suleiman and Mirriam are the names of Barakat’s parents, “*My parents, Suleiman and Mirriam, whom I call Yaba and Yamma*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 11). Moreover, Barakat’s brother is named Muhammed. They have Arabian and religious roots. Abu Qazem is the one who did the circumcision of the brothers of Barakat (Basel and Muhammed), the name also has Arabian roots. The names of shops (such as Abu Azmi grocery shop and Salah pharmacy) work as a reference to the Arab culture; “*Jubah newspaper shop, Salaam taxicab office, Fam boutique, Abu Azmi grocery shop, Zabaneh market, Salah pharmacy are all closed, but all are there*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 13).

### 3. Traditions, Family and Social Structure

Certain behaviors are made by the characters in the novels that play an important role in reflecting Middle Eastern culture. For example, they have a feast (a chicken, and a goat) for celebrations;

*On some Fridays, however, Mother and Father killed an adult chicken for a feast to celebrate our being together, and having survived one more week of our tumultuous life. Friday, Jumua, meaning the day of gathering, was our weekly day off* (Barakat, 2007, p. 70).

The author highlights the importance of family gatherings and states that Friday is the day of gathering. “*Father tied Zuraiq’s legs with short ropes, turned him upside down, read prayers over him, and, with Mother’s help, severed the head from the body*” (Barakat,

2007, p. 91); Zuraiq (according to Palestine country) is the name of their goat that was butchered to be cooked as a feast to celebrate the circumcision of Barakat's brothers. The Middle Eastern readers activate butchering an animal (sacrifice) schema; the heads that help in this activation are the word Zuraiq (the name of the goat in the text), the object (ropes), and the actions (to say a prayer, to sever the head). The type of discourse is schema preserving (no new information is added to the reader's existing schema). This schema activation may add new information to international readers about butchering an animal for celebration purposes. They might be unfamiliar with reading prayers over an animal while butchering it or this whole traditional behavior. Thus, international readers may face schema disruption which ends up with restructuring their existing schema. As a part of the schema, there is a sequence of events about butchering an animal (script). Circumcision has religious roots as it is "something that the great prophet Abraham had done with his sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Honoring Abraham, the Muslims and Jews circumcise their boys" (Barakat, 2007, p. 82). Cognitively, the Middle Eastern readers activate the circumcision schema as they read the following extract:

*As Abu Qazem took out a steel rod. He used it to measure the length of foreskin that he was going to snip off. While carefully working his scissors, Abu Qazem commended Basel for his courage in enduring the pain of this ancient ritual. "Enduring pain makes you a man," he said.* (Barakat, 2007, p. 94).

The objects (a steel rod and scissors) and the sequence of events help in this schema activation which preserves their existing schema. On the other hand, this schema activation may reinforce the existing schema of international readers. Moreover, hospitality and good treatment of others reflect how generous and kind Middle Eastern people are. In the following extract, Hamameh (a character in the book) invited Mirriam (Barakat's mother) to her home during

#### **4. Middle Eastern Cultural Clothing**

The author refers to traditional clothing by using transliterated words such as long traditional garments (thawb and dishdasha),

Mirriam's difficult times; "*But Hamameh understood her silence. "Mirriam, my home is your home," she said to Mother. "Come with us until the men return." She tugged at Mother's shoulder.*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 31). Middle Eastern people have respect for elders and guests and this is illustrated in the following line "*The food was served first to Abu Qazem*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 94). The duty of relatives on occasions is also highlighted by Barakat "*relatives and guests leaned down to kiss them and put money under their tear-soaked pillows.*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 94). Additionally, celebrating the coming of a newborn, they hand chocolates to others "*To celebrate the birth, Father handed me a big box of Silvana chocolates to give to my schoolmates and teachers*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 108). Moreover, Middle Eastern people make a difference between boys and girls in terms of how to do various daily activities or even how to behave, for example, "*But I could never understand why a boy could play outside while a girl must stay in and work*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 103). Furthermore, mothers in the Middle East have certain ways that are used as instructions to their children to act well when they go for a visit; "*If she bit her lips, that meant "Stop talking." If she opened her eyes wide and glared at us, it meant "I see you and you must stop what you're doing immediately"*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 86). Lastly, wearing black on sad occasions is how people in the Middle East express their sadness; "*At the Jalazone school, teachers announced the loss by wearing black*" (Barakat, 2007, p. 111).

Finally, family is shown as the core unit of strength and survival. The novelist portrays traditional Arab family roles, such as the protective father, nurturing mother, and collective sibling experience. Respect for elders, the role of extended family, and community cohesion are central themes in the novel which reflect the typical of Middle Eastern societies.

and black-and-white hatta scarves (keffiyeh) that men wear; "*The old men wore long traditional garments resembling dresses and*

covered their heads with black-and-white hatta scarves.” (Barakat, 2007, p. 92). In addition, there are many language patterns that describe dresses that are embroidered (beautiful outfits with intricate needlework) that women wear on occasions: “The women lined their eyes with dark kohl; some painted their lips and nails, and all of them wore black dresses colorfully embroidered with endless stitches, each the size of a sugar granule.” (Barakat, 2007, p. 92), “Grandma Fatima wore a long black dress embroidered with green, white, red, and pink flowers” (Barakat, 2007, p. 86).

### 5. Religion

Religion plays a crucial role in the book. There are religious practices related to Islam mentioned by the author, such as the five prayer times.

*Father prayed five times a day. He would spread a tiny rug that had a drawing of a mosque on it, stand up facing in the direction of Mecca, and then bow to God, kneeling and leaning forward until his forehead touched the ground* (Barakat, 2007, p. 69).

Here, the Middle Eastern readers activate the prayer schema (a religious practice) through the mentioned object (rug) and the actions of how to do a prayer. This activation preserves their existing knowledge about how to pray as long as they are familiar with it. In contrast, international readers may have an idea about prayer but not comprehend this full religious practice. Thus, this activation may reinforce and strengthen their existing schema by adding new information to it. Moreover, people ask Allah and pray for what they need; “Mother raised her hands and asked Allah to guide our steps” (Barakat, 2007, p. 50). In addition to prayers, reciting the Qur’an is also an Islamic practice; “I memorized part of the

*Qur’an there—the chapter called ‘Surat Ya Seen.’ I can still recite it by heart.”* (Barakat, 2007, p. 73), “recited in unison “*Surat Al-Fatihah*” (Barakat, 2007, p. 101). Here, the author (Barakat) is the one speaking.

The KWIC tool helps find the immediate contexts of the word *prayer* which occurs 16 (3.68) times in the text. Table 1 displays the concordance lines of *prayer*:

Table 1. Concordance lines of prayer in the Novel

Left	Node	Right
as though we were hearing	prayers.	Father touched the radio gently
we hesitated. We said the	prayer	of the desperate, “Ya rab!”
had told us that during	prayer	one steps inside the hand
Father’s parents. We said a	prayer	for their souls. They both
a long line of unanswered	prayers	hung from it. They were
responses to them—first curses, then	prayers	for the time when he
turned him upside down, read	prayers	over him, and, with Mother’s
country, broken. Letters are like	prayers;	they take a long time
as he said a short	prayer,	then ran a knife through
a bowl engraved with Qur’an	prayers	on the inside. She called

The corpus analysis also reveals language patterns about the belief according to the Islamic religion in Allah or God as illustrated in Figure 2. The word God is frequently repeated and it is associated with strong belief and faith.



File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1	TEXT Tasting th... et Abraham's son, as the story in the Qur'an says. I thought about	God.	I did not know who He really was because each time I asked about Him, who His parents
2	TEXT Tasting th... them she will know that I care about her and be gentler with me. "	God,	I feel terrible for Mother because she works so hard. And I don't know what it is
3	TEXT Tasting th... use he had told us that during prayer one steps inside the hand of	God.	I felt like we were climbing inside the hand of God with him. The rooster continued his calls
4	TEXT Tasting th... what God looked like. But that He created all things. "Who created	God?"	I then asked. "No one" was my father's usual answer. "People's minds are too simple to
5	TEXT Tasting th... he believed the story, and that God could make anything happen,	God	could have sent the donkey to this man the way He sent the ram to save the prophet
6	TEXT Tasting th... l, and laughed. But Father said that he believed the story, and that	God	could make anything happen, God could have sent the donkey to this man the way He sent the
7	TEXT Tasting th... r, and they both walked home. One moment the woman thanked	God	for his safety, the next she cursed and wished the boy dead. Hearing about this incident, Mother became
8	TEXT Tasting th... ir grief. They begged one another for a drink of water and begged	God	for mercy. I wandered aimlessly, staring at strange face after strange face. And then, suddenly, I thought I
9	TEXT Tasting th... y mosque announced the arrival of a new morning. Allahu Akbar,	God	is greatest. Everyone awake repeated the words. But was God going to end the war today? End our
10	TEXT Tasting th... ices, promising that it would not pass through. They chanted that	God	is mightiest and asked for His help, which it seemed they would certainly need as it roared closer
11	TEXT Tasting th... aised our arms above our heads in the shape of empty baskets for	God	to fill with the day's rations of our lives. The women hoped the darkened windows would allow
12	TEXT Tasting th... l. I wondered if they were praying. Were they like us—daily asking	God	to show them the right path? My morning excitement about "Surat Al-Fatihah" was interrupted daily by havir
13	TEXT Tasting th... go back to Mother without a match or some fire. We trusted that	God	was going to help because Mother had asked Him to do so, and we needed His help. So
14	TEXT Tasting th... re us. We walked back silently, shuffling our feet and wondering if	God	was unhappy with us. But suddenly, our prayer seemed to have been answered with more than the sparks
15	TEXT Tasting th... driver announced the moment we crossed the bridge. He thanked	God	with a quick prayer. But even though we had entered Jordan, we could still hear warplanes right above
16	TEXT Tasting th... de the hand of God. I felt like we were climbing inside the hand of	God	with him. The rooster continued his calls long after Father's prayers were over. I did not like
17	TEXT Tasting th... ried, for Behawenha Allah meant "We have lost so much that only	God	can ease our loss." Our loss? I knew that days ago I had lost my shoes and our
18	TEXT Tasting th... hearing this. "There is still good in the world," Mother exclaimed. "	God	does not forget anyone," Hamameh affirmed. It seemed that we were close to safety. "We made it!" the
19	TEXT Tasting th... bar, God is greatest. Everyone awake repeated the words. But was	God	going to end the war today? End our flight and send us home? I wanted to know. We
20	TEXT Tasting th... ver. "People's minds are too simple to grasp the endless nature of	God,"	he would add. Looking down from the tall minaret, I thought God must be kind to send a
21	TEXT Tasting th... r emerged from the silver spot on the horizon. People cried out to	God	in gratitude and jumped high in the air as if to deliver the words in person. But instead
22	TEXT Tasting th... on it, stand up facing in the direction of Mecca, and then bow to	God,	kneeling and leaning forward until his forehead touched the ground. That was the moment my brothers, siste
23	TEXT Tasting th... re and what He looked like, my father said that no one knew what	God	looked like. But that He created all things. "Who created God?" I then asked. "No one" was my
24	TEXT Tasting th... orpions had also nested in our belongings. Stuttering the name of	God,	Mother walked to the green iron door, its two sides sealed at the center with a large locked
25	TEXT Tasting th... od," he would add. Looking down from the tall minaret, I thought	God	must be kind to send a ram to save a boy and a donkey to save someone falling
26	TEXT Tasting th... minded him that we were hungry refugees and were to be pitied. "	God	shall compensate you," another affirmed. Now the pastry man covered his face with his hands and moaned t
27	TEXT Tasting th... we hesitated. We said the prayer of the desperate, "Ya rab!" asking	God	that He might be kind to our hopes. Then we raced toward the answer until it was before
28	TEXT Tasting th... nor gamble, as you ordered. I don't even smoke," he pleaded with	God.	White clouds passed above him like angel caravans, perhaps carrying the complaints of others. Mother locke

Figure 2. Concordances of "God"

## 6. Palestinian War and Arab Identity

The memoir centres around Ibtisam's childhood during the 1967 Six-Day War and its aftermath, reflecting the collective trauma and resilience of Palestinians. It provides insight into the lives of refugees, showing how displacement and occupation

affect individuals, families, and entire communities a reality familiar to many in the Middle East. The node 'war' has a significant frequency in the text, it occurs (50) times, as shown in Figure 3.

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1	TEXT Tasting the... me with many others. I tell her that, like Father, I have become ill with	war.	I describe to her the images I see. But I do not say I
2	TEXT Tasting the... gravel toward him. My dad was my favorite person in the world, and before the	war	I had an unwavering sense that all was well as long as he came
3	TEXT Tasting the... minaret. Then I remembered Souma, my donkey friend at the shelter during the	war.	I imagined the donkey my father mentioned standing there under the minaret the way
4	TEXT Tasting the... I had felt when I was separated four years ago from my family in the	war.	I wanted to be there for him, to comfort him and speak into his
5	TEXT Tasting the... her that he himself was a refugee and understood the plight of parents during	war.	I was to stay a night at the hospital for initial treatment and supervision.
6	TEXT Tasting the... tanker now rattled as it struggled to move as quickly as it could away from	war.	The driver reminded us over and over not to press too hard against the
7	TEXT Tasting the... and could not return to their homes. Mother said she had heard that, after the	war,	the government of Jordan had turned many schools into temporary housing for West Bank
8	TEXT Tasting the... her's memories, leaving feather prints of a kindness birthed from the cruelty of	war.	The school playground was filled with boys who kicked balls hard, tackled and punched
9	TEXT Tasting the... looked the head administrator in the eye and said that Father had died in the	war.	The words made me ill. My father had become a secret. We were admitted
10	TEXT Tasting the... The city of Amman was flooded with refugees like us who had fled during the	war	and could not return to their homes. Mother said she had heard that, after
11	TEXT Tasting the... big building reminded me of the hospital in Jordan I had gone to after the	war,	and I did not want to get close to it. In and out of
12	TEXT Tasting the... Works Department. He said he was going to help repair roads destroyed by the	war	and to build new ones. Mother let us play outside as long as we
13	TEXT Tasting the... uma until the air raids subsided. But then the howling of stray dogs began. The	war	had awakened their pack instinct. They came to the city searching for food and

15	TEXT Tasting the...eh," the man trumpeted. I knew the taste of basbooseh and loved it. Before the	war,	Mother had made this treat by mixing semolina flour, yogurt, and sugar. She topped
16	TEXT Tasting the... front yard, near the trench where we had hidden on the first day of the	war,	Mother picked up a large bullet, one that she believed had been aimed at
17	TEXT Tasting the...deh, Mother, and her siblings had fled, along with all the other villagers, in the	war	of 1948. But Grandma still kept the key to her old house there and hung
18	TEXT Tasting the... had moved to Ramallah upon the takeover of their town, Beit Mahseer, in the	war	of 1948. They were aloof and kept to themselves. The Mahasreh house closest to us
19	TEXT Tasting the... punched one another, and fought as though they themselves were engaged in	war.	They broke many windows. Nothing got fixed. Day and night, the hot air streamed
20	TEXT Tasting the...inian refugees who could not return home after the war of 1948 or the Six-Day	War.	They revealed the shreds of their lives and hoped that relatives, or anyone who
21	TEXT Tasting the...ding there under the minaret the way Souma had stood in the shelter after the	war.	Was he sent to save me? But Souma and I now were in different
22	TEXT Tasting the...ak as though they were friends. Hamameh invited Mother to visit her when the	war	was over and we all returned home. "Bring your children and come spend a
23	TEXT Tasting the...it my father describes in his nightmares. With every step I take, more images of	war	appear. I stagger through the door under Mother's scrutinizing eyes. She is filled
24	TEXT Tasting the... thing for a house to have them. She also tried to stop us from playing	war.	But we liked our pretend wars. We imitated the soldiers, pointing our fingers or
25	TEXT Tasting the...71 1967, Ramallah, West Bank Written on my heart All that I lost. Shoelaces The	war	came to us at sundown. Mother had just announced that our lentil-and-rice
26	TEXT Tasting the... this was my true home. Unlike the many places we had lived in since the	war	changed our lives, this was the place I loved. I knew the road to
27	TEXT Tasting the... Muhammad, who had opened up their home to shelter us. They had spent the	war	days in Amman with their relatives, and now they had returned. Um and Abu
28	TEXT Tasting the... did not return, they would help each other through whatever followed. But the	war	ended six days from the day it had started. For those of us at
29	TEXT Tasting the... Perhaps she does not really want to know. For this, I am grateful. "When a	war	ends, it does not go away," she says. "It hides inside us." She knows. "
30	TEXT Tasting the...ing freely, being outside, and getting lost in games that made us briefly forget	war,	fear, and even lentils. To cheer us up, Father brought back an extra barrel
31	TEXT Tasting the... he was closer that I could hear. "Turn back!" he shouted. "Tell your mother the	war	has started," he ordered. "Run!" I did not fully understand what he said, but
32	TEXT Tasting the... they were right above our rooftops, and hearing them rekindled the feeling of	war	in me. When I heard them, I made certain I had my shoes on
33	TEXT Tasting the... The women did not sleep. Instead, they passed the time by telling stories of the	war	in 1948, embroidering their memories with worry and tears. They only stopped when the call
34	TEXT Tasting the... needed no one to tell me what to do when I heard the sounds of	war.	Jerusalem For three weeks, we were unable to go outside our house. The soldiers
35	TEXT Tasting the... of her own—Hamameh, the driver's wife. The two women agreed that if the	war	lasted a long time and their husbands did not return, they would help each
36	TEXT Tasting the... compare my father with the fathers of other girls. He is poorer than many, and	war	lives inside him. Every night, he wakes up shouting that someone is going to
37	TEXT Tasting the...ld close my eyes and hide anywhere in my imagination, making the sounds of	war	more distant and less alarming. In a short time, the shelter began to feel
38	TEXT Tasting the...o metal layers. The slightest move made it rattle noisily. Every night before the	war,	my brothers and I had vied to sleep in that bed. We had settled
39	TEXT Tasting the... It aired the voices of Palestinian refugees who could not return home after the	war	of 1948 or the Six-Day War. They revealed the shreds of their lives and
40	TEXT Tasting the... and worked in the city of Jaffa by the Mediterranean for many years before the	war	of 1948, and the sight of any of us squinting hard to see Jaffa's
41	TEXT Tasting the... know what it is to be a mother in a land filled with soldiers and	war.	Please make her happy. Take from my happiness if that's the only way
42	TEXT Tasting the...ily a few steps behind her braid. When my fingers finally touched her dress, the	war	seemed to halt. Thinking that I was with my mother again, I could see
43	TEXT Tasting the... one. Once again, I was with my family. Together, we entered the second day of	war.	Shelter There were no cars or trucks on the Jordan road for as far
44	TEXT Tasting the... one thing: we would return to Ramallah no matter how long the wait. Now the	war	sisters held each other's faces; they would never forget. In silence deep as
45	TEXT Tasting the... my shoes on and kept an eye on my sister and baby brother. If a	war	started, I was going to make sure that the younger children were not forgotten.
46	TEXT Tasting the... us. My father would not be able to protect us. He could not make the	war	stop. He could not talk to the people in the planes and tell them
47	TEXT Tasting the... is greatest. Everyone awake repeated the words. But was God going to end the	war	today? End our flight and send us home? I wanted to know. We raised
48	TEXT Tasting the... their heads in sorrow and waved their arms as though to erase the memory of	war.	We, too, wanted to leave. We waited for Hamameh's husband and Father to
49	TEXT Tasting the... the words, Father cursed, saying that we were living in the middle of a daily	war.	Where was it leading us? It seemed to him that the planes flying low
50	TEXT Tasting the... if the shelter was attacked and they died. Since no one knew how long the	war	would last, they decided that all would share the work and take turns sleeping.

## Prominent Stylistic Features of the Novel

It is important to shed light on the linguistic and stylistic choices made by Barakat in her book *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. The author overused semantic deviation, deviating from the normal combination of words (everyday language). Specifically, simile (making a comparison by using like or as) and metaphor (making a comparison directly without using like or as) devices:

### Simile

*"the fear that hides under my feet like a land mine"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 5).

The author (Barakat) talks about the experience of waiting at a military checkpoint, this situation is often encountered by people living in conflict zones. She expresses her terrified feelings at that moment. It evokes the image of a hidden land mine that can cause sudden, destructive damage, much like the

fear that Barakat carries. Thus, the hidden worry is just as dangerous as a land mine.

*"His eyes are hidden behind sunglasses, dark like midnight"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 5).

At a military checkpoint, Barakat describes the soldier's eyes by describing the sunglasses as dark, just as midnight. She cannot make eye contact; the dark sunglasses make it impossible to read the soldier's intentions, which only heightens her terror.

*"He throws the question like a rock"* (Barakat, 2007, pp. 5-6).

The soldier stands on the top step of the bus and asks, "To where?". Here, Barakat describes the soldier's question as direct and cruel in the way of saying it. It is similar to how a rock can injure someone if thrown with force. This choice of words emphasizes the

aggressive and scary atmosphere at the military checkpoint.

*"I pull my head toward my body like a tortoise"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 6).

Barakat conveys her reaction when the soldier asks "To where?" in an attempt not to be the one who answers. She tries to be hidden and invisible to the soldier and to protect herself by withdrawing inward. It suggests a protective gesture like a tortoise retreating into its shell in the face of danger.

*"I want to open my mouth and let my feelings escape like birds, let them migrate forever"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 6).

Barakat is the one who answers the soldier's question. She says "Ramallah," (the bus is going to Ramallah), and the soldier declares "There is no Ramallah anymore," he says. "It all should be gone by now." (Barakat, 2007, p. 6). She is astonished and starts wondering about her home and family if they are still alive. Thus, she uses this simile to express a deep desire to release her hidden feelings of insecurity while being stuck at a military checkpoint and find some sense of relief. A desire for these bad feelings to depart and never come back is implied by the comparison of birds migrating forever.

*"The compound feels like the carcass of a giant animal that died a long time ago"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 7).

Barakat uses this simile to emphasize the lifeless and unwelcoming nature of the military checkpoint compound. It implies that the compound feels dead and deserted, like the rotten carcass of a massive animal. A carcass (a dead body) suggests something that was once bright but it is now abandoned. This depicts the author's nervousness, fear, and the oppressive atmosphere of the checkpoint due to the presence of soldiers and the possibility of violence.

*"The boy's laughter now zigzags up and down like a mouse trying to flee and not knowing which way to turn."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 7).

The soldiers let all the passengers off the bus. The passengers form a line and walk to a waiting area. One soldier raises his hand to search a teenage boy standing next to Barakat.

the boy starts to giggle (he is horrified and he wants to cry but his reaction was to laugh instead). The use of this simile suggests that the boy's laughter is random and uneasy, like a confused mouse running away. It illustrates how disorganized and unmanageable the boy's reaction was in the face of violence.

*"the search soldier punches the boy, but like a broken cup that cannot hold its contents, the boy continues to laugh."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 7).

The soldier punches the boy, but the boy continues laughing despite the violence in this stressful situation. Barakat compares the boy to a broken cup, it implies that the boy is unable to control his laughter despite his injuries, just as a broken cup cannot hold liquid.

*"We stand still like trees"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 8).

After making the boy cry with the aggressive punches, the other people at the checkpoint stand frozen without any movement in the face of oppressive control by the soldiers just like trees fixed in a place and immobile.

*"Letters are like prayers; they take a long time to be answered."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 11).

Barakat longs to receive letters from her pen pals (friends from other countries) but there are no letters in her postbox. She faces difficulty in sending and receiving letters because the mail system there is broken, expressing the challenges and delays in communication. Thus, she compares letters to prayers which frequently take a long time to obtain a response and call for patience.

## Metaphors

The author uses several metaphors. These metaphors are stylistic features that add creativity to the work:

*"Paper and ink, poems and my postbox are medicines that heal the wounds of a life without freedom."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 9).

The common healing properties (relief, hope, healing, comforting) between the mentioned elements (as a process of mapping between the elements) constitute the ground of the metaphor. It is a visible metaphor.

Obviously, in the lack of freedom in the text, sending and receiving letters may offer emotional and psychological healing, as seen by the comparison made between paper, ink, poems, and the postbox and medications that treat wounds.

*"I search for the soldier's eyes, but his sunglasses are walls that keep me from seeing."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 6).

The common ground between sunglasses and walls is that both function as obstructions through their shared qualities (barrier, impediment, hindrance). It is a visible metaphor. The sunglasses hinder Barakat from making eye contact and comprehending the soldier's intentions since the sunglasses function as an obstacle, as evidenced by the comparison to walls.

*"Fear is a blizzard inside me."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 6).

In this conceptual metaphor, there is a mapping of common properties (disorder, coldness, immobilizing) between the two elements (fear and blizzard) which constitutes the ground of the metaphor. It is a visible metaphor. When fear is compared to a blizzard (snowstorm), it implies that fear is chaotic and overwhelming, causing the author to experience a storm of emotions.

*"he embraced me with a splendid smile that made his right eye fade into the shape of a crescent moon."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 16).

Barakat makes a comparison between her father's right eye when he smiles and the shape of a crescent moon. They have the same appearance. Thus, their shared qualities (curvature, brightness) constitute the metaphorical ground between them through mapping. It is an invisible metaphor. Moreover, this metaphor implies that the smile is so bright and charming that it changes the appearance of his eye, producing a vivid and imaginative image, through the description of the eye fading into the shape of a crescent moon.

*"Fear dug a hole in my heart."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 20).

Personification is used in this conceptual metaphor. Barakat attributes human qualities

(the ability to dig a hole) to a non-human abstract concept (fear). This invisible metaphor implies that fear has caused an intense emotional injury when it is compared to something that can dig a hole.

*"She also said that birds told her about me in my absence."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 103).

The author (Barakat) uses personification in this metaphor. She attributes human quality (the ability to convey information) to non-human creatures (birds). The metaphor of birds communicating represents obtaining something new through odd or indirect methods.

## Discussion

Middle Eastern culture in the selected data of the study through a cognitive corpus stylistic approach. The analysis reveals the prominent stylistic patterns and cultural patterns that shape how Middle Eastern culture is portrayed. By combining quantitative with qualitative approaches, the stylistic features of the data were objectively revealed and identified. This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how cultural elements are constructed and transmitted to readers. To answer the first research question "What are the stylistic patterns that reflect Middle Eastern culture?" The findings reveal several stylistics and cultural elements of the Middle East that are associated with traditions, food, names, costumes, and religion; such as circumcision, mosque, prayer, mansaf, and embroidered dresses. This aligns with the previous study by Zen (2020) that aimed to explore language patterns and literary elements. Moreover, the stylistic features are highlighted through the cognitive stylistic interpretation that reveals the frequent use of similes and metaphors, such as *"I pull my head toward my body like a tortoise"* (Barakat, 2007, p. 6) as a simile, and *"Fear dug a hole in my heart."* (Barakat, 2007, p. 20) as a metaphor. In the memoir, Middle Eastern culture is deeply embedded in the language and storytelling style that Barakat employs. Linguistically, the book reflects Palestinian and broader Middle Eastern culture in several key ways:

Barakat incorporates Arabic words and expressions into the text, preserving the authenticity of Palestinian speech. She often provides explanations or allows context to convey meaning, helping readers unfamiliar with Arabic understand cultural nuances. Words like *yaba* (father), *ummi* (mother), and *habibi* (my dear) are used naturally in dialogue, showcasing familial bonds and warmth in Middle Eastern communication. Moreover, Middle Eastern culture has a strong tradition of oral storytelling, and this is reflected in the memoir's lyrical and poetic prose. Barakat's narrative style resembles an oral tale, with vivid descriptions and emotional depth, mirroring the way stories are passed down through generations in Arab families. The way Barakat's characters communicate shows the importance of respect and politeness, which are central to Middle Eastern cultural norms. Phrases like *inshallah* (God willing) and *alhamdulillah* (praise be to God) are used frequently, reflecting the deep connection between language and faith in daily life.

The second research question, "How does the cognitive corpus stylistic approach reveal Middle Eastern culture in the selected novel?" is answered through the revealing of the language patterns through the integration of the corpus and the cognitive analyses. The concordances of the keywords of the novel help to have a better qualitative stylistic analysis. Furthermore, specific mental schemas associated with the Middle Eastern culture are reinforced and activated through the qualitative analysis of the book using schema theory. For example, the schema of traditional food served at celebrations, the butchering an animal (sacrifice) schema, the circumcision schema, and the prayer schema.

## Conclusion

In this paper, the researchers show how schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory in cognitive stylistics are used to

analyze a non-fiction text. Additionally, the corpus stylistics tools helped in investigating concordances and the frequencies to reveal linguistic patterns that are associated with Middle Eastern culture. The study reached several conclusions. Firstly, many linguistic patterns show how Middle Eastern culture is constructed in the selected text, which are associated with traditions, food, names, costumes, and religion, such as circumcision, mosque, prayer, *mansaf*, and embroidered dresses. These cultural elements have an important impact on how Middle Eastern culture is reflected. Furthermore, the frequent use of stylistic features, specifically similes and metaphors, is highlighted through the cognitive stylistic interpretation. Lastly, specific mental schemas associated with the Middle Eastern culture are reinforced and activated through the qualitative analysis of Barakat's book using schema theory. For example, the schema of traditional food served at celebrations, butchering an animal (sacrifice) schema, the circumcision schema, and the prayer schema. As a recommendation for future research, certain gaps could be overcome by extending the study to include fiction produced in other languages, especially by authors from the Middle East. To conclude, the study's findings correspond with literary and cultural research on how literature shapes perspectives on culture. Corpus tools such as frequency counts, concordances, or collocation analysis are designed to detect recurring linguistic patterns, which are more robust in larger datasets. In a single text, the limited size may reduce statistical reliability; however, this has been tackled by the qualitative analysis. To sum up, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative one (cognitive processes) results in a rich understanding of the data that is analysed. Thus, the use of a cognitive corpus stylistic approach presents a systematic viewpoint and enables a more thorough comprehension of the creation and reception of cultural narratives.



### **Ethical approval and consent to participate**

The study was based on a text analysis of a fiction book. No direct participation of individuals was involved, and therefore, ethical approval was not required.

### **Author contribution**

E. A. J. led the analysis, writing, and interpretation as well as the preparation and presentation of this manuscript. S. H. contributed to the analysis and interpretation and collected the necessary sources.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The authors state that they do not have any applicable or material financial interest pertaining to the research study presented in the present paper.

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