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Writing to Resist

A Stylistic Approach to Sameeha Elwan's Toothache in Gaza

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Dedication 1

(Rayane)

All praise is due to Allah, always and forever.

Primarily, I dedicate this work to myself in recognition of the perseverance, strength, and determination that Made this journey possible.

To my mother, the source of my strength and support.

whose prayers and encouragement guided me at every step.

To my father, my support and pride, who taught me the value of patience, effort, and resilience.

To my sister, friend, and colleague in this work, Afaf, thank you for making the journey lighter and the accomplishment more meaningful.

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To my companions along this path, my friends of the laughter that softened difficult days and the encouragement that always arrived at the right moment.

To my family.

I dedicate this humble work.

All success comes from Allah alone.

Dedication 2

(Afaf)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

All praise belongs to Allah, the Almighty,
who blessed me with strength, patience, and the ability to complete
this journey.

Every word in these pages is, first and last, by His grace.
To my beloved mother you are the warmth behind every sentence I
wrote.

Your love carried me when I could not carry myself.
To the pure soul of my father though you are no longer here to see
this, your memory has been my compass every single day.
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my joy, and my safety.

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reach the end.

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quiet smile of encouragement.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how literary style becomes a powerful tool of resistance in Sameeha Elwan's short story "Toothache in Gaza." Drawing on postcolonial theory and the tradition of resistance literature, the study combines Edward Said's concept of the right to narrate, Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity, Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's views on language and culture, and Barbara Harlow's framework of resistance literature with a detailed stylistic analysis based on the Leech and Short model. Through this approach, the research reveals that stylistic devices such as fragmentation, semantic fields of pain and siege, code-switching, and ironic closure do not merely describe suffering; rather, they actively enact resistance by mirroring the fragmented reality of occupation while preserving human dignity and agency. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates that even under extreme conditions of siege and oppression, language itself can remain an unassailable space of freedom and survival, offering new insights into contemporary Palestinian literature as both an aesthetic expression and a powerful form of political and cultural resilience.

Keywords: Resistance literature, postcolonial, stylistic analysis, cultural resilience, occupation, suffering, Palestinian literature.

Résumé

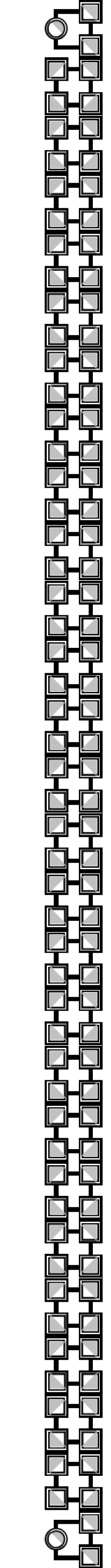
Cette dissertation explore comment le style littéraire devient un puissant outil de résistance dans la nouvelle de Sameeha Elwan intitulée « Toothache in Gaza » (Mal de dent à Gaza). En s'appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale et la tradition de la littérature de résistance, l'étude combine le concept du droit de narrer d'Edward Said, la notion d'hybridité de Homi K. Bhabha, les vues de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o sur la langue et la culture, et le cadre de la littérature de résistance de Barbara Harlow avec une analyse stylistique détaillée fondée sur le modèle de Leech et Short. Cette approche révèle que des procédés stylistiques tels que la fragmentation, les champs sémantiques de la douleur et du siège, l'alternance codique et la clôture ironique ne font pas que décrire la souffrance ; ils mettent activement en acte la résistance en reflétant la réalité fragmentée de l'occupation tout en préservant la dignité humaine. En définitive, cette dissertation démontre que même dans des conditions extrêmes de siège et d'oppression, la langue elle-même peut demeurer un espace inviolable de liberté et de survie, offrant de nouvelles perspectives sur la littérature palestinienne contemporaine à la fois comme expression esthétique et comme forme puissante de résilience politique et culturelle.

Mots-clés : Littérature de résistance, postcolonial, analyse stylistique, résilience culturelle, occupation, souffrance, littérature palestinienne.

ملخص

تستكشف هذه الرسالة كيف يصبح الأسلوب الأدبي أداة قوية للمقاومة في قصة سميحة علوان القصيرة «ألم الأسنان في غ». «زقة بالاعتماد على النظرية ما بعد الاستعمارية وتقاليد أدب المقاومة، تجمع الدراسة بين مفهوم إدوارد سعيد للحق في السرد، وفكرة هومي ك. بهابها عن الهجينة، وآراء نغوي واثيونغو حول اللغة والثقافة، وإطار عمل باربرا هارلو لأدب المقاومة، مع تحليل أسلوب مفضل يستند إلى نموذج ليتش و شورت. من خلال هذا النهج، تكشف الدراسة أن الأساليب الأسلوبية مثل التجزئة، والمجالات الدلالية للألم والحصار، وتبديل الأسلوب، والخاتمة الساخرة لاكتنفي بوصف المعاناة؛ بل تمارس المقاومة بشكل فعال من خلال عكس الواقع المجزأ للاحتلال مع الحفاظ على الكرامة الإنسانية والقدرة على الفعل. في النهاية، تثبت الأطروحة أنه حتى في ظل ظروف الحصار والقمع القاسية، يمكن للغة نفسها أن تظل مساحة لا يمكن المساس بها من الحرية والبقاء، مما يقدم رؤى جديدة للأدب لفلسطيني المعاصر باعتباره تعبيرًا جماليًا وشكلًا قويًا من أشكال المرونة السياسية والثقافية.

كلمات مفتاحية: أدب المقاومة، ما بعد الاستعمار، التحليل الأسلوبي، المرونة الثقافية، الاحتلال، المعاناة، الأدب الفلسطيني.



Contents

Table of content

Contents

Dedication 1	II
Dedication 2	III
Acknowledgements.....	V
Abstract	VI
Résumé.....	VII
ملخص.....	VIII
General Introduction	1
Background of the Study	2
Significance of the study	3
Research questions.....	3
Aim and objectives	3
Hypotheses	4
Methodology.....	4
Dissertation structure	5
Chapter- One : A Stylistic Exploration of Resistance in Toothache in Gaza	6
Introduction.....	7
Section One Postcolonialism and Resistance	7
1.1 Defining Postcolonial Literature: General overview.....	7
1.2 Key Postcolonial Theorists	9
1.2.1 Edward Said and The Right to Narrate	9
1.2.2 Homi K. Bhabha and Hybridity.....	10
1.2.3 Ngũgĩwa Thiong’o and Language.....	11

1.3 Resistance Literature as Postcolonial Literature.	11
1.3.1 Core Traits of Resistance Literature.	12
1.3.2 Palestinian Literature as Resistance Literature	13
1.4 Sameeha Elwan as a Representative of Palestinian (Gazan) Resistance Literature.	16
Section Two Stylistics in Literature and Interpretation: A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	18
2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Stylistics.	18
2.2 Stylistics in Literature:	19
2.3 Main Stylisticians.....	20
2.4 Stylistics as a Tool for Interpretation.	21
Conclusion.....	22
Introduction.....	25
1 Graphological, Phonological, and Morphological Analysis of Toothache in Gaza	25
1.1 Graphology (The Visual Level).....	26
1.2 Phonology (The Sound Level)	28
1.3 Morphology (The Word-Building Level).....	30
2 The Vocabulary of Siege and the Lexicon of Defiance: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Toothache in Gaza	32
2.1 Word Choice (Diction).....	33
2.2 Figurative Language.....	36
2.3 Semantic Fields.....	38
3 Syntactic Level.....	39
3.1 Sentence Structure and Narrative Flow	39
3.2 Sentence Types Fragmentation, Tension, and Survival.....	41
3.3 Stylistic Deviation and Emphasis as Modes of Political Assertion	42
4 Stylistics and Resistance: Constructing a Discourse of Defiance.....	43
Conclusion.....	46

General conclusion	48
References.....	51

General Introduction

Background of the Study

Palestinian's resistance literature emerged as a powerful response to the continuous suffering and struggle of the Palestinians people under occupation. through poetry, novels and short stories. Palestinian writers express pain, loss and hope while resisting the erasure of their identity and homeland. Literature in this context becomes not only a means of storytelling but also an act of resistance, a tool to fight against oppression and preserve collection of memory. (Said1978; Ngũgĩ 1986). This is evident in Susan Abulhawa's novel "Morning in Jenin", Suheir Hammad's poet "Born Palestinian, Born Black", and Ghassan Kanafani's short story "Land of Sad Oranges" etc.

Although, previous studies have investigated more about Palestinian literature as political testimony, but limited attention on stylistic analysis helps to understand how language itself becomes as weapons against dehumanization. (Leech and Short 2007; Simpson 2004).

Samiha Elwan is a Palestinian writer who wrote about the lives of people under occupation. Her short story "Toothache in Gaza" shows the life of young woman who suffers from toothache but must continue living under hard condition in Gaza. The story highlights pain, patience, and strength of woman in difficult situations. (Elwan 1-2.).

This dissertation attempts to delve into the literary production of Elwen to address ow Elwen uses style to resist narrative of dehumanization and assert Palestinian identity.

Significance of the study

This study highlights language as a powerful form of resistance in contexts of occupation and oppression (Ngũgĩ 1986). It demonstrates how literary style contributes to the expression of pain, resilience, and identity in Palestinian writing. Furthermore, the study contributes to stylistic and postcolonial scholarship by expanding critical attention to contemporary Palestinian short fiction and its linguistic strategies of resistance (Leech and Short 2007).

Research questions

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How does Samiha Elwan employ stylistic devices in “Toothache in Gaza”?
2. How do these stylistic choices contribute to the construction of resistance, resilience, and Palestinian identity?

Aim and objectives

1. To identify and analyze the stylistic device used by Elwan’s Toothache in Gaza as a form of literary resistance (Simpson 2004).
2. To analyze how these features reflect the themes of pain, endurance, identity, and resistance (Ngugi 1986).
3. To demonstrate the relationship between linguistic form and ideological meaning in the text (Bhabha 1994).

Hypotheses

To guide this study, the following hypotheses were proposed:

1. Sameeha Elwan deliberately uses specific stylistic devices in “Toothache in Gaza” such as fragmentation, capitalization, code-switching, and ironic closure , as conscious tools of literary resistance, and not just as simple artistic choices.
2. The stylistic features in the story do not merely describe the suffering of Palestinians under occupation. Instead, they actively build a discourse of resistance that strengthens Palestinian identity and keeps collective memory alive.
3. The relationship between linguistic form and ideological meaning in this short story shows that even a simple, personal narrative can become a powerful space for political and cultural resistance within postcolonial literature.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative and text-based approach, focusing on stylistic analysis. The corpus of the study is Sameeha Elwan’s “Toothache in Gaza,” which is examined through a close reading of the text. The analysis identifies stylistic elements such as word choice, syntax, and figurative language in order to explore how these linguistic features work together to convey meanings of resistance, pain, and endurance. The interpretation is supported by examples from the story as well as insights drawn from stylistic and postcolonial theories. Furthermore, the scope of the study is limited to the analysis of this short story within the broader context of Palestinian literature.

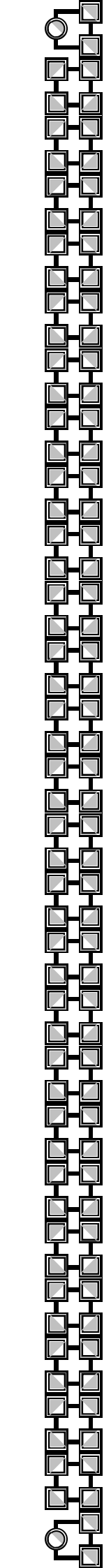
Dissertation structure

This dissertation is divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, the dissertation builds up the theoretical framework of the topic. The section explores postcolonial theory and resistance literature as the primary critical lenses through which “Toothache in Gaza” will be examined. Drawing upon the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, this chapter examines how representation, hybridity, language and discourse function as mechanism of both cultural control and resistance.

Furthermore, Palestinian writing is situated within the border tradition of resistance literature as theorized by Barbara Harlow.

The second chapter offers a comprehensive stylistic analysis of the short story. Using the leech and short model, it examines the text across multiple linguistic levels to show how Elwan’s deliberate stylistic choices transform a personal medical complaint into powerful discourse of defiance.

The dissertation ends with a general conclusion that brings together the findings of both chapters, reflects on how stylistic strategies answer the research questions, and highlights the contribution of the study to the understanding of contemporary Palestinian literature as both aesthetic expression and political resist



Chapter- One : A Stylistic Exploration of Resistance in Toothache in Gaza

Introduction

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework of the present study. The first section explores postcolonial theory and resistance literature as the primary critical lenses through which Sameeha Elwan's "Toothache in Gaza" will be examined. Drawing upon the works of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the chapter examines how representation, language, and discourse function as mechanisms of resistance. Palestinian writing is situated within the broader tradition of resistance literature as theorized by Barbara Harlow, who conceptualizes literary production as an active participant in national liberation struggles. The second section introduces stylistics particularly the contributions of Geoffrey Leech and Paul Simpson as the methodological framework guiding the analysis conducted in Chapter Two.

Section One Postcolonialism and Resistance

This section provides an overview of postcolonial literature and introduces the key theorists whose ideas form the critical foundation of this study. It examines how postcolonial writing emerges as a response to colonial domination and explores the contributions of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to our understanding of resistance, identity, and language.

1.1 Defining Postcolonial Literature: General overview

Postcolonial literature refers to the body of writing produced by societies that have experienced colonial rule and its lasting cultural, political, and psychological consequences. It is not simply a category describing texts written after colonialism;

rather, it is a critical response to the “structures of representation and control” established by imperial powers (Ashcroft et al. 1–2). Emerging from cultures shaped by imperial domination, this literature seeks to challenge and dismantle colonial authority at both political and epistemological levels.

A central objective of postcolonial literature is the reclamation of silenced voices. Formerly colonized people used literary expressions to reassert their narrative authority, reclaiming the ability to tell their own histories and represent their own identities (Said 24, 38, 150). In this sense, literature has become a site of cultural recovery and political intervention. As Suleiman and Muhawi argue, nations are to a significant extent constructed through literary production, as poets and novelists reshape cultural memory in service of collective identity (Suleiman and Muhawi 1–2). Literature therefore participates actively in the formation of national consciousness rather than merely reflecting it. Within this framework, postcolonial writing functions as a means of preserving collective memory and resisting cultural erasure.

Said argues that Palestinians’ histories and voices have been marginalized in dominant narratives, and reclaiming these voices is essential to representing their identities and experiences (39).

As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, postcolonial literatures emerge from societies affected by imperialism and function to challenge and resist colonial domination (Ashcroft et al. 1–2).

1.2 Key Postcolonial Theorists

Several major scholars have shaped the field of postcolonial theory and provided the intellectual tools through which resistance literature can be understood. This section presents the three theorists most relevant to the present study: Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Each offers a distinct but complementary perspective on how colonial power operates and how it can be challenged through language, culture, and narrative.

1.2.1 Edward Said and The Right to Narrate

Edward Said is a foundational figure in postcolonial theory who changed how we study literature and culture. In his book *Orientalism*, he argues that the West created an "invented" image of the East. He describes the Orient as a "contrasting image" used to help define Europe as superior. Said defines Orientalism as a "corporate institution" used by the West to dominate and have authority over the Orient (3).

According to Said, representation is never neutral but is always tied to power. Orientalist thinking works through binary opposition, making a sharp distinction between "the Orient" and "the Occident." These divisions help justify colonial rule by portraying the East as the "Other."

In *The Question of Palestine*, Said explains that the Palestinian struggle is not just about land but about the "permission to narrate" their own history (34). He argues that Western media often reduces Palestinians to "refugees" or "symbols of terror," which denies them their identity. For Said, intellectual resistance means having a "critical consciousness" to challenge these false images. This "right to narrate" is central to Palestinian literature, where telling a story is an act of survival.

Through a study of Edward Said's theory, it becomes clear that in this story, Samiha Alwan challenges Western perceptions of the city by portraying the Palestinian experience and its suffering, rather than the stereotypical image promoted by the West. She does not merely accept existing narratives but actively shapes this image through personal and human storytelling that reveals the reality of Palestinian life and its pain.

1.2.2 Homi K. Bhabha and Hybridity

Homi K. Bhabha is another major figure in postcolonial theory whose work focuses on culture, identity, and the instability of colonial authority. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha challenges the fixed binary oppositions identified by Edward Said and argues that colonial relationships produce what he calls “hybridity,” a space in which identities are negotiated rather than imposed (Bhabha 1–2, 4).

Bhabha introduces the concept of the “Third Space,” which refers to an in-between cultural position where meaning is constantly being redefined (36–39). This space disrupts the rigid division between colonizer and colonized, showing that colonial authority is never complete or stable. Instead, it is continuously challenged through cultural interaction and reinterpretation.

Through these concepts, Bhabha demonstrates that resistance does not always take the form of open confrontation. It may also operate through cultural negotiation, linguistic adaptation, and the reinterpretation of dominant discourse.

1.2.3 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Language

Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o is a central figure in postcolonial thought whose work emphasizes the political role of language in colonial domination. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, he argues that colonialism operates not only through military and economic control but also through linguistic and cultural domination (9). According to Ngũgĩ, the imposition of the colonizer's language results in the erosion of indigenous identity and cultural memory.

Ngũgĩ describes language as both a means of communication and a "carrier of culture" (13). When colonial education systems replace native languages with European ones, they reshape how individuals perceive themselves and their history. As a result, the colonized subject may become alienated from their own cultural heritage.

For Ngũgĩ, true decolonization requires reclaiming indigenous languages and cultural forms of expression. He therefore advocates writing in native languages as an act of resistance against cultural imperialism (28). Literature, in this sense, becomes a tool for restoring collective memory and reasserting national identity.

Ngũgĩ's emphasis on language is particularly relevant to Palestinian literature, where the preservation of Arabic functions as a form of cultural resistance against erasure and displacement.

1.3 Resistance Literature as Postcolonial Literature.

Resistance literature represents one of the most direct forms of postcolonial writing, using narrative and poetic expression as instruments of political and cultural

struggle. This section examines the core characteristics that define resistance literature and then situates Palestinian writing specifically within this tradition, showing how it responds to occupation, displacement, and the suppression of national identity.

1.3.1 Core Traits of Resistance Literature.

Resistance literature is not limited to one geographical region. It has appeared in various contexts of struggle, including African anti-colonial movements, Latin American liberation struggles, and Palestinian resistance (Harlow 3-6). In each case, literature serves as a cultural front in the broader political struggle. Writers such as Ghassan Kanafani and Mahmoud Darwish, for example, transformed literary expression into a means of articulating national identity and collective loss (Harlow 2). Their works demonstrate how poetry and fiction can function as instruments of political consciousness and cultural resilience.

In the Palestinian context in particular, resistance literature occupies a central place in national discourse. Emerging from the experience of displacement and occupation, it seeks to reclaim the “right to narrate” identified by Edward Said (24, 38, 150). Through fiction, poetry, and memoir, Palestinian writers contest dominant representations and affirm their historical presence. Thus, resistance literature becomes not only a reflection of struggle but also a form of struggle itself.

This understanding of resistance literature provides the foundation for analyzing Samiha Elwan’s work. Her writing can be situated within this tradition, as it engages with themes of gendered violence, memory, siege, and resilience while employing narrative strategies that challenge political and cultural silencing.

1.3.2 Palestinian Literature as Resistance Literature

Palestinian literature represents one of the most sustained examples of resistance writing within postcolonial discourse. Emerging from the historical experiences of displacement, occupation, exile, and political fragmentation, it reflects the central concerns of postcolonial theory—particularly issues of representation, identity, memory, and the struggle over narrative authority (Ashcroft et al. 186).

Following the events of the Nakba in 1948, Palestinian writing became deeply intertwined with national consciousness. Literature assumed the responsibility of preserving collective memory and articulating a history that was often denied or marginalized in dominant international narratives (Said 8).

As Edward Said argues, the Palestinian struggle involves reclaiming narrative authority to assert historical presence and political legitimacy through storytelling, countering views that reduce Palestinians to abstract political subjects rather than a people with distinct cultural identity (24, 38, 150). Palestinian literature thus functions as a counter-discourse to such representations.

One of the defining characteristics of Palestinian literature is its focus on themes of exile, loss, homeland, resistance, imprisonment, and return. These themes reflect lived historical realities and serve to preserve national identity across generations. Writers frequently depict the fragmentation of land and identity while simultaneously affirming cultural continuity through memory and storytelling. In this sense, literature becomes an archive of collective experience (Suleiman and Muhawi 1_2).

Language plays a particularly significant role in Palestinian resistance writing. As Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o emphasizes, language is not merely a tool of communication but a "carrier of culture" and identity (13). The preservation and creative use of Arabic in Palestinian literature function as acts of cultural resistance against erasure and assimilation.

Palestinian resistance literature has been shaped by prominent figures whose works transformed literary production into a form of political engagement. Ghassan Kanafani, for example, explored themes of exile and revolutionary commitment in works such as *Men in the Sun*, portraying the psychological and material consequences of displacement (Harlow 2). Mahmoud Darwish's poetry, including collections such as "Unfortunately, It Was Paradise, articulates longing for homeland while affirming collective dignity under occupation. Both writers exemplify what Harlow describes as literature that participates actively in liberation discourse rather than remaining detached from political struggle (2).

In addition to these foundational figures, contemporary Palestinian writers have expanded resistance literature to include questions of gender, memory, and everyday survival under siege. Women writers have contributed significantly by foregrounding gendered experiences of violence and resilience. Their narratives broaden the scope of resistance literature beyond armed struggle to include cultural endurance, domestic spaces, and the preservation of dignity in daily life. For instance, in Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015), the multi-generational story of the Baraka family traces the Nakba's enduring trauma through the lives of Palestinian women in Gaza. The novel interweaves personal and collective memory, portraying how women sustain family bonds, cultural traditions, and emotional

resilience amid displacement, siege, and repeated cycles of violence—thus transforming the domestic sphere into a site of quiet defiance and identity preservation (Abulhawa 123).

Similarly, Adania Shibli's *Minor Detail* (2017) juxtaposes a 1949 incident of gendered colonial violence (the rape and murder of a Bedouin girl by the Zionist state's soldiers) with a contemporary Palestinian woman's obsessive attempt to uncover the truth decades later. Through sparse, haunting prose, Shibli exposes the intersections of historical erasure, bodily violation, and psychological fragmentation, showing how everyday acts of remembering and investigating become forms of resistance against ongoing occupation and the silencing of Palestinian women's stories (Massad 35).

Within this framework, Palestinian literature must be understood not only as a national literary tradition but also as a dynamic site of cultural negotiation and political assertion. It engages directly with the theoretical concerns articulated by Said, Bhabha, and Ngũgĩ, while grounding those concerns in lived historical realities. Thus, Palestinian writing embodies the intersection between postcolonial theory and resistance literature, demonstrating how storytelling becomes a means of survival, identity formation, and political resistance.

This context provides the necessary foundation for examining the work of Samiha Elwan, whose writing can be situated within this broader tradition of Palestinian resistance literature.

1.4 Sameeha Elwan as a Representative of Palestinian (Gazan)

Resistance Literature.

Sameeha Elwan is a contemporary Palestinian scholar and writer whose academic and creative work. Her scholarship and literary engagement reflect the intersection of postcolonial thought, feminist theory, and cultural studies, positioning her writing within ongoing discussions of identity, power, memory, and representation.

Elwan holds a PhD in English and Comparative Literature from Murdoch University and a master's degree in Cultural Studies from Durham University in the United Kingdom. She is currently a lecturer in the English and Creative Writing Program at Murdoch University, where her teaching and research explore the intersections of literature, identity, and structures of power (Elwan, personal interview). Her academic background in postcolonial and feminist theories informs her critical engagement with texts that address colonial domination, gendered violence, and cultural resistance.

Relocating to Australia in 2014, Elwan worked with the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza, where she documented women's testimonies concerning life under siege. She examined the gendered implications of occupation, including violations of international humanitarian law. (Elwan). This direct engagement with lived experiences of political violence significantly shapes her intellectual and creative work. Her earlier role as a lecturer in the English Department at the Islamic University of Gaza further grounded her scholarship within the Palestinian educational and cultural context.

In Australia, Elwan has continued her academic and cultural advocacy through research, public speaking, and creative collaborations. She participated in community-based art and writing projects such as *Palestinian Threads and Stitches* (2019–2020) and the *We Are Not Numbers Exhibition* (2024), which combine storytelling, visual art, and collective memory as forms of cultural resistance. These initiatives demonstrate how literary and artistic production function not only as academic inquiry but also as community-centered acts of remembrance and resilience.

Elwan's work reflects central characteristics of resistance literature as defined by Barbara Harlow, particularly the integration of literary expression with political consciousness (2). Her research and writing foreground women's narratives, emphasizing how gender intersects with colonial and military violence. By documenting personal testimonies and engaging with both traditional and digital storytelling platforms, she expands the boundaries of resistance literature to include contemporary modes of expression.

Through her academic scholarship and creative engagement, Samiha Elwan represents a modern continuation of Palestinian resistance writing. Her work affirms Edward Said's concept of the "right to narrate," as it seeks to preserve Palestinian memory, articulate gendered experiences of oppression, and challenge dominant representations (1). In this sense, Elwan's contributions situate her within the evolving tradition of Palestinian literature as both cultural production and political resistance

Section Two Stylistics in Literature and Interpretation: A Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Definition and Characteristics of Stylistics.

In literary studies, stylistics refers to an approach that considers language as a central element in interpreting texts (Simpson 2). Also, stylistics examine how formal features of language operate within literary texts to produce meaning and effect. It creates an interaction between the literary reader and the linguistic analysis, making the study of texts an exploring journey for both the critic and the linguist (leech& Short 9).

After understanding how stylistics operates, it is necessary to explore and focus on the stylistics characteristics. In literary texts, stylistic focus on the use of language. And it examines different linguistic levels such as phonological levels, how words are articulated; semantic levels, the interpretation of words and sentences; syntax levels, in how words are arranged together to form phrases and sentence, lexical levels the collection of words used in language, and pragmatic levels in how meaning is shaped by language context. Otherwise, writers select forms instead of others to create meaning. Every utterance, whether literary or nonliterary, is produced within a specific time, place, and cultural context, as stylistics is closely linked to language function. In addition, the stylistic approach “is based on clear scientific principles; it must be organized and precise, grounded in a specific theoretical framework, not personal impressions”. And that is “relies on clear and agreed-upon terminology among researchers” and is “characterized by its applicability by others to verify its findings” (Simpson 2–5). studying how writers depart from ordinary language to produce special

stylistic effects (Leech&Short 48). Stylistic plays a major role in the development of literary criticism, as it “draws on both language studies and literary analysis” (Simpson 3).

2.2 Stylistics in Literature:

To clarify how language is used to create aesthetic effects and meanings, Stylistics aims to offer methodical and impartial analysis based on accepted linguistic frameworks rather than depending on impressionistic interpretation (Leech & Short 11). Geoffrey Leech claims that stylistics studies the connection between literary function and linguistic form, showing how particular vocabulary, syntax, and figurative language choices support creative expression (Leech 3). For instance, in George Orwell’s “Animal Farm” the repeated use of simple political terms such as “power” and “control” reflects themes of manipulation and authority. Likewise, Mick Short contends that the goal of stylistic analysis is to explicitly link textual elements and how they affect readers' interpretations (Short 11). This can be seen in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, where the metaphor “Juliet is the sun” creates a strong emotional and aesthetic effect by elevating Juliet’s importance. Similarly, sentence structure plays a key role, as in *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, where short, simple sentences mirror the protagonist’s exhaustion and struggle. According to this viewpoint, stylistics provides an organized approach to comprehending how literary texts fulfill their aesthetic and communicative goals, acting as a link between linguistics and literary criticism, as also illustrated through repetition in “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King Jr., where the phrase “I have a dream” reinforces meaning and intensifies emotional impact (Leech & Short 39).

2.3 Main Stylisticians

The development of Stylistics that linked the intersection of linguistics and literary criticism; their work has established stylistic as a systematic and rigorous method of analysis, and among the most influential figures in the field are Geoffrey Leech and Paul Simpson.

2.3.1 Geoffrey Leech

Geoffrey Leech, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University, is one of the most influential figures in stylistic studies. In his book “Style in Fiction” with the co-author Mick Short, he developed several elements such as the study of style in general and its definition, the linguistic approach to the analysis of prose in fiction, moving on to language as a communication system in context, and the application of linguistic levels such as grammar, lexical and semantic, as well as the development of stylistic over twenty-five years as a subdiscipline and analysis (Leech and Short 1–15).

2.3.2 Paul Simpson

Paul Simpson is a professor of English language at the University of Liverpool. Also, one of the most influential figures in developing stylistics, his book *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*, examines stylistics’ definition and its levels, as well as the development in stylistics for analyzing literary and nonliterary texts (Simpson 1_10). His work emphasizes the relationship between linguistic structures and meaning, which makes stylistics more useful for students and researchers.

The theoretical contributions of these scholars serve as the foundation for the stylistic analysis conducted in the following chapter, where the short story *Toothache in Gaza* by Sameeha Elwan will be examined through stylistics perspectives to show how language can convey themes of resistance and suffering.

2.4 Stylistics as a Tool for Interpretation.

Stylistics functions as a powerful tool for interpretation by moving beyond mere description to explain why particular linguistic choices were made and how they produce specific effects (Leech and Short 13). It does not ask only, "What was used?" but "Why was it used?" and "How was the effect created?" thereby transforming description into interpretation.

Similarly, Simpson stresses that linguistic patterns alone cannot clarify without ideological, social, and cognitive contexts; only when these elements are included does stylistics become a genuinely effective interpretative method. He further shows that patterns of modality and point of view play a crucial role in constructing narrative tone and evaluative stance (6). From this pluralist perspective, stylistics is inherently interpretative because it uncovers how different linguistic functions generate multiple layers of meaning within a single text.

This interpretative function of stylistics is particularly relevant to the analysis of *Toothache in Gaza*. The story employs specific linguistic patterns such as the repetition of pain-related vocabulary, the use of first-person narration, and shifts in tone to reflect both personal suffering and collective trauma. For instance, the narrator's focus on physical pain can be interpreted as a metaphor for the broader socio-political condition in Gaza. Moreover, the use of simple yet emotionally charged

language enhances the realism of the narrative while simultaneously conveying deeper ideological meanings. Through stylistic analysis, it becomes possible to uncover how these linguistic choices construct a discourse of resistance, transforming an individual experience into a representation of collective struggle.

Conclusion

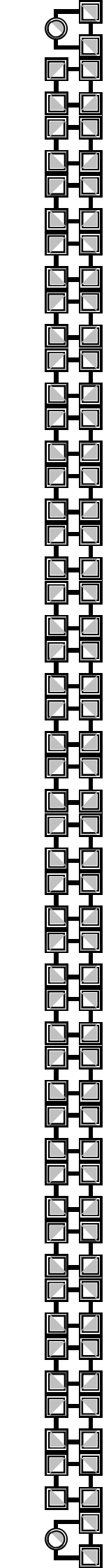
This chapter has established the dual theoretical and methodological foundation of the present study. Section 1 situated Palestinian literature, and particularly Sameeha Elwan's *Toothache in Gaza*, within postcolonial theory and the broader tradition of resistance literature, drawing on the contributions of key theorists such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o, and Barbara Harlow. It has demonstrated that literature is not merely a reflection of political conditions but an active site of struggle over identity, memory, representation, and narrative authority.

Section 2 introduced stylistics as the methodological framework of the study, relying on the contributions of Geoffrey Leech and Paul Simpson. It has shown how stylistics provides systematic tools for analyzing linguistic features such as lexical choice, syntax, and discourse, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in literary texts. In this sense, stylistic analysis goes beyond description to interpretation, revealing how language functions as a medium of both aesthetic expression and ideological significance.

Taken together, these theoretical and methodological perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing *Toothache in Gaza* as both a literary and political text. They demonstrate how narrative, language, and form operate as tools of

resistance, transforming individual experience into a broader commentary on social and political realities. Accordingly, the linguistic and stylistic strategies employed in the story will be examined in the following chapter as deliberate acts of cultural and political resistance, ensuring a rigorous analysis of both thematic content and formal features.

By synthesizing post-colonial theory and resistance discourse, this chapter demonstrates that narratives are not merely artifacts, they function as a primary site of struggle for individuals to reclaim their history, identity, and narrative truth.



Chapter Two: A Stylistic Exploration of Resistance in Toothache in Gaza

Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the short story “Toothache in Gaza” by Sameeha Elwan; its style is not ornamental but strategic. It is not just about “beautiful writing”; rather, it is about survival. The style operates as a systematic set of choices (Simpson 22) shaped under the extreme pressures of occupation. These choices transform a private medical condition—a toothache—into a broader discourse of resistance. Building on the postcolonial framework established in Chapter One, this chapter demonstrates how Elwan’s language reclaims narrative authority.

The aim of this study is to convey meaning and highlight resistance as a theme. It also focuses on the connection between linguistic elements and their effects on the reader to make a deep comprehension of the text.

The analysis examines the text across multiple levels: graphological, phonological, morphological, lexico-semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and discourse levels. By using this multi-layered approach, the analysis explores how stylistic choices are used to convey, express, and reinforce the theme of resistance.

1 Graphological, Phonological, and Morphological Analysis of Toothache in Gaza

The “surface” structure of a text, how it looks on the page, the sounds it evokes in the mind, and the way words are built, forms the initial framework for the reader. In *Toothache in Gaza*, these formal levels collectively shape the reader’s immediate

encounter with fragmentation and tension. These levels allow the reader to “feel” the siege before they even finish the first page (Leech and Short 15).

1.1 Graphology (The Visual Level)

According to Leech and Short ;stylistic analysis should pay attention not only to the meaning of words but also to the aesthetics of forms(18). Even surface features such as layout and visual presentation can attract the reader’s attention and contribute to the overall artistic effect (13_15)

Elwan’s narrative is marked by short paragraphs and abrupt full stops. There is strategic spacing around minor sentences such as “That was out of question,” “What a relief,” and “Two minutes.” Visually, this creates a fragmented appearance on the page (Leesh and Short 172). She uses spacing and inverted commas as form of graphological foregrounding (Simpson 51) to emphasis meaning. This strategy emphasizes isolation on the page mirrors the narrator’s internal state of resigned finality, where daily routines are constantly interrupted by the machinery of the occupation.

These graphological choices indicate that certain terms are not used in a stander sense, but rather to highlight a state of being that is forced upon the inhabitants of Gaza, together, turn the page into a visual map of a life under siege, where thoughts are interrupted and identity is constantly questioned

One of the most striking graphological features in *Toothache in Gaza* is the use of capitalization. Elwan deliberately capitalizes certain words and phrases to draw the reader’s visual attention and to foreground important meaning. The capitalized word “Seven” in “I was no longer me. I was Seven” (1) is the most powerful example, show

that the narrator arrives at the clinic and loses her personal identity, Elwan turns an ordinary waiting _ list number into a proper noun. The narrator is no longer recognized as a human being with a name, feeling, and dignity, she has been reduced to number. Capitalization visually immediately shocks the reader and dramatizes the dehumanizing effect of the bureaucratic system under occupation. According to Simpson, this use of capitalization is a form of foreground that disrupts the reader's expectations (50). The text visually captures the moment a human being is reduced to statistics.

In the context of Gaza, people being reduced to numbers reflects a wider reality of displacement and loss of agency. This visual reduction connects directly to the "We Are Not Numbers" project, by encouraging young Palestinians to write their own stories, the project resists the colonial tendency to treat Gazans as mere statistics (2024). By capitalizing "Seven," Elwan highlights this struggle; she uses the number to show how the system tries to erase the person, but the writing itself acts to heal and reclaim that lost identity.

Similarly, the capitalization of institutional names such as "AL WAKALA" using capital letters for Arabic terms acts as a visual sign of cultural identity that resist the dominant language (Ashcroft et al, 72). This contrast draws the reader's eye and highlights the mixed reality of life in Gaza, where daily experiences are shaped by both local culture and international institution, Arabic word asserts cultural identity, it refuses to disappear, making its presence an act of cultural resistance.

Furthermore, the UNRWA Health Center is also capitalized to carry deep symbolic weight. UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) is a complicated institution; while it provides help, it also represents the tragedy of being

a refugee. By capitalizing the name, Elwan makes the institution feel large and intrusive on the page. This visual choice turns a simple toothache into a political statement: even physical pain must be managed by the system of international aid and control. As Barbara Harlow points out, this reflects a form of struggle where the “resistance is fundamentally to be found in the language itself” (3).

1.2 Phonology (The Sound Level)

Phonology concerns the auditory texture of the text and the “phonological potentials” that readers mentally activate even during silent reading (Leech and Short 105). In *Toothache in Gaza*, Sameeha Elwan masterfully manipulates sound patterns to make the reader not only understand pain but feel it. Harsh consonantal clusters, especially plosives (/p/, /t/, /k/) in phrases such as “same painful toothache” and “toothache headache,” (1) create a sharp, percussive effect. These sounds require greater articulatory effort, producing a throbbing sensation that iconically mimics the pulsating bursts of dental pain. This is reinforced by the repetition of the tense diphthong /ei/ in “painful,” “headache,” and “cries,” which adds a strained, high-pitched quality, and by sibilants in “shivers” and “moaning cries,” which evoke a continuous grating irritation.

Equally significant is the rhythm of the prose. Short, clipped, and minor sentences such as

“That was out of the question,”

“What a relief,”

“Two minutes,”

and “Not for long, I discovered later” (Elwan2)

Generate a staccato rhythm marked by abrupt pauses and rapid pacing. This phonological pattern draws the reader into quick, anxious bursts of reading, mirroring the narrator’s breathlessness and constant state of alert under siege. As Leech and Short explain, variations in sentence length and rhythmic structure function as foregrounding devices that imitate “the exigencies of encoding”, the pressure of articulating experience when the mind is overwhelmed (185–186). They also note that such rhythmic patterns powerfully shape the reader’s emotional response (74–76).

In sharp contrast, the final sentence — ““Yes, painkillers’, thoughtfully, I smiled” (Elwan2) — introduces a slower, smoother rhythm with longer vowels and more measured pacing. This deliberate shift from fragmentation to composure signals the narrator’s transition from physical suffering to mental clarity and ironic defiance.

These phonological choices are performing important ideological work. The dominant harsh sounds and staccato rhythm embody the disruptive, dehumanizing reality of life under occupation, forcing the reader to experience the same tension and fragmentation as the narrator. However, the final rhythmic release represents a subtle but powerful act of resistance. Although the narrator cannot control the external conditions (the pain, the overcrowded clinic, the siege), she retains authority over her inner narrative and emotional response. By shifting the rhythm at the moment of ironic awareness, Elwan demonstrates that linguistic style itself can become a site of defiance. The prose thus both reproduces the chaos of oppression and affirms the possibility of psychological and narrative liberation. In this way, phonology operates as a tool of postcolonial resistance, transforming personal bodily pain into a collective discourse of endurance and quiet rebellion.

1.3 Morphology (The Word-Building Level)

Morphology focuses on how words are constructed to carry meaning. The text shows a high level of compression and hybridity. The compound “toothache headache” (Elwan1)fuses physical pain and psychological stress into a single lexical unit, showing that the narrator’s suffering is “totalized” ,it affects her body and her mind equally.

This unusual combination draws the reader’s attention and intensifies the sensory and emotional impact of suffering (Leech&Short39–41, 110–116). At the same time, it reflects the way language shapes human experience (Halliday, 30–31). By merging “toothache” and “headache,” the text creates a reality in which physical agony and mental distress are completely inseparable,a powerful image of the totalized suffering caused by prolonged oppression.

This linguistic collapse also shows how overwhelming trauma finds expression through the body when words alone are insufficient (McDougall 22). The blending of “tooth” (a site of physical pain) with “head” (the center of consciousness) dramatizes the breakdown of boundaries between body and mind. Under the unrelenting pressure of the siege, there is no space for relief; the pain of the tooth becomes the pain of the mind.

Code-switching is another powerful morphological device. The sudden insertion of “El WEKALA” and “UNRWA Health Center” creates hybrid forms that reflect the linguistic reality shaped by international intervention and occupation. These foreign-sounding terms stand out morphologically as intrusions into the narrator’s native Arabic context.

This disruption operates at the level of reading, as the unfamiliar terms momentarily slow down comprehension and foreground their foreignness, thereby emphasizing the presence of external institutional forces within the narrator's everyday life.

According to Leech and Short, shifts in linguistic variety and register can signal changes in voice and social context, allowing the text to encode multiple layers of meaning (104–105). In this case, the insertion of bureaucratic terminology introduces an additional socio-political voice that intrudes upon the personal narrative.

This linguistic hybridity can be further interpreted through Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space," where meaning emerges through the interaction of different cultural systems (56). The coexistence of Arabic and English terms produces a hybrid textual space that resists fixed linguistic and cultural identities. By retaining "EL WEKALA" in its original form rather than translating it into "The Agency," the narrative refuses to fully accommodate the Western reader. This strategy preserves cultural specificity and transforms language into a site of cultural and narrative resistance.

Finally, there is a meaningful shift in verb forms. The narrator is first described in the passive voice "My father dragged me in", positioning her as the object of external force. Later she describes herself with the active progressive form "while I was dragging myself in". This morphological change reflects the narrator's oscillation between being a victim of the system and becoming an active, though reluctant, participant in her own survival.

These formal features are not merely decorative; they actively perform resistance. The visual fragmentation (graphology) mirrors the broken daily life under siege, fostering resilience by forcing the reader to experience the same interruption the narrator endures. The phonological tension and morphological hybridity embody Palestinian identity as a hybrid, resistant voice that refuses to be silenced or standardized by occupation.

Collectively These choices construct a textual environment that visually fragments experience and audibly intensifies suffering. By reflecting this hybridity and tension at the most basic levels of language, Elwan prepares the ground for the deeper lexico-semantic and syntactic layers of resistance that follow.

2 The Vocabulary of Siege and the Lexicon of Defiance: A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of *Toothache* in Gaza

The lexico-semantic level forms the core of stylistic analysis because it explores both the direct and figurative meanings of words, as well as the ways in which contextual meaning is realized within the text. It pays close attention to various types of connotations, expressive, evaluative, emotive, and dialectal words, and examines how these words function and behave in the text. Lexical and morphological foregrounding at this level includes a range of stylistic devices such as the repetition of the same lexical item, the repetition of synonyms, the repetition of the same word with a different grammatical function, neologisms, word blends, dialectal words, register shifts, and archaisms (words from dead languages). As Gargash observes, the repetition of the same lexicon generally functions to depict a state of great emotional excitement, stress, or emphasis (19).

At the semantic level, the focus shifts to the meaning of phrases, clauses, and sentences. According to Yule, semantics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and how words literally connect to things in the world; in other words, it is the study of meaning in language (4). To understand meaning properly, one must pay careful attention to the language people actually speak and the way they use it in context (Hurford et al. 1). A stylistician must always remember that meanings are never fixed; they are judged according to the specific context, as well as social and individual points of view.

In *Toothache in Gaza*, Elwan masterfully uses these lexico-semantic resources to turn a personal toothache into a powerful discourse of resistance. By paying close attention to lexical choices, figurative language, and semantic fields, we can see how she maps the narrator's bodily pain onto the collective experience of occupation, thereby constructing resilience and affirming Palestinian identity.

2.1 Word Choice (Diction)

Diction is simply the way an author chooses specific words to tell a story. In *Toothache in Gaza*, Sameeha Elwan moves back and forth between words filled with deep emotion and words that feel cold and official. This contrast is intentional; it connects the narrator's private physical pain to the shared struggle of everyone living under occupation.

The story opens with the stark declaration: "I woke up with the same painful toothache." The adjective "same" immediately signals that the pain is not a one-time event but a permanent, cyclical condition. The choice of "painful" adds an emotive and evaluative connotation, inviting the reader to feel the narrator's suffering from the

very first line. Short, isolated minor sentences such as “That was out of the question” and “What a relief” use simple, everyday diction to convey resignation and momentary false hope. The phrase “out of question” carries a strong evaluative connotation of impossibility and helplessness, while “What a relief” is ironic—the relief is immediately undercut in the next sentence. This lexical oscillation between despair and fleeting optimism mirrors the emotional rollercoaster of life under occupation.

The sudden introduction to the Arabic term “El WEKALA” functions as a “fearful word” that triggers trauma. The foreign institutional name stands out visually and phonologically, creating a sense of intrusion and alienation. This diction highlights the hybrid linguistic reality of Palestinian life, where even medical care is mediated through international aid structures.

The climax of dehumanizing diction arrives in the statement “I was no longer me. I was seven.” The shift from the personal pronoun “me” to the impersonal, capitalized number “Seven” strips the narrator of her identity. The lexical reduction from a human being to a bureaucratic digit powerfully enacts the loss of Palestinian personhood under occupation.

In the UNRWA reflection, Elwan uses bitterly ironic diction. The word “privilege” is placed in quotation marks in the narrator’s mind, exposing the absurdity of calling Palestinians “lucky” for receiving basic rations. The concrete nouns “bag of wheat,” “bag of sugar,” and “bottles of oil” carry strong evaluative and emotive connotations of humiliation and dependency. These choices highlight the tragic dispossession: material aid is given, but dignity and self-sufficiency are taken away. The phrase “olive trees that have been mercilessly uprooted” extends the diction of

loss beyond the body to the land; the adverb “mercilessly” adds a strong emotive charge, personifying the occupation as cruel and deliberate.

Intensifiers such as “unbearable” and “unprecedented” appear early when the narrator describes the pain. “Unbearable” carries a strong emotive and evaluative connotation, suggesting not only physical discomfort but also psychological exhaustion. “Unprecedented” further elevates the suffering, implying that this toothache is different from ordinary pain — it is a symptom of the prolonged, abnormal conditions of occupation. When the narrator refers to “El WEKALA” as the “fearful word,” the diction becomes meta-linguistic: Elwan comments on the emotional power of the word itself, turning an ordinary institutional name into a symbol of dread and loss of control.

The phrase “sterile room” is highly evaluative. Literally, it means “clean” and “medical,” but figuratively, it suggests emotional coldness, dehumanization, and the absence of warmth or humanity. In the final reflection, the narrator notes that the smile restores her “usual color.” The word “color” moves beyond the literal (pale face due to pain) to the metaphorical—it represents the return of vitality, identity, and humanity. The clinic scene uses diction of regimentation: “crowded people lining” (Elwan1) and the verb “summoned” (by the voice on the microphone). These words evoke military or prison-like discipline rather than medical care.

The diction reaches its peak of irony and reclamation in the final sentence: “Yes, painkillers,” thoughtfully, I smiled. The simple acceptance “Yes, painkillers” is followed by the adverb “thoughtfully,” placed in an interrupted position. This lexical choice forces the reader to pause and consider the quality of the smile. The verb “smiled” is a deliberate deviation from the established vocabulary of pain (moaning,

crying, pale). It reclaims the narrator's identity and agency, turning the final act into a quiet but powerful assertion of resilience and resistance.

Through these specific word choices, Elwan gives voice to the difficult realities of living under siege. By repeating the word "same," reducing a person to the cold number "Seven," and using ironic language to describe the aid system, she transforms a private medical problem into a public act of standing up for her community. Word choice is not decoration; it is the most important tool Elwan uses to show strength, build resilience, and proudly claim Palestinian identity.

2.2 Figurative Language

Figurative language builds on lexical choices by using non-literal expressions to create deeper emotional, sensory, and political effects. In *Toothache in Gaza*, these devices transform a private medical condition into a powerful discourse of resistance.

Metaphors dominate the text and equate bodily pain with political reality. The opening "same painful toothache" functions as a sustained metaphor for the permanent siege of Gaza. "I was no longer me. 'I was Seven'" is a central metaphor of dehumanization in which the narrator's identity is completely replaced by a bureaucratic number. "The image of the place was suddenly all what I saw" metaphorically shows fear replacing physical reality. "Olive trees that have been mercilessly uprooted" extends the metaphor to the land, linking the narrator's toothache to collective Palestinian dispossession.

Irony exposes the absurdity of life under occupation. "Privilege" is bitterly ironic when the narrator reflects on the refugee card; being called "lucky" for receiving basic aid is not a privilege but a humiliating reminder of loss. "Laughably small clinic"

combines humor with pain to criticize the inadequate medical system. “What a relief” is immediately undercut, turning momentary hope into further disappointment.

The final sentence contains a quiet oxymoron: “Yes, painkillers,” thoughtfully, I smiled”. A smile normally suggests happiness, yet here it is thoughtful and defiant, mixing acceptance of pain with inner resistance.

Synecdoche appears when parts stand for the whole to highlight loss of individuality. “Numbers” and “face” represent entire human beings in the clinic “I was Seven,” “pale face”. This device reduces people to bureaucratic digits or pale expressions, showing the dehumanizing effect of the siege. The occupation is personified as cruel in “olive trees that have been mercilessly uprooted.” Hyperbole appears in intensifiers such as “unbearable” and “unprecedented,” elevating the toothache beyond ordinary pain.

These figurative devices organize the vocabulary into patterns that move from suffering and dehumanization to ironic aid and eventual reclamation. By deviating from literal language, the figures transform a medical narrative into a political statement that reflects the social realities of occupation. Figurative language creates powerful sensory and emotional images across the entire story. The reader feels the throbbing pain through the toothache metaphor, the humiliation of aid through irony, the grief of dispossession through the uprooted olive trees, and the quiet victory through the oxymoronic smile. The contrast between dark images of suffering and the bright image of the thoughtful smile produces a strong emotional response that mirrors the narrator’s journey from helplessness to inner defiance. The sensory and emotional power of these figures makes the story not only descriptive but ideologically effective, turning linguistic patterns into a vehicle for resistance.

2.3 Semantic Fields

Semantic fields group words that share related meanings and work together to construct the overall atmosphere, theme, and ideological message of the text. In *Toothache in Gaza*, using these fields Elwan ensures that the meaning of the narrator's pain is understood through a social and political lens, rather than just a literal one.

From the opening sentence "I woke up with the same painful toothache" through the clinic scenes, words such as "same painful toothache," "unbearable," "agony," "misery," "moaning cries," "pale face," "shivers," and "unprecedented" form the field of pain and suffering. These terms emphasize the cyclical and total nature of suffering.

Terms such as "wait," "waiting," "line," "lining up," "numbers," "summoned," "Seven," "I was no longer me," and "out of question" cluster around the clinic experience, creating the field of waiting and dehumanization. This field highlights regimentation and the reduction of human beings to bureaucratic statistics.

Institutional and material vocabulary, including "UNRWA," "El WEKALA," "privilege," "bag of wheat," "bag of sugar," "bottles of oil," and "laughably small clinic," forms the field of aid and irony. The ironic tone exposes the gap between promised assistance and actual humiliation.

Expressions such as "olive trees that have been mercilessly uprooted," "sweet homes," "fearful word," and "sterile room" link bodily pain to the wider experience of displacement and the loss of rootedness, forming the field of loss and dispossession.

The closing sentence introduces the contrasting cluster “thoughtfully,” “smiled,” and “usual color,” creating the field of resistance and reclamation. This small but powerful field signals quiet defiance and the restoration of identity.

These semantic fields move progressively from trauma and dehumanization to ironic aid and, finally, to reclamation. By organizing the text’s vocabulary into these clusters, Elwan transforms a private medical visit into a shared Palestinian narrative of endurance and resistance. The sensory and emotional power of the fields makes the story not only descriptive but ideologically effective, turning linguistic patterns into a vehicle for resistance.

3 Syntactic Level

3.1 Sentence Structure and Narrative Flow

The syntactic level examines how words combine to form sentences and phrases. It studies sentence structure, sentence types, word order, and deviation from normal patterns to create specific effects. As Leech and Short argue, syntactic choices in literary prose are never neutral: the selection and arrangement of clauses carry implications about agency, temporality, and the relationship between the self and the world (152). In *Toothache in Gaza*, syntactic choices convey the disruption of life under occupation and the eventual reclamation of narrative control.

The narrative opens with short, simple sentences such as “I woke up with the same painful toothache” and “That was out of the question.” These compressed structures limit elaboration and present experience in a direct, almost formulaic way,

such syntactic reduction can be interpreted as a form of constrained discourse under domination, where expression is restricted by external control (Ngũgĩ 9). Language is reduced to survival-level articulation, reflecting restricted subjectivity under oppressive conditions.

As the narrative progresses, more complex sentences appear in moments of recollection. For example, “the image of the of the place was suddenly all what I saw when my father dragged me in” (Elwan1), embedded clause structures show how perception and memory are layered within a single syntactic unit. This expansion reflects the persistence of traumatic memory and suggests that violence is internalized within consciousness., such disruption of linear syntax resists closure and stable representation, reinforcing what Harlow describes as resistance literature’s refusal of narrative containment (16-17). The embedding of clauses reflects a reality where memory and fear dominate perception.

Syntactic variation also constructs the narrator’s role. Earlier structures emphasize passivity, while later expressions introduce forms of self-directed movement. However, this shift reflects what postcolonial theory defines as constrained agency, where subjectivity emerges within limiting structures rather than outside them (Fanon11-12). Syntax encodes the tension between domination and emerging self-awareness.

The most striking syntactic moment appears in the final line, where an internal interruption disrupts sentence flow. As Leech and Short explain, such deviation functions as foregrounding, drawing attention to significant shifts in meaning (104–105). This syntactic break becomes meaningful: it transforms a routine exchange into

an ironic and controlled response, where meaning is located in internal positioning rather than explicit speech.

These syntactic features create powerful sensory and emotional images. The reader experiences the breathlessness of short sentences, the tension of fragments, and the release in the final reflective structure. The contrast between fragmented early sentences and the thoughtful final sentence mirrors the narrator's journey from helplessness to inner defiance. Through sentence structure and narrative flow, syntax reflects the stress of survival and the quiet assertion of agency.

3.2 Sentence Types Fragmentation, Tension, and Survival

The typological range of sentences in the text — minor, simple, complex, and compound shapes the emotional rhythm of the narrative with considerable precision. Minor sentences, those lacking a full grammatical subject-predicate structure, are the most disruptive. "That was out of the question." "What a relief." "Two minutes." "Not for long, I discovered later." These incomplete structures enact what Halliday calls "textual ellipsis" the deliberate omission of recoverable elements to create compression and urgency (76) . Here, the urgency is not merely stylistic; it is existential, reflecting the narrator's inability to afford the linguistic luxury of full sentences.

Simple declarative sentences advance the narrative at a brisk, watchful pace: "I woke up with the same painful toothache." "My father dragged me in." They carry information without elaboration, reflecting the economy of a consciousness that cannot afford to dwell. Complex sentences emerge only when the narrator steps back from immediate experience into reflective memory, suggesting that reflection itself is a form

of resistance, the capacity to situate the present moment within a longer historical narrative.

The interaction of sentence types produces a structural tension that is resolved, provisionally, only in the final sentence. That resolution is achieved not through grammatical complexity but through syntactic interruption that changes everything.

3.3 Stylistic Deviation and Emphasis as Modes of Political Assertion

Stylistic deviation, as Leech and Short explain through Halliday's framework, occurs when the textual function of language draws attention to itself: when the way a sentence is structured becomes as significant as what the sentence says (39) .

The passive to active shift is the most sustained of these. "My father dragged me in": the narrator is the object, carried along by forces outside her control. "While I was dragging myself in": now she is the subject, and the progressive form an ongoing, effortful present rather than a completed past, insists that this agency is not easy or triumphant. It is reluctant and continuous. She is dragging herself. but she is doing it.

The final sentence performs its most visible syntactic act: "yes, painkillers', thoughtfully, I smiled." The adverb "thoughtfully" is placed between the speech act and the narrating verb in a position that forces the reader to stop .syntactically, it does not belong there by ordinary convention, and that is exactly why it is there. The interruption draws the eye to the word, holds the reader in it for a moment, and makes them feel the deliberateness of the smile. this is what Leech and Short call foregrounding at the level of syntax: a deviation from expected structure that is artistically motivated, that has a "value in the game" the value here is the assertion that this smile is not passive, not resigned, not defeated. It is thought (39).

The parallel structures in the aid reflection “bag of wheat”, “bag of sugar”, “bottles of oil”, work through the textual function in a different way. Their grammatical equivalence mimics the logic of institutional: everyone gets the same, everyone is the same, everyone is interchangeable. Parallelism is not consoling; it is the syntax of standardization, of the system that the rest of the story refuses.

These syntactic breaks are not accidental. They mirror the disruption of daily life under siege and prepare the reader for the final act of reclamation. Through deviation and emphasis, syntax moves from helplessness to agency. The passive-to-active shift and the deliberate pause in the final sentence transform grammatical form into a tool of political assertion, showing how even sentence structure can resist the dehumanizing logic of occupation.

4 Stylistics and Resistance: Constructing a Discourse of Defiance

The preceding sections have examined the lexico-semantic and syntactic levels separately. This section brings them together to show how they interact as a single, unified system. In *Toothache in Gaza*, stylistic choices do not work in isolation; they reinforce one another to transform a private medical grievance into a public discourse of resistance.

Diction supplies the raw material: the repeated “same,” the dehumanizing “Seven,” and the ironic “privilege” establish the vocabulary of siege and humiliation. Figurative language extends this vocabulary, turning the toothache into a metaphor for permanent occupation and the final smile into an oxymoronic act of quiet defiance. Semantic fields then organize these choices into coherent clusters—pain and suffering,

waiting and dehumanization, aid and irony, loss and dispossession, resistance and reclamation—giving the text its emotional depth and ideological coherence.

Syntax provides the structural framework that makes these semantic patterns felt. Short, fragmented sentences and minor constructions create the rhythm of anxiety and interruption. The shift from passive to active voice mirrors the narrator's movement from object of external force to reluctant agent. The final interrupted sentence uses deviation and pauses to foreground the ironic smile as the culminating moment of reclamation.

These levels do not function separately; they reinforce one another. The lexico-semantic choices supply the content of resistance, while syntax shapes that content into a lived rhythm of tension and release. The result is a textual architecture in which even the smallest linguistic unit participates in the larger project of defiance.

Within this thesis's argument that Palestinian women's writing enacts resistance through formal choices, "Toothache in Gaza" demonstrates that language under occupation is never neutral. Every word Elwan selects, every sentence she interrupts, participates in what Said calls the "worldliness" of the text: its presence in and against relations of power (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 36). To write this story is not to describe Palestinian suffering; it is to perform the authority to represent it on one's own terms.

It is worth being honest about what the story does not do. The resistance it performs is interior and ironic. The narrator smiles; she does not transform the system. The toothache is accepted along with the painkillers; the UNRWA queue will form again. One might reasonably ask whether ironic endurance is enough—whether a text that leaves the conditions of suffering intact has truly resisted anything. Hussein offers a useful frame for this question in her analysis of Refaat Alareer's late poetry: she

shows how Palestinian literary texts achieve their resistance not through triumphant action but by “anchoring” the individual voice in a specific Palestinian geography and reality, making visible what institutional language works to erase (97). Elwan does exactly this. The toothache is not universal suffering; it is Palestinian suffering, situated in Gaza’s UNRWA clinics, its waiting rooms, its numbered bodies. That specificity is itself a form of resistance.

The title *Toothache in Gaza* is simple but deeply meaningful. At first, it sounds like an ordinary story about a woman suffering from a toothache. Yet by linking this personal pain with “Gaza,” Sameeha Elwan turns a small, everyday problem into a powerful symbol of the larger suffering endured by Palestinians under siege. The toothache represents the constant, exhausting pain of daily life under occupation — a pain that is both physical and emotional, individual and shared by the whole community. The words “in Gaza” firmly place this suffering in a real political and geographical context. In this way, the title itself becomes an act of resistance. It refuses to treat personal pain as separate from politics and shows how even the smallest bodily experiences are shaped by occupation. Through this short, clever title, Elwan tells the reader from the very first moment that the story will use the language of the body to speak about survival, dignity, and quiet defiance.

The narrator’s final thoughtful smile, prepared by every preceding linguistic decision, asserts something that the system has denied throughout: that even when the body is numbered and fenced in, the grammar of the self remains unconquered. Through the interplay of lexico-semantic choices, syntactic structures, Elwan constructs a discourse in which personal suffering becomes collective testimony and

linguistic form itself becomes an instrument of survival. This chapter has shown that the stylistic choices in “Toothache in Gaza” are not ornamental. They are the architecture of resistance.

Conclusion

Through this detailed stylistic analysis, it becomes clear that Sameeha Elwan does not simply tell the story of a woman suffering from a toothache. Instead, she carefully uses language as a tool of resistance. Every level of style — from the visual layout and capitalization to the rhythm of short sentences, the compound words that join physical and mental pain, the vocabulary of suffering and siege, and the fragmented syntax — works together to reflect the broken reality of life under occupation. At the same time, these linguistic choices allow the narrator to preserve her dignity and reclaim a small space of freedom.

The final “thoughtful smile” at the end of the story is especially powerful. It shows that even when the body is in pain and the system fails to help, the mind can still resist through awareness and irony. In this way, Elwan transforms a personal medical complaint into a broader political statement. The style itself becomes a form of quiet defiance — proving that language can survive and resist even when everything else is under siege.

This stylistic “architecture of resistance” supports the main argument of the thesis: writing is not just a way to describe suffering, but a powerful means to survive it and assert human dignity. By blending postcolonial ideas with close stylistic examination, this chapter shows how Elwan’s story gives voice to the daily struggles

of Palestinians and reminds us that even in the hardest conditions, the human spirit — and the language that expresses it — remains unconquered.

General conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis set out to explore how literary style operates as a form of resistance in Sameeha Elwan's "Toothache in Gaza" and focusing on the themes of resistance pain, loss, identity and hope depending on the postcolonial theory and the stylistic analysis.

Chapter One established the theoretical foundation. It situated Palestinian writing within the broader tradition of resistance literature, drawing on Edward Said's emphasis on the "right to narrate," Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the Third Space, Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o's view of language as a carrier of culture, and Barbara Harlow's framework of resistance literature. This chapter argued that storytelling under occupation is itself a political act and a means of preserving identity and memory.

Chapter Two conducted a detailed multi-level stylistic analysis of the text. At the graphology, Phonology, Morphology, Lexico-semantic, and Syntactic level. Taken together, these levels form a unified textual architecture of resistance. Elwan does not merely describe suffering, she enacts resilience and reclaims narrative control through the smallest units of language. The resistance portrayed is not triumphant but deeply human: a thoughtful smile in the face of systemic failure. This quiet assertion of dignity and awareness represents a profound form of defiance against erasure.

The findings of the study confirm the importance of stylistic analysis to reveal the deeper meanings embedded within literary texts and also highlight the significance of literature as a powerful means of resistance. Furthermore, the study shows the way in which linguistic and stylistic choices are employed to depict the harsh realities faced by Palestinians under occupation, and to uphold the collective

memory and culture identity. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the significant role of literature in expressing suffering, resilience and ongoing struggle for dignity and freedom.

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