



Alibbaa': Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab

Special Issue Vol. 01 2026

P-ISSN: 2721-1606 | E-ISSN: 2716-4985

doi: <https://doi.org/10.19105/ajpba.vi.25846>

The Struggle Values of the Main Character in Capharnaüm: A Greimasian Narrative Semiotic Analysis Assisted by Artificial Intelligence

Nurfadilah¹, Rohanda², Muhammad Nurhasan³

^{1,2,3}*Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia*

Corresponding E-mail: nurfadilahbakim99@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the struggle values represented by the main character in *Capharnaüm* as a work of contemporary Arabic cinema through A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotics supported by Artificial Intelligence. The study addresses two research questions: (1) how the film's narrative structure is constructed through Greimas's actantial model, functional structure, spatial-temporal isotopy, and semiotic square; and (2) how this structure represents the struggle values embodied by the main character. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes dialogues, scenes, and narrative sequences using Greimas's framework, while Artificial Intelligence serves as an analytical support tool to verify interpretive consistency and strengthen analytical triangulation. The findings reveal that Zain's struggle is narratively constructed as a transformation from social exclusion toward the recognition of human dignity. This structure represents six struggle values: sacrifice, perseverance, respect, patience, cooperation, and unity, which collectively reflect human dignity, resilience, and social solidarity in contemporary Arab society. The study contributes to Arabic literary studies by demonstrating that narrative semiotics can reveal social values embedded in contemporary Arabic cinema while illustrating the methodological potential of AI-assisted qualitative interpretation.

Keywords: *Contemporary Arabic literature; Capharnaüm; narrative semiotics; A.J. Greimas; struggle values; Artificial Intelligence*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis representasi nilai-nilai perjuangan tokoh utama dalam film *Capharnaïm* sebagai karya sinema Arab kontemporer melalui pendekatan semiotika naratif A.J. Greimas yang didukung oleh *Artificial Intelligence*. Penelitian ini menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian, yaitu: (1) bagaimana struktur naratif film dikonstruksi melalui model aktansial, struktur fungsional, isotopi ruang dan waktu, serta segi empat semiotik Greimas; dan (2) bagaimana struktur tersebut merepresentasikan nilai-nilai perjuangan tokoh utama. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis dialog, adegan, dan rangkaian naratif berdasarkan kerangka Greimas, sedangkan *Artificial Intelligence* dimanfaatkan sebagai perangkat pendukung untuk memverifikasi konsistensi interpretasi dan memperkuat triangulasi analisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perjuangan Zain dikonstruksi sebagai proses transformasi dari keterpinggiran sosial menuju pengakuan atas martabat manusia. Struktur naratif tersebut merepresentasikan enam nilai perjuangan, yaitu rela berkorban, semangat pantang menyerah, harga-menghargai, kesabaran, kerja sama, dan persatuan yang membentuk dimensi martabat manusia, resiliensi, dan solidaritas sosial dalam masyarakat Arab kontemporer. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan kajian sastra Arab kontemporer sekaligus menawarkan inovasi metodologis melalui pemanfaatan *Artificial Intelligence* sebagai pendukung analisis kualitatif.

Kata Kunci: *sastra Arab kontemporer; Capharnaïm; semiotika naratif; A.J. Greimas; nilai perjuangan; Artificial Intelligence*

Introduction

Contemporary Arabic literature has undergone significant development, extending beyond written genres such as poetry, short stories, novels, and drama to encompass audiovisual media that present literary narratives through cinema. This development reflects the growing recognition of film not merely as a form of entertainment but as a cultural text that represents social experience, collective identity, and the complexities of Arab society.¹ As an expression of modern Arabic literature, film constructs sophisticated narratives through the integration of language, dialogue, visual imagery, symbolism, and cinematic

¹ Gutiérrez Almenara, Angelina. "Literatura Contemporánea Árabe a Través de Sus Cubiertas: Un Análisis Desde La Retórica Visual." *TRANS: Revista de Traductología*, no. 27 (December 2023): 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.24310/trt.27.2023.16196>.

techniques, making it a relevant object of inquiry in contemporary Arabic literary studies.²

From the perspective of Arabic literature, cinema possesses the capacity to document and simultaneously construct the social realities of Arab societies through cultural, political, and humanitarian representations. It serves as a medium through which lived experiences are negotiated via characters, conflicts, and plot development, producing meanings that are not only aesthetic but also ideological.³ Consequently, the study of Arabic cinema should extend beyond thematic or moral interpretations to examine the narrative structures through which such meanings are generated.

One of the most influential works of contemporary Arab cinema is *Capharnaïm* (2018), directed by Nadine Labaki. Set in Lebanon and performed in Arabic, the film presents a compelling social critique of structural poverty, child exploitation, migration, and the state's failure to guarantee fundamental human rights. Through its protagonist, Zain, the film portrays a child's struggle to preserve human dignity, obtain legal recognition, and claim the right to a decent life amid multiple forms of injustice.⁴ Consequently, *Capharnaïm* functions not only as a representation of contemporary Arab social reality but also as a cinematic literary work that embodies profound humanitarian values of struggle.

Struggle values constitute an essential dimension of literary meaning because they reflect the attitudes, actions, and decisions of characters when confronting social and personal challenges. In *Capharnaïm*, the protagonist's struggle is expressed not only through physical actions but also through the moral courage to resist injustice, uphold human dignity, and defend neglected fundamental rights. These values emerge through interconnected narrative events, requiring an

² Dampierre-Noiray, Ève de. "Fiction against Belief and Belief in Fiction in Modern and Contemporary Arabic Literature." In *The Routledge Handbook of Fiction and Belief*, 430–41. New York: Routledge, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003119456-37>.

³ Paul, Drew. "Transmission and Transit in Contemporary Arabic Literature: Naql and Its Limits." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 53, nos. 1–2 (March 2022): 100–131. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341452>.

⁴ Aghasi, Maya. "Pour Dire La Souffrance Des Innocents?" Problematics of the Madonna-Son Trope in Representing Trauma in Philippe Aractingi's *Under the Bombs* and Nadine Labaki's *Capharnaïm*." In *Trauma and Motherhood in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, 105–28. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77407-3_6.

analytical approach capable of explaining the systematic relationships among narrative elements.

A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotics provides a comprehensive analytical framework for examining how meaning is constructed through narrative structure. Its actantial model, functional schema, isotopy, and semiotic square enable researchers to identify relationships among narrative functions, the dynamics of conflict, and the transformation of meaning throughout the story.⁵ Compared with approaches that focus primarily on themes or symbols, Greimas's framework offers a deeper explanation of how meaning is generated through the structural relationships among actants within a narrative.

Research on film narratives has evolved through various semiotic approaches to explain how narrative structures generate meaning. Wang (2026) demonstrated that Greimasian narrative semiotics effectively reveals the relationships among narrative functions in representing violence and class consciousness in *Wrath of Silence*.⁶ The study confirmed that cinematic meaning is produced through systematic relationships among actants and semantic oppositions rather than through characters or plot alone. Similarly, Tseng and Bateman (2012) proposed a multimodal narrative approach that explains how visual and verbal modes interact to construct cinematic narratives.⁷ This perspective was further developed by Tseng, van Leeuwen, and Djonov (2025), who emphasized the role of spatial organization as a semiotic system in meaning-making within film.⁸ Meanwhile, de Lauretis, in *Desire in Narrative*, argued that film narratives function as sites of meaning production through the interplay of narrative structure, representation,

⁵ Fontanille, Jacques, and Alessandro Zinna. "Le Dialogue Entre La Sémiotique Structurale et Les Sciences. Hommage à Algirdas Julien Greimas." *Langages* N° 213, no. 1 (February 2019): 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.3917/lang.213.0005>.

⁶ Wang, Renshun. "A Greimasian Semiotic Analysis of the Violence Narrative in the New Typical Chinese Crime Film *Wrath of Silence*." *Sage Open* 16, no. 1 (January 2026). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440261426154>.

⁷ Tseng, Chiao, and John A. Bateman. "Multimodal Narrative Construction in Christopher Nolan's *Memento* a Description of Analytic Method." *Visual Communication* 11, no. 1 (February 2012): 91–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357211424691>.

⁸ Tseng, Chiao-I., Theo van Leeuwen, and Emilia Djonov. "The Fragmentation and Plasticity of Space in Film." *Multimodality & Society* 5, no. 4 (December 2025): 427–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26349795251335017>.

and ideology.⁹ Collectively, these studies demonstrate the analytical strength of semiotic and narrative approaches in uncovering cinematic meaning. Nevertheless, they primarily emphasize narrative structure, multimodality, or conceptual issues without examining how narrative structures represent values within the context of contemporary Arabic literature.

Within contemporary Arab cinema, scholarly attention has largely focused on representations of social, political, and humanitarian issues across the Middle East. Dopplinger (2024), for example, examined *Capernaum* through the perspectives of visual history and human rights discourse, highlighting its representation of human rights violations, child exploitation, and the *kafala* system.¹⁰ Likewise, Evecen and Serter (2025) argued that contemporary Lebanese cinema functions as a collective space for reconstructing memories of war, trauma, and social identity.¹¹ These studies demonstrate that contemporary Arab cinema serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for representing social realities and critiquing humanitarian issues. However, their analyses primarily emphasize human rights, collective memory, and social criticism rather than investigating how narrative structures systematically construct representations of struggle values through Greimasian narrative semiotics.

Building upon these research gaps, this study does not seek to replace the interpretive role of the researcher with Artificial Intelligence (AI). Instead, AI is employed as an analytical support tool to enhance interpretive consistency, strengthen analytical triangulation, and verify the coherence of narrative structures identified through Greimas's narrative semiotic framework. Accordingly, A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotics remains the primary theoretical framework, while AI functions solely as an analytical support tool during the interpretive process.

Against this background, the study addresses two research questions. First (RQ1), how is the narrative structure of *Capharnaüm* constructed through the actantial model, functional structure, spatial and

⁹ Onega, Susana, and Jose Angel Garcia Landa, eds. *Narratology*. Routledge, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315843018>.

¹⁰ Dopplinger, Verena H. "Nadine Labaki's 'Capernaum' and the Human Rights Discourse: An Analysis in Visual History." *Journal of Media and Rights* 2, no. 1 (June 2024). <https://doi.org/10.4102/JMR.v2i1.4>.

¹¹ Evecen, Gökhan, and Sirri Serhat Serter. "Remembering The Civil War in Today's Lebanese Cinema." *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 13, no. 1 (May 2025): 335–71. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2025.714>.

temporal isotopy, and the semiotic square within A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotic framework? Second (RQ2), how does this narrative structure represent the struggle values embodied by the film's protagonist?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to reveal the representation of the protagonist's struggle values in *Capharnaüm* as a work of contemporary Arabic literature through A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotics, supported by Artificial Intelligence as an analytical support tool. The study is expected to contribute not only to the advancement of contemporary Arabic literary studies but also to offer a methodological contribution by demonstrating how Artificial Intelligence can be integrated into narrative semiotic research to enhance the rigor, consistency, and transparency of qualitative interpretation without replacing the central role of the researcher.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to examine the representation of the protagonist's struggle values in *Capharnaüm* through the perspective of A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotics. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of how meaning is constructed through the relationships among narrative elements. In this study, the film was treated as an audiovisual literary text that represents the social and cultural experiences of Arab society through a system of signs embodied in dialogue, scenes, characters' actions, and plot development. Accordingly, the analysis focused not only on the story itself but also on the mechanisms through which meaning is generated within the overall narrative structure.

The primary data source was *Capharnaüm* (2018), directed by Nadine Labaki, with Arabic as the primary language of dialogue. The data consisted of dialogues, scenes, characters' actions, conflicts, and sequences of events representing the protagonist's struggle values. Data were collected through documentation techniques by repeatedly viewing the film, transcribing relevant dialogues, recording significant scenes, and identifying narrative elements related to the research objectives. The collected data were then purposively classified according to their relevance to Greimasian narrative semiotic analysis, ensuring that only data directly representing the protagonist's struggle values were included as units of analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotic framework in four stages. The first stage involved identifying the actantial model to determine the narrative functions of the Sender, Subject, Object, Helper, Opponent, and Receiver. The second stage applied the functional schema to examine the narrative progression from the initial situation through conflict, character transformation, and resolution. The third stage analyzed spatial and temporal isotopies to explain how space and time shape character relationships and narrative development. Finally, the semiotic square was employed to reveal the semantic oppositions and logical relationships underlying the representation of struggle values in the film. The findings from each analytical stage were subsequently interpreted to develop a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed throughout the narrative.¹²

As a methodological innovation, this study incorporated **Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)** as an **analytical support tool**. Artificial Intelligence was neither used to generate research data nor to replace the researcher's scholarly interpretation. Instead, it supported the analytical process by verifying the actantial structure, assessing the consistency of relationships among narrative elements, and providing alternative interpretations of data that had already been analyzed manually. In this capacity, Artificial Intelligence functioned solely as a supporting instrument to enhance the transparency and consistency of the analytical process while preserving the researcher's role as the primary interpreter and academic decision-maker.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed both **theoretical triangulation** and **interpretive triangulation**. Theoretical triangulation was achieved through the consistent application of A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotic framework across all stages of analysis. Interpretive triangulation involved comparing the researcher's manual interpretations with alternative interpretations generated by Artificial Intelligence. The combination of these techniques enhanced the credibility, consistency, and transparency of the analytical process while ensuring that the final interpretations remained grounded in the

¹² Trifonas, Peter Pericles. "From Semantics to Narrative: The Semiotics of A. J. Greimas." In *International Handbook of Semiotics*, 1099–107. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9404-6_50.

researcher's scholarly judgment and the theoretical framework adopted in this study.

Results and Discussion

Narrative Structure of the Main Character's Struggle in Capharnaüm

To address the first research question (RQ1), this study analyzes the narrative structure of *Capharnaüm* using A.J. Greimas's narrative semiotic framework, comprising the actantial model, functional structure, spatial and temporal isotopy, and the semiotic square. These four analytical instruments are employed in an integrated manner to explain how the protagonist's struggle is constructed through the relationships among actants, narrative progression, the organization of space and time, and the semantic relations underlying the narrative. The analysis reveals that Zain's struggle is not presented as a series of isolated events but as a coherent narrative structure that gradually progresses from powerlessness toward the recognition of human existence and dignity.

Actantial Model

The actantial analysis demonstrates that Zain's struggle is structured through six interrelated actantial functions, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Actantial Structure of *Capharnaüm*

Actant	Representation in the Film	Narrative Function
Sender	Sahar's forced marriage	Initiates the conflict and motivates Zain's struggle
Subject	Zain	Central actor who carries out the mission
Object	Human dignity and the right to a decent life	Goal pursued throughout the narrative
Helper	Rahil, lawyer Nadine Al Alam, and the media	Assist Zain in achieving his objective
Opponent	His parents, structural poverty, and the absence of legal identity	Obstruct Zain's struggle
Receiver	Zain and baby Yonas	Beneficiaries of the struggle's outcome

The Sender is represented by Sahar's forced marriage, which serves as the catalyst for the entire narrative conflict and motivates Zain's

resistance. His suspicion arises when Assaad and his father arrive at the family home carrying several chickens. Although his mother claims that they are merely discussing the house rent, Zain realizes that the chickens constitute part of the marriage arrangement for Sahar. This realization is reflected in the following dialogue.

زَيْن: أمي، ماذا يفعل أسعد ووالده هنا؟
الأم: اهْدَأْ، إنهم يتحدثون مع والدك بشأن الإيجار.
زَيْن: كنت سأقطع يدي اليسرى ويعطون بضع دجاجات لسحر.

Zain: Mother, what are Assaad and his father doing here?

Mother: Calm down. They are talking with your father about the house rent.

Zain: I would rather cut off my left hand than let them exchange a few chickens for Sahar.

The conflict reaches its turning point when Zain fails to help Sahar escape and witnesses her being handed over to Assaad. His resistance is expressed in the following exchange.

زَيْن: أين تأخذونها؟ هل تريدن بيعها كالعاهرة؟
سعاد: يا زَيْن، حاول أي شيء وسأقتلك.

Zain: Where are you taking her? Do you want to sell her like a prostitute?

Soud: Try anything, Zain, and I will kill you.

This event marks the decisive shift in Zain's role from a powerless child into an active subject who openly resists injustice.

As the Subject, Zain occupies the center of the narrative, with every major event unfolding through his actions, decisions, and struggles. In the film's opening courtroom scene, he openly declares that he is suing his parents for bringing him into the world without fulfilling their parental responsibilities.

القاضي: هل تعلم لماذا أنت هنا؟
زَيْن: نعم.
القاضي: لماذا تريد أن تتهم والدك؟
زَيْن: لأنهم أنجبوني إلى هذا العالم.

Judge: Do you know why you are here?

Zain: Yes.

Judge: Why do you want to sue your parents?

Zain: Because they brought me into this world.

This dialogue illustrates how Zain's struggle develops from protecting his sister into a broader challenge against a social system that fails to safeguard children's fundamental rights.

The Object pursued by Zain is not material gain but the preservation of human dignity and the right to a decent life. This objective becomes evident when he telephones a television station from prison and criticizes adults who fail to fulfill their responsibilities as parents.

أريد أن يستمع إلي الكبار... أريد من الكبار الذين لا يستطيعون تربية الأطفال أن لا ينجبوا أطفالاً... الحياة كومة من القذارة، لا تساوي أكثر من حذائي...

I want adults to listen to me... Those who cannot raise children should not have children... Life is a pile of filth; it is worth no more than my shoes...

His objective is further reinforced after he learns that his mother is pregnant again following Sahar's death.

زين: الطفل الذي تحمله سيكون مثلي.

القاضي: ماذا تريد من والديك؟

زين: أريد أن يتوقفوا عن إنجاب الأطفال.

Zain: *The child you are carrying will become like me.*

Judge: *What do you want from your parents?*

Zain: *I want them to stop having children.*

These dialogues demonstrate that Zain's struggle is ultimately directed toward securing every child's right to a dignified life.

Throughout his journey, Zain receives support from three principal Helpers: Rahil, lawyer Nadine Al Alam, and the media. Rahil provides shelter and entrusts Yonas to Zain, enabling him to survive after fleeing his family home. Her trust is reflected in the following courtroom testimony.

القاضي: هل توقع أن يؤذي يونس؟

راحيل: لا، مستحيل. كانوا كالأخوين.

Judge: *Did you ever think he would hurt Yonas?*

Rahil: *Never. They were like brothers.*

Meanwhile, lawyer Nadine provides legal legitimacy by proving that Zain's birth had never been officially registered.

حضرة الرئيس... لم يتم تسجيل زين عند ولادته... إليكم تقرير الطبيب الذي يشهد بأن... زين كان يبلغ من العمر حوالي اثني عشر عاماً

Your Honour, Zain was never officially registered at birth. Here is the medical report confirming that he was approximately twelve years old at the time of the incident.

The media subsequently transforms Zain's personal struggle into a broader public issue concerning children's rights and the failure of social protection systems.

Conversely, the Opponents consist of Zain's parents, who exploit their children through child labor and forced marriage, together with structural poverty and the absence of legal identity. These interconnected obstacles continually hinder Zain's pursuit of justice throughout the narrative.

The Receiver is represented by both Zain and baby Yonas, who ultimately benefit from the struggle's outcome. After being arrested for stabbing Assaad, Zain provides the police with identifying information about Aspro, enabling Yonas to be found and reunited with his mother.

زَيْن: عَيْنُهُ مِنْ هُنَا زَرْقَاءَ ...
الْشَّرْطِيُّ: هَلْ عَيْنَاهُ كِلْتَاهُمَا زَرْقَاوَان؟
زَيْن: لَا، إِحْدَى الْعَيْنَيْنِ بَنِيَّةُ اللَّوْنِ.

Zain: *One of his eyes is blue...*

Police Officer: *Are both of his eyes blue?*

Zain: *No. One eye is brown.*

At the conclusion of the film, Zain himself finally obtains legal identity. The actantial model therefore demonstrates that the relationships among characters and events are systematically organized to direct the protagonist's struggle toward the recognition of human existence and dignity.

The findings of the actantial analysis are reinforced through the functional structure, spatial-temporal isotopy, and semiotic square. The functional structure reveals that Zain's journey unfolds through five narrative stages: initial situation, qualifying test, decisive test, glorifying test, and final situation, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Functional Structure of the Narrative in *Capharnaüm*

Stage	Narrative Representation
Initial situation	Zain lives in extreme poverty without legal identity and is subjected to familial exploitation.
Qualifying test	He fails to rescue Sahar, runs away from home, meets Rahil, and learns to survive independently.
Decisive test	Sahar dies, Zain stabs Assaad, is imprisoned, and files a lawsuit against his parents.
Glorifying test	Zain's lawsuit gains public attention through the courtroom proceedings and media coverage.
Final situation	Zain obtains legal identity, symbolizing the recognition of his existence.

From a spatial perspective, the narrative is structured around the opposition between domestic spaces, which function as sites of exploitation, and public spaces, which, despite their harshness and

uncertainty, create opportunities for Zain's struggle. The family home, Rahil's apartment, the streets of Beirut, and the courtroom collectively constitute successive spaces that accompany the protagonist's transformation. Temporally, the film employs a flashback structure that links the courtroom scenes in the present to Zain's past experiences, while the concluding scene, in which he receives legal identification, projects the narrative toward a hopeful future.

These findings are further synthesized through the semiotic square, which illustrates the movement of meaning from exclusion (S2) to recognition (S1). At the beginning of the narrative, Zain occupies the position of exclusion, deprived of legal identity and institutional protection. Through his struggle, this condition gradually shifts toward the negation of exclusion and ultimately culminates in recognition through the acquisition of legal identity. Although this recognition does not entirely eliminate the structural injustices underlying the narrative, the overall trajectory demonstrates a transformation from non-existence to the acknowledgment of human dignity. Accordingly, the integrated application of Greimas's narrative semiotic framework reveals that Zain's struggle is constructed through a coherent, progressive, and interconnected narrative structure, which provides the analytical foundation for examining the representation of struggle values discussed in the following section.

Representation of Struggle Values

Having mapped the narrative structure through the actantial model, functional structure, spatial-temporal isotopy, and the semiotic square, the next stage of analysis examines how these narrative structures represent the protagonist's struggle values. From the perspective of Greimasian narrative semiotics, narrative structure does not merely organize relationships among characters and sequences of events but also functions as the mechanism through which meaning is produced. Accordingly, the struggle values embodied in *Capharnaüm* do not appear as explicit moral messages; rather, they emerge progressively through Zain's narrative transformation. Based on the integrated analysis of the narrative structure, this study identifies six struggle values proposed by Joyomartono: self-sacrifice, perseverance, respect, patience, cooperation, and unity. The relationship between the narrative structure and these struggle values is summarized in Table3.

Table 3. Representation of Struggle Values

Struggle Value	Narrative Representation
Self-sacrifice	Zain's efforts to protect Sahar and care for Yonas despite sacrificing his own childhood.
Perseverance	Zain's continued struggle despite repeated failures, culminating in his lawsuit against his parents.
Respect	Zain's treatment of Sahar and Yonas as individuals possessing dignity, in contrast to the exploitative environment surrounding them.
Patience	Zain's endurance in the face of poverty, violence, and neglect without abandoning his pursuit of justice.
Cooperation	The mutual support between Zain and Rahil in sustaining their daily lives.
Unity	The emergence of a humanitarian bond among Zain, Rahil, and Yonas as an alternative family amid social marginalization.

The findings indicate that self-sacrifice constitutes the primary value driving Zain's struggle. This value first emerges in his attempt to prevent Sahar's forced marriage, even though his actions provoke conflict with his parents. After failing to save his sister, his sacrifice takes a different form when he assumes sole responsibility for caring for baby Yonas following Rahil's arrest. In both situations, Zain places the welfare of others above his own interests. The actantial model demonstrates that his role as the Subject is motivated not by personal gain but by a moral commitment to protecting those who are more vulnerable. Consequently, self-sacrifice serves as the moral foundation underlying his entire narrative journey.

The second value is perseverance. The functional structure reveals that Zain's struggle develops through a succession of failures that never deter him from pursuing his objective. He fails to rescue Sahar, loses his home, is separated from Rahil, and even loses Yonas after being forced to entrust him to Aspro. Yet each failure gives rise to a new form of resistance, ultimately culminating in his decision to sue his parents. From a narrative perspective, this transformation marks Zain's evolution from a passive victim into an active agent who demands justice. Perseverance is therefore represented not as the achievement of success with ease but as the capacity to remain committed to one's purpose despite continuous setbacks.

The narrative also represents the value of respect through Zain's recognition of others as individuals possessing inherent dignity. This is evident in his rejection of Sahar's forced marriage and his unwavering care for Yonas. Despite living in extreme poverty and enduring neglect himself, Zain never treats Yonas as a burden. Instead, he strives to meet the infant's basic needs to the best of his ability. The contrast between Zain's treatment of Yonas and his parents' exploitation of their own children reflects the semantic opposition identified in the semiotic square—namely, the opposition between recognition and exclusion. Respect for human dignity thus emerges as one of the central meanings generated throughout the narrative.

The value of patience is reflected in Zain's ability to endure circumstances that consistently position him as a victim. The spatial–temporal isotopy demonstrates that his life unfolds within environments characterized by poverty, violence, and uncertainty, while the film's flashback structure emphasizes the continuity of his suffering over time. Nevertheless, patience is portrayed not as passive resignation but as a form of resilience that enables Zain to continue pursuing his objective. In this sense, patience becomes a prerequisite for his transformation, as the journey toward recognition would not have been possible without the capacity to endure prolonged hardship.

The final two values, cooperation and unity, are represented through the relationship among Zain, Rahil, and Yonas. All three belong to socially marginalized groups: Zain is a child without legal identity, Rahil is an undocumented migrant, and Yonas is an infant deprived of parental protection. Their relationship gradually develops into a small community founded upon mutual trust and reciprocal support. Rahil provides shelter and food, while Zain assumes responsibility for caring for Yonas during her absence. Even after Rahil's arrest, Zain continues to fulfill this responsibility despite facing severe hardships. Consequently, cooperation and unity are portrayed not merely as social relationships but as strategies of survival that enable marginalized individuals to preserve their humanity amid the failure of formal social institutions.

Overall, these six struggle values do not function as isolated themes but emerge from the integrated narrative structure identified in the preceding analysis. The actantial model explains the functional relationships that drive the protagonist's struggle, the functional structure illustrates the process of character transformation, the spatial–temporal isotopy provides the social context from which the struggle arises, and

the semiotic square reveals the semantic movement from exclusion toward recognition. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that *Capharnaüm* represents struggle not simply as a sequence of heroic actions performed by a child but as a systematic narrative process through which fundamental humanitarian values are constructed and articulated through the lived experiences of its protagonist.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the narrative structure of *Capharnaüm* functions not merely as an organizational framework for the plot but also as a mechanism for constructing meaning that progressively represents the protagonist's struggle. Through the interplay of actantial functions, the development of the functional structure, spatial-temporal isotopy, and the semantic oppositions revealed by the semiotic square, Zain's struggle is constructed not as an isolated heroic act but as a process of transformation emerging from unequal social relations. These findings reinforce Greimas's proposition that narrative meaning is generated not by individual characters alone but by the functional relationships that organize the narrative as a coherent system.¹³ In *Capharnaüm*, every shift in Zain's position is shaped by his interactions with other actants, transforming him from an object of oppression into a subject who actively struggles for dignity and fundamental rights. Consequently, the film's narrative structure does more than recount a sequence of events; it systematically constructs a progressive logic of struggle that culminates in the recognition of the protagonist's existence and humanity.

These findings further demonstrate the continuing relevance of Greimasian narrative semiotics for interpreting contemporary Arabic literary works, particularly those expressed through the cinematic medium. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focus on identifying actantial functions or mapping narrative stages, the present study shows that these structural elements serve a broader interpretive function by constructing representations of struggle values through their interrelationships. In other words, the actantial model, functional structure, isotopy, and semiotic square should not be regarded as the ultimate objective of analysis but rather as analytical instruments for

¹³ Azadeh Abbasi, and Fazeleh Mirghafooriyan. "A Semio-Semantics of 'Ezat and Zelat' in the Quranic Story of Joseph (A.S) Based on Greimas's Semiotic Square." *Language Related Research* 16, no. 4 (2025): 305–38.

explaining how the meaning of struggle is systematically produced within the narrative. This perspective extends the application of Greimasian narrative semiotics beyond structural description toward the interpretation of values embedded within narrative organization.¹⁴

From the perspective of contemporary Arabic literature, the representation of struggle in *Capharnaïm* reflects a shift in narrative orientation from the conventions of classical Arabic literature, which typically positioned heroic figures at the center of conflict resolution.¹⁵ Instead, the film places a marginalized child at the center of the narrative, articulating criticism of structural poverty, child exploitation, early marriage, the absence of legal identity, and the failure of social institutions to protect vulnerable populations. This shift reflects the broader development of contemporary Arabic literature, in which social reality increasingly occupies the center of literary representation. Literary works thus function not merely as aesthetic expressions but also as critical interventions that expose the structural conditions producing social injustice.¹⁶ Accordingly, Zain's struggle should not be understood solely as the personal experience of an individual child but as a representation of the collective experiences of marginalized communities living under conditions of structural poverty, limited access to public services, and inadequate protection of children's rights.

The Lebanese social context further reinforces this interpretation. As a country characterized by complex social, economic, and migratory dynamics within the Arab world, Lebanon provides a setting in which multiple forms of marginalization intersect in everyday life.¹⁷ The portrayal of impoverished families, undocumented migrant workers, and children without legal identity demonstrates that the issues addressed in *Capharnaïm* extend beyond domestic family conflict to reflect broader humanitarian challenges confronting contemporary Arab societies. In this context, the film's narrative structure functions as a bridge between the protagonist's personal experiences and the wider social realities that

¹⁴ Shivdarshan Kadam. "Cinema as Development Communication: A Semiotic and Narrative Analysis of Swades." *CINEFORUM* 66, no. 2 (2026): 1059–1084.

¹⁵ Osti, Letizia. *History and Memory in the Abbasid Caliphate*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838600556>.

¹⁶ Guedj, David. "Social and Educational Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Moroccan Judeo-Arabic Halakhic Literature." *Jewish History* 38, nos. 1–2 (November 2024): 69–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10835-024-09466-0>.

¹⁷ Munira Khayyat. *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon*. California: University of California Press, 2022.

shape them. By establishing this connection, the film not only evokes empathy for its protagonist but also encourages audiences to question the social structures that perpetuate such injustices.¹⁸

The findings further indicate that the identified struggle values are not presented as explicit moral lessons but emerge through the protagonist's narrative transformation. The six struggle values identified in this study can be synthesized into three broader dimensions. The first is **human dignity**, reflected in Zain's sacrifices to protect Sahar and his unwavering care for Yonas. The second is **resilience**, demonstrated by his determination to pursue justice despite repeated experiences of failure, loss, and violence. The third is **social solidarity**, embodied in the reciprocal relationship among Zain, Rahil, and Yonas, who form an alternative family outside the boundaries of biological kinship. Together, these dimensions suggest that struggle in *Capharnaüm* is represented not as an expression of individual heroism but as an effort to preserve fundamental humanitarian values within a social order that consistently places vulnerable individuals at risk.

This interpretation also distinguishes the film's representation of struggle from conventional narratives of heroism. The protagonist does not achieve victory through physical strength, social status, or institutional power, but through the moral courage to voice the injustices he has experienced. Zain's lawsuit against his parents in the film's concluding sequence symbolizes the idea that struggle is not necessarily expressed through revolutionary action but may also take the form of demanding recognition of fundamental human rights. Within the context of contemporary Arabic literature, this representation reflects an increasing emphasis on universal humanitarian concerns rather than individual heroism.¹⁹ Consequently, *Capharnaüm* can be understood as a cinematic literary work that employs the lived experience of a child to articulate criticism of structural inequality while simultaneously affirming universal humanitarian values.

This study contributes to contemporary Arabic literary scholarship in two important respects. First, it demonstrates that Greimasian narrative semiotics is effective not only for mapping the

¹⁸ Caballero, Jorge, Carles Sora-Domenjó, and Lluís Codina. "Implicaciones de La Inteligencia Artificial Generativa En La Narrativa y La Estética Cinematográfica: Un Estudio Sobre Las Convocatorias OpenDocs y +RAIN Film Festival." *Anàlisi* 71 (January 2025): 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3773>.

¹⁹ Elhers, Ghanem, and M. Laeeq Khan. *Decoding Disney's Arab and Muslim Narratives*. Lexington Books, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881888459>.

narrative structure of Arabic literary works but also for revealing the social and humanitarian values embedded within that structure. Semiotic analysis therefore extends beyond the identification of narrative components to become an interpretive framework for understanding the relationship between textual structure and the social realities it represents. Second, this study enriches scholarship on Arab cinema as part of contemporary Arabic literature by demonstrating that film possesses the same capacity as written literary texts to represent social realities, construct cultural criticism, and articulate humanitarian discourse through complex narrative strategies.

Beyond its substantive contribution to contemporary Arabic literary studies, this research also offers a methodological contribution through the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as an analytical support tool. In this study, AI was not employed to generate research data or replace scholarly interpretation. Instead, it was used to enhance analytical consistency by verifying relationships among narrative elements, assessing the coherence of interpretations, and exploring alternative readings of the identified narrative structures. All analytical decisions remained the responsibility of the researcher, guided by Greimas's narrative semiotic framework, while AI functioned solely as a supporting instrument that improved the transparency, accountability, and consistency of the qualitative analytical process. This approach demonstrates that the integration of AI into literary research need not be viewed as a substitute for human interpretation but rather as a methodological resource capable of strengthening interpretive validity without diminishing the depth of humanistic inquiry. Accordingly, this study not only advances understanding of the representation of struggle values in contemporary Arabic literature but also proposes a model for integrating narrative semiotics and Artificial Intelligence that may be applied to future literary and cultural research.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the narrative structure of *Capharnaïm*, as analyzed through A.J. Greimas's actantial model, functional structure, spatial-temporal isotopy, and semiotic square, systematically constructs the protagonist's struggle. Accordingly, RQ1 is answered by showing that Zain's struggle is represented not as an individual heroic act but as a process of transformation shaped by social relationships, structural conflicts, and the pursuit of human dignity. RQ2 is addressed by demonstrating that this narrative structure represents six

struggle values-self-sacrifice, perseverance, respect, patience, cooperation, and unity-which can be synthesized into three broader dimensions: human dignity, resilience, and social solidarity. These findings confirm that *Capharnaüm*, as a work of contemporary Arabic literature, not only reflects the social realities of Arab society but also constructs humanitarian values through a coherent and meaningful narrative strategy.

The study offers both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of Greimasian narrative semiotics from structural mapping to the interpretation of value representation in contemporary Arabic literature. Methodologically, it demonstrates the potential of Artificial Intelligence as an analytical support tool for enhancing the consistency, transparency, and verification of qualitative interpretation without replacing the researcher as the primary interpreter. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single film and focuses exclusively on its protagonist, thereby restricting broader generalizations regarding the representation of struggle values in Arab cinema. Future research is therefore encouraged to examine a wider range of Arab films and literary works from diverse social and geographical contexts, integrate narrative semiotics with other literary, cultural, or discourse-based approaches, and further explore the systematic and comparative application of Artificial Intelligence as a methodological resource in literary analysis.

REFERENCES

- Abbasi, Azadeh, and Fazeleh Mirghafooriyan. 2025. "A Semio-Semantics of 'Ezat and Zelat' in the Quranic Story of Joseph (A.S.) Based on Greimas's Semiotic Square." *Language Related Research* 16 (4): 305–338.
- Aghasi, Maya. 2021. "Pour Dire La Souffrance Des Innocents?" Problematics of the Madonna–Son Trope in Representing Trauma in Philippe Aractingi's *Under the Bombs* and Nadine Labaki's *Capernaum*." In *Trauma and Motherhood in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, 105–128. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77407-3_6.
- Caballero, Jorge, Carles Sora-Domenjó, and Lluís Codina. 2025. "Implicaciones de la Inteligencia Artificial Generativa en la Narrativa y la Estética Cinematográfica: Un Estudio sobre las Convocatorias OpenDocs y +RAIN Film Festival." *Anàlisi* 71: 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3773>.
- Dampierre-Noiray, Ève de. 2023. "Fiction against Belief and Belief in Fiction in Modern and Contemporary Arabic Literature." In *The Routledge Handbook of Fiction and Belief*, 430–441. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003119456-37>.
- Dopplinger, Verena H. 2024. "Nadine Labaki's *Capernaum* and the Human Rights Discourse: An Analysis in Visual History." *Journal of Media and Rights* 2 (1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/JMR.v2i1.4>.
- Elhersh, Ghanem, and M. Laeeq Khan. 2024. *Decoding Disney's Arab and Muslim Narratives*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881888459>.
- Evecen, Gökhan, and Sirri Serhat Serter. 2025. "Remembering the Civil War in Today's Lebanese Cinema." *CINEJ Cinema Journal* 13 (1): 335–371. <https://doi.org/10.5195/cinej.2025.714>.
- Fontanille, Jacques, and Alessandro Zinna. 2019. "Le Dialogue entre la Sémiotique Structurale et les Sciences. Hommage à Algirdas Julien Greimas." *Langages* 213 (1): 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.3917/lang.213.0005>.
- Guedj, David. 2024. "Social and Educational Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Moroccan Judeo-Arabic Halakhic Literature." *Jewish History* 38 (1–2): 69–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10835-024-09466-0>.
- Gutiérrez Almenara, Angelina. 2023. "Literatura Contemporánea Árabe a Través de Sus Cubiertas: Un Análisis Desde la Retórica Visual."

- TRANS: Revista de Traductología*, no. 27: 99–119.
<https://doi.org/10.24310/trt.27.2023.16196>.
- Kadam, Shivdarshan. 2026. "Cinema as Development Communication: A Semiotic and Narrative Analysis of *Swades*." *CINEFORUM* 66 (2): 1059–1084.
- Khayyat, Munira. 2022. *A Landscape of War: Ecologies of Resistance and Survival in South Lebanon*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Onega, Susana, and José Ángel García Landa, eds. 2014. *Narratology*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315843018>.
- Osti, Letizia. 2022. *History and Memory in the Abbasid Caliphate*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838600556>.
- Paul, Drew. 2022. "Transmission and Transit in Contemporary Arabic Literature: *Naql* and Its Limits." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 53 (1–2): 100–131. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064X-12341452>.
- Trifonas, Peter Pericles. 2015. "From Semantics to Narrative: The Semiotics of A. J. Greimas." In *International Handbook of Semiotics*, 1099–1107. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9404-6_50.
- Tseng, Chiao-I, Theo van Leeuwen, and Emilia Djonov. 2025. "The Fragmentation and Plasticity of Space in Film." *Multimodality & Society* 5 (4): 427–446.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/26349795251335017>.
- Tseng, Chiaoi, and John A. Bateman. 2012. "Multimodal Narrative Construction in Christopher Nolan's *Memento*: A Description of Analytic Method." *Visual Communication* 11 (1): 91–119.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357211424691>.
- Wang, Renshun. 2026. "A Greimasian Semiotic Analysis of the Violence Narrative in the New Typical Chinese Crime Film *Wrath of Silence*." *SAGE Open* 16 (1).
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440261426154>.