

## Social Critique in *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* by Najib Kailani: A Greimassian Structural Analysis and Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Approach

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**Abstract:** This research is motivated by the strong social critique found in Najib al-Kailani’s short story *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq*, which portrays the tension between the individual and the socio-political structures that confine him. The metaphor of the “narrow world” functions as a symbol of both psychological and structural entrapment experienced by the main character. This research aims to examine how social criticism is constructed through narrative structure and power discourse within the story. The method employed is qualitative research with a library-based approach, using the short story as the primary data source and literature on A.J. Greimas’s structuralism, Teun A. van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis, and studies on al-Kailani’s works as supporting data. The analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically. The findings show that the actantial schema of the story forms a conflict pattern between the protagonist as the Subject under pressure and the socio-political forces as structural Opponents, emphasizing the dominance of the opposition between the pursuit of dignity and the coercive pressures of power. Meanwhile, Van Dijk’s discourse analysis reveals that the metaphor of the “narrow world” is an ideological construction representing state repression, class injustice, and individual alienation within an unequal social structure.

**Keywords:** Najib al-Kailani, *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq*, Greimasian structuralism, Van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis, social criticism, modern Arabic literature.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kuatnya kritik sosial dalam cerpen *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* karya Najib al-Kailani yang menggambarkan ketegangan antara individu dan struktur sosial-politik yang mengekangnya. Metafora “dunia sempit” berfungsi sebagai simbol keterhimpitan psikologis sekaligus struktural yang dialami tokoh utama. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji bagaimana kritik sosial dibangun melalui struktur naratif dan wacana kekuasaan dalam cerpen tersebut. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka (*library research*), dengan teks cerpen sebagai sumber data utama dan literatur terkait strukturalisme A.J. Greimas, Analisis Wacana Kritis Teun A. van Dijk, serta studi tentang karya-karya al-Kailani sebagai data pendukung. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif-analitis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa skema aktansial cerpen membentuk pola konflik antara tokoh utama sebagai Subjek yang terhimpit dengan kekuatan sosial-politik sebagai Penghambat struktural, yang menegaskan dominasi oposisi antara pencarian martabat dan tekanan kekuasaan. Sementara itu, analisis wacana Van Dijk mengungkap bahwa metafora “dunia sempit” merupakan konstruksi ideologis yang merepresentasikan represi negara, ketidakadilan kelas, dan keterasingan individu dalam struktur sosial yang timpang.

**Kata Kunci:** Najib al-Kailani, *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq*, strukturalisme Greimas, analisis wacana kritis van Dijk, kritik sosial, sastra Arab modern.

## Introduction

Issues of poverty, social marginalization, and power relations constitute a recurring thread in much modern socio-political literature of the Arab world. Within the Egyptian literary tradition in particular, representations of the working class, urban peripheries, and families fractured by economic pressure and patriarchy frequently function as a medium for critiquing unequal social structures. Najib al-Kailani’s short story *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* (The Narrow World) foregrounds the everyday experiences of a lower-class family in an urban setting, making it especially amenable to being read as a discourse of social criticism imbued with ideological and structural significance. (Mulyawati & Fatawi, 2024)

Recent scholarship on Najib al-Kailani’s works indicates a growing academic interest in social representation within his literary corpus, including structural and semiotic studies that position his texts as critiques of contemporary socio-political and moral conditions. (Anjum, 2016; Mulyawati & Fatawi, 2024) Studies on al-Kailani’s short stories increasingly emphasize the relevance of combining structural and discourse-based approaches, as narrative structures often generate symbolic layers that either legitimize or challenge social practices such as economic injustice, patriarchy, and class stigma. (Mulyawati & Fatawi, 2024; Umami, 2023)

Current research on al-Kailani also highlights the socio-religious dimensions of his narratives and the ways in which his texts frame marginalized experiences. Mulyawati and Fatawi (2024), for instance, analyze al-Kailani’s short stories by examining the interaction between religious motifs and social realism in constructing moral figures and social victims. Their findings provide a strong empirical basis for reading *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* as a form of social criticism rooted in lower-class experience. (Mulyawati & Fatawi, 2024)

In a different cultural context, Andi Saadillah et al. (2020) apply Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to an Indonesian short story to examine power relations. Their study of Ken Hanggara’s *Tukang Dongeng* demonstrates how CDA can reveal social cognition concerning the low appreciation of storytellers in the modern era, as well as the resignation of the poor within social and affective relations. At the level of social context, their analysis underscores the declining role of storytelling as a literacy tradition, illustrating the analytical potential of Van Dijk’s framework beyond its original socio-political setting. (Saadillah et al., 2020)

Similarly, Abdul Muntaqim Al Anshory, Bening Nuha Nirmala, and Nur Latifah (2023) analyze the animated film *Turning Red* using A.J. Greimas’s narrative structure theory. Their study identifies three actantial models shaping the main conflict, with the character Mei functioning as the central narrative driver. Mei occupies multiple actantial roles: receiver in three segments, subject in two, and opponent in one, resulting in a forward-moving and sequential plot. Although focused on film rather than literary prose, this study demonstrates the analytical strength of Greimas’s actantial model in uncovering deep narrative structures. (Al Anshory et al., 2023)

Further, Afifah Febriyanti et al. (2025) examine class consciousness ideology in Ahmad Tohari’s novel *Orang-orang Proyek* through Van Dijk’s CDA framework. Their

findings show that textual structures, social cognition, and social context operate in tandem to articulate criticism of class inequality during Indonesia's New Order period. The study highlights ideological commitments to honesty, advocacy for marginalized communities, resistance to oppression, and freedom of expression as central components of the novel's social and moral critique. (Febriyanti et al., 2025)

Likewise, Tama Naufal and Muh. Hanif (2025) analyze representations of moral values in the novel *Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* using Van Dijk's CDA. Their results indicate that contemporary literature functions as a site for redefining moral values in response to modern ethical challenges. The study confirms the effectiveness of Van Dijk's framework in revealing processes of value transmission and internalization through textual structures, while identifying critiques of intellectual arrogance, ritual formalism, and academic elitism as salient social issues. (Naufal & Hanif, 2025)

Despite this growing body of scholarship, studies of *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* remain largely confined to narrative-structural or psychological approaches, with limited engagement with broader constructions of social discourse. Moreover, research that employs Greimas's narrative theory and Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis tends to treat these frameworks separately and apply them to different objects of study across linguistic and socio-cultural contexts.

This study therefore occupies a distinctive position by offering an integrated analysis. First, it dismantles the narrative structure of *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* through Greimas's actantial schema. Second, it exposes practices of domination and socio-economic representation within the text through Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis. By bridging textual structure and social context, this research makes an original contribution to the study of contemporary Arabic literature, particularly the works of Najib al-Kailani.

Accordingly, this article examines the actantial narrative structure embedded in *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* from the perspective of A.J. Greimas, reinforced by an analysis of micro-structure, social cognition, and social structure as proposed by Teun A. van Dijk. This combined reading is directed toward elucidating relations of power and social domination articulated by al-Kailani as a form of social critique.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative design based on library research. As Creswell (2018) explains, qualitative research seeks to understand meanings constructed by individuals or groups in relation to social problems. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2014) The primary data consist of the text of *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq*, while secondary data include theoretical works on Greimas and Van Dijk, as well as recent empirical studies on al-Kailani's writings and class representation in contemporary Arabic literature. Data collection was conducted through intensive textual reading and systematic documentation of narrative structures and critical discourse elements. Data analysis draws on Greimas's actantial narrative theory and Van Dijk's framework of micro-structure, social cognition, and social structure. The findings are presented through descriptive-analytical exposition.

## Results and Discussion

### A. Najīb al-Kailāny dan Cerpen *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq*

Najīb al-Kailānī (1931–1995) is widely recognized as a major pioneer of *al-adab al-iltizām* (committed literature) in the Arab world, a literary movement that integrates aesthetic expression with socio-religious responsibility. Born into a modest farming family in Sharshabah, al-Gharbiyyah Province, Egypt, al-Kailānī’s formative experiences of economic hardship under colonial conditions profoundly shaped his humanistic outlook and sustained concern for the oppressed. His education began in a *kuttāb*, where Islamic values were internalized, and later continued through modern schooling until he completed medical studies at Cairo University. Although professionally trained as a physician, his intellectual inclination and creative energy were more strongly oriented toward literature. (al-‘Uraynī, 2005) His decision to pursue medicine nonetheless reflects his self-positioning as an intellectual grounded in the concrete needs of society.

Al-Kailānī’s political involvement, particularly his proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood, led to repeated imprisonment under Nasser’s regime during the 1950s and 1960s. These periods of incarceration constituted a decisive turning point that intensified the themes of social critique and resistance to tyranny in his literary production. After obtaining his medical degree and practicing in Egypt, ongoing political repression compelled him to migrate to Kuwait and later to the United Arab Emirates, where he continued working in the health sector while remaining active as a writer. (al-‘Uraynī, 2005) Living at the intersection of political repression and social injustice, al-Kailānī consistently employed literature as a medium of ideological resistance and humanitarian advocacy.

Al-Kailānī’s oeuvre comprises more than seventy works, including novels, short story collections, poetry, and essays on Islamic and social issues. Across these genres, he persistently foregrounds social realism, poverty, urbanization, exploitation, class inequality, and the moral decay of authoritarian regimes, all framed within a vision of Islamic liberation. (al-‘Uraynī, 2005) The short story *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* stands as a particularly powerful articulation of this vision: it narrates the experience of a “narrowing living space” endured by the urban poor in Egypt’s major cities, functioning as a critique of oppressive social structures and the erosion of human dignity. In this sense, al-Kailānī’s biography operates not merely as an authorial background but as a formative context of meaning that situates the story within the broader landscape of contemporary Arab social-critical literature.

The narrative of *al-‘Ālam al-Ḍayyīq* centers on the suffering of Abduh, an impoverished building caretaker who struggles to support his family on a meager income. He is repeatedly humiliated by the building’s owner and compelled to perform degrading labor for trivial pay. His dwelling, a stifling room beneath a staircase, serves as a powerful symbol of his constricted existence. Despite being crushed by poverty and burdened by a perpetually resentful wife, Abduh clings to hope through his son Fathi, a police officer who usually sends money home to sustain the family. (al-Kailānī, 2015)

At the same time, Ruhayyah, Abduh’s eldest daughter, who is pregnant, endures severe emotional suffering due to her husband’s cruelty and her own mother’s lack of empathy. The family’s collective hope converges on the arrival of a letter from Fathi, believed to carry financial assistance and a resolution to their hardships. Yet the long-awaited letter delivers a devastating reversal: it contains news that Ruhayyah has been divorced by her husband. This tragic disclosure crystallizes the story’s central critique,

exposing how fragile hope is repeatedly crushed within an oppressive social reality.(al-Kailānī, 2015)

## B. A.J. Greimas's Narrative Structure and Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis

Modern narrative studies emphasize that a comprehensive understanding of the social message of a literary text requires the integration of two analytical levels: (1) structural analysis, which maps actantial functions, plot development, and oppositional relations within the narrative, and (2) critical discourse analysis, which examines how language and textual structures reproduce or contest power relations in their social context.(Mulyawati & Fatawi, 2024) A.J. Greimas provides a robust theoretical framework for explicating actantial schemes and narrative functions that constitute the narrative "program" of a text. This approach is particularly effective in identifying who acts for what purpose and who functions as an obstacle within the story.(Umami, 2023)

Greimas developed his narratological theory as an extension of Vladimir Propp's model of narrative functions and positioned it as an analytical framework applicable to all literary genres.(Greimas, 1983) As noted by Ratna, Greimasian narratology synthesizes Lévi-Strauss's paradigmatic model, focused on myth and binary oppositions, with Propp's function-based analysis of folktales.(Ratna, 2012) Greimas's primary concern lies in relations of action rather than characters as individuals; accordingly, the analytical focus is on narrative agents, which he terms *actants* and *acteurs*.(Greimas, 1983) As emphasized by Rimmon-Kenan, actants need not be human; non-human elements may also function as actants insofar as they perform specific narrative roles.(Rimmon-Kenan, 2009)

Structural analysis in the Greimasian tradition typically relies on what is considered the second phase of analysis, namely the deconstruction of narrative syntax through the actantial structure. Initially applied to myths and folktales, this structure later evolved into a universal narrative framework applicable to modern literary texts.(Istiqomah, 2017) Greimas identifies six actants organized into three binary oppositions: subject/object (the relation of desire or quest), sender/receiver (the relation of communication and purpose), and helper/opponent (the relation of support and obstruction within conflict).(Herman, 2009)

By contrast, the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as formulated and elaborated by Teun A. van Dijk, facilitates an examination of how textual discourse shapes and reproduces social structures, domination, and mechanisms of legitimizing inequality.(Dijk, 2015) By combining these two approaches, Greimas's model for reading narrative structure and Van Dijk's model for analyzing the performativity of power through discourse, it becomes possible to uncover ideological dimensions embedded in representations of poverty, gender, and power within literary texts.

The term "discourse," derived from the Latin *discursus*, has been used in both narrow and broad senses. In its narrower sense, it refers to the rules and conventions governing language use in spoken and written communication. According to Roger Fowler, discourse is spoken or written communication viewed from the perspective of the beliefs, values, and categories embedded within it; these beliefs represent a

worldview, that is, an organized representation of experience..(Eriyanto, 2001; Mills, 2004)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) goes beyond treating discourse merely as a linguistic phenomenon. Language is analyzed not only in terms of its formal features but also in relation to its context. Here, context refers to the purposes and practices for which language is used, including practices of power, particularly in the formation of subjects and various modes of representation in society. Fairclough and Wodak explicitly argue that CDA views discourse as language use in speech and writing understood as a form of social practice.(Fairclough, 2013)

Among the various CDA models proposed by different scholars, Teun A. van Dijk’s model is one of the most widely applied. Van Dijk’s approach does not limit analysis to textual features alone; it also examines social structures, domination, and power relations within society, as well as the cognitive processes, thoughts and forms of consciousness, that shape and influence texts. Van Dijk conceptualizes discourse as comprising three interrelated dimensions: text, social cognition, and social context.(Dijk, 2015) In this sense, the global meaning of a discourse emerges from the interaction between overarching ideas and their micro-level realizations.(Eriyanto, 2001)

In Van Dijk’s framework, social cognition is closely linked to the process of text production, understood as the author’s way of perceiving social reality and transforming it into discourse. The key to understanding text production lies in examining how texts are formed. This process involves not only the formal construction of discourse but also how information drawn from particular events or discursive practices is interpreted, inferred, and assigned meaning by the author.(Dijk, 2015)

Van Dijk argues that text production occurs primarily at the level of the author’s mental processes. All acts of understanding and meaning-making are largely situated within the author’s social cognition. Although this may appear individual in nature, it is not purely personal or detached from social factors. Authors do not exist in isolation; their interpretations are shaped by values and beliefs internalized as members of a social community. Consequently, texts are not produced in a social vacuum but emerge through continuous interaction with the surrounding social environment.(Eriyanto, 2001)

Social cognition thus constitutes the background reality underlying the production of literary works, while social context refers to the reality represented within those works. The relationship between social cognition and social context is reciprocal: social cognition generates social context. According to Van Dijk, two key concepts are central to the analysis of society in this regard: power and access.

Van Dijk defines power as the capacity possessed by a group (or its members) to control another group (or its members). This power is typically based on access to valued resources such as wealth, status, and knowledge. In CDA, particular attention is paid to domination, that is, the exercise of power in ways that sustain inequality.

Van Dijk’s analysis also places strong emphasis on access, namely the differential access of social groups to discourse and communicative resources. Elite groups, for example, enjoy greater access than marginalized groups. As a result, those in positions of power have more opportunities to access the media and, consequently, greater capacity to influence public opinion and social consciousness.(Dijk, 2015)

### C. Narrative Structure of the Short Story *al-‘Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq*

Based on Greimas's actantial model, Abduh functions as the Subject who carries the mission of preserving his family's dignity and survival as the Object. Poverty and social pressure operate as the Sender, compelling Abduh to act, particularly in light of the expectation that his eldest son, Fathi, might change the family's condition. Abduh's family itself occupies the position of Receiver, indicating that his struggle is not motivated by personal interest but by collective survival. Helpers appear in the form of prayer, patience, and hope, especially the possibility of assistance from Fathi, who symbolizes deliverance from suffering. In contrast, the Opponents do not manifest as a single figure but take the form of oppressive social structures: an unequal economic system, abusive authorities, a hostile urban environment, and domestic pressure from an abusive wife.

Abduh's position as Subject is reinforced by the narrative's consistent focus on his actions, burdens, and responses to oppressive social conditions. From the opening, he is portrayed as the central figure bearing the entire narrative tension: "*Istabadda al-qalaqu bi-'Amm Abduh wa ḥaṭṭa 'alā qalbihi hamm(un) thaqīl... mādhā yaf'alu wa al-afwāhu al-jā'iatu lā ta'rifu aṣ-ṣabr?*". This narrative shows that every movement of the plot originates in his anxiety and struggle to meet his family's needs. His role as the driving force of the story is evident in his persistent efforts to work and his determination not to give up for the sake of his family, especially when his belief in Fathi's assistance becomes the sole reason for his endurance.

فأبوها بواب مسكين.. مرتبه ثلاثة جنهات... وبعض الصدقات، وقروش قليلة يسقطها سكان العمارة في يده.. كلما أدى لهم شيئاً من الخدمات، أو اشترى من الخارج بعض ما يحتاجون إليه، ومع ذلك فالرجل يعول أطفالاً أربعة وزوجة، هذا عدا ابنته فتى لا يكلفه شيئاً، بل هو مصدر من مصادر رزقه؛ لأنه يبعث إلى أبيه بجنيه كامل أوائل كل شهر. (al-Kailānī, 2015)

Even when subjected to violence and humiliation, Abduh continues to position himself as the family's mainstay, as seen when he passively accepts abuse from a car owner and responds submissively: "*Ḥaqqak 'alayya yā sayyidnā al-bēh... jā'at salīmah.*". The overall narrative structure thus places Abduh at the center of action rather than as a passive reactor, as the plot unfolds through his choices, hopes, and constraints from providing for the household and protecting Ruhayyah to waiting for Fathi's letter, which he perceives as *al-faraj al-murtaqab* (the awaited relief). Accordingly, Abduh fulfills the Subject function in Greimas's scheme as the narrative motor tasked with preserving family dignity amid oppressive social structures.

The Object in the story takes the form of family dignity and survival, two social values that orient all of Abduh's actions. Dignity is explicitly foregrounded when he refuses to beg despite extreme hunger, as reflected in his inner monologue on death. Here, self-respect is defended more fiercely than physical need.

وعاد... لكنه أخذ يستعيد ما حدث.. ماذا لو مات؟ ووجد نفسه لا يرتعد لورود هذا الخاطر على رأسه.. الموت.. لا شيء.. الموت حق أتراه يستريح؟! (al-Kailānī, 2015)

The Object also materializes in his efforts to safeguard his family’s survival, particularly in protecting Ruhayyah from domestic violence and social pressure, as emphasized in the scene:

وفي داخلها - قرب الباب - تجلس روحية محمرة العينين في انتظار زوجها الذي طال غيابه، وأمعن في جفوته، والقلق يستبد بها كما فعل بأبها، وخوف مهم يرعش كيانها، ويزيد من ضربات قلبها، ويهتف ضميرها ((أولاد الحرام كثيرون.. لكن هذا غير معقول!! إن بطني منتفخ.. سوف أنجب له طفلاً جميلاً.. لن يفرط في غيابه..))، وقليل من الرضى العليل الشاحب أخذ يسرى في قلبها.-(al-Kailānī, 2015)

These passages demonstrate that Abduh’s struggle is not oriented toward personal gain but toward the moral and existential values of the family. Thus, the Object in Greimas’s scheme is not a tangible goal but a socio-ethical value that determines the trajectory of the narrative.

The Sender in the story is embodied in structural poverty and social pressure, which function as the primary catalysts for Abduh’s actions. These conditions are not mere background elements but forces that “dispatch” Abduh on his mission of survival. Poverty and ignorance classify Uncle Abduh into a lower social class, confining him to menial work with meager wages and frequently exposing him to harsh treatment from those in higher social strata, as the narrator explicitly emphasizes, as the narrator states:

بواب مسكين.. مرتبه ثلاثة جنهات... وبعض الصدقات، وقروش قليلة يسقطها سكان العمارة في يده..  
بقرش طعمية يا عبده. انطق يا بجم.. واتحرك..  
فتح يا بهيم.. أنت سكران يا لوح؟  
بقرش طعمية يا عبده. انطق يا بجم.. واتحرك..  
فتح يا بهيم.. أنت سكران يا لوح؟(al-Kailānī, 2015)

Collectively, these textual elements show that poverty and social repression operate as active Senders in Greimas’s scheme: causal forces that propel the Subject into the narrative conflict.

The Receiver function is clearly occupied by Abduh’s family, since all his struggles aim to preserve their survival and dignity. The narrative repeatedly emphasizes that Abduh never centers his own interests but prioritizes his family’s needs, even to the extent of enduring hunger:

ماذا يفعل والأفواه الجائعة لا تعرف الصبر، وجيبه ليس فيه مليم واحد  
لكن الحقيقة أن عقله الباطن كان يختزن في الوقت نفسه - مرارة ما بعدهم مرارة ؛ بسبب ابنته الكبرى ((روحية)). لقد طردها زوجها العامل بمصانع الزجاج..  
ومع ذلك فالرجل يعول أطفالاً أربعة وزوجة(al-Kailānī, 2015)

His persistence is likewise motivated not by self-interest but by awareness of his family’s total dependence on him, as indicated when he contemplates death: “*azza ‘alayhi an yatruka Rūḥayyah fī ta‘āsatiḥā wa-atfālahu al-ṣiḡhār bilā ‘ā’il.*”. The family thus

emerges as the entity that receives the benefit of every action and sacrifice Abduh makes, fulfilling the Receiver (récepteur) role in Greimas's actantial schema.

Within the narrative structure, Helpers appear through hope, prayer, and the figure of Fathi, all of which function as emotional energies that sustain Abduh's capacity to continue his life mission. This support is not material but moral, providing inner resources when he repeatedly confronts failure. The text notes that Abduh "*akhadha yatamatamu bida'awātin khāfītah tanba'ithu min a'māqihī mukhlīṣatan al-lawḥah*," referring to whispered prayers arising from his depths, desperate yet sustaining.

Fathi occupies an even more symbolic position as the "son of hope," believed to send a letter containing money or an economic solution: "*lā budda minā al-mustaḥīl an yata'akhhara akthara min dhālik... sāl al-barīd al ladhī sayahmilu khiṭāba Fathī*." Hope in Fathi is not merely pragmatic expectation but a psychological mechanism that restores Abduh's will to struggle amid relentless social oppression. Accordingly, hope, prayer, and the figure of Fathi clearly fulfill the Helper (adjuvant) function in Greimas's framework, providing the transformative energy that enables the Subject to sustain narrative action.

In Greimas's scheme, the Opponent does not appear as a single individual but as an oppressive social structure that systematically obstructs Abduh's pursuit of his objective. Emotional opposition arises from his abusive wife, whose degrading outbursts: "*qalbuka mayyit... yā laka min rajulin?*", mark the household as a site of additional pressure rather than refuge. Socio-economic opposition is evident in the behavior of authorities and urban residents. Abduh is treated brutally and inhumanely when nearly struck by a car, followed by physical humiliation, "*ṣafatun qawīyyah... wa tarannaḥa lahā*", from an official, signaling that the poor are rendered valueless within urban power hierarchies.

The city itself is constructed as a hostile landscape:

وعبده خرج إلى الشارع ليشتري الطعمية والجاز، وخطواته تنتقل في بطنه وذهول، والعربات والناس والحيوانات والباعة يملئون الشارع بالضجيج، والمذياع يترنم بأغنية مر الخريف بعده دبل زهور الغرام.. والدنيا من بعده هوان ويأس وآلام، وضوء الشمس يغمر الشارع والغبار المثار يبعث على الحنق والضيق، وحركة غير عادية تحدث خلف عم عبده، فيفريق من أحلامه وينظر خلفه فيرى عربة فاخرة، ورأس رجل أنيق تطل من نافذة العربة الأمامية، يضع على عينيه منظاراً أسود ويزعق: ((فتح يا بهيم.. أنت سكران يا لوج؟)) (al-Kailānī, 2015)

A space where suggesting that the poor are acknowledged only as disturbances. This constellation of obstacles demonstrates that opposition is not personal but systemic: a network of power, symbolic violence, and social exclusion that consistently constrains the Subject's agency. Thus, the Opponent function operates not merely to hinder narrative action but to affirm the story's structural critique of the dehumanization of the urban poor.

## D. Critical Discourse Analysis of the Short Story *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq*

### Micro-structure of *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq*

At the micro-structural level, *al-Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* most clearly manifests its ideological work through lexical choices that consistently degrade Abduh's dignity.

Insulting expressions such as *bī-qirsh ta‘miyyah*, *yā bahīm*, *yā himār*, and *yā bajam* do not function as neutral descriptions but operate as rhetorical strategies that position Abduh as subhuman. As Van Dijk argues, lexical selection is an ideological practice through which the identities of marginalized groups are diminished. The repetition of insults directed at Abduh thus constitutes not merely individual rudeness, but a mechanism of social delegitimation that reproduces stigma and reinforces class hierarchy.

Spatial description in the story functions as a social metaphor that intensifies marginalization. Expressions such as *al-ḥujrah al-muḏlimah taḥta al-sullam*, *‘ālamuhā al-ḏayyīq*, and *al-‘ālam al-ḏayyīq* construct narrow, dark, and suffocating physical spaces as direct representations of the protagonist’s social constraints. The narrowing of physical space becomes a symbol of existential confinement: a social world that offers no access, opportunity, or security. In this way, the narrator fuses material and psychological conditions, turning spatial restriction into a concrete image of structural exclusion.

Dialogue and reported speech serve as discursive devices that reinforce power asymmetries. Dominant groups: building owners, police officers, and affluent citizens, are consistently portrayed through imperative or aggressive utterances, displaying illocutionary force that subjugates and judges. By contrast, Abduh’s speech is rendered as whispers, murmurs, or minimal responses, signaling a speaking position detached from authority. Van Dijk emphasizes that control over discourse constitutes a form of social control; in this story, the unequal distribution of speaking rights directly maps the asymmetrical power relations between oppressors and victims.

Lexical irony and satire also function as micro-structural devices that expose contradictions within social reality. The use of the title “*al-ustādh*” on the envelope, expected to contain a check but ultimately delivering a divorce letter, creates tragic irony that shatters Abduh’s hopes while simultaneously revealing the absurdity faced by the poor. This irony operates on two levels: first, it overturns the protagonist’s expectations; second, it compels readers to recognize how social systems generate false hopes that ultimately deepen structural wounds.

Modality and evaluation within the text further reveal ideological bias that consolidates marginalization. The narrative frequently directs negative evaluations toward the victim, for instance through accusations such as “*yā bahīm*, *yā himār*, and *yā bajam*”, while the actions of aggressors are legitimized through discourses of social normalcy or institutional authority. Epistemic and deontic modality constructs the impression that Abduh’s suffering is either “deserved” or “inevitable,” thereby normalizing structural violence. Consequently, the micro-structure of the story does not merely describe injustice; it actively participates in its production through language that constrains possibilities for defense, resistance, or social transformation.

### Social Cognition

From Van Dijk’s perspective, the discourse of this short story functions as a manifestation of social cognition, namely the schemas, stereotypes, and norms embedded in the collective memory of society. The narrative reproduces entrenched stereotypes of poverty as an identity associated with degradation and powerlessness, as reflected in children’s mockery, the landlord’s reprimands, and the coercive treatment by state authorities who deny Abduh basic dignity. At the same time, the construction of

Ruhayyah reflects a classical patriarchal schema: women are portrayed as figures who must be “maintained” by men, rendering their dependence on male protection natural and socially acceptable. In this way, the text mobilizes deeply rooted social prototypes, such as poor people as burdens and women as dependents, which readers recognize as familiar elements of social reality.

The mental models generated by the text also guide how readers perceive the characters. Through the narrator and the voices of the surrounding community, Abduh is initially represented as ignorant, weak, and incompetent. Readers are encouraged to adopt this perspective because external social discourse dominates the narrative space. However, when the story introduces Abduh’s inner monologues and emotional vulnerability, readers are confronted with an alternative cognitive layer, one that is humanizing and empathetic. This shift reveals how the text negotiates the tension between external social discourse that stereotypes and internal discourse that restores humanity, thereby exposing the gap between what society “believes” and what individuals actually experience.

Furthermore, the story demonstrates how social justification and the naturalization of oppression operate through language. Violence by authorities, verbal abuse by citizens, and even religiously framed remarks such as “*ḥarām ‘alayk yā shāwīsh*” and “*rabbanā kataba laka ‘umran jadīdan*” are presented as ordinary and unproblematic, a discursive strategy that normalizes structural injustice. Collective emotions like pity, compassion, and moral judgment are likewise shaped by social framing. Ruhayyah’s suffering, for instance, is interpreted not as the consequence of poverty and structural inequality, but as a personal moral misfortune. According to Van Dijk, such discourse reinforces shared societal beliefs while obscuring the power relations that underpin everyday forms of violence.

## Social Structure

At the level of discourse–structure relations, the short story presents a network of actors that function as instruments of institutional, economic, and cultural domination. The landlord operates as a holder of economic power who controls access to living space and symbolic dignity, while the police embody state–legal authority that produces physical violence legitimized by uniform and institutional power. Within the domestic sphere, Ruhayyah’s husband negates female autonomy through patriarchal mechanisms such as divorce and expulsion, whereas the surrounding community acts as a cultural agent that normalizes the humiliation of the poor. Together, these actors constitute a multilayered structure of domination, symbolic, physical, economic, and cultural, directed at the bodies and dignity of vulnerable subjects.

Domination in the narrative is not the outcome of a single individual’s actions, but the product of collective mechanisms operating simultaneously. Economic exploitation (low wages), social exclusion (stigma and mockery), the legitimization of violence (state intervention), and legal–cultural patriarchy form an ecology of oppression that mutually reinforces itself. From Van Dijk’s perspective, this configuration illustrates how discourse functions as a means of reproducing social structure: each insulting utterance, act of neglect, and religio–normative symbol works to reaffirm class and gender hierarchies. Even the protagonist’s responses, prayer and hope placed in Fathi, expose the asymmetry

between individual agency and institutional power, underscoring that personal resilience alone cannot dismantle entrenched structures of domination.

The story also reveals the normalization of poverty through religious discourse and social convention that frame suffering as fate or destiny. Expressions such as “*ḥarām ‘alayk yā shāwīsh*” and “*rabbanā kataba laka ‘umran jadīdan*” and the public’s acceptance of violence as a routine feature of urban life demonstrate how dominant ideology operates: it not only oppresses, but renders oppression natural, ordinary, and seemingly unchangeable. In this sense, the text shows that discourse does not merely represent reality; it actively affirms and stabilizes the power structures within which it circulates, an insight that lies at the core of Van Dijk’s critical discourse model.

### E. Contemporary Relevance

This short story demonstrates how discourse functions as a primary site for the production and reproduction of social inequality. At the micro level, derogatory lexical choices, demeaning dialogues, and the persistent depiction of constricted spaces construct a systematic representation of dehumanization. The discourse that diminishes Abduh is not merely descriptive but performative: it actively produces a social reality in which the protagonist is positioned as a subject undeserving of respect. In this sense, language operates as an instrument of power that sustains hierarchy and facilitates the legitimization of violence.

Such discourse, however, becomes effective only because it rests upon collective cognition, shared stereotypes, norms, and beliefs deeply embedded in society. Stereotypes such as “the poor are ignorant and burdensome” or “women must depend on men” function as interpretive schemas through which other characters judge the actions of Abduh and Ruhayyah. These cognitive frameworks render verbal and physical violence seemingly natural, even “deserved,” revealing how social perceptions of poverty, class, and gender are shaped by shared mental structures that are difficult to contest. The story underscores that oppression first takes shape as a way of thinking before it materializes as social action.

These two layers, discourse and collective cognition, ultimately reinforce broader social structures involving institutions (state authorities, landlords), cultural norms, and patriarchy. Structure provides legitimacy for oppressive practices: a police slap is not an aberration but an expression of authority; divorce and expulsion are not personal tragedies but enactments of patriarchal culture; public mockery is not incidental but a cultural practice that preserves class hierarchy. Here, the story’s social critique reaches its culmination. Through the sharp contrast between hopes of social mobility (the letter, the title *al-ustādh*) and the reality of marginalization (divorce, humiliation), the author exposes the ideological mechanisms that obstruct social transformation. The narrative ultimately reveals how discourse, collective cognition, and social structure are interlocked within a single system that confines individuals within a “narrow world”, not only physically, but socially and existentially.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis, *al-‘Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* demonstrates that social injustice is not rooted primarily in individual actions but in an interlocking network of discourse, social cognition, and social structure. At the micro level, mocking and abusive lexical choices, metaphors of confined space, and tragic irony consistently construct a dehumanizing representation of Abduh and the urban poor. At the meso level, this discourse operates through social cognition composed of shared stereotypes and normative assumptions about poverty, class, and gender. These mental schemas render violence appear normal, acceptable, and even justified. At the macro level, these processes are embedded in and reinforced by social structures, state authority, property relations, patriarchal family norms, and class culture, that sustain domination through economic, symbolic, and physical power.

The story does more than depict individual suffering; it exposes the ideological mechanisms that preserve inequality. The sharp contrast between the promise of social mobility (the letter, the title *al-ustādh*) and the harsh reality of marginalization (divorce, humiliation, eviction) reveals how the social system actively obstructs opportunities for upward mobility among the lower classes. The author makes clear that Abduh’s suffering is not the result of personal failure, but of entrenched power structures reproduced through language and collective ways of thinking.

Accordingly, the findings address the research questions by showing that the short story functions as a pointed social critique. It uncovers how discourse produces stigma, how collective cognition legitimizes domination, and how social structures institutionalize injustice. Ultimately, *al-‘Ālam aḍ-Ḍayyīq* offers a critical reflection that the “narrow world” it depicts is not merely a physical space, but a social construction that constrains human dignity, autonomy, and future possibilities.

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