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Actantial Model Patterns Of Revolutionary Consciousness in Zoulfa Katouh's As Long As The Lemon Trees Grow

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ABSTRACT

This study applies Greimas's (1987) actantial model to analyze how the novel encodes revolutionary consciousness as a structural process. The novel is analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method from the perspective of the protagonist, Salama, based on the axes of desire, transmission, and power across three narrative phases. The research reveals three actantial shifts across the phases: the Sender evolves from an external obligation to a fully self-determined desire, the Receiver expands from self-exclusion to a collective inclusion, and the Opponent evolves from external political forces to a natural obstacle. These shifts correspond structurally to the stages of revolutionary consciousness theorized by Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963): subalternity, the phase of struggle, and the phase of agency. The findings reveal that the novel thematizes revolution and structurally defines it; each phase of awareness is expressed as a specific and recognizable actantial configuration. Khawf is the structural connection between the paralysis of Phase 2 and the liberation of Phase 3, and each level of consciousness is represented by a specific actantial configuration. The lemon tree planted in the epilogue marks Salama's structural emergence as a self-determined subject. This study contributes the first structural-political reading of the novel, addressing a gap in scholarship that has concentrated mostly on romance, psychoanalysis, nationalism, and identity.

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1. Introduction

Revolution has historically been the subject of literary analysis, providing a narrative structure for authors to examine the connection between personal actions and systemic transformation. Asif and Imran (2026) argue that literary narratives do not merely document political events. They actively shape the acts of resistance and defiance that lead to revolutionary change in society. Clarke (2026) describes revolution as "an irregular effort to change a political regime through mass mobilization." Clarke describes revolution as a political mobilization that aims for quick changes in political power and broader social and economic structures. Similarly, Djuve & Knutsen (2025) investigate the role of opposition mass mobilization in the process of regime change through popular revolutions, analyzing the sociopolitical conditions and institutional consequences of revolutionary movements. From these definitions, revolution is recognized as a conceptual framework for the analysis of narrative structures of transformation, agency, and consciousness in literary texts (Rahman et al., 2019; Tammasse et al., 2022; Panggabean et al., 2025).

Zoulfa Katouh explicitly narrates the setting of As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow as a "revolution" rather than a "war." In an interview with Middle East Monitor, Katouh emphasizes that the novel takes place during the "Syrian Revolution," claiming that the people's cry for freedom against an oppressive dictatorship should be recognized as such (Nazeer, 2022). This distinction is important because revolution represents the development of what Gramsci and Fanon define as "revolutionary consciousness," the transformation of oppressed people from passive acceptance to active agency. This process was characterized by Gramsci (1971) moving from "subalternity" to "hegemony," in which the oppressed groups develop a unified critical awareness that is capable of challenging the current power structures. Moreover, Ahmed (2024) states that Gramsci's concept of subalternity is a space of counter-hegemonic opposition in literature. Similarly, Fanon (1963) states that "the only real liberation is when the colonized subject leaves the zone of nonbeing behind and reclaims agency by overcoming internalized oppression and reclaiming psychological agency" (Maslovski, 2025). Yadav (2023) claims that literary narratives, particularly those produced under political hardship,

intentionally inspire readers to see the necessity of reform in the system. This approach is applied to literature by Paschal-Mbakwe (2024), who shows how narratives of revolutionary consciousness expose the point at which oppressed people start to recognize the need for systemic change. The novel follows Salama Kassab, a teenage pharmacy student forced to volunteer as a surgeon in Homs. This novel is academically interesting because of how Katouh constructs its narrative structure: the novel divides into three clear phases, the protagonist's actantial position transforms from external control to self-determined agency, and the figure of Khawf shifts between Helper and Opponent across phases. These structural features make the novel particularly suitable for analysis through Greimas's actantial model, providing identifiable turning points where Salama's actantial configurations undergo fundamental transformation.

Although there are an increasing number of studies on Katouh's work, this structural approach and revolutionary consciousness theme have yet to be explored. Existing research has investigated the romance formula (Machmuri et al., 2025), nationalism (Qudsi, 2025; Sulistiawati, 2024), social identity (Rahmah & Panggabean, 2025), and ecocriticism (Latumeten & Nofansyah, 2024). These studies center on thematic material rather than the foundational narrative structure that guides character actions and transformations. What remains unexplored is that most existing studies discuss psychoanalysis (El Gebali, 2025; Fadhilah & Sumaryani, 2025; Najam & Gul, 2025; Nopriyanto, 2024; Shabbir et al., 2024) even though the novel's central theme is revolution. Since the structure of this novel has not yet been comprehensively analyzed, the structural pattern that could reveal the development of revolutionary consciousness remains undiscovered. This study fills the gap by applying Greimas's actantial model to reveal the narrative structure of the novel and then interpreting the findings through the lens of Gramsci's and Fanon's theories of revolutionary consciousness, as no previous research has applied these theoretical frameworks to this novel.

Structuralism provides a framework for analyzing how meaning is generated through structural relations rather than through isolated elements. Saussure (1959) argues that language constitutes a system of signs, each including a signifier (sound-image) and a signified (idea), while meaning is generated based on the difference from other signs within the system. In the structuralist tradition, meaning is not simply "delivered" as explicit information, but rather encoded by structures that actively position the reader (Chandler, 2017; Swandayani et al., 2026; Junaid et al., 2026). This principle is generalized by Strauss (1963) beyond language to the study of narrative texts, where structure has no content in itself: it is the content, as a feature of the real. Narrative schemas are generic event and action structures stored in memory that influence the readers' comprehension and anticipation of the story's development (Lopez et al., 2025; Ranta, 2021; Andini et al., 2026; Abbas et al., 2024). Based on this, Greimas (1987) proposed the actantial model as a systematic structuralist framework for narrative analysis, which required distinguishing between actants (abstract structural functions) and actors (their actual narrative representations). This study defines a narrative schema as the general sequence of actantial configurations across the three phases of the novel and an actant as an abstract structural function (i.e., Subject, Object, Sender, Receiver, Helper, Opponent), referred to by its position in relation to other actants and not to intrinsic features Fowler (2026). The actantial model categorizes these six actants into three opposing pairs: the axis of desire (Subject vs. Object), the axis of transmission (Sender vs. Receiver), and the axis of power (Helper vs. Opponent) (Ampleman & de Vries, 2024). In this study, each of Salama's three narrative phases is analyzed through all three axes to identify how the actantial configuration shifts and what those shifts reveal about the development of revolutionary consciousness.

Therefore, the objectives of this research are to identify actantial roles and their shifts across the three narrative phases of As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow and to examine how these actantial shifts reveal the revolutionary consciousness in the novel.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine how utilization of the actantial model across the three phases of the novel reflects the evolution of revolutionary consciousness. To achieve this purpose, a descriptive qualitative design was selected. This design is suitable because, as Villamin et al. (2025) describe, qualitative descriptive procedures are methods that produce rich data on experiences or events from the participants' viewpoints. The qualitative descriptive technique requires textual evidence rather than numerical measurement because the structural analysis of narrative function is interpretive in nature (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The primary data are Zoulfa Katouh's novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022); secondary data include the theories of Greimas, Gramsci, and Fanon and textual evidence from literary reviews.

The data were collected through close reading and thematic analysis. According to Bingham (2023), qualitative data collection and analysis should be "systematic, organized, and iterative in nature." The novel was divided into three phases based on the narrative key points that led to a significant shift in the actantial configuration. Phase 1 (Chapters 1–22) ends

with the revelation of Layla's death, which collapses Salama's external Object and Sender. Phase 2 (Chapters 23–30) ends with the hospital bombing, which dissolves the structural incompatibility. Phase 3 (Chapters 31–39 plus epilogue) covers the boat journey and new life in Toronto.

The data were analyzed in two layers. First, Greimas's actantial model was applied to identify actantial roles and their shifts across the three phases. The model organizes six actants into three structural axes: the axis of desire (Subject vs. Object), the axis of transmission (Sender vs. Receiver), and the axis of power (Helper vs. Opponent) (Ampleman & de Vries, 2024). According to Yin (2016), qualitative data analysis involves five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Following Yin's framework, the analysis proceeded in five steps: (1) compiling data through close reading of the novel; (2) disassembling the data by dividing the novel into three narrative phases; (3) reassembling by identifying actantial configurations from the main character's point of view within each phase; (4) interpreting the patterns through comparative analysis of shifts across phases; and (5) concluding by synthesizing the findings into a coherent structural argument. Second, the identified actantial patterns were interpreted through the theories of Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963) to examine how they reflect revolutionary consciousness.

The method is written descriptively and should describe the research methodology or steps in conducting the study. A brief justification of the method is recommended to give an idea to the reader about the appropriateness of the method, reliability and validity of the results.

3. Results and Discussion

Our analysis reveals that the novel illustrates revolutionary consciousness as a structural process through its structural roles. Developed by Greimas (1987), this structural role refers to the actantial model, which provides a structural framework generated through six roles (actants) and organized into three axes: the axis of desire (Subject and Object), the axis of transmission (Sender and Receiver), and the axis of power (Helper and Opponent). The shift is generated by the pattern of the actantial model. The structural characteristic of revolutionary consciousness is collectively defined by three actantial shifts (Sender, Receiver, and Opponent) that occur during three narrative phases. These phases progress from subalternity (Phase 1), where the subject is completely dependent on external forces, to struggle (Phase 2), where awareness of oppression is blocked by internalized barriers, to agency (Phase 3), where the subject acts with completely self-determined motivation. This three-stage process corresponds to the stages of revolutionary consciousness proposed by Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963). The results are presented in three parts: first, an overview of the three actantial shifts in all phases; second, a phase-by-phase analysis based on the three structural axes of the model; and third, an interpretative discussion establishing a link between the actantial configurations and the theories of revolutionary consciousness.

3.1 The Actantial Shift of Character's Transformation

Actantial shifts symbolize the transition between narrative phases when a large event in the story requires a reconfiguration of roles. The actantial model portrays the main character's evolution from external control (Phase 1) to self-determined agency (Phase 3) through these three-phase shifts. Throughout a series of events, the phase signifies a consistent configuration of actantial roles. Each phase consists of an initial situation (the starting configuration), a transformation (a significant narrative event that alters the roles of the characters), and a final situation (the outcome that either finalizes the arc or leads to the next phase). Al Anshory et al. (2023) prove that this three-part structure is a commonly used technique to operationalize Greimas's model by using it to analyze narrative transformation in popular narratives. This development is the structural signature of revolutionary consciousness.

Table 1. Actantial Configuration of Salama Across Three Narrative Phases

Phase	Initial Situation	Transformation	Final Situation
Phase 1 (Ch. 1–22)	Salama (Subject) devotes everything to keeping Layla safe (Object), with her actions driven by Hamza's promise (External Sender). She puts pregnant Layla before herself (Receiver). Khawf (Internal Opponent)	Using her pharmacy training, her mother's memories, and Dr. Ziad (Helpers), Salama keeps working toward the object despite the regime's siege and Am's four-thousand-dollar boat price (External	Layla and Baby Salama (Object) are revealed as a hallucination; Layla has been dead for five months and never existed as Salama believed. With nothing left to protect, the Sender loses its referent,

	is urging her to flee, but she can still resist him.	Opponents). Kenan offers emotional support (Partial Helper). She resists Khawf's pressure to escape and negotiates with Am for boat passage, all for Layla's sake, not her own.	and the entire configuration collapses. (Object: NOT ACHIEVED → Phase 2)
Phase 2 (Ch. 23–30)	Salama (Subject) reorients toward survival (Object) as atonement. Khawf (Distorted Sender) uses guilt and fear to push her toward flight. For the first time, she acts for herself (Receiver). Kenan (helper and opponent) refuse to leave, creating conflict of Objects.	Khawf (Sender) paradoxically claims her agency, blocking the very action he demands. The regime's military breach (External Opponent) escalates, and the hospital bombing forces Kenan's Opponent role to dissolve, their conflicting Objects converge as both agree to flee. (Objects Aligned)	Salama boards the boat and leaves Syria, but Khawf (Sender) still drives her; the escape is an act of guilt, not self-determination. (Object: PARTIALLY ACHIEVED → Phase 3)
Phase 3 (Ch. 31–39 + Epilogue)	Salama (Subject) now acts from her own desire to live and hope for freedom (internal Sender for the first time) and counts herself among those she fights to protect (Receiver). Khawf disappears, no internal Opponent remains.	Salama's full competence as Subject is now fully internal: she succeeds and keeps everyone alive. The only obstacles are the sea and storm, natural forces (Opponent). Khawf departs, confirming the internalized Opponent of Phase 2 is fully gone.	They reach Canada safely. Salama plants a lemon tree in Toronto as a free act of will (Sender: her own) for herself and her family (Receiver: collective). All three axes are fully reconstituted. (Object: FULLY ACHIEVED)

The Sender shifts across phases from external obligation to distorted guilt to fully internalized desire, marking the first structural signature of Salama's developing revolutionary agency. As revolutionary consciousness is a developmental process, it cannot be captured by a single actantial arrangement; it requires the analysis of shifts across phases. In Phase 1, the Sender is fully external: Hamza's promise is an inherited duty for Salama, not an option. This structure is consistent with the concept of subalternity, as explained by Gramsci (1971), which refers to the situation of the dominated being ruled by external forces under hegemonic control without an autonomous political will. In Phase 2, the Sender is distorted. Khawf controls Salama's actions through guilt and fear while claiming her agency: "You're not in control, Salama. I am" (p. 147). This paradox reflects the phase of struggle, in which the subject recognizes oppression but is unable to act freely. Phase 3: The Sender fully internalizes. Salama wants to live. She hopes to be free, not because of outside forces or her own fear. This progressive internalization of the Sender constitutes the first structural marker of Salama's emerging revolutionary agency.

The Receiver shifts from excluding to including herself to form a collective Receiver, marking Salama's integration into solidarity-based struggle as the second structural signature of revolutionary consciousness. In Phase 1, Salama completely excludes herself from the Receiver role; her actions only benefit Layla and Baby Salama, encoding self-sacrifice motivated by external obligations. Salama becomes the only Receiver of her own actions for the first time in Phase 2, as the revelation of Layla's death as a hallucination is revealed. However, her self-directedness remains influenced by guilt. The Receiver's expansion in Phase 3 is a direct reversal of Phase 1, as she includes herself and her new family. She acts for herself for the first time, based on affection and collective purpose, rather than obligation or guilt. This development aligns with Gramsci (1971) argument that revolutionary consciousness requires subaltern classes move beyond individual interests and establish a unified collective will. Kipfer & Mallick (2022) argue that both Gramsci and Fanon believe this social transformation is essential for overcoming subalternity. Fanon (1963) also highlights that decolonization is a collective process and that there is no liberation without solidarity from people in a similar situation. The Receiver's

development through these three phases represents Salama's movement from individual self-sacrifice to collective, solidarity-based agency. This is an important phase in the development of Salama's revolutionary consciousness.

The Opponent shifts across phases from external to internal to natural opponents, marking the final structural signature of a fully developed revolutionary consciousness. The regime, siege, and Am's high price are the external Opponents in Phase 1. Khawf continues to be an internal Opponent but is still resistible. In Phase 2 the Opponent configuration is primarily internal. As Khawf develops into a paralyzing force, Salama's agency becomes ineffective, and external Opponents intensify through military breach, assault, and hospital bombing. Salama is caught in a conflict between internal and external forces, resulting in the paralysis that characterized Phase 2. Fanon (1963) describes this configuration as the "zone of nonbeing," where self-doubt and oppression affect the colonialized subject. Swartz (2024) states that to achieve liberation, there is a need for "an authentic upheaval" from within. In Phase 3 the Opponents become natural forces (the sea and the storm), which have no ideological meaning and need practical rather than psychological solutions. Khawf's disappearance symbolizes Salama's success in overcoming internalized oppression. Salama's revolutionary consciousness is structurally completed by this progression from political to psychological to natural Opponents.

These shifts collectively formed the structural argument of the novel. Greimas (1987) defines action as a "temporal succession from one state to the opposite state" and suggests that the development of a subject must be analyzed through successive phases. These phases are intentionally synchronized with the stages of revolutionary consciousness: subalternity (Phase 1), the phase of struggle (Phase 2), and the phase of agency (Phase 3).

3.2 Phase Actantial Configuration

Each narrative phase is analyzed through the three structural axes of the actantial model to identify the relational functions of all six actants and the specific points at which Salama's revolutionary consciousness transforms. Ampleman & de Vries (2024) explain that the axis of desire connects the Subject and the Object as the main character strives to achieve their goal. The axis of transmission links the Sender, who establishes the goal, to the Receiver, who benefits from its achievement, and the axis of power positions the Helper and Opponent in relation to the Subject's goal. Analyzing each phase through these three axes reveals the complete structural configuration of each stage and enables the precise identification of the actantial shifts through which revolutionary consciousness develops.

3.2.1 Phase 1: The Subject Bound by Promise

Phase 1 represents the first stage of revolutionary consciousness called subalternity. It's the condition of being without autonomous political power and subjected to hegemonic domination Gramsci (1971). In this phase, the Subject is bound by promise, reflecting the external control of the external Sender. This phase covers the beginning of the novel through the revelation of Layla's death. Salama believes her sister-in-law Layla is alive and pregnant, and all of her actions are organized around the promise she made to her brother Hamza. The main structural tension of this phase is between Salama's dutiful Object, which is the protection of Layla and Baby Salama, and Khawf's competing Object of self-preserving flight. This configuration is the first stage of revolutionary consciousness in which the actions of the Subject are completely determined by forces outside her.

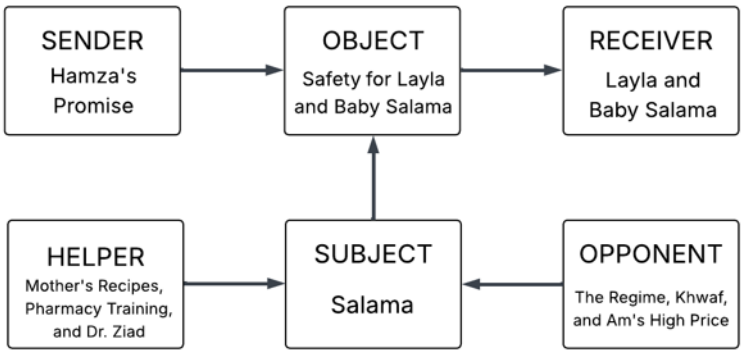

Figure 1. Actantial Diagram of Salama's POV in Phase 1

On the axis of desire, the Subject is Salama, and the Object is the safety of Layla and her unborn child, Baby Salama. Greimas (1987) defines the Subject not through identity but through action: it is the actant whose performance is directed toward the Object. All of the actions Salama takes in Phase 1, working in the hospital under siege, negotiating

with Am for a boat, and providing Layla's needs, are done with this Object in mind. It's not personal desire that motivates her but inherited obligation: "I promised Hamza. I would put my family's safety above everything. Whoever was left of it" (p. 29). This external wanting-to-do puts Salama in a state of subalternity, where her agency is dictated by the authority of another rather than her own desires. Therefore, on the axis of desire, Salama is a Subject whose Object is forced by an external promise, rather than self-determined.

On the axis of transmission, the Sender is Hamza's promise, an external moral obligation, and the Receivers are Layla and the unborn baby Salama, from whom Salama excludes herself. According to Greimas (1987), the Sender defines the Object and supports the Subject's desire for it. Salama's Sender is Hamza's promise. Since Salama's wanting-to-do is based on someone else's authority, rather than her own will, this Sender-Receiver configuration encodes the structural condition of subalternity. The textual evidence supports this claim. "Promise me again,' she says fiercely. 'I need to hear those words.' 'I promise,' I manage to whisper. Two words were never heavier" (pp. 28–29). Layla and the baby to be born are the Receivers. This idea is further reinforced by Layla's exclusion from the Receiver role. Salama prioritizes Layla's needs over her own, accepting a dominated order as natural and losing autonomous political will (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, on the axis of transmission, Salama is governed by an external Sender and excludes herself from the Receiver position, embodying the initial stage of revolutionary consciousness.

On the axis of power, the Helpers are Salama's mother's recipes, pharmacy training, and Dr. Ziad, with Kenan as a partial Helper, while the Opponents include the regime and Am's high price as an external Opponent and Khawf as an internal Opponent. According to Greimas (1987) and Ampleman & de Vries (2024), Helpers increase the Subject's competence and facilitate action toward the Object, while the Opponent is the anti-actant whose action works against the Subject's performance. Kenan, as a partial Helper provides her with emotional support. The regime manifests through the siege and soldiers that restrict Salama's movement and Am's demand of "Four thousand dollars. Two thousand each" (p. 39) functions as the external Opponent. Khawf introduces an opposing Object (self-preservation through flight) that contradicts the Object established by the Sender: "You know what I want," his voice ripples (p. 23). Although Khawf appears occasionally as a manifestation of Salama's fear and doubt, he is not yet strong enough to overpower her will. This configuration shows that Salama's actions are determined by forces outside herself; this represents the initial stage of consciousness under oppression.

The revelation that Layla has been dead for five months dissolves the structural foundation of Phase 1: no valid Object to pursue, no Receiver to benefit, and no Sender able to authorize the Subject's action. This structural collapse is not just a narrative loss but a transforming event that requires the building of a new actantial structure in Phase 2, shifting Salama from an externally enforced responsibility to the beginning of an internal struggle.

3.2.2 Phase 2: The Subject in Conflict

Phase 2 is the representation of what Fanon (1963) describes as the phase of struggle. A condition where the colonized subject recognizes the contradiction between the enforced order and their desires but remains within internalized oppression, a state he defines as the "zone of nonbeing" (Swartz, 2024). In this phase the Subject is in conflict with herself, reflecting the distorted Sender (Khawf) that demands departure and paralyzes agency. The colonized subject becomes aware of the contradiction between the enforced order and their desires but remains within internalized oppression, a state he refers to as the "zone of non-being" (Swartz, 2024). The primary conflict of this stage illustrates the dual Opponent connection in which Salama's goal (survival by fleeing) and Kenan's goal (resistance by staying) are mutually exclusive. This phase represents the struggle for revolutionary consciousness. Awareness of oppression is confronted with internalized challenges

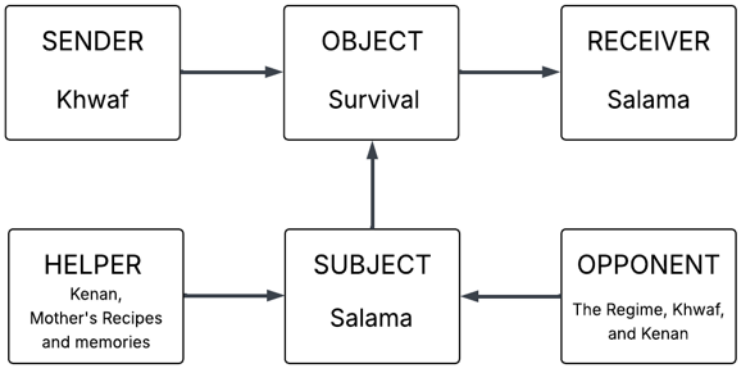

Figure 2. Actantial Diagram of Salama's POV in Phase 2

On the axis of desire, the Subject remains Salama, but the Object transforms from protecting others to survival as a form of atonement for her failure to save Layla. The Object is self-directed for the first time in Phase 2, requiring a complete reconstitution of the actantial structure. However, this self-direction is not a spontaneous decision; it is driven by remorse and the need to fulfill her promise to Hamza by saving her own life: "I've decided we're going to leave. I'm going to talk to Am, and I'm going to discover a way to pay for that boat... Reality set in" (p. 89). Salama represents Fanon's (1963) phase of struggle when there is a coexistence of persistent internal barriers and an awareness of the need for self-directed action. This guilt-driven motivation is the exact factor that distinguishes Phase 2 from Phase 3. The Object on the axis of desire is survival, but the motivation is not yet authentic self-determination.

On the axis of transmission, the Sender is Khawf in a distorted role, and the Receiver is Salama alone, but her self-directedness is driven by guilt. Khawf's role as Sender is structurally paradoxical: he creates Object of flight through guilt and fear but at the same time paralyzes the Subject's agency: "You're not in control, Salama. I am" (p. 147). This generates a structural impossibility in the Greimasian model, in which the Sender colonizes the Subject position. For the first time, Salama is the only Receiver, which is a transition to self-directed action. However, due to the distortion of the Sender, this self-direction is driven by guilt instead of true autonomy. This contradictory configuration is the structural representation of Fanon (1963) internalized oppression: a voice that demands action but denies agency to act. The axis of transmission in Phase 2 encodes a Receiver who is self-directed in form but not yet in heart.

On the axis of power, the Helper and Opponent positions become more complex, with Kenan claiming both roles and Khawf becoming more intense as an internal Opponent. Kenan continues to function as Helper through emotional support: "Kenan holds my hand... 'Thank you for your hard work.' 'Thank you for saving lives,' he whispers" (p. 239), and her mother's memories continue to provide comfort. However, as Greimas (1987) notes, one actor can simultaneously fulfill multiple actant roles. Kenan's refusal to leave Syria prevents Salama's Object of flight. "I'm not leaving Syria without you," Kenan says... "You said it yourself, the fight isn't just here" (p. 2228). Kenan is an Opponent not out of hatred, but because of structural incompatibility. Khawf is strengthened as an internal Opponent, and the regime becomes an external Opponent through the military breach. Kenan's conflicting object trapped Salama on the axis of power, while Khawf's distorted Sender function paralyzes him on the axis of transmission; he is structurally blocked on both axes. This double trapping serves as the structural representation of Fanon's (1963) zone of nonbeing (Swartz, 2024), and only a change in external conditions, such as the hospital bombing, may resolve the incompatibility along the axis of power.

The military breach of the hospital resolves the structural conflict between Salama's and Kenan's Objects by a change in conditions that makes staying in Syria practically impossible. The Opponent role of Kenan disappears, and their Objects align as they both agree to go. However, the Object of Phase 2 is only partially achieved: Salama can now escape, but her Sender remains Khawf (distorted, guilt-driven, and not yet self-determined). The partial achievement of the Object is needed because it constructs phase 3, where the Subject will go after the same Object but with motivation coming from within.

3.2.3 Phase 3: The Subject Reclaiming Agency

Phase 3 represents the phase of agency described by Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963). A condition where the subject acts of their own will, driven by internal desire and a collective purpose after overcoming internalized oppression. In this phase the Subject regains agency by internalizing the Sender, successfully escaping Syria, and starting a new life overseas. This phase includes the escape from the hospital, the journey to the shore, the crossing of the Mediterranean

Sea on a boat, and the beginning of a new life in Toronto. Phase 3 represents the agency of revolutionary consciousness, the first time that the Subject acts from an internal motivation

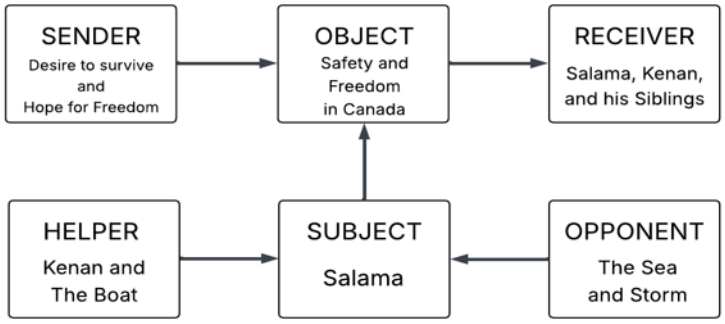

Figure 3. Actantial Diagram of Salama's POV in Phase 3

On the axis of desire, the Subject is Salama, and the Object is to reach safety and freedom in a new country, now genuinely desired rather than guilt-driven. The competence of the Subject is described by Greimas (1987) in the form of three modalities: wanting-to-do, knowing-how-to-do, and being-able-to-do. In Phase 1, Salama's wanting-to-do was externally placed in Hamza's promise. In Phase 2, it was distorted by Khawf's guilt mechanism. In Phase 3, all three modalities are finally internal: she wants to live, she has the skills to survive, and she has the capacity to act. This is evident in her leadership during the boat crisis: "We need to jump. "When the boat goes down it will make a current we won't be able to swim against" (p. 284). The complete internalization of competence on the axis of desire marks the structural initiation of the phase of agency indicated by Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963). Therefore, on the axis of desire, the Object is freedom, and Salama's wanting-to-do is finally her own.

On the axis of transmission, the Sender is Salama's own determination to survive and hope for freedom, and the Receivers expand to include herself alongside her new family. For the first time, Salama authorizes her own action and benefits from it, as shown when she directs the group in the boat crisis: "We need to move away from the boat. Now, keep kicking!" (pp. 286–288) and "We have to stay as close to me as you can" (p. 283). This configuration is a direct structural reverse of Phase 1, in which Salama excluded herself from the role of Receiver and performed for others only. The transformation to a collective Receiver is an example of the solidarity-based form of revolutionary struggle that Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963) considered crucial for decolonization. Thus, on the axis of transmission, the Sender is internal and self-determined, and the Receiver is a collective, including Salama herself.

On the axis of power, Kenan acts as the pure Helper along with the boat, and the Opponents are natural forces (the sea and storm) with no ideological meaning. Kenan's dual role of Phase 2 is fully resolved, and the boat serves as a material Helper that enables the escape: "The boat is right over there" (p. 272). The Opponents are the sea and the storm: natural forces with no ideological significance, representing neither political oppression nor internalized guilt, as confirmed by Kenan's warning, "Salama, the weather is bad" (p. 283). Greimas (1987) defines the anti-actant as the actant whose action opposes the Subject's performance; in Phase 3, this opposition is entirely impersonal. The departure of Khawf during the boat journey confirms that the distorted Sender–Opponent paradox of Phase 2 is fully dissolved. The axis of power in Phase 3 thus encodes a Subject who acts from internal determination, confronting only non-ideological obstacles, in structural confirmation of the agency phase of revolutionary consciousness.

In the epilogue, Salama plants a lemon tree in Toronto. Salama's actantial configuration is fully reconstructed across all three axes: an internal Sender, a self-inclusive collective Receiver, no political or psychological Opponent, and a Subject whose competence is entirely her own. The Object of Phase 3 is fully achieved. The structural arc is complete: the Subject who in Phase 1 was influenced by an external Sender, who in Phase 2 was paralyzed by a distorted Sender-Opponent, now acts from independent, self-determined consciousness, marking the structural completion of revolutionary consciousness.

3.3 Revolutionary Consciousness in As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow

Revolutionary consciousness is confirmed as the structural theme of As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow through the three actantial configurations identified across the phase analysis. The progression from subalternity (Phase 1) to struggle (Phase 2) to agency (Phase 3), as encoded in the three actantial shifts, now provides the structural foundation for interpreting this development of Salama's action.

Salama pursues the Object through an external Sender, excluding herself from the Receiver position, never asking whether the Sender position should define her Object. This condition is representative of a controlled individual's acceptance of a forced order as a natural reality without an autonomous political will, a condition theorized by Gramsci (1971) as subalternity. This condition is structural, not only an emotional condition. The actantial configuration defines her subalternity as a functional configuration in which the Sender is not from her will. Gramsci states that domination is not only maintained by force but also through the establishment of a cultural hegemony in everyday practices, discourses, and manipulation of common sense, making oppression appear as a natural and fundamental order (Ferraz, 2025). Salama's wanting-to-do is still external; she does things for others, never for herself. This is the first stage of revolutionary consciousness, where the person is completely controlled by other forces.

Salama is currently pursuing the Object for herself, but she is interrupted by Khawf, who functions as both the Sender and Opponent. Khawf constructs the Object by preventing her agency and via guilt and fear. This condition is characteristic of the phase of struggle defined by Fanon (1963), in which the colonized subject recognizes the contradiction between the forced order and his own needs yet remains unable to free himself from internalized oppression. Fanon (1963) describes this as a concept of internalized oppression, in which colonialism produces psychological trauma that creates self-doubt and submission that continues to exist even in the absence of the external oppressor. Fanon refers to this phenomenon as the "psycho-politics of decolonization," which is the process by which colonial structures generate "compliant and complicit subjects" and require the deconstruction of internalized psychological structures to achieve liberation (Jilani, 2025). Fanon also identifies this condition as a "zone of nonbeing," from which liberation demands "an authentic upheaval" from within (Swartz, 2024); Gibson et al. (2025) similarly characterize this as the dehumanizing condition produced by colonial occupation, in which life becomes constrained and every breath a combat, underscoring that disalienation must be both psychological and political. As Kipfer & Mallick (2022) argue, it is through the actual experience of struggle, not abstract reflection, that the subject is transformed. Salama's struggle with Khawf's immobilizing authority is a perfect example of this relational, practice-based process of consciousness creation. This is the struggle stage of revolutionary consciousness, where the recognition of oppression is in conflict with internalized obstacles.

Salama has now completely internalized the Sender role and included herself in the Receiver position. The ideological opponent has also disappeared. The subject acts autonomously, driven by internal motivation and collective purpose, after overcoming internalized oppression, as described by both Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963) as a phase of agency. According to Pratt Morris-Chapman (2025), this change is the fundamental transformation in consciousness that is required to overcome internalized oppression successfully. As Gibson et al. (2025) notes, Fanon clarifies that this transformation is not restricted to political aspects but also existential; it demands fundamental restructuring of the subject's relationship with themselves and their environment. This resolution is consistent with Beneduce (2017) concept of the "decolonization of the mind," which is a transformation of consciousness that is essential for any political movement that pursues political liberation. Kipfer & Mallick (2022) specify that both Fanon and Gramsci view this formation of consciousness as a spatially and historically situated process rather than a singular revolutionary event, one that must be continuously reconstructed in response to evolving historico-geographical conditions, a process that Salama embodies as she plants a lemon tree and builds a new life in Toronto.

The lemon tree that Salama plants in Toronto functions as a textual manifestation of the completed actantial transformation discovered across all three phases. It is performed not out of obligation, guilt, or fear but as a conscious expression of will by a Subject whose Sender is now entirely herself. As Salama added to the narrative, which is not a poetic conclusion but the textual signature of the structural transformation "*it reminds me that hope will never die as long as the lemon trees grow. (p. 295)*" The Subject who in Phase 1 excluded herself from the Receiver position, who in Phase 2 was paralyzed by an internalized Opponent, now acts simultaneously for herself, integrating all three phases of actantial development into a single unified gesture. Salama's actantial arc demonstrates the formation of revolutionary consciousness is not completed by physical departure but by the internal transformation that allows one to act from self-determined hope.

The actantial transformation across the three phases demonstrates that the idea of revolutionary consciousness evolves from external control (Phase 1) to internal struggle (Phase 2) to self-determination (Phase 3). Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963) identify as a developmental process that is essential for liberation from oppression. This evolution is not merely stated as a theme but structurally encoded. Each stage of consciousness corresponds to a distinct and identifiable actantial configuration. The novel's narrative grammar is itself an argument about how revolutionary subjectivity is formed, tested, and realized under conditions of political repression.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to identify actantial roles and their shifts across the three narrative phases of As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow and to examine how those shifts reveal the development of revolutionary consciousness. Both objectives have been fulfilled. The actantial analysis demonstrates that Salama moves through three structurally distinct configurations: subalternity in Phase 1, where an entirely external Sender and a self-excluding Receiver encode the initial condition of dominated consciousness; the phase of struggle in Phase 2, where a paradoxical Sender-Opponent figure named Khawf traps Salama between awareness and paralysis; and the phase of agency in Phase 3, where the full internalization of the Sender, the expansion of the Receiver to a collective, and the disappearance of ideological Opponents mark the structural completion of revolutionary subjectivity. These three configurations are not only narrative stages but also the structural grammar by which the novel argues that liberation is a developmental process rather than a single event.

What this study reveals is that Katouh's work is not simply presenting the story of the Syrian Revolution as a historical background. In delivering a story in which the actantial structure develops from subalternity to agency, the novel participates in what Gramsci (1971) and Fanon (1963) identify as the cultural work of revolutionary consciousness: making visible the conditions of oppression, making imaginable the possibility of liberation, and insisting that the two are inseparable from the internal transformation of the subject. The lemon tree that is planted in Toronto symbolizes the structural completion of the process. This act is not done out of obligation or guilt, but out of self-determined hope by a Subject who has finally become the Sender of her own story.

There are several ways for future researchers to extend this framework. Applying the actantial model to other narratives of Revolution would make it possible for comparative analysis of whether this three-phase structural pattern is specific to Katouh or if it is part of a larger genre of revolutionary diaspora fiction. Researchers may also compare the actantial configurations of different characters within the same novel: comparing Kenan's actantial arc with Salama's would reveal if the novel encodes different routes to revolutionary consciousness. Finally, the connection of Gramsci and Fanon implemented here opens up opportunities for reading different postcolonial novels via a combined structural and political lens, strengthening both narratological and postcolonial frameworks.

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