

# Portrayal of Children in War-struck Regions: A Study on the Movies ‘Turtles Can Fly’ and ‘Bekas’

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## Abstract

This paper analyses how the children’s life in the war-struck regions is portrayed in the world movies. The researcher examines two Kurdish movies of global acclaim released in two different decades of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The movies were dissected based on the portrayal of war-struck regions, portrayal of children’s life, analysis of lead characters, perception of America in Kurdish culture and analysis of climax. The researcher has found out that the atrocities against children were portrayed realistically in these movies. The children who inhabit in war-struck regions express high levels of responsibility, emotional maturity and survival capacity compared to the ordinary children. The human right violation against children is recreated in the movies without exaggeration.

## Keywords:

Children, War, War-struck Regions, Movies, Portrayal.

## Introduction

Childhood is not only a phase of a human being’s growth, but also a period of transformation in many aspects. Compared to adults, children are too vulnerable to distressful situations such as conflicts and violation of peaceful atmosphere. The younger victims of war are haunted by the trauma for the rest of their life. Psychological disorders and emotional imbalance are common among them. The reports on the war crimes contain horrifying revelations about the young victims. Child soldiering is a common practice, so is the case with slavery in army camps. Besides, rape and sexual slavery regardless of the child’s gender have been frequently reported from all over the war locations.

Apart from their high death toll, children who have lost parents, who are maimed, diseased, sexually assaulted, forced to serve in the war front or engage

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in laborious jobs also are found in huge numbers. The war-struck regions are destroyed using mass-destructive weapons in most cases. After the war, no infrastructure would be remaining intact. Educational institutions, hospitals, markets and residential colonies are collapsed into dust. Even the basic facilities such as water, food and shelter would not be available. The survivors, regardless of their age group, suffer the ordeal in order to retain their life.

During the conflicts, children act like adults with no sign of innocence and immaturity in them. They are compelled to leave the school and play ground and work in army or other dangerous situations in order to find a living. Most of the children are orphaned and the eldest sibling is left with the responsibility of the younger ones. They manage to do the multitasking, including household chores, baby sitting and working for money, in such a young age. (ICRC, 2009).

As a popular mass medium, movie has always attempted to depict the reality such as war atrocities on civilians. War movie is a film genre concerned with warfare, typically about naval, air or land battles in the twentieth century, with combat scenes central to the drama (Wikipedia, 2016). In fact, many of the brutalities against common people left unrecorded during the hustle-bustle of war were brought into limelight by cinema. War movies are a serious genre aimed at portraying the horrors of war to the audience. Most of them attempt to convince the spectators about the uselessness of war and its brutalities. Through movies, the reality is recreated before the viewers.

One of the most chaotic regions is Kurdistan. The Kurds are the largest populated diaspora in the world without a state of their own. Their population is about 40 million, spread over different countries. The Kurds have a deep historical background of continuous struggle for existence. In fact, discussing war without mentioning Kurds will be incomplete. They have been frequently undergoing wars and invasions, and the people have been subjected to severe war crimes. Iraq launched the most brutal genocide campaign on Kurds in 1988. They used lethal chemical weapons on Kurdish people and resulted in the death of more than 5000 Kurds in the village of Halabjah. The US invasion in Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the tensions between the USA and Iraq after Gulf War had created adverse conditions in Kurdistan. The existence of the country as a republic is not accepted yet.

For analysing the portrayal of children in war-struck regions in movies, two Kurdish movies are selected – *Turtles Can Fly* (2004) and *Bekas* (2012). They were released in the two decades of twentieth century and are based on the conflicts in Kurdish region of Iraqi-Turkish border and Iraqi Kurdistan respectively. From the news reports and historical records, it is clear that the locations mentioned in the movies are prone to conflicts and wars from the very

beginning. The children of these regions are victims of war. So, in order to derive findings on the topic, the researcher chose these movies.

### **Objectives**

- To analyse the portrayal of children's life in war-struck areas as shown in the two world cinemas –*Turtles Can Fly* and *Bekas*.
- To analyse the depiction of survival capacity of children living in life-threatening conditions in films.
- To analyse the portrayal of emotional development expressed by children in war-infested areas in movies.
- To analyse the atrocities against children in war-struck lands as portrayed in films.
- To understand the state of children performing the responsibilities of adults during a chaotic atmosphere in cinema.

### **Methodology**

The entire research design is revolving around qualitative research methodology. As the content of the films like the plot, characters, dialogues, performance and other visual elements are the basis of the study, content analysis is suitable for this research. As part of the research design, exploratory content analysis, narrative analysis, qualitative visual analysis and interpretative video analysis are employed in order to accomplish the objectives.

The research is based on the Media Representation theory. In this theory, representation refers to the construction in any medium (especially the mass media) of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as still or moving pictures (Media Representation Theory, 2010).

### **Analysis**

Plot, structure, characters, dialogues and performance of the two selected movies – *Turtles Can Fly* (2004) and *Bekas* (2012) - are the base for the analysis.

#### **Turtles Can Fly (2004)**

*Turtles Can Fly* is a Kurdish movie written and directed by Bahman Ghobadi in 2004. Well-acclaimed by the audience all over the world, it has

received numerous awards. It is the first movie made in Kurdistan after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The title of the film is a symbol of the joy, anguish and migration of the Kurds. Turtles live for long years, and their life is divided in the land and water which reminds the state of Kurdish people. Like the turtles, they move slowly towards their target (Ghobadi, 2005). The child actors of the movie were not professional actors.

*Turtles Can Fly* is the story of the Kurdish children in a village near Iraqi - Turkish border on the eve of American invasion of Iraq. They all find living from collecting landmines from fields. The head of the village lads, Satellite – as they call him, installs satellite dishes in the households for getting news of war. He develops a liking for a new girl in their area. She is accompanied by her handicapped brother and a blind toddler. It is a secret that the toddler was born to the girl out of rape by the army men. She wants to get rid of the child, but her brother does not allow her. Finally, she succeeds in drowning her son in the river and committing suicide.

### **Portrayal of War-struck Region in the Movie**

The elements of war are clearly visible in the movie from the beginning to the end. The first overview shot of the village of Kanibo gives the idea that the place is hit by some disaster. Instead of concrete buildings and infrastructure, the village is packed with temporarily built tents and partially ruined housing. Geographically it is a dry, hilly land with limited presence of vegetation. Rusted vehicles, piles of metal objects and all kinds of armaments are stocked in the open spaces.

People have no proper settlements. Many families share a common tent. Most of them are refugees who stay there until they leave to the border. By the end of the movie, majority of the families leave as the war is declared. The prices of things have gone up due to the war and the people are in short of money. They are compelled to rely on barter system. Children collect mines and sell it with the help of middlemen like Satellite. In the market, they trade mines and radios for purchasing the dish and weapons. Struck by war means struck by poverty too.

The entire village is terrified because of the impending war. They have no resource to know the progress of war, so that when the dish is installed in Esmael's house, all the people crowd there to know the news. The elders in the village compel Satellite to interpret the news of war. The alienation suffered by the people is summarised in Esmael's statement in the beginning:

*“Look what Saddam has done to us! We have no water, no electricity and no schools. They have deprived us from the sky.*

*They don't let our TVs work to see when the war will start.”*  
(03.07)

Even the areas on the both sides of a valley are lying within different borders. The land is so close to the neighbouring nations that they got trapped inside the borders of different lands.

The use of chemical weapons had once killed a lot of Kurds and they fear the enemies will repeat it. There is scene in which the teacher of the village and some other people distribute masks for the villagers and instructs them how to use it. They also suggest to stay underwater or to go to high areas to escape from chemical attack. When the war was finally declared, the people rush to the hill to save themselves. Direct attack on the civilians is present only in one scene, in which the soldiers chase the children, rape Agrin and try to drown her and Hengov in a pond. However, the visuals are carefully shot in order to avoid any exposure of the minor girl during the rape scene.

The villagers entrust Satellite with the responsibility of getting weapons from the market in exchange of mines. No restriction or licensing is required for buying weapons. Large stock of guns and cartridges in the shops show that everyone is getting ready to face the combat. The arrival of American military troop and their helicopter also indicates that the war between America and Iraq has commenced. The last scene shows Satellite watching the American soldiers entering amass with weapons, signalling the final stage of invasion.

### **Portrayal of Children's Life in the Movie**

The lead characters in the movie are played by children, who are non-professional actors. They were influenced by his life as a Kurd. The film maker Bahman Ghobadi himself clarifies that he picked up the kids from Kurdistan, because there are no professional actors in Kurdistan (Ghobadi, An Interview with Bahman Ghobadi, 2005).

The war has killed the civilians without any discrimination resulting in numerous orphan kids wandering in the streets. In the movie, we can see a number of such children without a guardian to take care of. The absence of adults makes them behave like grownups. In fact, the elders of the village depend on the children for many things.

The characterisation of Satellite and Hengov is a representation of the adult rivalry for power and authority. They do not accept the leadership of each other. In the market, Satellite is the one who purchases the dish and rents weapons. Even when he rents gun and cartridge, the shop keeper does not warn him of the danger and just asks him not to ruin them. Also, the children practice shooting without any adult supervision.

Child labour is intense in the region regardless of the age and security of the child. Mine sweeping being a major job, many children have been maimed in accidents. Hengov, Pashow and Satellite are visibly the victims of mine blasts. Even after they are disfigured, the children are forced to work in the mine fields for a living. Education is only a dream for them as the school has turned out to be a mere storage for weapons. Children practice shooting in school, instead of learning letters and the teacher argues with them.

*Teacher: "Hey! Why aren't you listening? Teach them math and science!"*

*Satellite: "They know math and science. They have to learn how to shoot now. They have to learn how to use masks." (1.14.19)*

The war compels children to abandon the carefree life of the tender age. Since they are unable to access the schools, education is stopped halfway. None of the children in this film is shown receiving any kind of education. Some of them update information with the help of media, just like Satellite. Shirkooh asking doubts to Satellite can be an instance for that. The children are never shown being sentimental over anything. Physical injury is the only thing that hurts them. They have no time to grieve on their lost childhood; instead they live in the present.

### **Analysis of Lead Characters**

In this film, three lead characters are selected for analysis. They are Satellite (Soran Ebrahim), Agrin (Avaz Latif) and Hengov (Hiresh Feysal Rahman).

#### **Satellite**

Soran alias Satellite is the lead character of the movie 'Turtles Can Fly'. The character was played by Soran Ebrahim, an orphan boy from Kurdistan. He gets the nickname 'Satellite' from his ability to install dishes and antennas. Satellite is a symbol of the teenagers who blindly follow the Western culture and try everything of modernity and sophistication. In spite of being an orphan, Satellite lives with his head high and that is the evidence for his survival capacity. Kanibo and other villages nearby depend on him for fixing satellites. People who want to clear mines from their fields approach Satellite for sending child workers. He does not depend on anyone, but makes others depend on him. Both children and adults of the village require his help for many things. He utilises his power to make others follow him.

Satellite ensures that he is always respected by everyone. He does not like being humiliated or belittled in front of the village children. In fact, his

sidekicks also share the feeling. Shirkooh even considers himself at the service of Satellite. The centre of power shifts to children when there are no adults to take that position, and it is a result of war. He keeps using English words and tries to appear modern among others. Towards the end of the film, Satellite realises the false claims of America. Shirkooh gifts him with a packet of red fish bought from America, and Satellite realises that he was fooled when its red colour goes in the water. It symbolically shows his realisation. He is a representation of those who perceive America as the saviour of the world and blindly follow what they say.

### **Agrin**

Agrin is the only female lead actor in the film. Compared to Satellite and other village children, she is a direct symbol of grief and agony of war. Throughout the film, she does not express any deep emotion and not even a smile appears on her face. Her loose, dark shaded dress represents her distressing life itself. Only her shoes are bright coloured which is left behind after her suicide. Agrin is rather a feeble character in most of the scenes. She depends on her brother and he decides everything for her. She makes home, babysit and accompanies Hengov to the mine field with Riga. She keeps arguing with Hengov about Riga. During the army raid in their home village Halabcheh, she was gang raped by the soldiers. Due to the horrific experiences of the past, she frequently exhibits suicidal tendency. So, she cannot accept Riga, her child who was born of rape. Until the mid half of the movie, everyone believes that the toddler is her brother.

The society creates only rape victims, not survivors. She is afraid of the people asking about Riga, when he grows up. Moreover, it will negatively affect her future too. So, she thinks it is best to abandon the child before they pass the border. She decides to succumb to her past, instead of reviving her perception of life. She resists strongly against every attempt from Hengov to make her accept Riga as her son. It can be assumed that she holds a rejecting attitude towards Satellite only because of the inferiority complex resulted from her past. The society leaves the women to bear the shame of rape for the rest of her life. So, Agrin might be considering herself as undeserving to be loved.

In the climax, she succeeds with her consistent effort to avoid the child. She drowns Riga and kills herself. She does not fight back to her past, but fails even before the war starts. Her appearance in the movie reminds us of the deadly presence of war. She is not the representation of survival, but the symbol of escape into death which provides the ultimate freedom, in her perception.

## Hengov

Hengov is Agrin's brother, who is visibly a victim of the war. He had lost both of his arms in the attack and is mentioned as 'the armless boy' by everyone. Only Agrin calls him his name. In fact, Hengov is the real war survivor of the movie. He lost his parents, he was maimed, his sister became a young mother of a war baby, they had to leave their home land, yet he is hopeful towards life. He has a unique ability of clairvoyance, which makes his character further complex. Sometimes, he does have dreams which apparently give a clue to some upcoming event. However, Hengov is not willing to sell his ability for anything.

Unlike the other kids, he does not accept the authority of Satellite. The interaction between Hengov and Satellite represents the ego clash between adults. Hengov is not ready to seclude from the society, despite his physical limitations. He works in the mine field, takes care of his sister and nephew without depending on others. When Agrin insists about leaving Riga before they shift, Hengov turns assertive. He considers him as a child rather than a symbol of their dark past. Though he does not understand the concerns of Agrin about her future, he is compassionate towards Riga and cares for him.

Hengov's life is full of tragedies. He became all alone in the world after the death of his parents, sister and nephew. Compared to his sister, he is daring enough to face the upcoming events. He does not try to escape from himself and the public. The boy bravely lives alone with his head high, whereas even adults fear the dangers of war. He truly survives the hardships of life by continuing his journey.

## Perception of America in Kurdish Culture

The story is set in the time of American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Yet, America is perceived as a great nation. Satellite is the major character who keeps praising America and foreigners. He is proud of being able to speak English. According to Satellite, even the mines made in America are first class. He instructs the children to collect only American mines, because they are expensive. There is an awesome feeling towards foreigners among the Kurds in general. However, it is Satellite who expresses it the most. When Satellite injures himself from mine blast in an effort to save the toddler, the teacher of the village says half contemptuously:

*"You kept saying USA, USA, until you fell on a USA mine". (1.21.33)*

There is a set propaganda behind the presentation of America as a great place. People consider themselves as inferior to USA citizens, because they are



compelled to perceive it like that. After the declaration of war, helicopters shower leaflets for the Kurdish villagers, which reads:

*“It’s the end of injustice, misfortune and hardship. We are your best friends and brothers. Those against us are our enemies. We will make this country a paradise. We are here to take away your sorrows. We are the best in the world.”* (1.03.24)

The words clearly illustrate how the image of America is developed in the public psyche. They depict USA as a rescuer of Kurdish diaspora. Apart from the self-praising, it contains a tone of threat for those who oppose. It tells that America gains support by creating either admiration or fear.

In Kurdish culture, satellite is prohibited due to the obscene content broadcast in it. But they relieved the rule for watching news only, because of the impending war. The first transition after American invasion was the removal of this prohibition. Pashow informs Satellite that the US soldiers took the dish to the hill and the village children accompanied them to watch the prohibited channels. The invasion is not only geographical, but cultural also. By the end, Satellite himself realises the truth.

Shirkooch arrives to say farewell along with the hand of Saddam’s statue and a few red fish from America for Satellite. But, when Satellite examines the fish closely, he finds that they are ordinary fish painted in red. It is a symbolic representation of their perception towards America. The glorified image of the great nation was scattered when they realise that there will be no change in their life. USA was like a saviour for them until the invasion really happened.

### **Analysis of Climax**

The story of the movie ‘*Turtles Can Fly*’ is not set in the chronological order. In fact, the climax of the movie is in the beginning. Agrin’s suicide forms the final part of the story, but her jumping off the mountain cliff is shown first. The flash back - flash forward format has been applied in it. After the suicide scene, the rest of the story takes place. The middle of the movie is the flash back of Agrin’s past.

In the climax, Hengov predicts that everything will end the next day, which Satellite misinterprets that the war will end. His ability of clairvoyance remains a mystery throughout the story. But, this time his prediction proves to be wrong. It was more related to his own life. After his leg injury, Satellite begins to realise the real face of USA. It points to the sudden transition in the traditional cultural setting of the society.

When Hengov sets out in search of Agrin and Riga after he had a dream, he sees Agrin's image standing on the military tanks. It is another clue of what happens to them. Before he could reach the spot, Agrin drowns Riga in the spring and kills herself by jumping off the cliff. Thus, the armless boy loses his entire family due to the war. He is a representative of the millions who are orphaned and maimed in the combats.

Satellite also gets his foot maimed and he begins to use the crutches to walk, like Pashow. He sees the American soldiers entering the village in clusters. The rest of the story is left to the viewers. The invasion might have brought even more serious harm to their lives. Otherwise, they could have been saved by USA, as they expect. The movie is all about how war tears apart the lives of innocent people, especially children. It shows the brutal deprivation of the right to live.

### **Bekas (2012)**

Bekas is a Kurdish movie written and directed by Karzan Kader in 2012. Semi-autobiographical in nature, the movie was well received among the audience. It was honoured with several awards. The film is a semi-autobiographical work of Karzan Kader. The lead child artists of the film are non-professional actors (Kader, 2012). Instead of the usual dark tone of war movies, he had chosen for a different method in this cinema. The presence of children is used for balancing the traumatic effect of war with their innocent and humorous approach to life.

*Bekas* is the story of two brothers, Dana and Zana, in Kurdistan, who lives as shoeshine boys. They are orphans and victims of war, and they consider even Saddam Hussein as their topmost enemy. The boys admire the Hollywood hero Superman and believe that Superman would solve all their problems. They find that Superman lives in America and decide that they must leave to that place. They work so hard so that money can be piled for the journey. The elder boy Dana falls in love with a girl and gets distracted from their target. The younger Zana gets a donkey, which he calls Michael Jackson, and plans to set out to America on it. They would understand the difficulty to pass the border, but somehow manage to move on. The boys fight with each other, gets separated and eventually rejoins. The story ends abruptly leaving the viewers imagine the rest of their journey to the destination.

### **Portrayal of War-struck Region in the Movie**

Though the movie is released in 2012, its story happens in the 1990's Iraqi Kurdistan under the horrid reign of Saddam Hussein. The whole movie is created in a light sepia tone to give the sense of melancholic atmosphere of the

war. In the opening scene, the children play and run along an arid land and congested, unpolished streets, which are notable characteristics of the place.

The ragged settlements behind the beautiful valley points to the harsh living conditions of the people. Their means of public transportation are so limited that they depend on carts. The streets are kept under surveillance by the army. In the scenes which show the children walking through the street paths, army men carrying gun pass them casually. Soldiers have become so common in their lives that they do not seem overwhelmed in the presence of military personnel.

The anti-Kurdish campaigns of Saddam Hussein have destructed their peaceful life. Zana buys a copy book after they have decided to go to America, and writes down the names of those who were mean to him. The name of Saddam Hussein tops the list. He knows that his parents were killed because of Saddam. Throughout their journey, Zana keeps asking Dana about Superman in order to ensure that he is powerful enough to destroy Saddam's army.

*Zana: "Is Superman powerful enough to destroy all the bad people and bring back all the good ones?"*

*Dana: "Yes, he is. And he is very brave and he can fly too..."*

*Zana: "Kaka, so why doesn't he destroy Saddam? Everyone knows he's very bad with people and he has killed our parents too..."*

*Dana: "I don't know. Maybe he hasn't heard of Saddam." (43.35)*

The journey to America is only a dream for the Kurds, as they are not allowed to cross even the border of a town. The rights of the Kurdish people are not accepted by the host countries like Iraq. When Zana and Dana try to pass the border on the donkey, the lieutenant insults them and drives them away. The scenes at check posts speak aloud of the restrictions imposed on the Kurdish population. Long queues of vehicles are put to wait for checking. Apart from checking the identity cards of the travellers, they examine every part of the vehicles including its trunk, chassis and even the luggage is not spared. It is obvious from the scrutiny by military officers that no one is allowed to escape from the country. Those scenes show how Saddam Hussein's army treated the Kurds living in their region.

Nearing the climax, Dana steps on a mine while walking along a deserted area. The war always keeps its active remnants of explosives in the land, even after everything is over. The lives of civilians are never considered during the execution of war strategies. The boy was walking so casually that nobody would expect a landmine being hidden there. Within a second, his

happiness fades in the fear of death. In war-struck regions death will arrive without any warning.

### **Portrayal of Children's Life in the Movie**

The trend of using non-professional actors is followed in this movie too by its director Karzan Kader. He tells that he used his childhood experiences in Kurdistan in the film. The boys were inspired from himself and his elder brother, and the character of Baba Khalid was a recreation of his own grandfather (Kader, *People in the Arab World Have to Stand up to Follow Their Dreams*, 2012).

The story is set in Kurdistan in the backdrop of Saddam Hussein's anti-Kurd reign. The Kurdish protest against ethnic alienation resulted in their mass destruction by Saddam's army. Many people died and their families were orphaned. Considering the time period of the story, the two homeless brothers of the movie are the victims of this. Zana and Dana live in the street and earn from shining shoes in the market. They work for daily bread instead of learning in a young age. They keep their belongings in Baba Khalid's shop, eat and sleep in the street, and they bathe in terrace of a building. It is hard to lead the life as orphans, because people would take advantage of that state of helplessness.

On the other hand, Helliya is the daughter of a professor and belongs to a middle class family. She leads a seemingly happy and satisfied life with her family. War does not affect the people who have money and resources to relocate themselves to safer shelters. She seems to be ignorant about the hardships undergone by other children of her age. Helliya is not a victim of war; she is one of the few fortunate persons, who need not even survive it.

Baba Khalid's death leaves the boys completely alone. When the approach the smugglers to move to America, they try to drive the kids away. Jamal treats them exactly like some domestic animals. When Zana seeks help in a market to save his brother, we can see the attitude of the people. We may expect someone would listen to his plea out of humanity, but they push him away. They expressed the general disgust towards street urchins in this visual. They are not willing to spare even a moment for a kid's cry.

The war killed the adults and spared their children just to wander in the streets without shelter, food, schooling and security. The wicked people take advantage of the insecure life conditions of children. The amount of survival capacity is different in each person. In this movie, the kids are fully aware that the mistreatment from the society is because of their orphanhood. Their minds are filled not with innocence, but fury against Saddam Hussein and his army. The boys are symbols of the numerous child victims of war.

### **Analysis of Lead Characters**

Three major characters played by children are selected for analysis. They are Zana (Zamand Taha), Dana (Sarwar Fazil) and Helliya (Diya Mariwan).

#### **Zana**

Zana is the youngest of all the characters. He is about six years old and has only his elder brother with him. Energetic, enthusiastic and innocent, he has all the charm of his age. His perseverance to achieve the target leads the entire story. He loves and respects his brother, no matter how hard Dana to him. Besides, he yearns for the love of an adult and that is why he is inclined to Baba Khalid rather than his brother is. The mischievous nature of the little boy makes the funny moments of the movie. He believes that whatever he fancies is real – be it Superman or the never-ending journey to America.

The characterisation of Zana is rather feeble. He is not dominant over others. Though he has his own opinions and decisions, they are mostly controlled by his elder brother. Zana outshines his age with his sense of responsibility. Once they set a target, i.e. to move to America, he is dedicated his maximum. He works extra time and keeps planning. Even after he is left alone by his brother now and then, he does not care and stays focused. He behaves like an adult sometimes.

Emotionally, Zana is more intense than anyone else. He loves people from the bottom of his heart. It is obvious from the way he expresses his feelings for their late parents, Dana, and Baba Khalid. When they decide to bring Superman with them, Zana seems more concerned with bringing their late parents back to life. He is so excited about going to America for this reason. In the climax, when Dana steps on a mine, Zana does not leave him. His passionate love for his brother keeps him strong. He endures the hardships to be together always. We may wonder watching his stubbornness despite the physical threat he suffer. He is extremely resistant at times, even when his brother gives up.

#### **Dana**

Dana is the elder one of the duo, who has to play the role of a father, mother and brother to a young boy. He acts as a hero to his little brother. He is in the beginning of teenage and has the complexities of the age. The childish characteristic of selflessness is almost absent in him, unlike his brother. Despite maintaining his own existence, he is supposed to look after his brother too, which he fulfils successfully. Compared to Zana, the intensity of emotions is less in Dana. He is not very expressive of feelings. He is optimistic about the future and nurtures his dreams to a better day ahead.

Dana is a survivor of war just like his sibling. He lost his parents in an early age and he had to live in the street with his young brother. He does not give up, instead works as shoe-shine boy to make the ends meet. The boys are treated unkindly at every phase of the life, be it the theatre owner, smugglers or donkey owner. Yet, Dana keeps moving ahead and dreams about going to America. He has the courage to resist when both of them are mistreated by the elders. However, Dana is less resistant in comparison with Zana.

He behaves like an adult while handling serious matters. When Dana confronts with a deadly time on the mine, he bravely asks his brother to go away. He gives priority to Zana. When Zana goes to get help, he waits under the burning sun for a long time. He decides to move from the mine at last, but it was not an attempt of sacrificing his life. He removes his foot from it slowly and steadily, and finally he wins. It shows his ability to overcome the unexpected obstacles.

### **Helliya**

Helliya is rather a minor character in the film. Yet, she has a significant role in the progress of the story. She appears only in a few scenes and has limited dialogues to deliver. Helliya is the daughter of a professor. She has a family and home, and belongs to middle class of the society. She is visibly elite and rich in comparison with other children. She is never found with the street urchins.

Though Helliya appears only a few times, she is dominant in nature. She understands that Dana is after her and behaves authoritatively. The way she talks is in a clearly dominating way. She questions him and commands as if he were a criminal. Apart from the authority between lovers, the disparity between social classes also is visible here. Helliya does not work to earn like the boys. She lives freely and is seen roaming around the street most of the time. She has no need of being responsible towards life.

Helliya cannot be considered as a victim of war. She has not lost anyone, anything. She is one of the persons who are not affected by war. So, there is no question of survival relevant in the case of Helliya. She is cared as a child and is dependent on her family. It is possible that she may not survive, if exposed to the horrors of war.

### **Perception of America in Kurdish Culture**

Since the story is set in the 1990's, America is perceived as a great source of power. The characters in the movie are Kurdish diaspora, who are oppressed by the host countries. They yearn for power and freedom; two terms the world usually associate with America. Even the young kids like Dana are

aware of USA. The arrival of Superman's movie is received very well among the Kurdish children. They do not have many mass media, so that a film is a festive experience for them. In addition, Superman is American, which can possibly be the reason for his power, at least in the kids' mind.

Not everyone of the region has heard of America. Because, when the term is used by someone, they ask who it is or where it is. Dana explains to Zana that America is a big city full of buildings which are tall enough to touch the sky. They understand that it is a developed nation unlike the ruined Kurdistan. So, they would like to go to America. Whenever they struggle during the journey, they believe that it really worth a trip to the great place. Here the Superman is symbol of the nation itself.

Glorifying Coca-Cola is another instance for the love for USA. Dana gets trapped in the van while trying to steal Coca-Cola. He returns triumphantly with the bottles. It is an international brand, so that drinking Coca-Cola makes one international, as they say.

*Zana: "You are international!"*

*Dana: "If you drink this, you'll be international too." (51.18)*

The children use the word 'international' without knowing its meaning. But they know that being international is something very great. Later, when he sets out in search of Zana after their fight, he picks two bottles of Coca-Cola for him. Whenever they succeed, there is Coca-Cola with them. It is more of an advertisement of a popular soft drink.

The old man they meet on the way is a true representation of Kurdish culture. He does not know anything about America. He is against satellites and television programmes, because they spread immorality and Saddam introduced it to destroy their culture. He does not know Michael Jackson and when Zana imitates his dance, he calls it evil. The boys teach him a few words in English and give him a bottle of Coca-Cola too. By the end of their journey, the man begins to like them. Similarly, America is perceived as a heaven-like land where one can enjoy the ultimate freedom and power.

### **Analysis of Climax**

The movie '*Bekas*' has a simple and direct climax. The story moves in the chronological order, starting from the first to the last event. There is no flash back, but the events happening simultaneously are shown in cut-to-cut format. The climax begins after the boys are packed in the sack and hidden inside the trunk of Jamal's car. The extremity of hostility between Iraqi army and Kurdish people is evident in this sequence. He checks the dickey thoroughly with his

gun's edge and does not let Jamal stay near the car. He asks him to move and turn back. However, he could not find anything and let them continue their journey.

Each check point is a test for the Kurds. They are not allowed to pass the boundary. We can see long queues of vehicles waiting at the border. Considering the history of 1990's Iraq, it was the period of Gulf war and the Kurdish uprising against the Saddam government. So, the army was extra vigilant to suppress any attempt of protest or migration to other countries. There is frequent mention of being killed by the soldiers if caught travelling illegally.

The children pass the border, and move on until Dana accidentally steps on a mine. It is a symbol of the hidden dangers of the war. Nobody would expect a mine on the path way, that too deserted and arid land. Living in a war-struck area has enabled them to identify a mine and to deal with it. An ordinary child may not know how a mine looks like or what happens if they release the foot set on its top. But these children know exactly that death waits in it. Zana runs to get help from a market, but in vain. Here again, the discrimination against children can be seen. People do not listen to Zana, even after he tells them to help his brother.

The story ends there without showing the rest of their journey or life. They might have continued the trip or cancelled it. It is left to the imagination of spectators. But, it gives the sense that no matter what obstacles come their way, the boys will overcome and move on. From the beginning to the end, they are presented as survivors of war and life. The movie ends with a positive tone. Survival through the hardships of life is the summary of this film.

### **Summary of Findings**

- Both the movies portray children in war-struck regions as victims and survivors at the same time.
- Most of the child characters of both movies show high amount of survival capacity in life.
- The children who live in war-struck regions confront with unexpected situations in life, such as death, sexual violence, maiming, child labour, etc.
- Though the atrocities against children are condemned, they are victimised indirectly before, after and during a war. The threats of displacement and relocation occur before war. Direct attacks like murder, mutilation and rape happen during war. The active mines



buried in the land causes many of the children suffer even after the combat.

- Children are compelled to engage in dangerous activities such as collecting mines, for a living. Besides, no adult supervision is suggested during the use of war weapons.
- The children are prone to exploitation in war time. The children in '*Turtles Can Fly*' are hired by adults for mine sweeping, which is apparently an unsafe activity. In '*Bekas*', the boys are cheated by the smugglers, who offer to take them to the destination, but desert them halfway.
- The people of war-struck regions, especially the children, perceive America as a rescuer. Satellite of '*Turtles Can Fly*', and Zana and Dana of '*Bekas*' are seemingly proud of speaking English and knowing about America and its culture.
- Difference in the nature of war and the time periods result in different experiences. An impending war and on-going war bring distinct effects.
- In the absence of adults in responsible roles, children take their place. They take charge of the scene and even elders depend on them.
- The children are used for accelerating the process of westernisation and globalisation. Besides, they apparently consider their culture as inferior to American culture.
- The lead characters of both movies are played by native, non-professional child artists, yet they perform without displaying exaggerated emotions. Casting of real life characters in the movie has helped a great deal in the realistic representation of the children's life in war-struck regions.

## Conclusion

In the analysis of war struck regions, both the movies have depicted the war torn lands differently. The disparity is caused from the stories set in different time periods. In *Turtles Can Fly*, remnants of a direct attack and clues of an impending war can be seen in the backdrop. *Bekas*, on the contrary, does not show any sign of an ongoing war. There is only an insecure condition prevailing among the people. When the life of children is analysed, the direct attacks on children and the consequential nervous tensions are more present in *Turtles Can Fly*, whereas the emotional insecurity and orphanhood resulted from war is the core of *Bekas*.

It has been found that the children in these movies appear to be more responsible, surviving and emotionally mature, even though they lack proper education and development. The childish features usually associated with children are exhibited very little. The Kurds generally keep a positive mentality towards USA, contrary to the global perception of the same as a militarist nation. Climax of both the movies leave the story incomplete, challenging the imagination of the spectators.

In summarising, the portrayal of children in war-struck regions in movies can be understood from the movies *Turtles Can Fly* and *Bekas*. The human right violation against children is clearly visible in these movies. The ultimate victims of war are children, i.e. the future generation. The greatest virtue the elders could do to the younger ones is to stop the wars. Cinema can carry the idea of peace to a mass audience breaking the boundaries.

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