

Original Paper

Justice Monologues in War Films on Anti-Terrorism—Taking *Dağ II* As an Example

Jiyang JIANG^{1*}

¹ Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

* Jiyang JIANG, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China

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Abstract

*In a broad sense, anti-terrorism war films have always been closely related to the “anti-war spirit”, emphasizing how the war honed and devastated the humanity, and considering that anti-terrorism war is an unnecessary war. However, on the basis of ethnic relations and historical factors, Turkey’s anti-terrorism war films brought forward a unique view, and it has gradually received more attention. This thesis will take the anti-terrorism movie *Dağ II* as an example, briefly analyze the unique expression of Turkey’s anti-terrorism war films’ positive attitude to the anti-terrorism war as well as the aesthetic presentation in the field of art and aesthetics from three aspects: the historical background of Turkey’s anti-terrorism war films, the construction of characters and visual appreciation.*

Keywords

anti-terrorism war films, justice, narration

1. Introduction

From the perspective of film research, films which reflect wars appeared two centuries ago, and a new type of films was born then: war films. In this type of films, war and film are interdependent. Nowadays, the anti-terrorism war has provided rich ingredients for the film, and a series of films reflecting the anti-terrorism war have kept coming up since the beginning of the century, such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Jarhead* (2005), *The Hurt Locker* (2007), *Lone Survivor* (2013), etc. Through various narrative techniques, narrative strategies and sound and picture effects, these films enabled people to get to know the war from the screen and reflect on the serious consequences of the war,

which emphasizes the anti-war spirit.

However, in the development of western anti-terrorism war films, a unique view emerged: the anti-terrorism war is a just war action.

2. Just Anti-Terrorism War

In November 2016, *Dağ II*, a Turkish anti-terrorism war film which reflected the Turkish Special Force and was filmed by young Turkish director Alper Caglar, premiered in Turkey. So far, the film scored 9.3 on the IMDb, and with a budget of \$2 million, it earned \$11,378,898 worldwide (Note 1). This film is contrary to the context of most western anti-terrorism war films. Both the narrative strategies and the sounding and picturing skills emphasize that the anti-terrorism war which Turkey participated was a just war and was to protect its homeland. Therefore, we must combine the historical context to deeply explore the historical elements and events in the film. After reading some related books and documents, we found that the relations between Turks and neighboring countries and organizations, including jihadists, are very complicated, and it is like the separation state of Five Dynasties and Ten States Period in Chinese history (Note 2).

In the film, the story takes place at the junction of Turkey, Syria and Iraq. In 1923, Turkey signed the Treaty of Lausanne, which stipulated that non-Muslims were regarded as minorities and that Turkish citizens who believed in Islam were regarded as Turkish (Note 3). This made the Turkish government did not recognize the minority identity of the Kurds who also believed Islam, and even called the Kurds “the Turks in Mountains”. Because Turkish government poses oppressing and assimilation policies on the Kurds in regards to economics, culture, democracy, human rights and other aspects, the nationalist sentiment were provoked. Besides, the Kurds have already been intended to establish their own country, so for many years, they often revolted the Turkish government with violent ways.





Figure 1. The Female Journalist Who Was Rescued Should Be Turkish. The Assistants and the Producer May be Kurds or Others, thus “Racist” Was Mentioned

Although the film does not clearly present the specific identity of female journalist Ceyda’s team, we can roughly infer that from her conversation with members of the Special Force, and that Captain Musa said that he could not risk the lives of his troops for non-Turkish citizens could support this inference. Ceyda’s reports in her country were intended to criticize the Turkish government’s unfair racist policy towards Kurds



Figure 2. The Description of the Historical Massacre of Yazidi Kurds in the Film

However, the so-called “Islamic State” supported by Turkey to eradicate the Kurds has begun to create terrorist attacks in Turkey. As Islamic State’s destructive actions against Turkey became more and more rampant, the Turkish government began to abandon its unfair national policy towards the Kurds in Turkey, and considered that the Kurds, as a minority of Turkey, also belonged to the Turkish people. In 2014, extremist groups invaded Iraq from Syria, Islamic State marched into the Sinjar Mountain and massacred the Yazidi Kurds who believed in the primitive Yazidi religion, which almost killed all the Yazidi Kurds. In the film, on their way forward, the Special Force found Yazidi Kurds slaughtered by

jihadists, and according to Ceyda, jihadists would execute all Kurds and torture the rebels inhumanely, and the guilt of them is a religious contradiction that we cannot understand. In the past, the Turkish government has done nothing about this, but the forces of Kurdistan Workers' Party have marched from both Iraq and Syria to escort 80,000 Yazidi who were facing genocide to the refugee camps on the Turkish border. However, the Kurdistan Workers' Party were besieged by Islamic State on Mount Sinjar.



Figure 3. Turkish Special Force Soldiers Carrying Children to Helicopters

In the film, the role of rescuing ordinary people and being besieged in the Sinjar region was played by the Turkish Special Force. They decided to put the children on the helicopter which was intended to pick up them and leave there, and they decided to use their limited amount of ammunition to fight against the attacking jihadists. Through the development of various plots, the film's deconstruction and reorganization of real historical events is undoubtedly satirizing the inaction and cowardice of the government at that time, and the fact that the government even supported the so-called "Jihad" to achieve its terrible racist goals. In the film, the director planted his beliefs on the Turkish soldiers to accomplish what the Turks did not do at that time.

Here we can find that unlike what the Americans would consider, in the Middle East—whether in Iraq or Afghanistan, the United States is an "unexpected visitor" across the Atlantic Ocean and it launched war under the cover of the "9.11" incident to plunder oil resources (Note 4). For Turks, however, the war took place at their own country anyway, and their stupidity in the past led to serious consequences. Therefore, the war against terrorism is a war to protect their own country.

3. The Construction of Characters

In daily life we never understand each other, neither complete clairvoyance nor complete confessional exists. (Note 5)

In the movie *Dağ II*, director Alper Kagra uses an omniscient perspective which is easy for the audience to understand, and uses narrative techniques to create the characters in the whole film. With the rescue operations going deep into the enemy's rear, the relationship between the characters and their

psychological activities gradually unfolded in front of the audience. In the film, the important characters are the members of the Special Force, especially the close relationship between the two surviving protagonists Caglar and Bekir and Captain Musa in the previous film *Dağ* (2012). Musa and Yasar, the commander of operations in the works of previous generations, had the same teacher, and the two surviving protagonists were saved by him and returned to their motherland. Musa did not want the two wounded young men, which were saved by himself, to be thrown into the cold war again, so he was intended to reject their request to join the army again. However, the desire of Caglar and Bekir to avenge their former captain and end the whole war finally touched Musa and Musa agreed that they could take part in rigorous selection training.

After sorting out and analyzing, we can divide the characters in the film into two categories according to Foster's concept of characters, namely, flat characters and round characters. Flat characters were called "type of temperatures" in the seventeenth century. Sometimes they are also called typical characters, or cartoon characters. Its purest form is based on a single idea or quality. As mentioned above, Caglar and Bekir are the surviving protagonists in *Dağ*. In this previous film, they did not know each other until they got in a fight with each other, and eventually became good friends who cherished each other and overcame difficulties in the harsh environment. Generally speaking, people believe that the characters in the previous works will play important roles in the next works.

But on the contrary, we don't seem to see too much from these two people. What the audiences did see was two typical "revengers" or "patriots" who have become flat characters, and this did not bring too many surprises to the audience. Except for Commander Moussa, the entire action team, including Caglar and Bekir, was full of flat characters. Their constant qualities are the obedience to their commander, the protection of their people, and the dedication spirit. The advantage is that they can easily stand out from the screen and become a heroic symbol: rescuing female journalists at the beginning; rescuing Kurdish civilians halfway; and finally defending villages. In every scene, the audience will have no doubt about their selflessness and sense of justice, and they are typical flat characters.

Let's put aside these two-dimensional characters for a while and have a look at the round characters. Commander Musa is the most representative round character in this film. He is accompanied by the process of quality change and growth. In the rescue action at the beginning of this film, only the female journalist Ceyda is Turkish, and her companions are Kurdish—this has been speculated before, so I will not expound it here—so the whole rescue was only for Ceyda, which aroused a strong dissatisfaction of Ceyda, who wrote articles to criticize the government's national policy. Afterward, she did not change any of Musa's ideas when talking with him. Later, special teams discovered Kurdish civilians who were slaughtered by IS. Musa originally thought that "this is not our fight", but when he realized that it was not a fight, but a genocide, he gradually began to change his mind. Faced with the coming "murderers", he decided to crack down on these desperate jihadists.



Figure 4. Musa's Change

Before the final town defense war, facing a large number of upcoming jihadists, Musa had planned to faithfully fulfill his mission as a soldier—to rescue and send back the female journalist Ceyda. However, through the guidance of Ceyda and Caglar, Moussa finally made a choice “between what’s right and the mission”: to evacuate children and journalists, to guard towns, to eliminate jihadists.

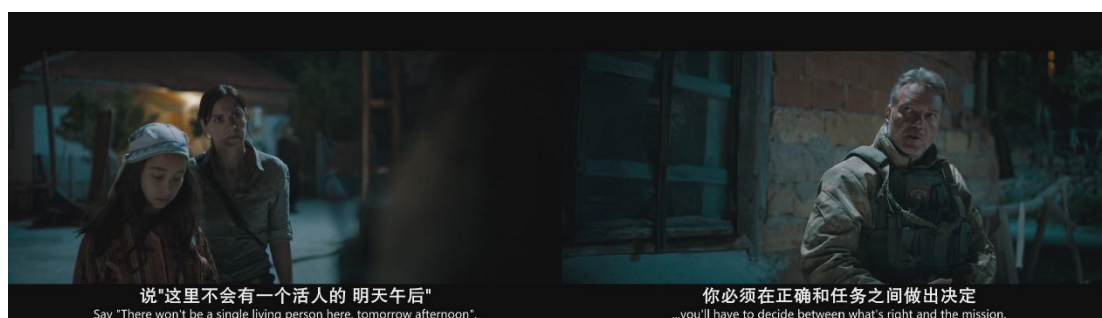


Figure 6. Moussa's Choice

Foster emphasizes in his book that “a novel that is at all complex often requires flat people as well as round, and the outcome of their collisions parallels life more accurately...” From the above analysis, we can clearly see that the journalists Ceyda, Caglar and Bekir, all three of them played important roles in the process of Moussa’s “transformation”, making the characters round and the story richer. At the same time, the audience not only gained the real experience, but also were inspired and experienced some other feelings of their own.

4. Visual Appreciation

Appreciation refers to the value of expressiveness and information, with which a given image can be enriched to produce an exact impression, which already exists in a person's direct experience or experience in his memories, and then the information or expression is like "naturally" coming from what he sees and is already contained in the image itself. (Note 6) As a kind of theme film under the type of war movies, anti-terrorism war movies naturally have the existence of visual requirements in war movies. With the help of modern science and technology, *Dağ II* has left a special impression on people's mind: a large number of long-term and wide-angle lenses are fascinating while being original; exquisite combat scenes perfectly interpreted the basic requirements of war movies; the contrast between the contents of the pictures sublimates the theme of the film.

Using a wide-angle lens (a lens shorter than the standard focal length) can make the background look larger in the focal length, but the objects in the image appear to be farther away from the camera and alienated from each other (Note 7). In the movies, there are at least sixteen pictures with big shots (including vista, panorama, etc.). These pictures appeared at the beginning of the film, before and after rescuing the female journalists, before and after discovering the slaughtered Kurds, before and after rescuing the Kurds, before and after guarding towns and so on. Such a large number of pictures with big shots were definitely made on purpose. Such pictures are in sharp contrast to the "stingy" pictures of the U.S. military fighting against terrorists in the streets and alleys.

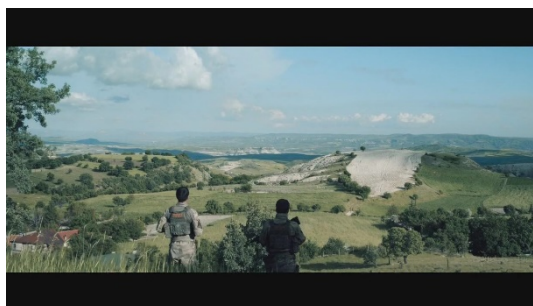


Figure 7. The Use of Pictures with Big Shots is Actually Ingenious

Different shots have different presenting effects. I think that some American anti-terrorism war movies mostly use close-up and close shots. Their purpose is to depict the characters' facial expressions and make the audience feel the real inner feelings of the people in the anti-terrorism battlefield through the main characters' facial expressions or actions on the screen, and the core of their thoughts is the anti-war spirit; the shots of *Dağ II* mostly uses vista and panorama, and they were used to depict the terrible events that were taking place in this beautiful Middle East land (the place where the story happens is not Turkey's real territory, but it is interpreted in the film that "as long as the Kurdish land exists, the Turkish military should guard it"), including showing the heroic image of Turkish flag and Special Force shown in pictures shot from low angles. Through a single type of flat characters, the

audience will incarnate members of Special Force to protect civilians and complete their mission, and the Special Force carries with them the spirit of justice to protect their country. This is the fundamental difference between the movies from these two countries.



Figure 8. Excellent Special Effects and Props

But this has become the history of the previous film, whether in the number of actors, props selection, or in the combat effects, the director Alper Caglar obviously paid more attention than the previous one, and the investment is also greater. Therefore, the performance of *Dağ II* can completely abandon the criticizing hat and stand confidently in the ranks of anti-terrorism war movies and become a classic of Turkey's anti-terrorism war movies.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the 2016 film *Dağ II* shows us the self-improvement of the director Alper Caglar, and presents a wonderful anti-terrorism war film for the audience. Its visual effects have even caught up with the special effects of the American anti-terrorism war movies. In the future, we hope that this movie can have better sequels and call on more people of insight to join in this just war.

In addition, if we leave aside narrative techniques, another problem will arise: under such visual effects, a large number of narrative flashbacks interlaced in the course of the actions—the past of the character, but it is more like the growth story of the “unpopular” soldier, and it seems to deconstruct the narrative system established by visual wonders. Of course, these are all hindsight. In a word, compared with the previous film, *Dağ II* has made great progress.

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Notes

- Note 1. The statistic is from IMDb.
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