

An Agambenian Reading of Bare Life in Katouh's *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*

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Abstract

This research examines the sufferings of children during periods of war by using the theory of bare life given by Agamben, focusing on the concept of bios and zoe explained in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. The study explores how war-affected children become devoid of any political and social rights, reducing their existence to mere survival (zoe). Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* has been used as a primary text in this research and key moments of dehumanization, displacement, and loss of innocence present in the novel were examined closely to uncover the ethical and moral crisis of modern warfare. A qualitative research approach, particularly the close reading method was used to conduct this research. The study contributes to existing scholarship by merging literary analysis with *Agambenian* philosophy which is based on the principles of Foucault's biopolitics, offering a critical understanding of how war narratives expose the fragility of human rights and the erasure of childhood. Therefore, this research highlights the imperative necessity to establish and implement effective inclusive policies in order to minimize warfare and social chaos, so that the safety of children can be ensured.

Keywords: Bare life, Biopolitics, Sovereign powers, State of Exception, War torn childhood

Introduction

Children are the most innocent group of the human population who deserve to live in a protected and loving environment. The idea of childhood is inherently connected with love, laughter, hope and joy. In a morally normal world, children are given the chance to live a peaceful and stable life under all conditions and circumstances. Unfortunately, the real corrupt world of humans has created two different worlds for children belonging to different countries. The children who

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belong to powerful and financially stable regions get to enjoy every happiness they rightfully deserve, however the children of war affected areas live a life full of misery, pain and horror. Armed conflicts and repeated violent incidents destroy the physical and psychological world of innocent children (Akbulut, 2014). The death of family members, lack of basic facilities like food and clean water, shortage of medicine and constant bombing are some of the many catastrophic events that war-affected children experience during their young age (Jensen and Shaw, 1993). The age where they should be able to play and live happily under the warmth of their parents, the children afflicted with war live those years trying to merely survive.

Children are the most vulnerable population of any region affected by war. The war zones face humanitarian crises, leading to the disruption of normal development in children (Harghandiwal, 2025). Katouh has masterfully explained each minor detail of oppression that is exercised on children living in areas surrounded by armed conflict. Katouh is a Canadian writer who has a Syrian background. She wrote her first novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* in 2022. Her debut novel elaborates the real struggles of Syrian people particularly children who faced intense adversities during Syrian civil war 2011-2024. Through the interactions between protagonist Salama and young victims of war, who come to hospital after becoming victims of poisonous chemical and sniper attacks, Katouh has masterfully depicted the horrifying consequences of war on the lives of children. The children in the story are stripped of their basic political and human rights, and their lives revolve around the mere struggle to survive another day without being starved and bombed.

The Syrian civil war is one of the darkest chapters of the 21st century which created one of the greatest humanitarian crises in human history (Seven, 2022). It killed and displaced millions of Syrian people, particularly affecting the mental and physical well-being of children. Hospitals and schools were bombed which disrupted the entire life course of people in Syria. Salama lost her entire family due to war and her dream of becoming a successful pharmacist broke into pieces. At the young age of 18, she had to perform surgeries on children who were shot in the head and stomach. Syria, particularly the city of Homs in Katouh's novel, became a zone of exception where no life was worthy and anyone could be killed by state military at any time. Basic necessities of daily life became scarce for people and their life turned from the mode of living into barely surviving. Children and women became victims of sniper attacks, resulting in the death of countless innocent souls. War left deep trauma in its survivors, specifically children who became patients of mental health issues

including PTSD, depression and anxiety (Attanayake et al., 2009; Slone and Mann, 2016). Properly structured large-scale programs are needed to address and treat the mental health issues of children caused by war and displacement (Yule, 2002). These challenges faced by Syrian people and children have been described thoroughly by Katouh in her novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*.

Katouh has illustrated in her novel how war turned the life of Syrian children into a war-torn reality where they felt unprotected in their own country. However, some parts of the novel show how Syrian children showed resilience amidst chaos. While unbearable brutalities were being committed by Syrian militants on children, the brave kids of Syria tried to preserve their innocence, childhood and purity. Katouh narrated: “Look at them,” Kenan says. “Look how even the agony hasn’t stripped their innocence” (Katouh, 2022). The character of Kenan who lost his parents in war showed resilience and hope throughout the story in Katouh’s novel. He used his camera and social media sources to share challenges and miseries of his people with the world, finding meaning within chaos and war (Lutfia and Nuristama, 2025). Studies also show that children encounter the challenges of war with great adaptability and resilience (Jersild and Meigs, 1943; Popham et al., 2023).

This study has employed *Agambenian* theory of bare life to closely examine the dehumanization of children during war times as portrayed in Katouh’s novel. Agamben also quoted Foucault’s famous concept of “Biopolitics” in his book, stating that Foucault merged the biological and political domain and named it ‘Biopolitics’. Sovereign powers are no longer controlling territories and resources only; they are controlling human bodies and their full course of life. The setting of Katouh’s novel is a Syrian city, Homs, which is affected by violence and aggression on a high scale. The Homs city and hospital shown in the novel falls into the category of Agamben’s idea of ‘state of exception’. People living in a state of exception are not protected by any national or international legal framework. To understand the profound sufferings and tragedy of the narrative presented by Katouh, this study will employ the theory of ‘Bare life’ proposed by an Italian philosopher Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and Bare life* which was originally published in 1995 and was later translated into English language in 1998 by Roazen (Agamben, 1998).

The research holds immense significance as it addresses the sufferings of most affected victims of war; children who are most vulnerable in war conditions. The study highlights the marginalized voices of innocent children whose lives become

shattered and devastated by violence. They are vulnerable, defenceless and exposed to lethal violence, as stated by Agamben in his book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Agamben, 1998). The children living in war torn Syria and Salama's homeland Homs have been shown as unprotected and traumatized in Katouh's novel. They are killed in bombing and get severely injured in sniper shooting. Their parents are mostly gone, and they live without any warmth of paternal love in their life. By applying *Agambenian* perspectives to Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, this research highlights the devastating consequences of war on children, raising awareness regarding the need to have strong humanitarian policies around the globe in order to prevent children from experiencing such extreme brutalities of war. It is imperative in today's critical time to address trials and tribulation faced by children of war while emphasizing on the prevalence of peace across the globe.

Review of the Literature

This section discusses the previously written scholarship related to selected novel Katouh's *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* and theory of bare life proposed by Agamben. The critical topic of dehumanization of children during war has been under discussion by scholars in order to address the issue of innocent children and to demand justice for them by shaming and naming their killers.

Gebali (2025) explored how Katouh's novel portrays the complexities of post-traumatic stress disorder through life experiences of character Salama in the context of Syrian war. The Syrian war that started after the Arab Spring altered the life of protagonist Salama in the worst ways possible as it did with other Syrian people. As a pharmacy student and beloved daughter of a loving family, Salama had a bright future ahead, but the miseries of war shattered her life into grief and chaos. She lost her entire family and the only thing that stayed with her was her fears, hallucinations and sense of guilt of not being able to do anything to save her people. The presence of Khawf shows her psychological trauma and mental deterioration. This research combined Ehlers's ideas on mental defeat (2000) and notable work done on hallucinations by Lyndon and Corlett (2020), offering deeper understanding of Salama's mental and emotional state.

Zahid et al. (2025) used geocriticism and memory studies to explore Katouh's novel. The article highlights the significance of lemon trees, presented in the novel as a

symbol of resilience and strong Syrian cultural roots. Lemon trees give a sense of home and belonging to Syrian people amidst war conditions and miseries. In the novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022), Katouh has portrayed Syria as a place which is unbearable to live but it is so beloved to Syrian people including Salama and Kenan that they are hesitant to leave it. Zahid has employed the concept of “Third space” to Katouh’s novel, stating that Syria is shown as a “liminal zone” in *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022), a place of in-between where pain remains constant whether one stays or leaves. The research also explained the repeated murmuring of Salama such as remembering the name of flowers and their benefits as a defence mechanism where she tries to cope with her traumas and grief through recurring patterns. Thus, the novel reaffirms that home remains a source of emotional connection, memory and stability even when it is ruined and destroyed. Latumeten (2024) employed ecocritical lens to explore the novel, focusing on the integral role of Syrian nature and environment throughout the narrative. This research emphasized the connection between human and nature by discussing their sufferings during war conditions, collectively. Nature and humans cannot be separated as the misery of one brings misery to the other. During wars and conflicts, humans suffer immeasurably and so does nature. Environmental collapse due to war is also a significant issue that needs to be addressed seriously. The article used a qualitative research approach to underscore the sufferings as well as resilience of nature that has been portrayed in Katouh’s novel in the form of Salama’s homeland Syria, Homs and lemon trees. It highlights the resilient and persistent presence of nature throughout the times of crisis and destruction in human history.

Exploring Katouh’s novel further, Shabbir et al. (2024) investigated the mental struggles of Salama portrayed in Katouh’s novel by using Herman’s theory of trauma and recovery. The study focused on the psychological consequences of war on people, specifically on young individuals like Salama. During war, the shortage of basic human facilities, loss of family and close relatives, and a state of constant fear are some disastrous realities that have the capability to disrupt the emotional and mental condition of any person easily. War times don’t only give traumas to people but also modify the psychologies of its survivors so that they can endure extreme pain. These coping mechanisms such as hallucinations and altered behaviors do not signify healing or recovery, instead they are merely human efforts to survive. Human’s exposure to prolonged wars and conflicts impact them psychologically and emotionally for an entire lifetime.

Nurhayati et al. (2025) provided a feminist perspective of Katouh's novel. The article stated that Salama's life experiences and her sufferings during war shows how she suffers because of war and she suffers because of her gender as well. The research is grounded in a theoretical framework created by intersecting two theories, given by Judith Herman and Bell Hooks. Salama's struggles are further burdened because of her gender limitations, societal pressures and moral responsibilities. Unlike the male characters of the novel, Salama's experience is different during war, she is suffering more emotionally, she is more sensitive towards children's sufferings in hospital, and she is more resilient throughout crisis, as women are in most cases. The study also claims that the story of brave Salama presents a powerful image of Arab women, challenging the western propaganda of passive Arab women that they have been spreading. This qualitative study highlighted how women suffer during times of war and crisis and how these difficult times become both a source of oppression and empowerment for them.

Machmuri et al. (2025) used the model of ideal romance, articulated by Janice Radway. The study claimed that Katouh has used Radway's model of romance to portray the romantic connection between Salama and Kenan. Radway's narrative has thirteen functions and Katouh's story has included all of them. Romance remains a relevant and constant topic of literature even when the stories are placed in war settings, showing the significance and adaptability of this genre. The study also explained how romantic relationships are greatly influenced and shaped by culture, society and space.

In relation to the psychological aspect of the novel, Najam and Gul (2025) conducted thematic analysis of Katouh's novel to explain the representation of trauma in the novel. The interconnection between trauma, memory and resilience had been noticed throughout the story, showing that Salama's hallucinations, fears, intrusive memories and guilt are all projections of her psychological trauma. The novel is significant as it is not only a portrayal of real sufferings of Syrian people but is also a representation of non-western narrative in young adult literature. The theories of classical trauma given by Caruth and Herman and postcolonial trauma given by Craps and Visser had been combined in this research to conduct a detailed analysis of Katouh's novel.

Rahmah and Panggabean (2025) explained through the characters of Katouh's novel that inner conflicts have great influence on social identity of people. A qualitative

research approach had been used to conduct this research, focusing on the six types of inner conflicts that have been shown in the novel. The inner conflict between ego and super ego is the most dominant throughout the narrative especially in the character of Salama. Thus, social identity is not a static and rigid entity but is greatly dependent on the cultural, personal and historical context. A person with more inner conflicts and psychological dilemmas has a more disrupted social identity and he/she may suffer isolation and social anxiety.

Nugrahani and Istiani (2025) provided a philosophical analysis of main characters in Katouh's novel. Both Kenan and Salama suffer through existential confusion. They want to stay in their homeland and do some good for their people, but they also want to leave Syria so that they and their loved ones may survive. This existential dilemma has been explored in the article by using the theoretical lens of Existentialism, given by Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre's concepts of "Mauvaise Foi" and radical freedom have been specifically taken to scrutinize the mental turmoils of Salama and Kenan. In order to stay in their homeland, they take help of "Mauvaise Foi" where they deceive themselves that staying is the only option and this portrays the denial of human rights and personal freedom of choice. Later in the story, they act responsibly and decide to leave Syria for their better future which shows the stage of radical freedom.

Fadhilah and Sumaryani (2025) in scholarly article offered a deeper exploration of the character of Salama to understand her trauma and pain. In the novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Katouh has portrayed how war can induce psychological trauma in individuals. The appearance of hallucinations in people's lives does not happen suddenly, it is the consequence of being under constant pressure, fear and pain. Salama's mental condition and her interactions with hallucination of Khawf and Layla highlights how war leads to mental and emotional breakdown of people. Freud's theory of the unconscious mind had been employed in this study to dive deep into the cognitive state of Salama.

In qualitative research, Nopriyanto (2024) explained that trauma is not an isolated concept. It is deeply intertwined with other major disciplines including literature, history, war, psychology and sociology. In Katouh's novel, the Syrian civil war turned the life of Syrian people upside down and many of them became the victim of trauma for a lifetime because of witnessing constant destruction and death. Trauma theory, given by Caruth has been used as theoretical grounding of this study, focusing on

the examination of protagonist's trauma. Living under constant conditions of fear, loss, death, violence and disaster can trigger depression and PTSD in people just like it did with Salama. The study emphasized the significance of literature because of its potential to address the critical problems of the world by telling tales rooted in reality.

Marantika and Litaay (2024) in research work described the causes, symptoms and results of PTSD by analyzing the character of Salama and her struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD theory was used to conduct this study, and it revealed that Salama's PTSD was triggered due to her mother's death in a bomb explosion. Prolonged exposure to dreadful incidents in her hometown, particularly hospital worsened the mental and psychological condition of Salama and ultimately fear, anxiety and constant nervousness became an integral part of her personality. War induced trauma and PTSD made Salama emotionally unstable and socially anxious. Extreme anxiety, intrusive thoughts, avoiding painful memories of the past and hypervigilance are the four main symptoms of PTSD that Salama exhibited.

Saltaji and Nuaimi (2016) highlighted the humanitarian crises faced by children of Syria for 6 years long armed conflicts in research. Nearly one million children in Syria lost their one or both parents during this period, leaving them alone without any proper caregiver and strong support systems. The struggles of these children did not end after the war as they continued to suffer from both physical hardships and psychological problems. Millions of Syrian children went through displacement where they faced further difficulties of shelter, food and child labour. The research emphasized that relocation and displacement does not resolve the problems of children as they become more prone to PTSD and trauma during the period of displacement. Proper therapies and psychological treatment of these children should be arranged by organizations and governments to help these children reclaim their life. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines and other international laws should be implemented on these children by giving them special care and support. The study urges authoritarian structures and common people to help Syrian orphans so that they can be mentally sustainable again.

In comprehensive research, Mowafi and Leaning (2018) examined the death rate of civilians during the Syrian civil war Documenting deaths in the Syrian war. During the time span of 2011-2016, more than a million conflict-related deaths have been reported, according to the findings of the Violations Documentation Center. A large

number of women and children were killed brutally in sniper attacks, aerial bombing and artillery shelling. War has seen a transition from shooting in history to shelling in modern times, resulting in a high rate of civilian deaths. Studies reveal that 97% victims of explosive bombings were innocent civilians and according to evidential reports, at least two thousand children were killed due to aerial bombardment in Syria. These statistics raise concerns about the protection of innocent lives during conflicts, calling for the intervention of international humanitarian institutions.

Rizkalla et al. (2020) demonstrated the effect of war and displacement on children in article. Researchers interviewed 23 mothers of displaced Syrian refugee children and findings revealed that the children faced unsafe conditions during displacement. They suffered from domestic violence, poverty, lack of proper access to education and healthcare facilities and child labour. These children also went through family problems where they are often abused and beaten due to war intergenerational trauma. This qualitative study highlighted the need to address familial issues of war affected children alongside individual identity crises.

Harphoush et al. (2025) scrutinized the health condition of Syrian children throughout the period of 2012 to 2024. Thirty evidence-based studies based on surveys, interviews and medical records were analysed critically, while focusing particularly on internally displaced children. The study pointed out that the state-controlled areas of Syria had official health data while the areas which were not under the control of government relied upon the information provided by NGOs and humanitarian institutions, showcasing the variation and suspected credibility of documents. The health condition could be far more deteriorated than it had been documented. The researchers also noted that the information provided is very limited and imbalanced and marginalization of children particularly those internally displaced in the realm of research paradigm is also evident.

Meiqari et al. (2018) investigated the negative influence of Syrian civil war on children in scholarly contribution. Medical information was taken from the humanitarian activities of “Médecins Sans Frontières” in northern cities of Syria; Kobane and Tal-Abyad. Based on the medical data during the time period of 2013-2016, it was noticed that a large number of Syrian children were inflicted with contagious diseases and pathogenic illness. Children suffering from grave diseases like Thalassemia went through great difficulties because of the disruption of routine

healthcare and lack of proper treatment. Despite the efforts of localized and international humanitarian foundations, the medical reports indicated a major decline in the health status of Syrian children.

Guha-Sapir et al. (2018) discussed the mass killing of Syrian people from 2011-2016 due to violent armed conflicts. According to verified information provided by "Violation Documentation Center", 143,630 people were killed among those 101,4539 (70%) were innocent civilians, including women and children. 97% of people who became victims of explosive bombings were also turned out to be civilians. Cahue (2018) scrutinized the impact of war on Syrian's children across social, educational, personal and psychological domains. The crisis in Syria adversely affected the educational system for students, disrupting the proper functioning of schools. The quality and accessibility of education have declined critically due to mass killing, destruction of educational infrastructure and prevalence of poverty.

In relation to mass killing of children, Kahraman et al. (2019) in analytical research pointed out how Syrian children aged between 0-18 were subjected to severe injuries and bodily damages during Syrian civil war. These children went through painful surgical procedures in Turkey between 2011 and 2016. The results concluded that children suffered heavily during war and their injuries were highly critical. Complicated surgeries had to be performed on them so that they could survive. 41% of children had injuries on neck and head sites and 43.4% of children had burn wounds. In the "Plastic and aesthetic department of Hatay" located in Turkey, 242 surgeries were performed and the average stay of children in hospital expanded over 17 days. The exploratory research claimed that children suffer from more critical and severe injuries than adults during war, revealing the detrimental consequences of war on children belonging to areas experiencing armed conflicts.

Previously, the novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Katouh has been explored through various perspectives including psychoanalytic theory, nationalist theory, ecocritical theory and war trauma theories, but there remains a gap in the examination of war-torn childhood of young victims portrayed in the novel. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring the sufferings of children in war, using Agamben's theory of bare life.

Methodology

❖ Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the theory of 'bare life' introduced by Italian philosopher Agamben in his distinguished book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. The original Italian version of Agamben's book was published in 1995 and later in 1998, the English translated version of this exceptional book was published by Roazen (Agamben, 1998). Agamben is considered as one of the most influential philosophers and political thinkers of the 21st century. His works and thoughts are deeply influenced by ancient laws, Christian theologies, Foucault's concepts and ideas introduced by Benjamin and Aristotle. He taught as professor in various global institutions including University of Verona and New York university. He strongly critiqued the atrocities done by the US government on Guantanamo prisoners during "war on terror". He recorded his protest through his writings and registered his disapproval against the US government's unjust activities after the incident of September 9, 2011. Agamben's distinguished book *Homo Sacer* elaborates his concerns about war victims, refugees and camp prisoners comprehensively. Agamben developed his theory of bare life by drawing influence from Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Schmitt's idea of the state of exception and ancient Roman law regarding homo sacer.

• Agamben's concept of Bare life and Homo Sacer

According to the *Agambenian* concept, a bare life is that human life which is stripped of its social, moral, political and legal rights. The humans who come under the category of bare life can be killed without any accountability (Festus, 1913). Their existence is mere biological survival, and they belong to the state of exclusion, where no laws apply. In Roman ancient law, homo sacer used to be that insignificant person excluded from the society, who could be killed by anyone, yet was not worthy enough to be sacrificed (Antonello, 2019; Omari, 2024). *Homo Sacer* is the protagonist of Agamben's book. As Agamben mentioned in his book:

"The fundamental categorial pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life I political existence, zoe/ bios, exclusion/inclusion. The protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life of homo sacer (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not sacrificed. An obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is

included in the juridical order solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, of its capacity to be killed)" (Agamben, 1998).

Homo sacer therefore has a connection of "ban" with hegemonic authorities and according to Agamben 'he who has been banned is considered to be abandoned by law'. Roman law first introduced the idea of homo sacer, "Western politics" strengthened the enforcement of this law, and the authoritarian powers of today are still implementing it to deny marginalized people the right of living a dignified and decent life. Sovereign powers weaponize the judicial system to exclude homo sacer from any legal protection by labeling them as bandits, barbaric and suspected terrorists. Agamben claimed in his book that a bandit knows that no life is more influenced by politics than his because he is now abandoned by law and anyone who kills him will not be held accountable. Agamben's book states:

"The sacred man is the one whom the people have judged on account of a crime. It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide; in the first tribunitian law, in fact, it is noted that "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide." This is why it is customary for a bad or impure man to be called sacred" (Agamben, 1998).

The prisoners of Guantanamo Bay detention camp regulated by the US also became victims of the manipulation and exploitation of the legal system by the state authorities. They labeled their own chosen people as terrorists mainly targeting Muslims to gain their own political interests, calling it the "war on terror". Agamben claimed in his book that the situation and circumstances of people living in concentration camps built by Nazi Germany and suspected prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay detention camp are corresponding. Just like Nazi doctors used Jews as experimental subjects, the United States of America and many other states have been conducting medical experiments on prisoners by forcing or deceiving them. A report of the 1920s revealed that "800 prisoners held in US prison were deliberately infected with malaria" to conduct experiments on them and to come up with effective cures (Agamben, 1998).

Government authorities declare emergencies in states to suspend law and order for a determined period of time. War situations are also created so that those atrocities can be executed which are not permitted in normal times (Schmitt, 2003). Agamben used a symbol of veil in his book to elaborate this matter. According to him, "The

statue of freedom and justice are veiled for an inferred period of time during war” (Agamben, 1998). During the colonial rule in South Africa and Zimbabwe, people were forced to live as bare life (zoe), surviving under the conditions of marginalization and uncertainty (Mavengano and Nkamta, 2024). All people living in the state of war or emergency are labeled as “Homo sacer” by Agamben. According to Roman ancient law, he is the “sacred man” but his sacredness is highly paradoxical. He is outside the protection of any divine or human law; “anyone can kill him with impunity”, but he is not even worthy of religious sacrifice. His life is full of pain, rejection and uncertainty, just like people surviving in war-affected regions. Agamben asserted that sovereign powers create sacred lives so that they can impose a “ban” on them from legal and political safety afterwards. He stated:

“What is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: homo sacer. The life caught in the sovereign ban is the life that is originally sacred, that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed and, in this sense, the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty” (Agamben, 1998).

Agamben argued that ruling authorities exclude certain people from the political sphere to maintain their control over common people. In ancient Rome, Roman rulers created the law of homo sacer and zone of indistinction to gain absolute authority over people for their entire lifetime. Agamben stated in his book that “Augustus assumed the status of sacrosanctus (an extremely holy and sacred person who can’t be violated and criticized) so that he could remain in power for his entire lifetime” (Agamben, 1998). While supreme rulers remain untouchable, common people of their choice become mere biological beings who can be killed and treated as non-humans without any accountability. The condition of people living bare life is in-between; they can be killed but can’t be sacrificed, the law exists but for them it is suspended. Sovereign powers create two distinguished groups in society; one is protected and the other is non-guarded and vulnerable. This is how the political order in the world operates; by creating a state of exclusion for specific marginalized groups and individuals. Agamben in his distinguished book *State of Exception*, stated that situations of emergencies and wars are created by sovereign powers so that governments can implement the principle of bare life on determined people for as long as they want (Agamben, 2005). War conditions make it convenient for global powers to dominate people’s lives because they can easily kill people on a massive scale and later mask their war crimes by labelling them as mass casualties.

Hence, the theory of bare life proposed by Agamben has been used in this study to scrutinize the bare life of war affected children as portrayed in Katouh's novel *As Long as Lemon Trees Grow* (2022). The study explains how power structures deliberately push individuals into a zone of exception, where they are stripped of legal protection and reduced to bare life. Within this space, human beings can be exposed to death without juridical consequence. The research has further demonstrated how children, as the most vulnerable group, become primary victims of this sovereign violence. The research also emphasizes the significant role of literature in showcasing the major global crisis, enhancing the understanding of contemporary real world issues.

❖ Research Methodology

The research has employed a qualitative research approach, specifically close reading method to examine the representation of war-affected childhood in Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022). This approach has enabled an in-depth exploration of how war deprives children of their fundamental rights and opportunities for normal development, reducing them to vulnerable victims of political and social instability. The study has used the novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* by Katouh and Agamben's book *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* as primary sources of data. The secondary source of this study were research articles and scholarly works written on suffering of war affected children, including the official reports of global media and platforms like UN. By incorporating evidence from international reliable reports, the research critically analyzed the multifaceted challenges children face during wars, and it also stresses the ethical responsibility of healthcare professionals, educators, and policymakers to safeguard children's welfare.

Results and Discussion

During times of conflict and hostilities, children suffer the most miseries despite being the least responsible for any conflicted scenario. Fear and anxiety become an inseparable part of their souls and their lives become a living example of what Agamben calls a bare life, turning them into victims of mental trauma (Cloitre et al., 2013; Vander and Brown, 2025). Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* delves deep into the brutal realities of war and how the horrors of war steal away every ounce of happiness from the lives of children. The novel is set during the

Syrian civil war which according to UNHCR displaced 5.6 million people externally and over 6.2 million internally. This situation of war and displacement places children under high risk of mental and physical suffering (Peltonen, 2025).

❖ **Bare Life of Children Portrayed in Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow***

In her novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Katouh has masterfully highlighted the hardships and miseries of war-torn children. The devastating conditions and violent environment that has been presented in the novel align with the real-world war situations. War kills children and it breaks their body and soul into fragments. The psychological impact of terror incidents on children's mental health has been displayed in Katouh's novel in a detailed manner.

• **The Normalization of Death: Children as Homo Sacer in War Zones**

Katouh has portrayed the sufferings of children during war in her debut novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* in a detailed manner. The novel describes the atrocities done on innocent civilians and children of Syria during the Syrian civil war that continued for 14 years (Ahamed, 2022). The characters are fictitious but the stories and pain behind them have real context. Through the painful journey of protagonist Salama, Katouh has masterfully explored the devastating conditions of Homs and its civilians, particularly children during the civil war. The Syrian city became a state of exception where no life was considered worthy and where no one was under the protection of any national or international legal human rights, affecting millions of individuals including children (Ahmed and Nashwan, 2022; Karovska and Dovichinski, 2024; Keseljevic and Spruk, 2024). Throughout the story, children are being killed mercilessly either in bombing, shrapnel strikes, sniper attacks or chemical attacks (Akhtar and Nageen, 2019). Their lives have become deprived of any political value, what Agamben calls a bare life, resulting in a major humanitarian crisis of human history (Gucturk, 2014). No matter how much effort Salama put in order to save her people, death always came to them mercilessly, particularly the children of Syria. She asserted:

“And no matter how much I try to beat death, he still wins. I close five pairs of eyes today. Three children, one young woman, and one young man. Their faces smeared

with blood, their mouths hanging open, an expression of betrayal forever etched on their faces” (Katouh, 2022).

The protagonist of the novel Salama is merely an 18-year-old young girl who dreamed of having a bright future in her life. She had a lively family and was a student of Pharmacy before the war started. The beginning of armed conflicts and cruelties in Salama's homeland killed her dreams alongside her entire family. Seeing the nonavailability of enough medical assistance in the neighbourhood, she started working at a hospital as a doctor in order to help her people. Although she was herself going through the worst kind of hallucinations, anxiety and psychological problems, she worked tirelessly to protect as many lives as she could. What affected Salama most during her journey as a doctor in Dr Ziad's hospital was the crying and screaming of countless children she witnessed there (Shabbir et al., 2024). Salama's encounter with various children in hospital describes how children become the most targeted group under conditions of war. In the start of the narrative, Katouh has shown the bombing at Al-Ghouta which resulted in the killing of 20 innocent people including children (Jabbour et al, 2018). Salama explained:

“But no matter how many times I see it, no amount of warning can prepare me for the sight of a human struggling for breath. This is not normal, and it never will be. “Salama, get to the children first,” Dr. Ziad says sharply” (Katouh, 2022).

It implies that mostly children were among the victims of bombing, resulting in the death of countless child's casualties in war. Children have been turned into mere biological beings who can be killed easily without any fear of accountability. Agamben's notion of homo sacer is well suited to the children of Syria who struggled to survive each day until they were killed with impunity. The normalization of unlawful killing of children under war conditions has been described by Katouh in these lines: “I lose count of how many I can't save. The next bodies my hands touch is dead. No one's alive. Bodies upon bodies surround me, and I stand in the center” (Katouh, 2022).

The heartbreaking story of six-year-old Ahmed shared by Katouh presents the unbearable sufferings and griefs of war-affected children. He became seriously injured after his elementary school was hit by a shrapnel strike. The bombing of school is a devastating catastrophe that Katouh has illustrated in her novel to display the real events that happen with children belonging to war-ravaged areas. They are

killed without any shame and consideration of human rights just like ‘Homo Sacer’. Unlike other children Ahmed was not bleeding but he had suffered from internal bleeding in brain after bombardment in his school. Due to the unavailability of any neurosurgeon and medical facilities that could treat him, he died silently taking with him his pains he endured in such a short lifetime due to war. The last words Ahmed spoke during his painful helpless death were tragic and painful. He said to Salama: “Auntie, don’t cry. When I go to Heaven, I’ll tell God everything” (Katouh, 2022). Salama portrayed the harrowing conditions in which children came to the hospital after being hit by bombs, strikes and bullets. She stated:

“I see a child crying for his mother, who is nowhere to be seen. I see a tight-lipped boy no older than ten, face as white as a sheet, with a large slice of metal stuck in his right arm. I see little girls with legs twisted into unnatural positions. Their eyes carry the full meaning of what’s about to happen. Amputation. I wish we were being broadcast live on every channel and smartphone in the world so everyone could see what they’re allowing to happen to children” (Katouh, 2022).

Children died during war like it was a normal thing to happen and the world went on with their normal lives, portraying the failure of the international community. (Orcutt et al., 2019; Sarkin and Capazorio, 2022) After becoming seriously injured, when they were used to being brought in hospitals as Salama has shared, there was never enough medicine, medical facilities and qualified doctors present in clinics to treat those children. Children didn’t only die due to direct killing, they also died due to the tragic condition of shortage of basically everything that they needed as humans (Coutts et al., 2013; Taleb et al., 2015). As Agamben stated in his book *Homo Sacer* that those who live in a state of exception created by sovereign powers, live in misery, pain, abandonment and devastation (Agamben, 1998). From the beginning to the end, the brutal killing of children did not stop in the story just like it happens in reality (Smith, 2019). Before leaving Syria, Salama closed the eyes of countless children and pregnant women. The victims of sniper attacks according to Salama mostly used to be innocent children and they died most of the time after being hit in sensitive spots like stomach, brain and heart. Those who survived became amputated for their lifetime, resulting in a life of misery and pain (Arafat et al., 2017). Dr Ziad shared with Salama how women and children were murdered brutally by militants in Karam-el-Zeitoun. The novel narrates:

“Did you hear what happened yesterday in Karam-el-Zeitoun?” His voice is hushed, a strangle of pain. “Women and children with slit throats. None left alive. Not a single gunshot. The children... they were” He loses his composure once more, his eyes glistening, and mine burn with tears. “They were hit with blunt objects, and one girl was severely mutilated. The neighborhoods beside them heard the screams” (Katouh, 2022).

Salama's hospital which was one of very few working medical corners in Homs, treating victims of air strikes and sniper attacks was also bombed and completely destroyed by the controlling regime just like it happened in reality (Garcia et al., 2020; Jabbour and Fardousi, 2022). Salama observed while evacuating from hospital a few minutes before bombing that many of the patients were elderly and children with broken limbs and amputated bodies who couldn't get out to avoid the risk of being bombed. Many babies in incubators were killed in that bombing. Salama felt the pain of every Syrian child, and she realized how the defenceless, orphaned children must have suffered when they were tortured and killed by the hands of militants. When the state-controlled army attacked the hospital, the first thing they did after entering into the hospital was killing a little girl, elaborating how the sovereign powers and war mongers treat children during war. They hurt them first intentionally in order to hurt the most vulnerable and defenceless group of population first. Salama states:

“The hospital doors burst open and five soldiers walk in. Their green military uniforms reek of murder. One takes out a handgun and shoots a patient execution style. A little girl with an eyepatch and two mismatched hair ties. We stare as the little girl slumps over, a pool of blood swallowing her small body, staining her short black hair” (Katouh, 2022).

Katouh has also portrayed the use of chemical attacks by militants against civilians and children which also happened in the real civil war of Syria, particularly the Ghouta chemical attack incident 2013 gained global attention (Girdhar, 2017; Hart and Trapp, 2018). Dr Ziad explained to Salama how an attack worse than missiles and bullets was hovering over people of Homs and it turned out later that the regime ordered the use of dangerous chemical Sarin on innocent civilians of Syria (Horner, 2013). Salama stated that most of the victims who came to hospital after the chemical attack were little children and young teenagers and had white foams coming out of their mouths. The attackers did not only use Sarin, but they also used Chlorine on

women and children, clearly violating the Geneva conventions and international laws but Salama wondered what cruelties they have been doing to people of Syria were actually not illegal. A swarm of victims came, and doctors were helpless as they were never trained to treat chemically attacked patients.

Despite trying every possible thing, they could think of, the victims died within minutes in front of their eyes. The story narrates: "A scream rips the air, and I turn around, shocked. I've never heard a scream like that in my life. The doors open to a horde of victims swarming in, but I don't see any injuries. Teenagers with their heads stretched back, arms and legs shaking uncontrollably. Little children with foam at their mouths, looking up, trying to make sense of what's happening to them.

"Chemical attack," I hear Dr. Ziad say. "They've finally used sarin" (Katouh, 2022). Salama's homeland Homs was under the control of the Free Syrian Army who revolted against the totalitarian regime of Bashar-al-Assad (Hinnebusch, 2012; Parker, 2018). Due to this reason, the third largest city of Syria, Homs became a particular state of exception where the government and military treated people like bare lives as Homs was 'known as the capital of revolution' (Azzouz, 2019).

Millions of people including children were killed and countless were seriously injured during the long Syrian civil war (Celikel et al., 2015; Littell, 2015; McIntyre, 2020). The novel showed how Salama closed the eyes of a five-year-old girl who was killed after being the victim of sniper attack. Salama alongside Kenan joined the revolutionary protest and sang rebel song "How Sweet Is Freedom", written by famous Syrian courageous singer Ibrahim Qashoush (Issa, 2018). During the rally, they heard screaming and crying of children and realized the military was bombing civilian homes and mothers were wailing for their children who were trapped under the rubble of destroyed homes and buildings. The people and children of Homs were outside any legal or political protection as Agamben stated that Homo sacer lives a bare life, stripped of all legal, social or basic humanitarian shelter.

- **Critical Physical Injuries: Children as Primary Victims of Sniper Attacks**

In Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (Katouh, 2022), children have been presented as the most vulnerable part of the population. During the conditions of armed conflicts and wars, children are the one most affected both physically and

psychologically (Celikel et al., 2014; Celikkaya et al., 2020). Throughout the journey of Salama as a doctor, she observed the sufferings and devastation of children belonging to her homeland Homs. She took the bullets out of their stomachs, and it gave her a lifetime emotional trauma. Salama shared she does not even remember the counting of children she has witnessed dead after they were bombed or killed. Children's elementary schools were bombed killing hundreds of children while they were just trying to study. Many pregnant women including Salama's sister-in-law and best friend Layla died with their unborn children after being attacked by snipers. The targets that attackers intentionally set to kill were mostly children and women, exposing the sick criminal mentality of sovereign powers (Nyirubugara, 2018). They try to control life by dominating it through political force, as asserted by Foucault in 'Biopolitics'. The story narrates how a five-year-old girl died after she was shot in heart in a sniper attack. Salama shared the miserable state of little sniper victims, stating that:

"Two little girls lay motionless before me, bullet holes ripped through their throats. The girls look about seven, clothes torn, knees scraped. The snipers' victims are always the innocents who can't fight back. Children, the elderly, pregnant women. The Free Syrian Army informed Dr. Ziad that, early on, the military would target them for sport" (Katouh, 2022).

Dr Ziad shared with Salama that the militants and attackers deliberately attack defenseless people, mainly innocent children as it amuses their evil dark souls (Kannabiran, 2026). In contemporary times, this intentional targeted killing of children is most evident in Gaza (Schluter et al., 2025; Zahran and Abu-Sittah, 2025). Katouh has displayed how people in war zones are always afraid that they or their loved ones will become victims of sniper attacks anytime and any day. A bullet will come out of nowhere randomly and there will be nothing left of them. Kenan's nine-year-old little sister Lama became the victim of bombing and a shrapnel struck inside her stomach. Salama had to perform an open surgery on her stomach to take out the shrapnel without using any anesthesia as it was not available even in hospitals. The little girl suffered with unbearable pain as a consequence of living in a warzone; a war she did not have any idea about. Salama wondered how and when the course of her life and of Syrian children altered in such destructive ways. Salama narrated: "Our future is bleak. A half-destroyed apartment, with his little sister fighting for her life. Our future has been ripped from our hands" (Katouh, 2022).

Children were supposed to play and study freely while living happily with their families, but they experienced pain, bombings, bullets and chemical attacks; a profoundly tragic destiny for children of war. Salama narrated: “I can’t stand seeing another broken child. I couldn’t save a little boy. I couldn’t. Everyone is dying. Nothing I do works. I feel like I am screaming into an abyss that just swallows everything up” (Katouh, 2022). Salama’s mother died in a bombing and her pregnant friend Layla in a sniper attack, leaving an everlasting scar on Salama’s soul. Pregnant Layla was shot in the head and uterus and both she and her child died due to that incident. Three other women and a child were also among the dead people with Layla, depicting the vulnerability of women and children during war. Salama elaborated the devastating consequences of a single sniper attack in these words:

“Sometimes the shock of seeing bloodied bodies, especially the children shot by snipers, is enough to make me break down. I don’t tell him about the many times that has happened. The doors burst open and an avalanche of people swarms in, blood soaking their clothes and dripping to the floor. Limp bodies are being carried in rescuers’ arms. I know they’re victims from a sniper attack when I see no dismembered limbs but blood fountaining out. And they’re all children” (Katouh, 2022).

After the critical injury of Kenan’s sister Lama, Katouh has portrayed that Am’s daughter Samar also became a victim of sniper attack. Her neck was severely injured, and blood was coming out of it in a rush. This depiction of sniper victims in every home of Homs has a significant meaning, showing that no one was excluded from the destruction and pain while living in war-torn Syria. Children in every second home were critically injured after becoming sniper victims. The repetitive talk about fear of having a sniper around between Kenan and Salama and the frequent incidents of children being sniper victims explains that alongside bombing, sniper attacks were the cause of most killings and injuries in Homs. Describing one incident of sniper attack, Salama stated that despite her tireless efforts to save people, death always came for them. She closed the eyes of five people and three among them were children. The victims either dead or injured are mostly shown as children in Katouh’s novel, asserting that children suffer the most in times of war (Pearn, 2003). Children lose their limbs, becoming amputated for their lifetime after being victims of bombing, strikes and bullets, as Katouh has shown in the story repeatedly. The war they didn’t start and have no idea about dictates their lives and forces them to live a reality they can’t even comprehend (Gribble, 2010). Salama showed concern about the sufferings of babies living in Homs, stating that:

"You see the military beating people up in the streets, dragging them away, and murdering them, and you see your kid siblings trying to warm themselves at night, and you think it can't get any worse. But this, Salama, this is where hope dies. The fact they don't know what's going on because, how could they? They're babies. They're just babies. I remember Ahmad, the way his body was hollowed out like a shell. His labored breaths and the vast calm in his eyes as he accepted death. He was also just a baby" (Katouh, 2022).

Salama was informed by Dr. Ziad that in the incident of Karam-el-Zeitoun, murdered women and children were found with slit throats. One girl lost a limb after being hit by a sharp blunt instrument. Incidents of children torture has also been portrayed by Katouh in her distinguishing novel to illustrate the evil ways which sovereign powers and their followers use to harm mere children. Examining the little victims of elementary school bombing, Salama described that a 9 to 10-year-old boy was hit by shrapnel in his arm and was suffering from immense pain. Six-year-old orphaned Ahmed died after brain internal bleeding and many little girls had disfigured limbs. Dr Ziad also shared with Salama that the intestines of little girls were all over the floor after they became victims of bombardment. A six year old injured boy was also shown who was critically injured after being shot in the head. Salama explained the devastating condition of Homs using these lines: "In the last six months, I have participated in more surgeries that I can count and closed more eyes than I ever thought I would. This wasn't supposed to be my life" (Katouh, 2022). Arbitrary use of gunfire, aggression and violence on children and civilians has been reported by Katouh in her novel to demonstrate the real sufferings of Syrian children during civil war 2011-2024.

- **Psychological Sufferings of War-affected Children as portrayed in Katouh's novel**

In the novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*, Katouh has delved deep into the devastating consequences of war on the psychology of children as well as young individuals. The protagonist of the novel Salama suffered from intense anxiety, depression, hallucinations and she always felt afraid that something worse was going to happen. At a young teenage age, she lost her entire family as the result of war which left her mentally and emotionally unstable. After witnessing the death of her mother in a bombing, she started seeing the hallucination of Khawf on a daily basis who made sure that she was always in pain and agony. Salama always felt guilty

about the dying people in her hospital as if it was her fault. She had serious symptoms of post-stress psychological disorder and the exposure to miseries on a daily basis made it worse, until she decided to leave war-torn Syria to rehabilitate (Qaiser et al., 2026). Salama shared with Kenan:

“Khawf. He’s been in my life since Mama died. I fell pretty hard on my head that day and I don’t know, maybe a head injury coupled with my PTSD has affected the relationship between my brain’s frontal lobe and sensory cortex” (Katouh, 2022).

The younger brother of Kenan, Yusuf also became a victim of trauma and anxiety after the death of his parents. At only thirteen years of age, he saw the brutal killing of his parents with his own eyes and the memories of that terror incident never left him. He became mute and started having problems with communication and social skills. Before the experience of horror and war, Yusuf was a lively and playful boy, but war didn’t only make him weak and frail physically, it impacted his psychology in the gravest manner. Kenan tried to support and protect his siblings from all problems like his parents would, but he was unable to make Yusuf active again. He said to Salama: *“Yusuf hasn’t even spoken since my parents died, and he flinches at the slightest sound”* (Katouh, 2022). The warmth and love of parents were not available for Lama and Yusuf when they needed it the most because war separated them. The loss of parents, lack of any reliable guardianship and repeated observation of terror impact the psychology and cognitive abilities of individuals badly (Joshi and Odonnell, 2003; Vahidniya et al., 2024). Children are the most vulnerable in this aspect as they are the most innocent.

Six-year-old Lama, the younger sister of Kenan also transformed from a cheerful and energetic child to a serious and reserved girl. When she became the victim of a shrapnel strike and she had a shrapnel piece inside her stomach, she remained strong and acted like a mature girl because she knew under what conditions of destruction she was living. Salama had to perform surgery on Lama without any anesthesia and Lama endured it all with strength and quietness. The pain and misery that children go through after being exposed to violence, armed conflicts and war is beyond comprehensible. Six-year-old Ahmed also portrayed in his last minutes of life how he has suffered psychologically during war. Katouh stated: *“Am I going to die?”* he asks, and I see no fear. Do all six-year-olds know what death is? Or is it only children of war?” (Katouh, 2022). The mental and emotional condition of all people, specifically children, become deeply affected and altered during and post war

conditions (Kanan and Leao, 2024). Even after leaving the war-torn regions, the refugees and displaced people of Syria including children went through immeasurable challenges and they had to suffer from psychological problems like PTSD and anxiety for a long period of time (Javanbakht et al., 2018; Peltonen et al., 2023).

- **Maternity ward in Homs and the plights of infants in Syria**

The maternity ward in Dr. Ziad's hospital is a clear depiction of how war and crisis create a state of exception for common people and innocent children. Homs became a region surrounded with violence, conflicts and terror incidents. The pregnant women and newborn babies also become bare lives who couldn't afford to have a politically and legally protected life. While giving a detailed tour of hospitals and sharing patient's problems with Kenan, Salama showed him maternity ward of the hospital where pregnant women used to go for delivery and most of the time, doctors had to perform operation without using any pain-relieving medicine and anesthesia as the stock was always limited which also happened in real Syrian war context (Terkawi et al., 2019). Salama explained that most women die during the process of delivery because of the lack of basic nutrition and facilities they need. This situation is far worse when the mother dies and the baby gets to live as a motherless child has nowhere to go for love and kindness. Salama elaborated:

"This is where the pregnant women stay. We can't use any sedatives on them because we wouldn't have enough for surgeries. We've lost—some didn't make it. The worst is when the mother dies but the baby lives" (Katouh, 2022).

The war conditions are extremely challenging for pregnant women and their unborn child. The fundamental nutrition, care and support that they need during this sensitive period is mostly not available (Hamod et al., 2016; Saleem et al., 2025). Instead of relaxing in a peaceful environment, pregnant women are exposed to violence, anxiety, pain and constant fear that something will happen to them and their children. In many cases, their husbands are also killed, and they suffer from severe depression and loneliness alongside the lack of adequate food and medicine during pregnancy, risking the life of both mother and baby (Osman et al., 2025). Salama's pregnant sister-in-law, Layla went through immense distress and depression when she lost her husband while she was pregnant. The medicine was scarce so Salama had to steal two boxes of Panadol from the hospital so that she

could provide some sort of relief to her sister-in-law. Layla didn't have proper food with enough nutrition during her pregnancy which didn't only make her weak but also affected the health of her children.

The unborn children who belong to war-torn regions suffer from pain and misery even before they open their eyes into the real world. Salama explained: "Now that Layla is in her third trimester, Baby Salama's brain and neuron development are in full effect. Baby Salama wouldn't survive a harsh winter in Homs" (Katouh, 2022). The murder of Layla and her unborn child portray how cruel war can be for women and children. Salama said: "She was walking back from the supermarket when a military sniper's bullet went through her head. And the other through her uterus" (Katouh, 2022). A merciless bullet from a sniper killed Layla and her child. The amount of such brutal killings is countless in war settings which depicts how children are not safe even in their mother's wombs when they are living on land of conflicts and terror.

Salama explained to Kenan that the new born babies are too weak and frail that the hospital has to put them in incubators so that they can survive. Kenan showed disappointment over humanity when he saw the condition of babies and wondered how the life of babies in Homs is so different from the rest of the world. He said to Salama: "No one deserves this. Here babies are starving, while in cities like Damascus people are throwing away their leftover lunch because they're full" (Katouh, 2022). Salama also explained that if a mother dies during delivery, babies are given to close relatives if there are any left alive. The babies who have no one for their guardianship are destined to die as there is no one to take care of them. She said to Kenan: "The babies are there. They're in incubators? I don't like coming here. Seeing them so small and defenseless, it's too much. The lucky ones have family. The others either stay here until an orphanage can take them" I shudder. "I don't want to bury babies" (Katouh, 2022).

When the hospital was bombed by the Syrian military, the babies who were in incubators died in large numbers. Dr. Ziad, Salama and other doctors tried to evacuate as many babies as they could but due to the sudden attack, they had limited time and they could save only a few. After the building collapsed due to bombing, Salama heard the screaming of those children and people who were still trapped inside. Dr. Ziad had two babies in his hands who he managed to save but after coming out of the incubator, their hearts stopped beating. Katouh narrated: "The

rest are still inside. They killed babies" (Katouh, 2022). The dehumanization of infants and new born babies demonstrates how sovereign powers reduced the life of chosen people to bare life. They live miserably as if their life has no worth and anyone can kill them at any time without the fear of accountability. The bare lives of innocent children including the unborn and new born babies have been portrayed in an elaborated and deep manner by Katouh in her heartbreaking novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. Collective efforts are needed from political, humanitarian, legal and social grounds to guarantee the restriction of armed conflicts in the world. Children's security and wellbeing can only be guaranteed in a world where wars do not exist.

Conclusion

This study examined the portrayal of war-torn childhood in Katouh's novel *As long as the Lemon Trees Grow*. After close reading and thoughtful examination of Katouh's novel, the study indicates that Katouh has comprehensively mentioned the brutal realities of war and its adverse consequences on innocent children. Children belonging to war torn regions suffer from physical injuries, mass killing, destruction, loss of family and restricted access to basic human needs like medicine, food and clean water. The long exposure to traumatic incidents and violence has detrimental effects on cognitive health and psychology of children, resulting in the growing problem of PTSD, anxiety, depression and trauma in war affected children. During the Syrian civil war, thousands of children died in bombing, shrapnel strikes and sniper attacks. They lost access to education, healthcare and proper basic facilities. The direct experience of horror and conflict turned the lively children of Syria into traumatic individuals. A large number of children had to face displacement crises which worsened their mental condition. The illustration of children's miseries and challenges in Katouh's novel closely relates to the real effects of war on children.

After detailed analysis of surveys, research papers and international reports from scholars, UN and UNICEF, this research concludes that war with all its inhumane atrocities affect the innocent children the most in all spheres of life. They suffer from infectious diseases, deaths, amputation, malnutrition and starvation. War situations cause an irreparable loss to innocent children by stealing their parents, relatives, happiness and childhood from them. War robs the precious time of childhood from their life. They become familiar with loss, trauma and despair in those years of their life where they should have been enjoying alongside their age fellows in the

environment of peace. The long-term exposure to horrifying incidents and terror activities leave a lasting impact on the psychology of affected children. The long-lasting consequences of war on the psychology of children are far more harmful and devastating. Several researchers reported that children who encountered war incidents in their life showed clear symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. It is evident from the destruction of Syria and Gaza that the UN, UNSC and international forums of justice have failed miserably in providing legal protection to the children of affected regions. The constant condemnations from people and governments cannot help until they sincerely put some effort into providing protection to affected children. The complicity with cruel states in killing of children must end so that the evil regimes can be isolated globally. Every war starts with the interests of political powers and ends with thousands of dead, injured and traumatized children. Restriction of armed conflicts and wars is essential in order to protect children from facing such extreme adversities which they should never experience. Formal and informal international community must play their part in standing against those who willingly kill children for their benefits and evil goals.

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Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	20-Jan-2026
<i>Revised</i>	26-Mar-2026
<i>Accepted</i>	27-Mar-2026
<i>Published</i>	30-Mar-2026

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- **All Authors Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions, Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

- **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

- **Funding Sources:** NIL

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