Chapter 12

Migration and Alienation:
“When and Where Have I Changed?”
– An Analysis through Turkey–Austrian Migration Film

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse how immigrants become estranged with each other and their own culture together with migration. The sampling of this study consists of film Nachtreise/Night Traveling, 2002 by Kenan Kılıç. This fictional 63 min.-film focuses on a social reality which is named as alienation. This film shows the immigrants’ situation and hopelessness as distinct from the other films (by Umut Dağ and Hüseyin Tabak). The film by Kenan Kılıç presents immigrants’ alienation in their post-migration processes and emphasizes the phenomenon of not belonging to their own culture. The film departs from a binary opposition and makes a reference on one hand to people’s alienation and their relations, and consequently to the power, center-periphery relations while referring to social problems such as immigration, moving up into a higher class, financial troubles and unemployment on the other hand. It is clearly from this research that as a result of migration, consumerism, technology and the culture generated by a new society, immigrants become estranged with each other and the society.

INTRODUCTION

Eleven Kinds of Loneliness 1 is a collection of short stories written by Richard Yates from 1951 to 1961. Though Richard Yates’s first collection of short stories, Eleven Kinds of Loneliness, is hard to come by, the mere mention of its title is enough to produce quick, affirmative nods from a whole generation of readers. It has become something of a cult book, evoking in one’s memory a series of poignant glimpses into the people’s lives. The stories stand up well to a later reading (Tower, 1981). The present study firstly discusses the novel since it deals with the sadness, solitude, and alienation in the lives of immigrants.

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The topic of this study is migration and alienation. Migration can be defined as the process of leaving one country, region or place of residence to settle in another. In other words, migration is a process of social change where an individual, alone or accompanied by others, because of one or more reasons of economic betterment, political upheaval, education or other purposes, leaves one geographical area for prolonged stay or permanent settlement in another geographical area (Bhugra & Bhuı, 2001).

It is possible to say that migration is not only a transnational process but is also rural–urban. Any such process involves not only leaving social networks behind but also includes experiencing at first a sense of loss, dislocation, alienation and isolation, which will lead to processes of acculturation. A series of factors in the environment combined with levels of stress, the ability to deal with stress, and the ability to root oneself according to one’s personality traits, will produce either a sense of settling down or a sense of feeling isolated and alienated.

The duration of this settlement varies, however, in line with its main objective the present paper focuses on the individuals who relocate either semi-permanently or permanently to another country and examines a film on migration and alienation, Nachtreise/Night Traveling, by Turkish director Kenan Kılıç. The film is used as a sample in this study. As known film as one of the forms of mass media is also seen as something that has an impact on the audience. The cultural message in every film helps film-makers bring forward certain messages intended to be delivered to the film audience. Therefore, the film is not only elevated as an aspect of art but most important; it is also the medium of conveying effective messages that can be propagated among the society. The film should not be seen from the perspective of art only. The film is a medium of communication for educating the society by conveying a certain message to the public. Moreover, Jowett and Linton (1985: 16) confirmed that the study of film is not just a study of art but the perspective of the film also acts as a mass communication, playing a role as a mass-mediated culture in society.

The film tells the stories about the people who try to live as foreign-born regulars live on the edge of society. The majority are not Austrian citizens, are unemployed and have no financial resources. Their lives hover between legality and illegality, between surviving and wasting away. For a small group of native Turks, this existence represents a transitory phase which will eventually lead to a better life. One of them, Cemo, is unable to carry on in the face of this contradiction between hope and reality. This film is a story that the immigrants, coming from Turkey to Austria, try to survive without a visa, getting a job and a legal status.

Geyer and Heinz (1992) explains alienation as denoting a social or psychological estrangement of individuals from their environment and ultimately from themselves. This estrangement can manifest itself in a variety of ways: as a feeling of powerlessness or lack of agency due to external, often institutional constraints; as a lack of purpose in life caused by the instability of meaning in the social domain; as social exclusion or rebellion against established social norms; and finally, as a decentring and fragmentation of the self, characteristic of late capitalist society.

In classical Marxist theory, ‘alienation’ refers to workers’ loss of control over the act of production and over the product of their labour. According to Karl Marx, capitalism deprives work of its intrinsic value and turns it into a commodity, thus alienating workers both from each other and from human nature itself (Ro, 2012).

However, in the contemporary cultural studies, alienation is an important concept in analysing subcultures and minority groups. In addition to classical Marxism, several other theoretical strands are of relevance to the understanding of alienation in cultural studies research (Geyer and Heinz, 1992):
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