

Chapter 29. The Reception Analysis of the Short Movie “Bawke”

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Introduction

As a result of the social, political and economic problems in the Middle East and Africa, millions of people were forced to leave from their homes. According to the UNHCR reports nearly 60 million men, women and children forcibly displaced worldwide (Nebehay, 2015) and the situation is getting worse day by day. As the migration process mostly end up in Europe, refugee issue has become one of the hot topics in Europe and also in Turkey. In this process, especially Turkey has become an important destination for refugees both as a home and a transit point. Therefore, Turkish public and the media is familiar with the refugee issue for sure. By hosting refugees, for Turkish public it is very possible to see refugees in daily livings and in the media. The short movie Bawke also focuses on refugee issue in an unbiased manner and match up with refugee reality.

The Problem, Aim and Method of the Study

This study is a reception analysis of the short-movie Bawke, meaning “father” in Kurdish and including self-sacrifice story of a father who takes his son to Europe in illegal ways. This study aims to reveal and compare how participants perceived the refugee and migration issues which are in the center of the movie. The main problem of the study is to determine the possible differences of European and non-European participants’ refugee perception. This study is also carried out to determine how and in what aspects the codes in the movie encoded by participants who has different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, their answers were interpreted based on three types of reading introduced by Stuart Hall who defends people cannot see the same text in the same way depending on their identity, opinions, knowledge and other factors (Hall, 2005, p.96-97).

The reception analysis of the movie was made through deep interwiewing technique in Turkish and English. Interviews were conducted with 8 people separately. The age range of the participants are identified between 20 and 32. On the other hand, 2 of the participants were female and 6 of them were male. All of these participants are from different nationalities, are not citizen of Turkey, but living in Turkey for some time. Hometown of the participants are Poland, France, Germany, Estonia, Iraq, Somali, Nigeria, and Ghana. Therefore, as we see four participants are from Europe and the rest four are from outside the Europe. Chosen of this sample group is due to the curiosity of me actually. I was wondering refugee perception of Europeans and non-Europeans’ vary from or not. And how about their empathy levels on refugees was the other question in my mind. Therefore, the idea of possible differences between the participants’ receptions, who has different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, is the major motivator of choosing

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sample group for the study. However, this study approves in advance that it is not possible to generalize the results of the analysis because another analysis to be carried out with other people may give different conclusions. Also, these people do not identify themselves as European or non-European in the same way and rate.

Theoretical Framework

Stuart Hall differentiates between the process of production –encoding–, and the process of reception by the audience –decoding–. Hall’s “Encoding-Decoding” approach has introduced three different points of views to the positioning of receivers. One is the dominant-hegemonic position in which the message is decoded in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded. In this reading type, audiences can take the actual meaning directly, and it proposes that encoder and audience has the same judgments. The second is that of a negotiated code which contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements. In this position audiences are understood the dominant message, but they are not willing to completely accept the message the way the encoder intended, they act with suspicion towards the codes. In oppositional reading which is the third one, audiences understand the code of the message in a given text but decodes it in an oppositional way, by interpreting it within some alternative framework of reference (Hall, 1980, p. 136–138).

Summary and Analysis of the Movie

“Bawke” is first short movie of Hisham Zaman and was shot in Norway in 2005. The movie has participated around 50 international film festivals so far and recieved more than 40 awards. Also, a cinema magazine “Rushprint” deem “Bawke” suitable of the best movie among 2000 movies which was shot between the years of 2000 and 2010 (Güner, 2008).

The main theme of “Bawke” is refugee; and the subject of the film is father and son’s escape and asylum story. In the starting scene, we see a young boy and his father tried to find a truck to leave their hometown and at the end they found one which is just about to drive off. And they hide secretly under the truck and put up with a tough travel. When they arrived a new country they started searching for a police station to be accepted as refugees. Here we see a scene that father wants son to get rid of his soccer cards because they may be an obstacle for their acceptance but son refuses to throw them away because he loves soccer card of Zinedine Zidane. The father yelled his son as “here you will have the chance to become like Zidane”. At the end the son throws it away just his father says so. In this scene Zidane image is used as an indicator of the integration of refugees to Europe. On the way to the police station, while they were on the subway, the ticket controllers step into wagon, the father makes a fast decision and quickly leaves the train. Not knowing that his father has left, the son continues on the train, and at the end he realizes that he is alone. While his dad is taken in for questioning by the authorities, he is alone in the streets. When the father is finally transported to the refugee camp to carry out operations for his deportation, the son is already there and having chat with a friend. Father see his son but does not say a word and son does not see his father at first. When the father is escorted to a car by the police, son see him and runs after him. While father is sitting in the car and about to leave, the son catches

up with the car and hits window desperately. The father looks at his son standing outside the car, but when the policemen ask if he knows the kid, he says no. The car drives off, and the son desperately runs after it, this time not catching up with it. Then we see him standing completely alone on the road, watching the car drive away. On the ground he finds his father's hat, and in it a soccer card with his football hero, Zidane (Feifer, 2006).

Findings

Before watching the movie, I ask participants two questions. As a first question, I asked them if they follow the news in the media about refugees or not. By asking this, I tried to understand how they familiar about the issue. According to their answers, every participant without exception are aware of the events about refugees. As a second question before they watched the movie, I asked them "What do you think about refugee and what is the image formed in your mind when you hear about refugees?" This question asked for two reasons. Firstly, to measure the level of personal thoughts of them about refugee and secondly to measure meanings that they produced after watching the movie. Because, one of the question that I asked participants after they watched the movie is "have you had any idea changes about refugees after watching the movie?" As regards the first 'image' question, some answers are as follows:

The picture of refugee in my mind is people who are in difficult situation and praying not to die while running away. (Somalian)

They remind me hopelessness and desperation. The image in my mind is forcing people to leave their homeland. (Iraqi)

Not a good image – suffering, devastation. People losing their families, home, low quality of life etc. (Estonian)

I do feel sympathy towards the ones fleeing the war, and I do not feel much sympathy towards the ones coming to Europe only to use it social security system. Due to many of them not respecting our culture, values and religion I also perceive them as cultural invaders. (Polish)

In this question, only Polish participant act with suspicion towards refugees by dividing them into two groups as one group of refugees come to Europe because of its wealth and the other group truly running away from the war. The rest of the participants link refugees with war, hopelessness, dead, forced mobilization, desperation and so on.

After participants watched the movie, I firstly asked them the general views about the film and I want them to summarize the movie in a few words. All of the participants' answers confirming that the film is a refugee story which has emotional intensity. In the movie the encoder produces that being refugee and whole experiences while they are migrating to another country is something hard. Therefore, participants' answers indicate that their reception is the same with the main theme of the movie:

I think this short movie is an example of the experience if many refugees trying to cross over. Father and son trying to cross borders by any kind and father ready to risk anything to make sure his son manages to stay. (French)

It was very emotional movie. There is sacrifice, decision, sadness in the movie. It is a story of people who is forced to move. (Somalian)

Impressive short movie about immigrants. The film shows a story of a refugee father and son. It demonstrates the self-sacrifice of the father, while he aims to bring his son to Europe that he can gain a success, like Zidane. (German)

Secondly, I asked participants what they think about the representation of refugee characters in the movie? What I want to learn with this question is if the movie accurately reflects the refugees or not from participant's perspectives. When comments are considered, I reached the conclusion that participants' perception of refugees does not vary. All of them are of one mind about accurate representation of refugees in the film:

Touching representation and I think close to reality. Yes i think the movie show an accurate representation of most refugees. (French)

I think refugees characters matches well with reality. They expreience this kind of things in real life. Moreover there are worst situations like they lose their legs or they die during their escape. (Somalian)

Yes, the movie represents refugees same as media show us. (German)

As related to the question above, the next questions was "do you think this film could reflect a real event? Is such a thing possible in real life? Or those in the film are just exaggerated?" When the comments of the participants analyzed, they all found the film extremely realistic and made a hegemonic reading. Here are some answers of participants:

I think movie reflects a real event. This kind of stories are happening permanently. I do not think there is an exaggeration. (Ghanian)

I think this story already happened many times and I am also sure it happened in even more tragic ways. (French)

Yes it could reflect a real event because films generally are a reflection of reality. Yes it is definitely possible, no exaggeration. (Nigerian)

There are more tragic situations that refugees have to deal with. (Iraqi)

The question "how did you feel when you see the father and son's escape scene in the film?" asked to find out participant's reactions on the scene that includes a very tough travel under a truck with difficult circumstances and risk of death. In this question we firstly see a differentiation among European and non-European participants. Non-EU participants' answers mostly focused on fear, sadness and humanistic emotions which shows that they made hegemonic reading.

It was sad. I'm sorry that they are forced to flee because of economic, social or historical circumstances. (Somalian)

It was emotional scene. They have to cope with it. (Nigerian)

I feel really bad for them. They have to run away with hard circumstances. (Ghanian)

It was really crucial and disgraceful for me. (Iraqi)

On the other hand, EU participants' approach was quite rational and it seems that they answered the question dispassionately. By giving relatively cool answers, it can be say that they made a negotiational reading.

I understand that the father wants the best for his son and tries everything he can. (French)

I feel reality in that scene. They have to deal with it. (Estonian)

Neutral. (Polish)

Well, they had to do this if they want a good life. They did it because they want to take their chances. (German)

The next question's aim was to evaluate the feelings of participants again. Therefore, I asked "what did you think in the last scene when father pretend not to know his son?" Participants was unable to provide consensus in this question and three types of reading was made by participants. Four participants responded in the context of sacrifice and made hegemonic reading regardless of nationalities.

Father made sacrifice for the future of his little son. (Somalian)

It must have been the most horrible thing to do but the father was convinced it was the only solution for his son to stay. The son probably didn't understand the rejection but i am sure he will understand the sacrifice of his father later on. (French)

He thought this is the only way to save his son so he had to do this. Sad but true. (Iraqi)

It is an example of self-sacrifice of the father (German)

Two participants who are from Estonia and Poland made negotiated reading by expressing their opinions, giving advices and rejecting dominant message:

Better future for son, however, in real life it would be easier to ask for asylum when families are together, especially in Sweden, where asylum system works in a more advanced way." (Estonian).

I do not think he was sacrificing at all. Leaving his young son in a strange, but save country does not guarantee him a better future. Perhaps he would be better off staying with his family. I cannot see the son feeling happy about what happend even in the future. (Polish)

Two participants from Nigeria and Ghana had oppositional position by giving answer in the context of irresponsibility.

I don't like father's action. It is a big big irresponsibility. (Nigerian)

I think father's decision is an example of irresponsibility. If father loved his son, he would never leave him. (Ghanian)

The movie does not say who are these people, why and from where to where they were going. So, it does not focus on bacground of story and encoder actually coding the message of "we all might experience this hard situation". Therefore, I asked participants "If they can identify themselves with characters and do they think that this situation might happen to them?" In the interview results, it was seen that European participants do not find it practical to experience such a thing and made oppositional reading. On the other hand, non-Europeans made dominant reading by holding this situation possible in any time and anywhere. Probably this differentiation come true because of the different cultural backgrounds, individual experiences and selective perception.

Well, in Europe this is not possible I guess, but who knows. (German).

I can hardly identify myself since i don't think i will ever have such dramatic experience, but i am a foreigner living abroad so i can feel the difficulty to integrate in normal conditions. So I can only imagine how impossible it must be when you are not welcome and try to integrate anyway. (French)"

Anyone can experience this kind of things. No one has a secure life. (Somalian)

No one knows what tomorrow brings. (Ghanian)

Well, it may happen. But i don't pray for it. (Nigerian)

The main messages of the movie are being refugee is very difficult situation no matter how it caused and for better future sacrifice has to be done. Therefore, I asked participant if they want to help people they see in the movie? All of the participants made hegemonic reading by making empathy with them. Here are some answers compiled from interviews:

I think if someone watches the movie and doesn't want to help them, that person is not human. So of course I would like to help as well. But the main problem is that people would not know where to start. (French)

Of course, I would. I have already studied in aid company for refugees. (Iraqi)

While I was watching the movie, I thought I wish I could help these people. (Ghanian)

As I mentioned in the beginning of the paper, Zinedine Zidane whose family migrated to France from Algeria, is used as an indicator for integration of refugees. When I asked if they think in the movie Zidane is a figure who symbolizes the integration of Europe to understand what codes does participants produced, interestingly only one participant who also are from France like Zidane made a hegemonic reading by saying “*Zidane's parents probably had to live through it but not Zidane himself since he was born in France and was raised in a neighbourhood in France where many kids and families like him. But as a symbol for kids maybe it is a good idea of successful integration. He is still a son of immigrants who manages to find success and integration. (French)*” The rest of participants made oppositional reading. Here are some answers compiled from interviews:

I don't think so but he might be a figure of being successful or achieving the goals. (Iraqi)

Zinedina Zidane is a son of Algerian immigrants, that was born in France. Integration of Europe is a process of the european countries forming a federal super-state unifying their law, culture etc. Idea of Zinedine Zidane being a symbol of integration seems like a no-brainer. (Polish)

I don't think that Zidane is a symbol, which motivates the boy for his integration of a refugee. First of all, he is not a refugee. He is a son of a migrant family. Secondly he is an assimilated immigrant, which does not belong to the patterns of integration. (German)

The next question is a follow-up question which is “have you had any idea changes about refugees after watching the movie?”. Only one (German) participant found the movie too short and too inadequate to have such a change of idea. The rest of them are of the same idea about refugees. Moreover, according to some participants the film has strengthen their point of views about refugees due to film's dramatic fiction.

Conclusion

In the study, it is determined that participants' social and demographic features like age, gender, and nationality do not affect reception directly. Therefore, although the participants have different social and cultural backgrounds, they largely gave

common answers to the questions. Participants' answers separated only in two question in terms of their nationalities. About the espace scene question, European participants approached the issue from realistic perspective like the idea "father and son did what they had to do", on the other hand non-Europeans interpreted the scene very emotionally. Secondly, while European participants found it impossible to experience refugee situation in their own lives, non Europeans found it possible and approach like everyone may pass through refugee situation. Also, in one question three types of reading was made regardless of nationalities. In the study, similarities are quite often like both European and non-European participants follow the news about refugees, have similar refugee images which links with desperation, can make empathy with refugees, agree with the objectivity of the movie, and still have the same idea about refugees after they watched the movie.

Even if I thought much more differences may come out in the reception, it did not happen. But we cannot say that this shows nothing. Surely it shows something which may be in the answer of German participant whose answer helps us to comment all these similarities. About the refugee characters' representation question he answered as "the movie represents refugees same as media show us". These people also live in the same reality, see refugees in the media and in everyday live, are exposed to similar media contents and refugee images which mostly links with negativity. Media also creates some refugee stereotypes like dead refugees in their illegal journeys, poor ones crying for their lost relatives, beggar ones in the streets with their unlike clothes and so on. As I mention at the beginning of the study, it is not possible to generalize the results of the analysis because the analysis results would be different if it conducted with different people. Also a different method like focus group discussion or an ethnographic method may influence the results. Moreover, it is possible that participants do not identify themselves as European or non-European in the same way and rate. Or they do not even identify themselves European or non-European.

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