

Stages of Being Foreign as Portrayed in *Daughter of Keltoum and Lost Birds*

By Fran Hassencahl*

*In this paper, I use the intercultural communication model, The Stages of Being Foreign, developed by anthropologist Oberg (1960) and modified by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963), Lewis & Jungman (1986), and Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) to explain the experience of culture shock. This model describes the stages that individuals experience when they leave, either voluntarily or involuntarily, their home country/culture and must adapt to a new culture. These stages as described by Oberg are a preliminary stage (a spectator stage), an increasing participation stage, the pit of the culture shock stage, the adaptation stage, and for some migrants a reentry stage if they return to their home country. This model is still widely used by study abroad administrators and managers in corporations who assign students and workers abroad. I apply this model to the experiences of three refugee children depicted in two films: *Lost Birds* (2015) directed by Aren Perdecı and Ela Alyamac (Türkiye) and *Daughter of Keltoum* (2001) directed by Mehdi Charef (Algeria/France). Findings are that all three children experience the Stages of Being Foreign and make difficult adjustments to new lives.*

Keywords: Oberg, Stages of Being Foreign, Perdecı & Alyamac, and Charef

“The different experiences surrounding individual migration, and the wider political or cultural contexts in which it takes place, can have enormous practical and psychic repercussions reflected in the various words we use for those who leave one country for another. There are refugees, emigres, emigrants, and expatriates, designations that point to distinct kinds of social, but also internal experience. It matters enormously, for starters whether you choose to leave or are forced to.”

Eva Hoffman, 1999

“Films, in this sense, like works of literature, offer fictional micro -accounts of coming to terms with the past, which engage audiences’ emotions and invite them to identify with the subject position of the victims. And, in doing so, they facilitate the process of belated remembrance and mourning.”

Suner, 2009.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR) reported in May 2024 that the world broke old records by recording the largest ever number of displaced individuals. More than 120 million people have been forced to leave their homes. Refugees number 43.4 million and over one- half of these individuals are under the age of eighteen. Asylum

*Associate Professor at Old Dominion University, Department of Communication and Theatre Arts, Old Dominion University, USA.

seekers, waiting and hopeful, are 6.9 million. Media images of their plight show these individuals in crowded refugee camps either waiting to return home, emigrate or find temporary asylum in other countries or regions to escape war, famine, persecution, and economic deprivation. Families separate without hope of reunification or with limited ability to navigate the process for families to reunite. Brain drain occurs when those able to leave and by virtue of their economic situation, political and family connections can secure an airline ticket; others move by foot or by local transportation. Issues of acceptance, resettlement, and regulation of this human flow are discussed in major political debates and become the focus of voters' concern in elections in Asia, Europe, and the United States. Walls are built and the paperwork seems endless. Due to climate change these numbers are likely to increase. Individuals who are familiar with the research on the adjustment of those who move either permanently or temporarily to another culture would see those refugees experience "The Stages of Being Foreign" a model developed by anthropologist Kalervo Oberg. This model is primarily used in the communication field and in international education to help individuals, work, study and resettle in another culture.

Research Question

Tom J. Lewis and Robert E. Jungman (1986) assume that literature reflects life and compiled a book of short stories that reflect each of the Stages of Being Foreign. Their goal was to help people understand how millions of travelers manage their experiences when moving to a new culture. In this paper I investigate two film stories, *La Fille de Keltoum (Daughter of Keltoum, 2001)* by Mehdi Charef a French/Algerian film makers and *Yitik Kuslar (Lost Birds, 1915)* made by two Turkish independent filmmakers, Aren Perdeci and Ela Alyamac. Charef portrays a young woman, adopted as an infant and taken from Algeria to Switzerland. Rallia returns to connect with her birth mother presumed to be living in the dry rugged terrain of the Amazigh areas of Algeria and finds an unfamiliar system of values particularly in their treatment of women. *Lost Birds reaches* back into history to investigate through the eyes of siblings the situation of Armenians displaced by at first voluntary and then forced into internal and external population exchanges by Türkiye in the pre- and post-World War I period. I apply the model "Stages of Being Foreign" to these two films/stories.

I chose the medium of film because film because the universality of its language impacts a wide range of audiences across geographic and cultural borders. In a world connected to the Web and mobile phones, "communication shifts more and more toward visual language, moving images carry the potential to inform, evoke, cause distain or relief, and, ultimately, force viewers to react." (Kazecki, Ritzenhoff, and Miller, 2013, p. xv.). Films based upon stories of individuals who cross borders and live in conditions of diaspora show situations that are timely and universal. Potentially, viewers may reflect on the experiences and values of others or recall stories from their family's past when they crossed borders to seek a better life. Budd (2002, p. 257) argues that intercultural films can serve as "an intercultural barometer" to provide the viewer "an essentially accurate reading of the state of inter-

relations...biases and attractions, hopes and fears, warts and all-- a careful look at the Screen can reveal them.”

Development of a Model for Analysis

The model, Stages of Being Foreign, evolved as scholars attempted to describe the processes of intercultural interactions experienced by those who work or study in a different culture. This led to a spinoff of practical manuals, training courses and college courses, and advice to help individuals understand their experiences and emotions that arise from these interchanges. Immigrants and refugees face the potential experience of culture shock. Sojourners can measure their increased facility and comfort in a new culture by how successfully they navigate those issues of ‘belonging’ and ‘identity’ that sociologist Zigmunt Bauman, after losing his university position in Poland and moving to the United Kingdom, discusses in *Identity* (2004, p.9) “But there, in Britain, I was an immigrant, a newcomer- not so long ago a refugee from a foreign country, an alien. I have since become a naturalized British citizen, but once a newcomer can you ever stop being a newcomer?” These experiences of immigration may lead to depression, interpersonal stress, conflict, and inability to successfully work or adjust to live in the new culture, which are behaviors now grouped under the term of “culture shock.” Bauman, while experiencing shock and displacement, was able to adjust and find work in the familiar culture of the University of Leeds. Not all immigrants are so fortunate and find adjustment to be a long and complicated process.

The term culture shock formally originated in the field of anthropology and was first used by Cora DuBois, an American anthropologist who completed her Ph.D. in 1932 at the University of California Berkeley. She entered a job market that was not encouraging to women. DuBois began field work with American Indian tribes in the Northwest and later worked in Indonesia. She used the term in a 1951 speech to the Institute of International Education when she discussed the cross-cultural experiences of anthropologists engaged in field work (Jackson, 2018).

In 1960, anthropologist Kalervo Oberg published an article, “Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments”, in *Practical Anthropology*. He based the article on a speech he gave to the Women’s Club of Rio de Janeiro in 1954. Oberg supervised anthropologists and technicians who came from the United States to work on development projects. He observed that they often were less successful because they had problems of adjustment to a new culture. Such adjustment issues, often reflected in the American Peace Corps by the participant’s statement, “I wanna go home”, also wastes the training time and resources used to place the participant, who is expected to teach, develop new methods of sanitation, or help implement new agricultural practices. For many volunteers this would be their first experience working outside the US. Although Oberg applied the term broadly to all individuals who travel and work in another culture.

Born to Finnish immigrant parents in British Columbia, educated in Canada, England, and the United States (Ph. D. from the University of Chicago, in 1933), Oberg was a first-generation scholar who taught at various United States’ universities.

In 1942, he began 25 years of service with a variety of US government agencies in Ecuador, Brazil, Peru, and Surinam. His career concluded in 1973 by his death after being hired in 1968 at the University of Oregon at Corvallis, where he was recognized on campus by his trademark, a Stetson hat. His final overseas assignment was working on a project (1959-1963) with the US Mission in Surinam researching rural communities and laying the groundwork for planning projects in agriculture and fisheries. He was particularly interested in development issues and how groups coped with technological change (McComb & Foster, 1974).

Oberg drew upon his field work experiences and postulated that there are four stages in the process of adjusting to a new culture. These are the Preliminary or Honeymoon Stage, Culture Shock Stage, Increasing Participation Stage and Adjustment Stage. This paper examines those stages and the subsequent refinements made by other scholars and applies these stages to the experience of immigration as depicted in two films. Most of the research has focused upon the experiences of those who work or study abroad, members of the military or their dependents. These individuals usually stay in the host culture for a determined amount of time. Other than narratives written by individual immigrants about their experiences in coming to live in another country, few studies discuss Oberg's stages of culture shock to the immigrant and refugee experience (Zeng, 1991; Silonim & Regev, 2016)

The Model: Stages of Being Foreign

Oberg (1960) characterized culture shock by using the metaphor of "an occupational disease" experienced by those who have been "transplanted abroad". He characterized those individuals as "like a fish out of water" who experience anxiety by losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Everyday experiences such as saying, "hello" and "goodbye," tipping behavior, dress, the customs, and practices around eating unfamiliar foods, and bathroom usages become major difficulties to be overcome. These concerns often manifest themselves in individuals who see themselves as open-minded and culturally aware. They become anxious, even fearful, withdrawn, or complain and compare their experiences with their host country and their home country. They often reject the cultural practices of their new home and "everything American becomes irrationally glorified. All the difficulties are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered." Oberg wryly concludes "It usually takes a trip back home to bring one back to reality." (Oberg, 1960).

Fellow scholars made modifications, and the model has become the basis for cross-cultural training in education and the military, and to prepare individuals to study or work abroad either for a salary or in a volunteer capacity. Researchers and practitioners come primarily from the fields of anthropology, education, cross-cultural psychology, and intercultural communication. Much of the work in education focuses upon examining and dealing with issues arising from the student study abroad experience and the American Peace Corps assignments where some 30 to 40 percent of the volunteers return to the United States before completing their required two years. Shein (2015) reports that Peace Corps trainers make considerable effort to get the volunteers to understand that culture shock will be a normal part of their

experience. Gary R. Weaver (2000), editor of *Culture, Communication and Conflict*, and former faculty member at the School of International Service at American University, indicates that experiencing culture shock and not being able to overcome it, in addition to other factors such as health issues and disagreements with the managers of projects, are major factors in these drop-out rates. In the same volume, articles by Joann S. Lubin (2000) and Mitchell R. Hammer (2000) discuss the need for cross-cultural training in business. Hammer cites the cost in 1970 dollars of \$55,000.00 for each family that had to be returned prematurely from an overseas assignment. While these overseas experiences are not a focus of this paper, these concerns are still researched and discussed in scholarly literature. For example, the 2018 article by Cupsa, "Culture Shock and Identity" and "Risk Factors Associated with Culture Shock among Asylum Seekers from Darfur by Slonim-Nevo and Shirley Regev (2016) show that culture shock continues to be a major factor in the adjustment of migrants and those who work overseas. Textbooks in intercultural communication continue to address issues of culture shock. The former Intercultural Press (now Nicholas Brealey Publishing) carries books intended to dispel fears and help those working and traveling in a new culture to understand and communicate with Arabs, Germans, Iranians, Mexicans, Indians, and the Japanese.

Stages of Being Foreign Model

Oberg (1960) labels the first stage, the spectator stage, as the "honeymoon stage" which may last a few days or for perhaps six months. Individuals may be on a Cook's tour, fascinated by the new" and often stay in hotels and associate with nationals who speak their language. Oberg adds the proviso, "If one is a very important person, he or she will be shown the show places, will be pampered and petted." With such a favorable experience, these individuals will speak favorably about their hosts to the press and to colleagues when they return home.

The second stage of culture shock begins when individuals find that they must cope "with real conditions of life." Adjustment issues arise and individuals begin to feel angry and critical of the host country and "take refuge in the colony of your countrymen and its cocktail circuit which often becomes the fountainhead of emotionally charged labels known as stereotypes" (Oberg, 1960).

There is maid trouble, school trouble, house trouble, transportation trouble, shopping trouble, and the fact that people in the host country are largely indifferent to all these troubles. They help but they just don't understand your great concern over these difficulties. Therefore, they must be insensible and unsympathetic to you and your worries. The result, "I just don't like them." (p.143).

Rather than owning these problems and seeking solutions, some individuals blame the host country for their problems. If it is not possible to leave the country, they may resort to stereotyping and aggressive behavior toward their hosts. They recall "only the good things back home." This brings consequences, because citizens of the host country "will sense this hostility and, in many cases, respond in either a hostile manner or try to avoid you." Colleagues who have made a satisfactory adjustment may try to help or they may avoid you and view you "a bit queer"

(p.144). At this point, the individual begins to experience the symptoms of what Oberg (1960) labels culture shock.

Some of the symptoms of culture shock are: excessive washing of the hands; excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding; fear of physical contact with attendants or servants; the absent-minded, far-away stare (sometimes called the tropical stare); a feeling of helplessness and a desire for dependence on long-term residents of one's own nationality; fits of anger over delays and other minor frustrations; delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country; excessive fear of being cheated, robbed or injured; great concern over minor pains and eruptions of the skin; and finally that terrible longing to be back home. (p. 142-143)

Options to resolve culture shock include starting to learn the language, finding the humor in situations, and beginning to adjust to the new culture. "You adapt yourself to water and power shortages and to traffic problems." He reminds his audience that the environment does not change, but your attitude to the environment changes. In short, you get along under a new set of living conditions. Individuals gain an awareness that their previous lack of understanding and lack of ability to communicate are factors that can be overcome. At this point, the newcomers enter Oberg's Increasing Participation stage which is a process leading to the fourth stage of Adjustment (Oberg, 1960).

In that fourth stage of Adjustment, the individual begins to accept the customs of the country without passing judgement and begin to "enjoy" the foods, habits, and customs of the country. Oberg cautions that the problems of adjustment are real. There will be misunderstandings and frustrations and "intestinal disturbances." Nevertheless, when you return home you miss the country and the people to whom you have become accustomed (Oberg, 1960).

Additional scholars modified and expanded upon Oberg's model, and culture shock discussions are included in intercultural communication textbooks and in materials provided for individuals who work or study overseas. Kohls (1984), a director of training for the United States Information Agency, trained thousands of Peace Corps volunteers and US. Embassy personnel. He discusses in his book, *Survival kit for overseas living: For Americans planning to work and live abroad*, the stages of adjustment for those going overseas. He lists these stages as 1.) initial euphoria, 2.) irritability and hostility, 3.) gradual adjustment and 4.) adaptation or biculturalism. These stages parallel Oberg's stages. Kohls (1984) notes that in the second stage, "Gradually, your focus turns from the similarities to the *differences*. And those differences, which suddenly seem to be everywhere troubling." This is 'culture shock' and he warns that there may be multiple waves of culture shock (pp. 67-68).

Educators Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) characterize the overseas experience as a U curve with the highest levels of satisfaction at the beginning, after a period of adjustment and after the return home. They base their curve upon surveys of 400 American students in France and 5,300 American Fulbright and Smith-Mundt scholars abroad. They raise the question of what happens to the returnee and their interactions with colleagues back home. This is later articulated by the Gullahorns as the fifth stage or reentry stage. Adler (1975) finds that intercultural adaptation is a transitional experience which results in greater self-awareness and cultural

awareness in the unfamiliar environment. He characterizes the stages as contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence.

Lewis and Jungman (1986) add a new first stage which they call the Preliminary Phase where the sojourner decides to leave home, prepares for life overseas and forms stereotypes about what it will be like in the host culture. Their second stage, the Spectator Phase, parallels Oberg's Honeymoon Stage. Lewis and Jungman observe that the newcomer is caught up in the new sights and experiences and "is not likely to consider how he appears to others during this period, primarily because he is so deeply involved as a spectator of all that is going on around him that he has difficulty imagining that he himself is the spectacle" (Lewis and Jungman, 1986). Usually, the sojourner has a buffer from the difficulties of everyday life. A member of the host country or a colleague, who has been in the country for a while, will take the "Visitor" to see interesting landmarks, recommend restaurants and share cultural events. This visitor is assisted with the everyday tasks of living and may be in a hotel waiting for more permanent housing. The "visitor" in the spirit of optimism and newness may ignore any unpleasanties or social cues that might arise from their hosts.

Their third stage, Increasing Participation or Oberg's Adjustment Stage or Recovery Phase requires "a temporary letting go of established concepts of selfhood and of emotional investment in oneself that has built up over the years" (Lewis & Jungman, 1986). The sojourner begins to size up the situation and determines that it is possible to function in this culture. "Over time, the sojourner starts to realize that difficulties are not deliberate attacks by the hosts and begins to experience a perceptual shift from "culture shock" to "culture aware" (Pitts, 2010). If this stage is not successfully navigated, then the individual falls into "Culture Shock", where the person feels depressed, and begins to withdraw and isolate themselves from others and experiences "somatic disorders that are difficult to locate and identify precisely, irritability, uncharacteristically eccentric and compulsive behavior, and unpredictable outbursts of aggression" (Lewis & Jungman, 1986). The individual begins to intensely dislike the new situation and feeling unable to remedy it, retreats into spending time with others from their home country. Here they find company and begin to enact stereotypic in group behavior (e.g., amplifying home culture identity) while applying negative stereotypes to the outgroup, their hosts.

The Adaptation Stage, Oberg's fourth stage, occurs when individuals begin to feel more at "home" or can experience what Edward Hall calls "congruence" with the host culture. The visitors become bi-cultural or in some cases may even overidentify with the new culture. At this point they feel more confident, have learned effective and appropriate communication skills, and are able to build social relationships. Occasional frustrations occur, but they are not debilitating. Others begin to see this person as a participating member of the culture as the newcomer acquires new tools and begins to integrate into the host culture. The newcomer also functions more effectively on the job and places less strain on family relationships.

Oberg recognizes The Re-entry Phase as a potential problem, but he does not label it as a stage. Sojourners return to their home base country, but they do not step in the "river" in the same place as their departure. Time brought changes to their old environment. This return may not be satisfactory because, because they remember and like the old, and find their previous compatriots show little interest in hearing in any

detail about their new insights and experiences. "For people in the home culture, those experiences are remote in both space and time and are of little relevance to life here and now" (Lewis & Jungman, 1986). The travelers again feel like "fish out of water" and may reject their native culture or feel an intense longing to return where they feel better accepted and understood.

Some researchers find that the greatest adjustment problem occurs at the beginning of the entry into a new culture. Ward and Kennedy's 1996 study of New Zealand overseas volunteers found that depression occurred early in the workers' assignments. Zheng and Berry (1991) in their longitudinal study of Chinese scholars in Canada, found that the scholars experienced depression and anxiety within the first four months of their visit. Although there is disagreement as to the order of the stages of being foreign, there is no dispute that these stages occur for those who come to a new culture for a work assignment or study abroad. These stages also occur for those who leave their home country as an immigrant or as a refugee.

The order of the Stages of being Foreign is based primarily upon observational data and interviews. There is no systematic study of adjustment to a new culture because of difficulties in identifying participants for a study and following them for a year. Participants often drop out before the study is completed. (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Variables such as coping skills, prior experiences and social support networks influence satisfaction outcomes. Whether the sample is composed of those on short term assignments or refugees, and immigrants who are settling permanently in a new place will color the results of such a study (Ward and Kennedy, 2001).

Relocation continues to be fraught with problems for the receiving country and those received. Questions of assimilation are raised by the host country's citizens, who wonder about immigrant loyalties and whether these individuals threaten their jobs. One immigrant family is a novelty, but dozens of them are perceived as a threat. Natives often assume that the immigrant can change identities and cultural practices as easily as acquiring a new wardrobe. Granted it might take a bit longer to become fluent in the language. The stages of being foreign are not well understood by the traveler. Rarely can one step back with objectivity during this experience and say, "I am a spectator, or my anxiety is a symptom of culture shock." Edward Said (2000) reflects upon his immigration experiences and writes, "Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. They belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place. What is it like to be born in a place, to live and stay there, to know that you are of it, more or less forever?" Belonging or fitting into a new culture is a complex process and requires careful intercultural negotiations by both parties.

Stage studies have declined and some of the longitudinal studies are critical of the U -curve model, but no comparable model has emerged to take its place, albeit Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) offer their ABC model. They report that Oberg's model is intuitively appealing and resonates with individual experiences and that some research supports Oberg and the U Curve model. Both models explain the psychological adjustment experiences of those cast into a new and unfamiliar culture. When individuals leave their home country either by choice or necessity and reflect on their experiences, these newcomers are more likely to be able to fit

into these four stages rather than factor out their psychological factors such as locus of control, prior feelings of depression or attachment to social groups.

This paper is not the place to investigate all the journal articles and textbooks that investigate and expand upon Culture Shock. These stages have passed into training manuals and appear on web pages of organizations such as that of Investopedia and health care blogs such as AMN Healthcare. For the sake of consistency this paper will use Oberg's four stages to analyze two films about individuals' experiences as refugees. These films are *Daughter of Keltoum* and *Lost Birds*.

Three Directors Reflect their Experiences with Diaspora

Mehdi Charef, the director of *Daughter of Keltoum* (2001) was born in Algeria in 1952 and at the age of ten moved to live in Nanterre, one of the *bidonvilles*, the shantytowns, outside Paris. He received little education and worked as a mechanic in a factory for ten years before his first novel, *Le the' au harem d' Archi Ahmed* (1983) became a movie. Charef received a lucky break when celebrated director Constantin Costa-Gavras was impressed by Charef's interview on the literary talk show *Apostrophes*. Gavras and his wife Michele Ray-Gavras formed a production company to help finance turning Charef's novel into a film. A prize in 1985 at the Cannes Film Festival and an award for Best First Work from the Césars in 1986 established a new career for Charef. Eleven additional films have followed, and he has made films for French television (Armes, 2005; Xavier, 2010). *Keltoum* joins four other films: *Miss Mona* (1986), *Camomille* (1987), *Au pays des Juliets* (1982) and *Marie-Line* (2000) that explore the problems of women in a strict and patriarchal country where women band together to support each other and cope with the situation (Balkaran, 2016).

Aren Perdeci and Ela Alyamac, two Turkish filmmakers, made the movie *Lost Birds* (2015) after they discovered their family connections to the Armenian community. Aren Perdeci, a director of short films, commercials and music videos in Istanbul, discovered that he was a direct descendant of two Armenian families based in Konya and Bursa. His co-director Ela Alyamac had a similar experience after finding family secrets about close family friendships with an Armenian family who left to escape the genocide. She studied filmmaking at Chapman University in Southern California. Together they did extensive research to achieve their goal of introducing the topic of the Armenian genocide on the 100th Anniversary of the genocide with a more personalized story that Turkish people could relate to (Pambukyan, n. p.). To some extent this film is a continuing example of what Suner (2010) discusses as "the unprecedented questioning of the idea of Turkishness" which is primarily reflected by young independent directors who focus on the representation of non-Muslim minorities such as the Kurds, Greeks, and Armenians in Türkiye.

Classifications are more important to scholars than to the viewing public. Charef and Perdeci and Alyamac create films that could be considered accented cinema. Naficy's designation of "accented cinema" describes a diverse group of filmmakers united by their experiences of exile and diaspora. "Accented films are in dialogue with the home and host societies and their respective national cinemas, as

well as with audiences, many of whom are similarly transnational, whose desires, aspirations, and fears they express” (Naficy, 2001). These films are both global and local and their makers either by their experience of diaspora (Charef) or that of family members and neighbors (Perdeci and Alyamac) can be considered accented cinema.

A more useful categorization, if one is needed, is to think about films made by diasporic filmmakers and writers as a way of imagining “home.” Moorti (2003) argues that we can consider diasporic films, particularly those made by women filmmakers, as a “gendered mode”. Moorti designates two ways of visually creating identifications with the homeland. The films could reflect “a particular brand of hypermasculine nationalism” where elements of a mythical past are combined with a super patriotism. In contrast, a feminine mode of film making focuses upon and explores relationships and deals with issues of identity and multiple cultural affiliations. The feminine mode permits the filmmakers to explore “the interstice, the ways in which gendered subjects locate themselves and negotiate between multiple cultural affiliations and articulate how the processes of dislocation, affiliation and displacement are thoroughly radicalized and gendered” (Moorti, 2003). In a statement about *Lost Birds* that could also apply to *Daughter of Keltoum*, film director Aren notes, “This film cannot change the fact that this tragedy took place, but it can help us to better understand each other and to look at the future with hope” (Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa).

Application of Oberg’s Model to Two Films

Nineteen-year-old Rallia in *Bent Keltoum* possesses no memories of Algeria, her birthplace. The motivation for her return is anger and issues of identity. She plans to find her birth mother, confront her as to why she was given up for adoption and then to kill her mother for this act of abandonment. We get no information about Rallia’s life in Switzerland or whether she is employed or a student. She has the means and independence to travel and can choose to return to Europe. The Algeria she returns to has been wracked by a civil war (1991-2002). Despite President Bouleflika’s offers of amnesty, militant terrorist groups continue to fight in rural areas and exacerbate the poverty and isolation of those who have little political sympathies for the terrorists or the government in Algiers. We see this Berber/Kabyle settlement as a poverty stricken rural mountainous area untouched except for the occasional rebel Islamist soldier who continues to fight in a civil war known as the Black Decade (1991-2002) against the central government in Algiers. After gaining independence from France, Algeria made Arabic mandatory in the schools and began to forbid the use of Amazigh languages. The Berber-Arab divide encouraged by the French colonists remains a thorny issue to resolve. Economic neglect, and the Imazighen desire for regional autonomy brought guerrilla war to the region. Although the film is about relationships rather than politics, it is set in this political context. Rallia is not a *Pied Noir*, although she seeks healing, she has no memories or persistent nostalgia for her birthplace (Hubbell, 2012; Rahal, 2011).

Bent Keltoum does not address a preparation or planning stage, and we see Rallia a young bare headed nineteen-year-old woman stepping off a dusty bus in a

dry rural area of Algeria. Upon leaving the bus, she makes her way to a cluster of stone houses and meets her aging grandfather, who accepts her as family, but cannot recall whether she was born in the kitchen or outside. Nedjma, her aunt, takes care of her father and is in sporadic contact with her sister Keltoum, whom Rallia assumes to be her mother. Keltoum works as a housekeeper at a distant beach resort hotel in El Kantara located in northeastern Algeria.

Rallia does not know that she was sold to a European couple so her family could purchase a water pump to operate a well that soon was dry. Basically, she was seen as a “commodity” and as Briggs (2012) points out “losing children is an index of political and social vulnerability” By not knowing the culture she also would not understand the shame brought to her family, because she is the product of a rape by a passing soldier. Rallia settles in for a brief period, adjusts her wardrobe for protection from the ever-present rays of the sun and struggles to help her aunt carry jerry cans of water from a distant slow trickling spring. She cannot stay because her goal is to find her mother who infrequently visits her family. The story continues as Rallia and Nedjma make that journey to connect with the mother via travel in the back of pickup trucks, buses, a flatbed truck carrying bags of grain, and by foot. Rallia is driven by her desire to confront and kill her birth mother for abandoning her.

In the Increasing Participation Stage individuals experience good and bad days. Individuals begin to have problems with money and experience concerns about health and sanitation. Culture clashes continue and the individual either copes and forges on or falls into culture shock. Rallia reluctantly allows her aunt, Nedjma, to travel with her and resents her admonishments to cover her shoulders and hair. The aunt’s naivete and wonder at the world outside her home village which a fellow traveler describes as “a living hell” provides comedic relief to their difficult journey, which for Rallia becomes one big Culture Shock.

Rallia exclaims, “I am Lost,” when she meets another European/Amazigh woman from Belgium at a local communal bath for women. This woman has a similar experience and searches for her father who left her and her mother in Europe and returned to Algeria. Rallia has not experienced patriarchal control and the relegation of women being child bearers and housekeepers. She quickly discovers at a stop at a roadside cafe that water is available only for men and she hastily leaves the makeshift café under the threat of being beaten by the proprietor. Outside this cafe, Rallia sees a middle-aged woman standing with a rope around her wrist. The other end of the rope is attached to a donkey’s saddle. Nedjma explains that the woman is being “repudiated.” In this scene, her husband puts a few coins in his wife’s hand and drives her away with a stick. She will be replaced by a younger woman, the new wife, who will raise the repudiated’s children. Rallia is also shocked when she sees a little girl who is not in school but sits selling cigarettes one at a time to passersby. After a grain truck’s driver’s attempt to rape Rallia and her aunt, Rallia abandons her urban middle-class ways, becomes a thief, steals the trucker’s flatbed truck, and drives it to an eventual reunion with her birth mother.

At the resort hotel Rallia reunites with her birth mother, who turns out to be Nedjma, her presumed aunt. Rallia experienced culture shock, particularly as she finds women in these rural mountains have little value except for the labor and children they provide. With the passage of time, summoning one’s inner strengths

and support and conversations with old and new friends, most sojourners begin to adjust to their situation. Rallia could develop greater facility with the language and gain a better understanding of the host culture. She has an option to stay in the increasing participation and adjustment stages and become more task oriented and energetic. However, we see her boarding the same dusty bus that brought her into contact with her lost family. Now bare headed and free from male commands to cover she will return to Switzerland, which she considers her home. Her stage of adjustment is coming to terms with her circumstances of birth and subsequent adoption.

Perdeci and Alyamac while researching for their script found many Turkish Armenian descendants of orphans like the main characters in their film, Bedo and Maryam, who were willing to share their stories. Both Bedo and Maryam were caught up in the Turkification process and spent time in an orphanage. The guiding assumption by the newly founded state was that the children could be reprogrammed either by adoption by Muslim families or living in a state-run orphanage where they would be given new names, punished for speaking Armenian and forced to convert to Islam (Gzoyan, 2023). These goals reflected that Ottoman Empire composed of many ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities should be forgotten. The new Turkish republic was to be primarily composed of Turkish speaking Muslims. Atatürk's modernization of Türkiye occurred overnight with citizens waking up to a state mandated Western style alphabet, calendar, and dress.

The events in *Lost Birds* show a nascent nationalism, which grew after Türkiye recovered from the first World War. The nation, suffered under heavy debt, being on the losing side, and divided by the Treaty of Sèvres into realms to be controlled by England, Greece, Italy, and France. With these divisions, Seker (2023), and G. Emen-Gokatalay and S. Gokatalay (2023), explain that some Turks feared that the Armenians and Greeks would break away and establish their own states. The treaty was never ratified. The boundaries of the present Turkish state were established after the Turkish war of Independence (1919-23) with the military efforts of Atatürk who served as president of the new Republic from 1923 to 1938. In addition to Atatürk's modernization processes such as changing the alphabet and mandating free and compulsory elementary school education, Türkiye emerged from a multiethnic Ottoman Empire to a secular state accompanied by an enduring and strong state nationalism. Koksall (2016) notes that power was in the hands of the Sunni Turks. Alevi, Kurds, and Christian minorities needed to either suppress their identity or come to terms with being seen as "outsiders." As Orhan Pamuk (1997), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, states in his novel, *The New Life* "The west has swallowed us up, trampled on us in passing, They have invaded us down to our soup, our candy, our underpants; they have finished us off. But someday, someday perhaps a thousand years from now we will avenge ourselves; we will bring an end to this conspiracy by taking them out of our soup, our chewing gum and our souls" (Pamuk, 1997).

With an all-Armenian cast and filmed in a reconstructed village in Central Anatolia, Perdeci and Alyamac used Armenian music and thousands of candles that reflect the passage of time and the rituals of the Armenian church to recreate the story of Bedo, his sister Maryam, and their pet bird 'Bachig.' (which means "kiss"

in Armenian). The Turkish Culture Ministry General Directorate approved the film and provided a small grant, even though the policy of Türkiye is to deny the genocide of Greeks and Armenians (Witmer, 2015). Donations of props and carpets from that era and stories gathered from Armenian survivors still living in Türkiye, helped to make the set and script authentic.

Lost Birds opens with an introduction to an extended Armenian family living in a small Anatolian village. The father is absent due to conscription into the Ottoman army. The two main characters, Bedo and Maryam, live in a comfortable home with their mother and maternal grandparents. Early events in the film show an Easter celebration with family and neighbors complete with music, dancing, and a picnic of holiday foods. Trouble is brewing. In an Easter church service, the priest announces that the police are collecting residency permits. Prophetically, one of the men in the audience predicts that they will “exile all of us.” When the police arrest grandfather and all the other men in the village, the mother forbids the children to leave the house. The bored children sneak out with their caged bird and revel in the sunshine that illuminates the tall grasses and leaves of surrounding trees. When they return home carrying a bouquet of wildflowers, they find the house empty and ransacked. Thus begins their journey into Culture Shock. They become strangers and arrive at the Spectator stage while remaining in their homeland.

Not knowing that their mother escaped to Aleppo, the children set out amid long shots of the sunlit wheat fields and pastures to find her. At this point they move into the stage of Increasing Participation with the Turkish-Muslim culture. Bedo while gathering berries for their bird is captured by two Turkish soldiers who decide to take him to work in the fields at a local aga’s farm. Bedo not only gets a job, but he receives a new name and undergoes circumcision to change his religious identity. Thus, bringing him into the “Culture Shock Stage.” Later, he confides in Maryam after she asks whether he was baptized with his new name, he whispers to her about his surgery. She asks if it hurt a lot and Bedo answers “Yes” and adds that he did not cry.

Staff members from an orphanage run by a Christian missionary group from Switzerland find Maryam, who is exhausted and hungry from her search for her brother. Sharing their religious practices facilitates her adjustment to a familiar culture with a Christmas tree and gifts, but not so much that she wants to stay. After Bedo joins her at the orphanage, they run away and return to their old home expecting that their parents would be there for the Christmas holiday only to discover that another family now lives there. There would be no ability to regain access or payment for lost properties for Christian Ottomans under the newly established government in Ankara (Kurt, 2023). At this point, the children experience major Culture Shock and would have starved or frozen to death, were they not saved by intervening events and the fatherly kindness of “Uncle Mahmut”, one of the teachers at the rural orphanage. He braves the snow and wind to find them and arranges for their immigration into Syria. Their mother searched for her children in orphanages established by the state and religious organizations to take care of and in the case of state-run orphanages to convert children to Islam. From exile in Aleppo, she sent money to the officers of the Christian orphanage to arrange for them to be smuggled into Syria. Potentially Bedo and Maryam will revisit the Stages of Being Foreign.

The closing shots of *Lost Birds* show the children reuniting with their mother who waits with a group of mothers and black habit wearing church sisters, standing in front of a stone church on a hill outside Aleppo city. Maryam and Bedo can reassimilate into that Armenian community and reach a new Adjustment Stage. Symbolically, Maryam releases their caged iridescent blue bird, who flies off to freedom, analogous to the children leaving Türkiye by horse cart to find their freedom. They will participate in a new country without their beloved grandparents and father, but they can escape the Culture Shock brought about by Türkiye's rising nationalism and desire to create a homogeneous society. Yilmazok (2019) reiterates, "Nation building is based on the exclusion of differences"...and "the creation of a *constitutive outsider*". Orhan Pamuk (1997) in his novel, *The New Life*, has his main character Osman, a one-time university student, observe a cuckoo clock used for calling people to prayer that announces the time by saying "Happiness is being a Turk, a Turk, a Turk". Osman experiences an identity crisis and observes that the clock "automatically settled the Westernization-versus- Islamization question through a modern device." Sofos (2024) reiterates in his book, *Turkish Politics and 'The People': Mass Mobilization and Populism*, "Those who did not conform to the idea of Turkishness had no place in the Republic." It may be a modified adjustment stage, but Bedo and Maryam by joining the Armenian community in Syria will join a more pluralistic society, which at that time was less likely to view them as "Other."

Conclusion

Feury and Feury in *Visual Cultures and Critical Theory* (2003) write, "The image is a component in a complex configuration of political, cultural and social discourses and ideologies formulating visual culture". By looking, "we are incorporating ourselves into a chain of events." Are questions of history and political decisions romanticized or are stories intertwined with questions of history and politics? As the story unfolds the viewer can see the power relationships embedded in the narrative. The images and themes of cultural and geographic borders and crossing borders, may be an overworked perspective, but immigrants and their stories continue. The United States has joined other countries to restrict the movement of that 122 million mentioned in the opening paragraph of this paper. While sympathy may be fleeting, the image of the three-year-old Syrian boy wearing a red tee-shirt and washed up on a Turkish beach on the beach after attempting a perilous border crossing still resonates in the media. *Daughter of Keltoum* and *Lost Birds* deal with issues of immigration and Oberg's Stages of Being Foreign in a more personal way by returning to family histories or what is termed "history from below." Not dismissing the big macro-level stories of economic and political history, Suner (2009) argues that micro-level studies also should focus on the stories of individuals. These stories use film as does literature come "to terms with the past, which engage audiences' emotions and invite them to identify with the subject position of the victims." In this respect, *Daughter of Keltoum* and *Lost Birds*. explore family memories that present more nuanced perspectives and address the experiences of ordinary individuals in relation to the journey through the Stages of Being Foreign

as they encounter new political, cultural, and social discourses and ideologies that surround the process of immigration.

Optimistically, Weaver (2000) compares culture shock to the common cold, which should be managed. He points out that no prevention or magic cure exists, but understanding the process gives us a sense of control and predictability. Thus, border crossers like Rallia, Bedo, and Maryam can travel through the Stages of Being Foreign to cope, gain new intercultural skills and understanding and settle in the Adjustment Stage. Viewers of these two films could gain an understanding about the characters' refugee experiences and consider how they in such situations would navigate the Stages of Being Foreign.

References

- Adler, P.S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 15, 13-23.
- Armes, R. (2005). *Postcolonial images: Studies in North African film*. Indiana University Press.
- Balkaran, (2016). *The 'Algerias- of- the- mind' syndrome in Mehdi Charef's Daughter of Keltoum*, <https://www.academia.edu/747228147/>
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi/Zygmunt Bauman*. Polity Press.
- Briggs, L. (2012). *Somebody's children: the politics of transracial and transnational adoption*. Duke University Press.
- Budd, D. H. (2002). *Culture meets culture in the movies: an analysis east, west, north, and south, with filmographies*. McFarland.
- Charef, M. (Director). (2001). *Bent Keltoum*. [CD]. The Global Film Initiative.
- Cupsa, I. (2018). Culture shock and identity. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 48(2): 181-191.
- Emen-Gokatalay, G. & Gokatalay, S. (2022). Was there room for Christian Turks in early Republican Turkey? Debates on the migration and Turkishness of the Gagauz. *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 9(2):199-220. DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2022.2065480
- Feury, P. & Feury, K. (2003). *Visual cultures and critical theory*. Arnold Press.
- Gullahorn, J.T. & J. E. Gullahorn. (1963). An extension of the U-Curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 19(3), 33-47.
- Gzoyan, E.G., Galustyan, R.A., Khachatryan, S.R. & Margaryan, N.V. (2023). In the beautiful heaven, a golden cage: race, identity, and memory in Turkification of Armenian children in state orphanages during the Armenian genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 19 July 2023. DOI:10.1080/14623528.2023.2237700
- Hammer, M.R. (2000). *The importance of cross-cultural training in international business*. In G. W. Weaver (Ed.). *Culture communication and conflict: Readings in Intercultural relations* (2nd ed.). (pp. 173-174). Pearson Publishing.
- Hoffman, E. (1999) "The New Nomads" In *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*. A. Aciman, (Ed.). The New Press of New York,
- Hubbell, A. L (2012) The past is present: Pied noir returns to Algeria. *Nottingham French Studies* .51(1).66.-77.
- Jackson, J. (2018). *Interculturally in international education*. Routledge.
- Kazecki, K., A. Ritzenhoff, A. & Miller, C.J. (2013). *Border visions: Identity and diaspora in film*. Scarecrow Press.

- Kohls, R. L. (1984). *Survival kit for overseas living: For Americans planning to work and live abroad*. Intercultural Press.
- Koksal, O. (2016). *Aesthetics of displacement: Turkey and its minorities on screen*. Bloomsbury.
- Kurt, O. (1923). The fate of Armenian and Greek properties in the Post-First World War period. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/1944-8953.2023.2233363.
- Lewis, T.J. & Jungman, R. E. (1986). *On being foreign: Culture shock in short fiction*. Intercultural Press.
- Lubin, J.S. (2000). *Companies use cross-cultural training to help their employees adjust abroad*. In G. W. Weaver (Ed.). *Culture communication and conflict: Readings in intercultural relations* (2nd ed.). 170-172. Pearson Publishing.
- McComb, M.M. & Foster, G.M. (1974). Kalervo Oberg, 1901-1973. *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 76(2). 357-360.
- Moorti, S. (2003). Desperately seeking an identity: Diasporic cinema and the articulation of transnational kinship. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6 (3). 355-376.
- Naficy, H. (2001). *An accented cinema: Exilic and diasporic filmmaking*. Princeton University Press.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock and the problem of adjustments in new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology* 7. 177-182.
- Oberg, K. (1954). *Speech Presented to the Women's Club of Rio de Janeiro*, Brazil, August 3, 1954. The Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in the Social Sciences.
- Orme, R. (2025) *What is culture shock and how to deal with it*. AMN Healthcare. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from https://conneticsusa.com/resources_library/what-is-culture-shock-an.
- Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa, Lost Birds. (2022). <https://www.balcanicaucasos.org/eng/Areas/Turkey/Lost-birds-163507>
- Pambukyan, C. (2020), "Lost Birds" Film Tell Genocide Story Through Children's Eyes. <https://hyesharzhoom.com/lost-birds-film-tellgenocide-story-through-childrens-eyes/>
- Pamuk, O. (1997). *The New Life*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Perdeci, A., & Alyamac, E. (Directors). (2015). *Lost Birds* [Film]. Kara Kedi Film.
- Pitts, M. J. (2010). Culture Shock. In R. L. Jackson II & M.A. Hogg (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Identity*. Sage.
- Rahal, M. (2012). Fused together and torn apart: Stories and violence. *Contemporary Algeria, History and Memory* 24(2), 118-151.
- Said, E.W. (2000). *Reflections on exile and other essays*. Harvard University Press.
- Schein, R. (2015). Educating Americans for "overseasmanship": The Peace Corps and the invention of culture shock. *American Quarterly* 67 (4).1109-1136.
- Segal, T. (2024). *Culture shock: meaning, stages, and how to overcome it*. Investopedia. Retrieved March 12, 2025, from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/culture-shock.asp> and health care
- Seker, N. (2023). Between empire and nation-state: Debating and formulating nationality in post-First World War Turkey, 1918-1922. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 59(3).407-421. DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2022.21022
- Slonim-Nevo, V. & Regev, S. (2016). Risk factors associated with culture shock among asylum seekers from Darfur. *Journal of refugee studies*, 29(1), 117-138.
- Sofos, S.A. (2024). *Turkish politics and 'the people': Mass mobilization and populism*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Suner, A. (2010). *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, identity and memory*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010.
- Suner, A. (2009). Silenced memories: Notes on remembering in new Turkish cinema, *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 7(1),71-81.

- UNHCR. (2024). Figures at a Glance. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- Ward, C.A., Bochner, S & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. Routledge.
- Ward, C. and Kennedy, A. (1996), 'Before and after cross-cultural transition: A study of New Zealand volunteers on field assignments. In H. Grad, A. Blanc and J. Georgas (Eds), *Key Issues in cross cultural psychology* (pp.138-154). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Weaver, G.W. (2000). Understanding and coping with cross-cultural adjustment stress. In G. W. Weaver (Ed.). *Culture communication and conflict: Readings in Intercultural relations* (2nd ed.) (pp. 177-194), Pearson Publishing.
- Witmer, J. D. (2015). Lost and found. *American Cinematographer*, (September 2015). 68-79.
- Xavier, S. (2010). Mehdi Charef and the politics of French immigration, *The French Review*, 89(2). 328-340.
- Yilmazok, L. (2019). Persistent othering in Turkish cinema: the stereotyped and gendered Greek identity. *Turkish Studies*, 20(1).120-139.
- Zheng, X. & Berry, J.W. (1991). Psychological adaptation of Chinese sojourners in Canada. *International Journal of Psychology*, 26.451-470.