

## The cultural alienation in *Eating People Is Wrong* & *Türkler Almanya'da*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the concept of cultural alienation in the context of migration through a comparative analysis of Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People Is Wrong* and Bekir Yıldız's *Türkler Almanya'da*. Bradbury's novel explores the challenges faced by foreign students from former colonies studying in England in the 1950s, highlighting their struggles with cultural clashes and social acceptance. Yıldız's novel, on the other hand, focuses on Turkish workers in Germany in the 1960s, examining their experiences of alienation due to language barriers, cultural differences and societal discrimination. Through the lens of postcolonial theory and concepts of alienation articulated by thinkers such as Ahmet Cevizci, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, this study explores the psychological and social impact of migration on individual identity and cultural integration. The study also highlights how both groups experience feelings of estrangement and dislocation within their host societies, ultimately leading to a sense of alienation. By comparing these two novels, the paper sheds light on the persistent issues of cultural alienation in the context of migration and offers insights into the wider implications for contemporary society.

**Keywords:** cultural alienation, immigration, displacement, *Eating People Is Wrong*, *Türkler Almanya'da*

### Introduction

Emigration, migration and immigration have been important phenomena for humanity for a long time. People are constantly leaving their own countries and going to live in another country for different purposes. To describe the difference between these three close and related words, it will be useful to look at their dictionary meanings. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, emigration is "the act of leaving one's own country to go and live permanently in

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another country". Migration is "the movement of people to a new country or area to find work or better living conditions" and immigration is "the process of coming to live permanently in a country other than the one in which you were born" (oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Accordingly, in *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959) by Malcolm Bradbury, some foreign students come to England from colonial countries for university education in the decolonization period just after the Second World War in the 1950s. On the other hand, *Türkler Almanya'da* (1966) by Bekir Yıldız deals with Turkish migrant workers who went from Turkey to Germany to support German industry in the early 1960s after World War II. Thus, both novels in this paper deal with migration and its related issues. In particular, the alienation of the immigrant characters in both novels from their new socio-cultural environment in a diasporic country is the focus of this paper.

The issue of alienation in general has been an ongoing debate since the years following the second half of the 20th century, especially after the Second World War, until today. This period is also called the decolonization period for European countries such as England, France, Spain, and Portugal. *Since Eating People Is Wrong* deals with foreign students from ex-colonies and *Türkler Almanya'da* deals with Turkish workers in a foreign country, first some general definitions of the term and then its cultural dimension will be evaluated below to better understand the problem of alienation in both novels.

Ahmet Cevizci (2005, 1728) defines alienation as an action or development that distracts or alienates someone or something from someone or something else. In particular, it is also defined as deviation from normal in psychiatry, the feeling of alienation from society, nature and other people around him/her in contemporary psychology and sociology. In philosophy, alienation is the process by which things and objects appear strange, distant and uninteresting to the consciousness, to the things that previously interested it. It is also indifference, lack of interest, and even boredom or disgust toward people with whom one has a friendly relationship. In addition, alienation has an isolationist dimension. It occurs when people feel alienated or disconnected from the norms and values of society when they feel excluded or lonely in social relationships. Alienation is also defined as "the sense of estrangement from society or the self that has been identified in philosophy, social science, and literature as a central feature of modern life" (Quinn 2006, 17). Marx also emphasizes the

term with dissatisfaction of factory workers with their work as a meaningful expression of themselves depending on capitalist conditions (Ibidem). In other words, in capitalist economic systems, workers who produce things feel that they do not have any ownership rights over the things they produce. Thus, “workers are alienated from the products of their labour” (Klages 2012, 5). After these literal definitions of the term, we will now focus on the cultural side of alienation.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002, 9) the displacement of immigrants from their homelands to unfamiliar diasporic lands (through migration, enslavement, transportation, and indentured labour) makes them culturally denigrated according to the supposedly superior racial or cultural model they encounter. Certainly, this creates a cultural alienation in both immigrant and host people. The main reason for this cultural clash is some ambivalent feelings of the immigrants:

Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better ‘then’ or ‘now’. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a ‘myth of return’ or to design a new project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the ‘host’ society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. (White 1995, 3-4)

On the other hand, Frantz Fanon (1963, 222-223) asserts a relationship between the cultural alienation of the colonized natives to their literary products. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, he points out that the history of the emancipation of the colonized consists of three phases. In the first assimilation phase, the colonized writes entirely from the colonizer's point of view. In the awakening phase, the native remembers only his past conventions and culture. However, he evaluates the past literary works from the point of view of the colonizer. In the third phase of the struggle, the native intellect composes its own revolutionary and nationalist literature. In contrast to Fanon's phases, Homi Bhabha uses the term “in-between” to contest a hybrid cultural identity for immigrants from Third World countries in European diasporas. According to Bhabha (1994, 1-2), new signs of identity, innovative sides of cooperation and contestation are possible for future Western societies. Similarly, Soren Frank (2008, 133) states that the immigrant, deprived of his homeland, language, and culture, seeks a new identity and personality in the diaspora. This new being is usually a result of the inter-negotiations of the people who construct

the society. Moreover, in the period of decolonization, many immigrants from the former colonies of Britain have been pushed to England; and as Çelikel (2011, 9-10) states, most of them have felt alienated, during hybridization process in the British culture. The main reason for this is that they are imaginatively excluded in the host country and they “may well live in new places, but they can be seen as not belonging there and disqualified from thinking of the new country as their home” (McLeod 2000, 212). All in all, it is clear that immigrants, whether they go for better living conditions or temporary jobs, encounter some cultural and identical problems in the diasporic countries that they move in. Therefore, according to the brief discussion of cultural alienation and identity problems above, first *Eating People Is Wrong*, and then *Türkler Almanya’da* will be evaluated.

### **Cultural alienation in *Eating People Is Wrong***

*Eating People Is Wrong* (1959) is a novel by Malcolm Bradbury, also known as a campus novel. In addition to being academic, the novel is also autobiographical. Bradbury inspired the subject of this novel from the University of Leicester, where he went as a student in 1950, he also characterizes Stuart Treece, the novel's protagonist, as himself in his twenties (Bradbury 2021). In addition, the setting of *Eating People Is Wrong* is an unnamed provincial university in England, characterized as a red brick university, and the period is the postwar 1950s. The protagonist of the novel, Stuart Treece, is a professor in the English department, by the general tendency of campus novels (Turan 2021, 247). As a campus novel and because of the social and political conditions of 1950s colonial England, there are many local and international students in this red-brick university. Nevertheless, the academic life in the educational institutions defined as Red Brick Universities in England at that time was not very bright for the students who studied there, no exception for English or other nations. For example, an English student named Louis Bates, a working-class and economically low student feels inferior and marginalized in campus life. He uses self-defence mechanisms to overcome this feeling of marginalization, as “he cried, throwing an intense, soulful look in Treece’s direction, I’m just explaining the conditions under which I live. I mean, these are my terms, and they’re what I think will make me do well here” (Bradbury 1962, 17). Like Bates’s discomfort on campus, despite being a British citizen, other international students,

such as those from Africa, also have problems of acculturation and origin. In particular, Eborebelosa, a West African, spends his days locked in the toilets. One evening, as the vice chancellor was about to leave for home, someone broke a window in the bathroom:

The Vice-Chancellor looked up, surprised, and nervous, and in the broken window, a frightened black face appeared. 'How do you do, sir,' said the face. 'I am in prison in the toilet.' 'Who are you?' said the Vice-Chancellor. 'Eborebelosa,' said the blackface. 'Are you a student here?' 'Yes, indeed,' said Eborebelosa (Bradbury 1962, 25).

Eborebelosa is one of Stuart Treece's students, and Treece knows him well. He comes from colonial West Africa to be educated in various subjects. Since he belongs to a terrorist group dedicated to driving the British out of Africa, he is particularly interested in making gunpowder and time bombs. At the Vice Chancellor's request, Treece talks to him about his toilet locks:

'Now, tell me, why do you hide in the lavatories?' he went on. 'Well, it's silly, isn't it? You can't go on hiding in lavatories all your life, can you? How many public lavatories are there in your country?' Eborebelosa was not roused even by this sally. 'Probably not many. You'll be hard put to it, won't you? Or is it just because you're in England that you hide in public lavatories?' [...]

'Are you afraid of something? If so, you must tell me, and we'll put it right. Are you unhappy?'

Eborebelosa nodded his head in quick movements.

'Why?' went on Treece. 'What's troubling you?'

'I am despised by all,' he said suddenly in a deep clipped voice. People laughed at him, he said, because he was black and the other Negroes at the University did not like him because he was the son of a chief. He asked them for presents and they wouldn't bring him any. (Bradbury 1962, 27)

The above quote is striking from the point of diasporic problems, including cultural clashes. As stated above, Eborebelosa is an African black man who comes from a colonial third-world country to this British provincial university to study. However, the host country and its society do not welcome him. As a result, he feels physically and then culturally alienated in England. The physical alienation comes from his skin colour. He is black, and all black people here are accepted as strange and dangerous. We can understand this from the labelling of his native people as terrorists. Then this kind of physical exclusion from British society makes him culturally alienated as well. He feels himself to be different and inferior to British citizens, here to

British teachers and students. As a symptomatic result, he then locks himself in the toilets. It is clear, then, that both physical and cultural alienation become obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Next, Eborebelose tells Stuart Treece that he is the son of a chief in his village in Africa, and if people do not recognize him that way, he thinks he is nothing. Then Treece asks some questions about his accommodations in England:

‘Those are lodgings,’ said Treece. ‘That is not your house. What did you do there? Did you tell the landlady it was your house?’ ‘Yes,’ said Mr Eborebelosa. ‘What else did you do? Did you damage anything?’ ‘I have dogs to sleep in my bedroom. People also.’ ‘Women?’ asked Treece. ‘Some women; some men,’ said Eborebelosa.

‘You must be more thoughtful,’ said Treece. ‘We have great difficulty in finding landladies who are willing to accept Negro students as it is.’

‘A ha,’ cried Eborebelosa. ‘You see, sir, you see. You do not accept us.’ (Bradbury 1962, 28)

In the above, it is striking that Treece describes Eborebelose as negro instead of African or black. This situation reflects the general attitude of the British people who considered Africans inferior in the 1950s. As mentioned above, the 1950s was the beginning period of colonial migrations from ex-colonial countries to England and these diasporic movements started with the educational migrations of students. Thus, Eborebelose has some adaptation problems to university life and British society related to the cultural clash of the two nations. Moreover, the cultural clash that Eborebelose faces has two dimensions. On the one hand, Eborebelose sees himself as superior to the other black students because of his father's chief position. On the other hand, the British teachers and students are unhappy with Eborebelose's self-image and the abnormal behaviour mentioned above. At this point, Stuart Treece warns him like this: “You may be an important person in your country, but here you can only gain respect by the way you behave and the kind of person you are” (Bradbury 1962, 29). The result, however, is Eborebelose's cultural alienation and disillusionment, which leads to his obsessive-compulsive neurosis of locking himself in the toilets. Similar to Eborebelose's cultural clash above, there is another disturbance between Stuart Treece and other black students at one of the English Department's tea parties that Stuart Treece organizes for the foreign students:

## The cultural alienation

A group of Negroes, who had been chatting quietly in one corner, dressed in their native robes, had to pray to Allah - or someone like that - in ten minutes and wanted to know where there was a consecrated room. 'We have no consecrated rooms,' said Treece, embarrassed. No consecrated rooms! Here, said the world, is a man who gives a party for foreign students and fails to provide a consecrated room (Bradbury 1962, 34).

The cultural clash above stems from the religious differences between the two nations. Here, neither Stuart Treece, representing the British, nor the African students know much about each other's way of performing religious rituals. Moreover, this situation is compatible with Stuart Hall's (1990, 223) first moment of black representation. He "shows how diasporic communities have used unifying and homogenizing modes of representation in response to some of the less welcome experiences of diaspora". The African student group in the tea event above is collectively acting and reacting against the social and cultural traditions of the host country. Thus, a cultural clash emerges at the point of understanding and tolerance between the black immigrant students and the British academics. From now on, similar cultural and social conflicts in *Türkler Almanya'da* will be treated comparatively in the following.

### **Cultural alienation in *Türkler Almanya'da***

As mentioned above, there are many black colonial students in *Eating People Is Wrong* who come to England to study. Similarly, *Türkler Almanya'da* tells the story of Turkish immigrants who went to Germany as foreign workers in the early 1960s. The author Bekir Yıldız is one of the leading figures of immigrant literature in Türkiye and *Türkler Almanya'da* is the first novel of this genre in Turkish literature (Koyuncu & Asutay 2018, 2). In addition, *Türkler Almanya'da* is an autobiographical novel and it narrates Bekir Yıldız's own work experience in Germany for four years. Like Yıldız himself, the protagonist Yüce goes to West Germany as a guest worker in the early 1960s (Töngür & Çevik 2021, 905). Thus, the act of migration in *Türkler Almanya'da*, unlike educational point of *Eating People Is Wrong*, is based on a financial issue. In his first year in Germany, Yüce is alone, but later his wife comes to Germany with their two daughters to support him economically. In the beginning, Yüce works in different factories in difficult situations and positions as the author Yıldız did himself. After that, he starts working as a printer in a printing factory. With the help of his wife, he managed to collect the money for a

printing press in four years. Then, again as the author Yıldız did himself, Yüce buys a printing machine from the factory where he works in Germany and returns to Türkiye.

As mentioned above, the protagonist Yüce migrates from Turkey to Germany in the early 1960s as an immigrant worker with a large group of Turkish people to support the industrial and economic situation of West Germany after the Second World War. However, when they first arrive in Germany, they encounter the social and cultural conflicts that arise from the national traditions and way of life they were used to:

Welcome. This is the city of Munich, Germany. In a moment, this group will be put on a train to Heidelberg. They will meet you there. You will go to the factory. After that, you'll learn the rest there. Look after each other. Some of you disappear. If something like this happens to you, you can ask around, don't get trampled, don't shout and scream. No one will be interested in you. In such cases, stay where you are, like a nail. Here the immobile person stands out so that you are recognised as a foreigner (Yıldız 2012, 21).

The German officers address the above statements to the group of Turkish workers coming to Germany for the first time. However, the voice speaking above represents the authority of the host country, which warns the immigrant workers in a childish and insulting way. The protagonist, Yüce, goes on to recount another striking situation on the train as they travel from Munich to Heidelberg:

We were both ashamed and afraid to move around too much on the train. Our fear was because our ties to the caravan could not tolerate being stretched out. Our embarrassment was due to our one-inch beard and the horrible expression on our faces, black with coal dust, which our locomotive had produced from Istanbul to Belgrade (Yıldız 2012, 21).

It is striking that Yücel's shame and anxiety here are very similar to the cause of Eborebelosa's confinement to the toilets discussed above in *Eating People is Wrong*. As Eborebelosa hides and withdraws from public view, Yücel avoids walking in the corridor and confines himself to his compartment so as not to be exposed to the other German travellers on the train. Yücel's confinement is particularly evident when he first sees the factory where he will work:

Seeing the factory, located 20 kilometres from Heidelberg, from a distance, we felt a sense of loneliness and isolation, which our two-day journey had increased even more. I felt as if I was going to be taken to a prison because of the air of guardianship of the Germans who took us there (Yıldız 2012, 21-22).

Just as Eborebelosa feels alienated from the physical environment in *Eating People is Wrong*, Yüce feels alienated from the physical conditions of the working environment in the host country. There is also a cultural and social conflict between the Turkish and German ways of life:

Only 8-10 people out of forty drank the beer. The German asked in amazement:

“Why don’t they drink?”

I told him that drinking was a sin and that some of them wanted water.

“But is beer a drink? There is no water to drink here. After a while there’s plenty of water in the hut they’ll take you to. But this water is undrinkable, you will bathe in it...”

When I translated the German words to my friends, some of them swore, and some said: “So it is true that there is no water here... How can there be fertility where there is no water!” they grumbled. (Yıldız 2012, 22-23).

Similar to the black students in *Eating People Is Wrong* above, it is clear that both culturally and socially, the traditional way of life of the German people is different from that of the Turkish workers. Therefore, cultural and social differences in traditions and way of life create a conflict between the two parties and affect the adaptation period negatively. Besides, there is also a striking incident when the German authorities face Turkish workers for the first time to distribute a convenient professional position to each of them:

He wouldn’t have liked my thin, delicate anatomy. With a hard expression: “Give me your hands,” he said. I put my hands out, and he said, “Come closer.” I came closer. The director checked my hands with his huge hands, looking at their size, whether they were small or big, soft or hard. And then he turned to the men next to him, who were all stubborn-faced: “Very soft and small,” he said. (Yıldız 2012, 24)

It is clear that the way the director treats Yüce, the Turkish worker, is derogatory. He examines the worker’s hands as objects and expresses a negative attitude towards them. Furthermore, the work position offered to Yüce is also problematic for him:

“You will work in the magazine,” said the director.

I didn’t understand the specific meaning of this word, so I asked the interpreter:

“What is a magazine, sir?”

The interpreter replied: “The warehouse where the machine parts are stacked.”

He replied:

I was angry, and despite the two huge diplomas my hometown had given me, I could only fit in the warehouse.

“No way, no way,” I said, “I have two diplomas. My last diploma is from the School of Printing. Why don’t you tell me they don’t run it?”

Interpreter: “It is shameful to dislike work here. It is arrogant to object to work. Will someone else do the job you don’t like?” (Yıldız 2012, 25)

Yüce’s displacement and disillusionment with the job he is offered is in line with Marx's views on capitalism as stated above. Although Yüce is skilled in printing, he has to work in a position that he doesn't want. Thus, it is clear that Yüce is alienated from his work. All in all, similar to the ones that the foreign ex-colonial black students in *Eating People is Wrong* come across, the negative situations and attitudes that Turkish migrant workers face in the above examples constitute a cultural and social clash for both Turkish migrant workers and German host populations. The final outcome of these cultural and social clashes is seen in the form of alienation, displacement and self-confinement of the immigrants within the host society.

## **Conclusion**

This comparative analysis of Malcolm Bradbury’s *Eating People Is Wrong* and Bekir Yıldız’s *Türkler Almanya’da* explores the concept of cultural alienation in the context of migration. Both novels, set against the backdrop of post-colonial and migratory experiences, illustrate the profound challenges faced by individuals who find themselves in culturally and socially alien environments.

In *Eating People Is Wrong*, some black students came from the colonies to study in England in the 1950s. Coming from very different cultural and social backgrounds, they face very difficult conflicts in the host society’s way of life. In particular, the South African Eborebelosa wants the same opportunities as a chief's son that he had in his homeland. He also wants to marry Emma Fielding, one of his English classmates, as his fourth wife. At the same time, a group of black students at a tea party need a special room for their Islamic prayers. Naturally, Eborebelosa’s selfish requests and those of other black students create a major cultural and social clash between their own and the host society. As these demands are not satisfactorily met by the host country and its people, the ultimate result is the dissatisfied, disillusioned and alienated migrant students in the host society. Even Eborebelosa hides in the toilets as an escape. Similarly, the immigrant workers in *Türkler Almanya’da* encounter a very different cultural and

social environment in the host country, Germany in the 1960s after World War II. The Turkish workers were despised and treated with contempt when they first settled in Germany. Like Eborebelosa above, the Turkish workers feel trapped and confined in the host society. So, like Eborebelosa, they avoid contact with any German authority. In particular, the protagonist Yüce has become alienated from his workplace because the director disregards his education and diploma.

Through the lens of postcolonial theory and the concept of alienation articulated by thinkers such as Ahmet Cevizci, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Homi Bhabha, this paper has highlighted the psychological and social impact of migration on individual identity and cultural integration. Both novels underscore the persistent problem of cultural alienation, revealing how migrants' aspirations and cultural identities clash with the norms and values of host societies. By comparing these two narratives, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the broader implications of cultural alienation in migration contexts. The analysis highlights the need for greater social acceptance and integration strategies that recognize and respect migrants' cultural identities. This comparative approach not only enriches the discourse on migration and alienation but also offers insights into the ongoing challenges faced by migrants in contemporary society.

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