

A Study of I Saw the Sun Directed by Mahsun Kirmizigül. To Be at Home or Not to Be at Home!

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Abstract

Uprooted from their homelands, Kurds are in the predicament of living in an unhomey world which doesn't offer any reflection of their subjectivity and identity. This study tries to examine the movie, I Saw the Sun, directed by Mahsun Kirmizigül which tells the story of a Kurdish family forced to leave its homeland. The main purpose is to represent the psychological and social effects of unhomeyness on movie's characters and to delve into uncanny nature of movie's characterization, Kadri. It has been tried to challenge the fixed notion of identity and undervalue the binary oppositions which are the basis of the cultural thinking. In this gender-biased Kurdish community, people like Kadri are doomed to violence and death and the study's main focus is on this character's evolution from a naïve outcast into a mature outcast. The study based on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts, uncanny and unhomey offers a new reading of a post-colonial situation in which physically and psychologically unhomey characters live in an incredulous terror and are denied any sense of individuality and identity.

Keywords: I Saw the Sun, uncanny, unhomey, binary opposition, Homi K. Bhabha

1. Introduction

William Safire in his essay "Remember the Kurds" states that one person in six in Turkey is a Kurd; that's almost ten million people. They are called "Mountain Turks" and over years Turkish government has tried to melt them into Turkish pot. Diaspora, or the involuntary or forcible movement of Kurds from their homelands into new regions in Turkey is a central fact in their history. The descendants of this massive exodus have developed their own distinctive culture and sense of identity different from their indigenous culture and identity.

I Saw the Sun is an epic drama written and directed by Mahsun Kirmizigül. The movie retells the story of a close-knit Kurdish family who are evacuated from their village due to the conflicts between Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish government forces. This family's dispersed members who accommodate in Istanbul and Norway after the evacuation run into cultural and psychological problems. In this paper, all attempts have been made to elaborate on the concepts of unhomey and uncanny, both proposed by the post-structuralist theorist, Homi K. Bhabha.

Homi Bhabha was born in Bombay, India, into a Parsi family which has a long-lasting effect on his literary work. "The diasporic history of the Parsis is matched by their modern-day dispersal throughout the world, while still maintaining an important core community within India" (Lane, 2006). Due largely to his Parsi background "Bhabha articulates some recurring themes and questions about identity, which he also applies to the literatures that emerge from complex intersections of people and place" (ibid.). Among his prominent influences are Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon and Toni Morrison. In his 1986's foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, instead of regarding the configuration of race/gender and race/sexuality as "petty bourgeois deviations", sees them vital to understanding of colonialism's impact on humanity (ibid.). The rejection of binary thinking and binary oppositions is crystal clear in his criticism: not black/white, colonizer/colonized, male/female, heterosexual/homosexual but in-betweenness is of importance. The critical discourse in his *The Location of Culture* engages with heterogeneous communities and voices: "women, the colonized, minority groups, and the bearers of policed sexualities" (ibid.).

The idea of home and unhomeyness is central to Bhabha's theory and I Saw the Sun movie, and this sense of home is quintessential in movie characters' sense of identity. Bhabha explains that unhomey cannot be easily

accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public sphere, (Bhabha, 1994) and unhomeliness is a feeling that leaves the unhomed people in a state of incredulous terror. It is where "the recesses of domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (ibid.). I Saw the sun is about unhomely moments which relate "the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wide disjunctions of political existence" (ibid. 15). Unhomeliness is the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts that Goethe suggests:

Nations could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted, and come to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs (qtd. in Bhabha, 1994).

The concept of uncanny or unhomely first suggested by Freud is an important concept in contemporary thinking and its struggles extend over different range of disciplines including literature, queer theory, film studies and philosophy. Freud in his essay considers the response to dolls and other machines, being robbed of one's eyes and the idea of double as uncanny; to him the uncanny can be any repressed emotion and unconscious feeling that involuntary come into light. For Nicholas Royle "uncanny disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside" (2).

This paper tries to show that the world of people in I Saw the Sun movie is an unhomely world in which unsettled characters are dwelling. The major focus is on Kadri, the bisexual character of the movie, who is considered the uncanniest in a world in which time, order, space and sense are unsettled. Kadri is regarded as an abnormal character because he doesn't fit the long-held classical humanist belief called essentialism," which asserts that the true essence or identity of a human being is composed of finite and fixed properties that are the essential components of what it means to be human" (Bressler, 2007), he attacks the accepted belief that our sexuality is determined by essential features. He is considered uncanny because he rejects what Derrida calls logocentrism which assumes that there is an ultimate truth or reality that "serves as the basis for all thoughts and actions" (ibid. 257). According to Derrida, this logocentrism which has its origin in Aristotle's noncontradiction, "a thing cannot both have and not have a property" (ibid.), leads the system of binary oppositions in Western thinking.

2. Discussion

2.1 *To Be at Home or Not to Be at Home, That Is the Question!*

For many years Altun family had lived in a village in Southeast of Turkey but when the struggles between guerrillas and Turkish forces are intensified, the villagers are forced to immigrate. Haydar and Isa and their families settle down in Istanbul while Davut Bey decides to join his brother, Nadim, in Norway. The massive exodus of Kurdish villagers followed by the Altuns' immigration lead to certain cultural and national ambivalences that the movie tries to depict. Davut and his family in Norway run into different cultural obstacles such as language and integration into a foreign society while homeland traumas and losses intervene. Back in Istanbul Haydar's family troubles start as well; Havar, Ramo's wife has an operation due to pregnancy complication, their infant son is killed due to careless kids who were supposed to take care of him and Kadri, Haydar's son makes friend with a group of transvestites and understands the reason of his strange feelings; an acquaintance which leads to his murder by his own brother at the end of movie.

In this study two concepts, Unhomely and Uncanny, proposed by post-colonial and poststructuralist theorist, Homi K. Bhabha are applied. Bhabha in the introduction of his book, *The Location of Culture*, elaborates on the construction of identity in an unhomely world. He contends that "although the "unhomely" is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites" (Bhabha, 1994). This unhomeliness is not a physical one as Bhabha says "to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public sphere" (ibid.13). So unhomely moments creep upon you as your own shadow and leave you in a state of incredulous terror. This incredulous terror creeps upon people of this village during constant bombardments of Turkish government, during the time Gulestan, Davut's wife, is begging her son not to go or the time she is scared stiff at the thought of her son's death, or the time Kadri escapes from his outraged brother. The unhomely is the village where Davut Bey never intends to come back to a place where "brothers kill brothers and guns speak louder than words" (Kirimizgul, 2009). "The unhomely moment relates to traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (ibid. 15). And Bhabha suggests that the unhomely world" has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation or historical migration and cultural relocation" (qtd. in McClintock, 1997).

Bhabha says that unhomey feeling happened to him for the first time "in a prosaic house in Oxford, a narrow street reserved for college servant and research fellows. It was a red-brick, terraced house haunted by hydraulic regurgitations of the Victorian plumbing system"(qtd. in McClintock, 1997). The same unhomey feeling happened to Haydar family when they were forced to live in Istanbul but from all the luxuries of Istanbul a slum was their share to live in, a heavily populated settlement with substandard housing and squalor, a neighborhood with shanty and deteriorated buildings from whose windows clothes were hanged. The world of literature is replete with such unhomey houses such as 124 of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* which is dwelled by unsettled ghosts and unsettled people who suffered from the traumas of slavery.

As it was mentioned earlier unhomeliness is not to be physically homeless and as Bhabha claims "you have already heard the shrill alarm of the unhomey in that moment when Isabel Archer realizes that her world has been reduced to one high, mean window, as her house of fiction becomes the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation" (Bhabha, 1994). Darkness, dumbness and suffocation may best characterize, Kadri's, the bisexual character of the movie, feeling; darkness and suffocation which ultimately lead to his death, a death that he embraces warmly in the hope of the sun or light.

2.2 *Hypervisibility vs. Invisibility*

The majority of Kurds sent away from their own houses arrive into unhomey worlds where they suffer from hypervisibility and invisibility at the same time. Both hypervisibility and invisibility," according to Kelly Oliver leads to what he calls "bad visibility" that do not allow for those represented to be seen or recognized as individuals" (qtd. in Fotouhi, 2010). Hortense J. Spiller has a quotation in his article "Mama's baby, Papa's Maybe" which is quite applicable to what Kelly Oliver calls bad visibility. Spiller says that "I'm a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name" (Spiller, 1987). I Saw the Sun's characters are invisible characters in any political or ethical sense but they are marked at the same time. In the first place they are marked to that extent of being evacuated from their houses; then they immigrate to apparently safe places but again they are marked, different and in the case of Kadri, the bisexual member of family, uncanny. According to Oliver this seeing/being seen dichotomy mirrors the subject/object dualism that is emblematic of the oppressive society. "The seer is the active subject while the scene is the passive object" (qtd. in Fotouhi, 2010). Oliver argues that the oppression renders oppressed people into lesser subjects or better to say faceless objects.

2.3 *Uncanny Kadri*

Marginalization and exclusion are basic to Western culture or presumably all cultures. Hans Bertens in *Sexuality, Literature, and Culture* enumerates three differences, race, gender and class, which are the focus of literary theorists but he introduces the fourth difference which is sexuality. So white, middle class, and heterosexual man is considered the normal and natural and whatever different from this man is regarded uncanny and other.

Kurdish community is not an exception of the other communities in following the marginalization and exclusion rules. Kadri, Haydar's son, is a transvestite, he has wanted to be a girl all his life, he is interested in doing household chores, he is the only man who cheers coming of a new-born girl, and he is the one who has been beaten several times for wearing makeup and hanging out with transsexual people. To be accepted by family and community and not to be defined as Other, Kadri needs to conform to mainstream sexual behavior of heterosexuality, something he cannot conform to and he resists it. However these rules are well-established and defeat him at last and he is not able to persist anymore. For Foucault, "western culture has turned sexuality into a discourse that enables it to constantly monitor us and to exercise power: if we do not internalize its sexual rules and police ourselves, then it can step in and force us to conform" (Bertens, 2008).

Drawn from psychoanalysis, Bhabha uses the idea of uncanny to provide a picture of the colonial psychic, in which both colonizer and colonized are involved. Freud explains the uncanny as the feeling and experiences of childhood that have been repressed but they return to disrupt the everyday existence. The feeling of uncanny dominates the colonial and post-colonial experience because in colonial world the person doesn't know where he or she is or was. As Freud say "the better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it" (Freud, 2004). In the unhomey world of colonialism everything seems uneasy and gloomy. This enigmatic word of uncanny first comes from Freud psychoanalysis. For Freud, uncanny refers to that sort of frightening species that was well-known and familiar but is hidden now. Uncanny is something that can't be controlled, it is an old and familiar feeling that happens involuntary. This involuntary quality is a hidden feeling, a rememory or past that you don't want to face again, but it returns to haunt you. For Freud every repression is incomplete, so any past is always just about to break into the present; for him, the traces of past memories and experiences are present in the mind. Freud's essay "The Uncanny" begins with dictionary definitions which can be used for explaining the idea. Uncanny whose

definition is not straightforward in any direction is defined in different dictionaries as follows: Uncomfortable, uneasy, gloomy, dismal, ghastly, haunted, concealed, kept from sight; unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret and has become visible. The uncanny happens when repressed and infantile is brought back into our consciousness.

The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced (Royle 1). Who is Kadri? A man? A woman? He himself doesn't have any clue until he comes to Istanbul and comes across some other bisexual people like himself then suddenly his sense of identity, sexuality, and personality seems questionable. He escaping and hiding from his brothers begs them to leave him alone because he's gone his own way and has made his choice. But Kadri and people like him disturb the nature or what is considered normal, they are disgrace to men so they are bothered, beaten, and killed. Kadri's story is similar to Berfin's story, the flower in love with sun, the flower in love which has never seen the sun because the moment it sees the sun it dies but although it knows about its death, it looks at the sun and wilts away right away.

3. Conclusion

But there's also a father state that made a big mistake with us. We were pitched into a foreign land where we couldn't adjust. We decided to come back. I'm going to carry on raising my kids in midst of fighting. But how wonderful it would be, if people who sing the same song, people who support the same teams and are brothers in the same land, could embrace one another for once (Kirmizgul, 2009).

The concept of homeland and the sense of unhomeliness are central to the movie because it is crucial in one's sense of identity. In Sufi poetry, the idea of home and return to one's place of birth took on an allegorical connotation, where a return to the home symbolized the return to "the spiritual world, the abode of unification with the divine" (Fotouhi, 2010). At the same level Nicholas Royle says that "the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia and homesickness" (Royle, 2003).

Altun family lives in an unhomey world which doesn't offer any serenity, neither to boys nor girls. Girls are still the second sex and unwanted and boys don't enjoy a better situation, they either become guards or soldiers, or they join guerrillas. They are being put outdoors characters that are deprived of any individuality and identity as Cluadia, Morrison's cipher in *The Bluest Eye*, says:

There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with-probably because it was abstract. But the concreteness of being outdoors was another matter-like the difference between the concept of death and being, in fact, dead. Dead doesn't change, and outdoors is here to stay. Knowing that there was such a thing as outdoors, bred in us a hunger for property, for ownership (Morrison, 1970).

They live in the incredulous terror of the unhomey world proposed by Bhabha; pitched into a foreign land and outdoors they don't have any intention to return to their homeland where brothers kill brothers and guns speak louder than words.

"We are all haunted houses" H. D

On the other hand, living in this unhomey world leads to construction of uncanny identities who unsettle time, order, sense and space. Western culture and better to say that all cultures' thinking has its basis in binary opposition, such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and natural/unnatural, "by which a spectrum of diverse things is forced into only two categories, and in which the first category is assigned privilege, power, and centrality, while the second is derogated, subordinated, and marginalized" (Abrams, 1384). *I Saw the Sun* is the movie of binary oppositions which tries to depict what happens when male/female and heterosexual/bisexual are juxtaposed; the movie clearly states that there are no universal and transhistorical types of human identities. This declaration of liminality and in-betweenness has two manifestations in the movie; first, the death of Ramo's son who has been born as an answer to Ramo's constant prayers and its second manifestation is represented in Kadri's decision to face the music and clarify his intention to live as a transvestite.

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