

The Adaptation Community

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Devoting an entire issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* to the subject of adaptation might seem an ambitious, if not foolhardy undertaking. Hitherto adaptation studies has been predominantly concerned with textual transformations – literature into film, theater into film, and so on. As I tried to point out in the last issue of the journal, however, the term “adaptation” can be viewed in much broader terms as a process of coming to terms with new experiences, new material or other phenomena. This process underpins most transnational as well as transmedial encounters, as different groups appropriate material for specific socio-ideological purposes (Raw 4). To understand the process of adaptation provides a means of discovering what issues are significant at different points in time and space. If we apply that framework to American Studies, we can try to understand what “America” – understood as a social, ideological, commercial and psychological constructs – represents, both inside and outside the country. More importantly adaptation helps to strengthen community values by encouraging individuals to listen to one another and respond accordingly.

In a speech former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized the importance of these abilities, so as to ensure effective and lasting communication within an adaptive community (Clinton). Whether we like it or not, adaptation is central to our lives, as we endeavor to sustain relationships with those around us.

This issue of the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey* emphasizes the truth of this assertion through a series of contributions, each of which concentrates on how adaptation works both transmedially and transculturally. We begin with an extended interview with Jim Welsh – the first to appear anywhere, in print or online – the founder of *Literature/ Film Quarterly* in the early Seventies, and still a major

player in contemporary adaptation studies. In a fascinating piece he recalls how his attempts to establish a new journal devoted to cross-media transformations brought him into conflict with members of other academic disciplines – especially film studies – many of whom believed that adaptation studies had too much literary bias and not sufficient theoretical rigor. In the last three decades, however, attitudes have changed: adaptation studies is now emerging as a fully-fledged discipline, with an theoretical agenda similar to translation studies (for example), and an awareness that it can be (re)constructed very differently in different geographical territories. Welsh's experiences of working in Romania and the Republic of Turkey bear witness to this fact.

John Milton's article on translating and adapting texts in Brazil makes some trenchant points about the significance of politics in any transcultural exchange. In the past translators used their work to foreground colonial values at the expense of Native Indian cultures; by the Forties and Fifties they advanced the cause of Brazilian nationalism by producing versions of Anglo-American literary classics designed for popular consumption. Bronwin Patrickson's piece on American and Japanese constructions of anime media looks at the often contentious relationship between local and global interests. The term "global media" has often been used as an instrument of cultural colonization: local adaptations are often designed to resist that colonizing strategy. This phenomenon is especially interesting in terms of anime media, where American and Japanese producers compete for global supremacy. In this kind of universe, it becomes very difficult to distinguish between "global" and "local" interests: maybe we should adopt a more nuanced approach to understanding how media products are adapted across different cultures and/or communication platforms.

Elisabeth Bladh looks at how the Swedish novel *Sandor Slash Ida* (2001) was consciously reworked for the American market. The setting was changed, the characters' names altered; but more significantly large passages of the source-text were omitted for a variety of reasons. The translation caused considerable comment in Sweden, not least from the author herself, who believed that her work had been bowdlerized by the American publishers. Bladh's argument

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offers an interesting counterpoint to that of Milton, prompting us to consider the importance of place in any transcultural or transmedial encounter. The response to an American cultural product in a non-American location might be very different from a non-American cultural product that is consumed in America. Such differences tell us a lot about the ways in which American hegemony has been reinforced across various social and political platforms, while prompting us to look for alternative strategies of representation in which all interested parties should be prepared to adapt their respective ways of seeing. Olgahan Baksi Naylor's analysis of the film director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's oeuvre offers a good example. In a fast-changing Turkish society the onset of capitalism – identified as a specifically “American” phenomenon – creates both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand it can help to liberate women – especially – from their stereotypical roles as wives and mothers, offering new possibilities for self-expression. On the other hand capitalism can prove destructive not only for those brought up to believe in more collective ways of life, but also for those who believe in the idea of America as a land of opportunity. This might seem a paradoxical view (if capitalism is so destructive, how can one sustain one's faith in America, given that the country established itself on capitalist values?), but one that Ceylan believes is sustainable within rural Turkish cultures. It is up to viewers to adapt themselves to that perspective and draw their own conclusions. While Ceylan might not deal directly with American cultures, his films emphasize the importance of acknowledging individuals and the values they embrace.

The issue of the *Journal of American Studies in Turkey* rounds off with a book review section whose choice of texts might seem rather eclectic at first, but nonetheless encourages readers to reflect on a series of transcultural as well as transnational issues involving America, the Republic of Turkey and other geographical territories. Some of the themes addressed include the role of anthropology as a military weapon, shifting perceptions of the United States in Europe in a transnational age, unity and diversity in contemporary American cultures, and the relationship between Islam, modernity and capitalism. An extended film review section begins with two

complementary perspectives on the recent Turkish film *New York'ta Beş Minare* (*Five Minarets in New York*), a box-office smash dealing with the issues of terrorism, nationalism and cross-cultural exchange. One review has been written by Colleen Kennedy-Karpat, an American resident in the Republic of Turkey; the other by Barış Ağır from Bursa Technical University. Other film reviews deal with issues of cross-cultural exchange, both in terms of plot and structure (for example *Arietty*, the Japanese animated adaptation of the children's classic *The Borrowers*, or Woody Allen's latest film set in London). Such themes bring us back to where we started: to understand the process of adaptation helps us to maintain an adaptive community based on a greater understanding of ourselves as well as those inhabiting different cultures, in the past as well as the present.

Works Cited

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