

Existential Alienation in Turkey, Italy, Argentina, France (and Algeria), As Seen Through Four Cinematic Adaptations of Albert Camus's *L'Étranger**

Albert Camus'un *Yabancı* romanının dört sinema uyarlaması üzerinden Türkiye, İtalya, Arjantin, Fransa (ve Cezayir)'de varoluşsal yabancılaşma

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Abstract

The text explores existential alienation through various cultural adaptations of *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, demonstrating how the same philosophical core is reinterpreted across contexts. In the Turkish film by Zeki Demirkubuz, alienation appears as emotional detachment and passivity, with the protagonist wrongly punished due to society's inability to understand his indifference, reflecting Turkey's cultural tension between East and West. The Italian adaptation by Luchino Visconti emphasizes *angoscia*, a deep

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existential anguish tied to sensuality and the awareness of death, highlighting a more emotionally intense response to absurd existence. In Argentina, the opera adaptation transforms the narrative into a sensory and musical experience, using minimalist techniques and physical objects to express existential themes in a non-verbal, artistic language. Meanwhile, the 2025 French film by François Ozon reinterprets the story through a postcolonial and feminist perspective, foregrounding colonial injustice and giving identity to the previously unnamed Arab victim, although this shift is criticized for moving away from Camus's original focus on absurdism and moral ambiguity. Overall, the text argues that existential alienation manifests differently depending on cultural and artistic frameworks, proving the flexibility and lasting relevance of Camus's philosophy.

Keywords: *Existential alienation, Absurdism, Adaptation, Camus, Cultural interpretation*

Özet

Metin, Yabancı adlı eserin farklı kültürel uyarlamaları üzerinden Albert Camus'un varoluşsal yabancılaşma kavramının nasıl değişik biçimlerde yorumlandığını inceler. Zeki Demirkubuz'un filmi, bu yabancılaşmayı duygusal kayıtsızlık ve edilgenlik üzerinden ele alır; baş karakterin işlemediği bir suçtan cezalandırılması, toplumun bu kayıtsızlığı anlamlandırıp anlamamasını gösterir ve Türkiye'nin Doğu-Batı arasında sıkışmış kültürel yapısını yansıtır. Luchino Visconti'nin uyarlaması ise "angoscia" kavramını merkeze alarak varoluşsal kaygıyı, bedensellik ve ölüm bilinciyle birlikte daha yoğun ve duygusal bir şekilde sunar. Arjantin'de sahnelenen opera versiyonu, hikâyeyi müzik, ses ve nesneler aracılığıyla duygusal bir deneyime dönüştürerek varoluşçuluğu farklı bir estetik düzlemde ifade eder. François Ozon'un 2025 tarihli filmi ise postkolonyal ve feminist bir bakış açısıyla eseri yeniden yorumlar; sömürgecilik temasını öne çıkarır ve romanda isimsiz olan Arap karaktere kimlik kazandırır, ancak bu yaklaşımın Camus'nün absürdizm ve ahlaki belirsizlik vurgusundan uzaklaştığı eleştirisi yapılır. Sonuç olarak metin, varoluşsal yabancılaşmanın kültüre göre farklı biçimlerde ortaya çıktığını ve Camus'nün düşüncesinin evrensel geçerliliğini koruduğunu savunur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Varoluşsal yabancılaşma, Absürdizm, Uyarlama, Camus, Kültürel yorum*

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Introduction

One of the great novels of the twentieth century is *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*, 1942) by Albert Camus, the French philosopher known for his existentialist views on alienation (Camus, 1989). Currently, François Ozon's new film adaptation of *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*, 2025) is playing in movie theaters. *The Stranger* has been adapted across different media by creators from Algeria, Turkey, Italy, Argentina, and France. In this essay, I will briefly interpret the five versions to gain insight into the specific conditions of existential alienation in each national culture.



Figure 1. Portrait photograph of Albert Camus, 1959/1960.

Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum / LeMO; Pressebild-Verlag Schirner, inventory no. BA 94/733.

In 1999, the respected French newspaper *Le Monde* and the bookstore chain FNAC published a list of the *100 Books of the Century*, regardless of the language they were written in. This list was based on a survey of 17,000 readers, who were asked which books had “stuck the most” in their minds. The top book on the list was the 1942 short novel *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, known in English as *The Stranger* or *The Outsider*. The work is a masterpiece of world literature. In the novella, the protagonist and first-person narrator, Meursault, shoots and kills a nameless Arab man on a beach during a hot summer, with the sun glaring in his eyes. The philosopher and author Camus, who grew up in urban poverty in Algiers, was from a family of the so-called *Pieds-Noirs*, French settlers in Algeria. Leftist literary theorists in the tradition of post-colonial criticism have often claimed that the disregard for the life of the victim of Meursault's crime shows that Camus was a racist. The Algerian writer Kamel Daoud wrote a retelling of *The Stranger*'s fictional events, titled *The Meursault Investigation* (2013), which recounts the story from the perspective of Harun, Meursault's victim's brother. The dehumanization of Camus's Arab, who is gazed upon as “other” to the white Frenchman, is challenged by giving the Arab the human name Musa.

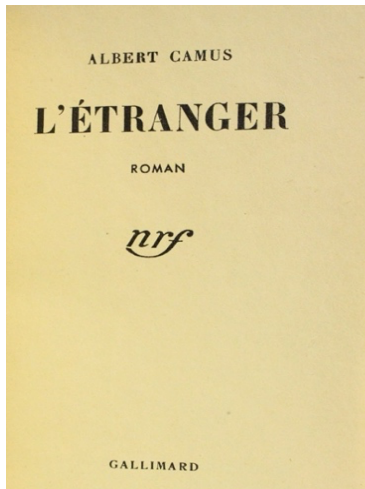


Figure 2: Title page of *L'Étranger*.

Source: Edition-Originale.com, n.d.; Gallimard, 1942.

Camus's book initially gained fame not as a commentary on society or politics but as an expression of his philosophy of absurdism and as a portrayal of what I will call "existential alienation." Existential alienation is a deep sense of estrangement from oneself, others, and the world. It's linked to the idea that life has no inherent meaning. Belief systems, such as organized religion, provide a social collective with automatic meaning; however, they are inauthentic because they do not encourage individual, conscious reflection. A person experiencing existential alienation feels disconnected and like a stranger in their own life. Yet, paradoxically, this can lead to meaningful self-discovery. As the story concludes with his execution by the French colonial judiciary, Meursault gains insight into what he truly values.

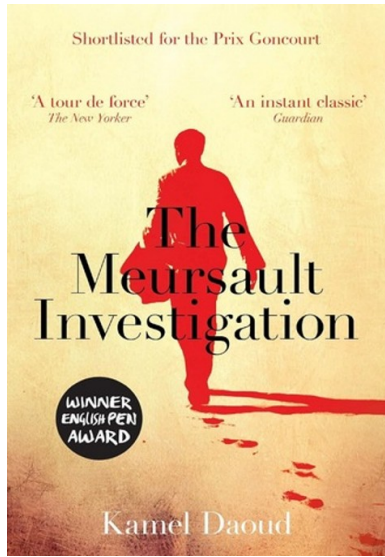


Figure 3: Cover of *The Meursault Investigation*.
Source: Oneworld Publications, n.d.; publication date June 24, 2015.

The categorization of works of literature and art into existential and political concerns often creates a divide between exploring the universal human condition and focusing on discontent or oppression within distinct historical, cultural, or economic contexts. Am I struggling because human existence is inherently tricky, or because the society I live in is particularly terrible? But what if this two-tiered hierarchy, or binary opposition, between nature and culture is preventing us from understanding how particular cultures and individual experiences of alienation are connected? Instead of a dualism between contemplating the human condition and grasping specific historical circumstances, I propose a different model in which analyzing an artifact, such as a novel or a film, becomes an investigation of a singular culture through the subtle differences and details of how the artistic creation depicts the critical ordeal of alienation.

My goal in this essay is to examine how existential alienation manifests differently across five national cultures: Turkey, Italy, Argentina, France, and Algeria. I will do this by examining four distinct artistic representations of *The Stranger*, as well as the original novelistic text. For Turkey, this is the 2001 film adaptation *Yazgı* or *Fate* by independent director Zeki Demirkubuz. Italy is represented by the 1967 film *Lo Straniero*, directed by the filmmaker, theater director, and opera director Luchino Visconti, starring the renowned actor Marcello Mastroianni as Meursault. Speaking of opera, Argentine composer Cecilia Arditto Delsoglio created *Der Fremde*, a version of Camus's work featuring a strong musical element and dramatic roles sung by performers. This piece had its world premiere in Mannheim, Germany, in 2024. The impressive cinematic adaptation *L'Étranger* by François Ozon, shot in black-and-white, was featured in the main competition at the Venice International Film Festival in September 2025 and was nominated for

the Golden Lion. An insight into existential alienation in Algeria under French colonial rule in the late 1930s can be gained from an interpretation of Camus's classic novel.

I experienced existential alienation in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, within middle-class suburbia, consumerism, and media culture. Because America needed young math and science geniuses as intellectual soldiers during the Cold War and the Space Race, I was advanced two years in school at age seven. This made me a social and psychological outsider in my teenage years. In my autobiography of "gonzo journalism," *Venice in Las Vegas*, just published by Peter Lang Publishing House, I advocate taking some distance from the emphasis of Marxism and leftist political philosophies on the subaltern status of groups designated as structurally disadvantaged by and within the "order of things" – the workers (the proletariat); the Third World colonized; people of non-white skin; women; gay men, lesbians, and transgender people (Shapiro, 2025). This is called identity politics. My claim is that the pivotal problem of our society is not the oppression of groups but rather the alienation of the individual.

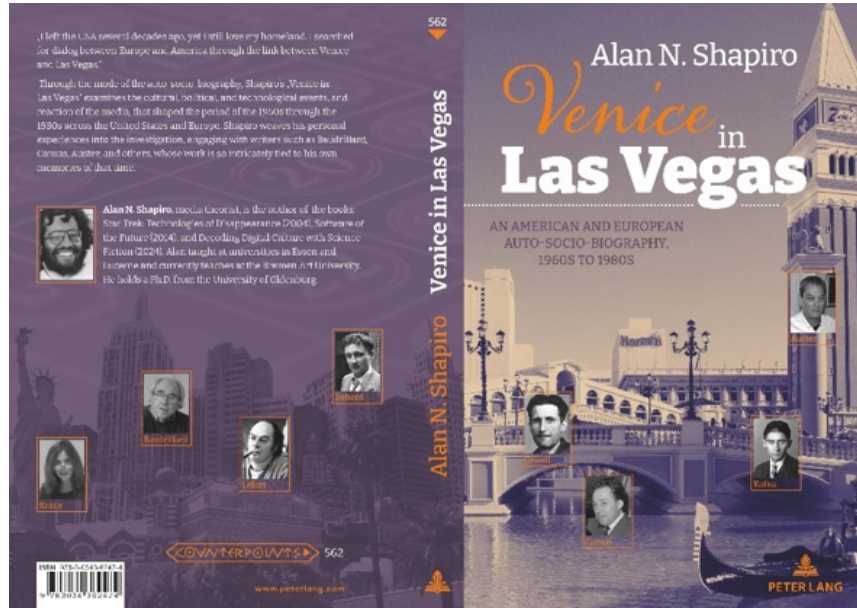


Figure 4. Cover of *Venice in Las Vegas*:
An American and European Auto-Socio-Biography, 1960s to 1980s.
Source: Peter Lang, 2025.

1. The Novel *L'Étranger*

The opening paragraph of *The Stranger* is the most famous passage of this highly praised novel. "Maman died today. Or yesterday, maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.' That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday." Throughout my life, I (Alan) have thought about these lines and wondered how it would feel to receive notice of my mother's death. When that fateful moment finally arrived, my mother was ninety-one, and it ended her suffering. The news arrived via a phone call from my brother. The occasion even caused me to lose what I thought was a close friendship. I told that female friend I was glad my mother had died. For her, that statement was sacrilege or blasphemy, a violation of a fundamental ethical principle. Somehow, the universe punished me for my ambivalence about my mother's death. In this way, I shared something significant with Camus's character Meursault.

Meursault has a dull, routine office job handling freight invoices. He informs his boss that he will be away for two days due to his mother's funeral. The boss is unhappy about this planned absence because it means his employee will have a four-day weekend. Meursault eats lunch at his usual restaurant. Then he takes a two-hour bus ride to the old folks' home where his mother spent her final years. The home's director mildly criticizes him for not having his mother live with him in his apartment and for visiting her only rarely. He keeps a vigil overnight in a special morgue room of the home but refuses to have the casket opened to see his mother's body, which surprises the institution's caretaker, who is keeping him company and chatting with him. Meursault smokes a cigarette. The next morning, he takes a long walk to the cemetery. By nightfall, he returns on the bus to Algiers. The next day is Saturday, and he decides to go for a swim. There, he meets Marie Cardona, a former typist from his office. They flirt and begin a romantic and sexual relationship. They go to a comedy film that evening. Marie spends the night in Meursault's apartment. The following weekend, she asks him if he loves her. He replies that he probably does not.

His neighbor, Raymond Sintès, who is suspected in the neighborhood of being a pimp, invites him into his one-room flat and asks Meursault for a favor. Raymond explains that he recently fought with an Arab, the brother of a woman with whom he has been having problems. He had been supporting this woman financially, but then realized she was cheating on him. He hit her and slapped her around, but wanted to punish her more. Knowing that Meursault was educated and good at writing, he asks him to craft an eloquent, subtly manipulative letter to the woman. The letter would make her regret her betrayal of him. Then she would come back to him, he would sleep with her, then spit in her face and throw her out. When Raymond carries out this plan, he gets into trouble with the police.

Meursault is indifferent to choices that others usually consider essential. Major life decisions do not matter to him. When his boss offers him a chance at a more exciting job in Paris, he says he does not care either way. Marie asks if he wants to marry her. He is willing to do so if she wants it. She has other plans for the evening, but he doesn't ask what they are.

Raymond invites Meursault and Marie to spend the upcoming Sunday afternoon at a friend's beach house. It's a perfect summer day. The Arab brother (named Musa in Kamel Daoud's intertextual retelling) of Raymond's former mistress, along with a small group of his comrades, quietly and ominously shadows Raymond, menacing him. The group of French people, on their Sunday outing, takes a bus to a seaside location on the outskirts of Algiers. Raymond's friend Masson spends weekends with his Parisian wife at a small wooden bungalow at the far end of the beach. Meursault swims happily in the sea with Marie, then lies contentedly on the beach, feeling the warmth and energy of the sun. The group of five enjoys a satisfying lunch of fried fish and potatoes, delicious bread, and meat. They drink plenty of wine. After the meal, they drink coffee and smoke cigarettes.

The three men walk along the beach. In the distance, they see two Arab men approaching slowly. One of them is the brother of the battered and rejected woman seeking revenge against Raymond. When the two groups meet, a fight breaks out. One of the Arabs stabs Raymond with a knife, injuring his arm and slicing his mouth. The brother and his companion run away. Raymond is treated by a doctor and returns to the beach cabin. Despite his injuries, he wants to face the Arabs again. He and Meursault walk a long way on the beach before they encounter their enemies once more. Raymond has a gun and gives it to Meursault. The Arabs retreat, and the two white proletarian friends go back to the beach house. Raymond climbs the steps into the house, but

Meursault inexplicably starts walking on the beach again. After a long and exhausting trek in the hot sun, he sees Musa lying on his back.

After they make eye contact, Musa puts his hand in his pocket, making Meursault fear he might threaten him with a knife. The hot sun burns our hero-anti-hero's cheeks. It reminds him of his mother's funeral, when his veins throbbed unbearably from the solar heat and heatstroke-induced vertigo. Musa raises his knife. Sunlight reflecting off the steel blade, along with sweat and salt dripping into his eyes, blinds Meursault to reason, moderation, balance, and the field of vision before him. "My whole being tensed, and I squeezed my hand around the revolver." Without premeditation, he pulls the trigger. Then he fires four more times compulsively into a motionless body whose life has already left it.



Figure 5. Scene from *Lo Straniero*.
Source: *Lo Straniero* (Visconti, 1967).

In Part Two of the novel, Meursault faces trial for the alleged murder of the Arab. He is found guilty and sentenced to death, not because of the crime he committed, but because he does not display the attitudes and behaviors society expects of its citizens. The prosecution forces many characters who interacted with him in Part One to testify against him. He did not cry at his mother's funeral. He did not want the casket opened to have a last look at his beloved Maman. The very next day, he went swimming, went to the movies, and made love with a woman when he should have been mourning. He does not believe in God. He has no career ambitions and disrespects the institutions of marriage and the family.

It is a fascinating paradox that Camus gained fame as a leading twentieth-century writer and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for, on the one hand, depicting what many saw as a brilliant artistic creation about universal existential alienation. However, on the other hand, Camus did so while living and writing amid the highly charged, racially tense environment of working-class and marginalized French versus Muslim Arabs in colonial Algeria. Camus believed there was no other valid way of life than one rooted in sensuality, concreteness, and embodiment. Meursault was alienated in the human condition but connected to the flesh of history. His alienation had social consequences. Existential alienation in Algeria, at its core, was the death of others.

2. The Turkish Adaptation of *The Stranger*

In 2001, the Turkish filmmaker Zeki Demirkubuz directed *Yazgı* (*Fate*), a cinematic adaptation of Camus's *The Stranger*. The main character of *Yazgı* is ironically named Musa, the same name

as the Arab victim in Daoud's *The Meursault Investigation*. This name originates from the *Qur'an* and relates to the Biblical story in *Exodus* of the child Moses being saved from the water—hidden by his Hebrew parents and rescued by an Egyptian princess—to escape Pharaoh's decree that all Israelite male babies should be killed. In the film *Yazgı*, Musa works in a customs office. Like Meursault, he is an atheist and, essentially, a nihilist who is indifferent to social conventions and ultimately to the meaning of life.

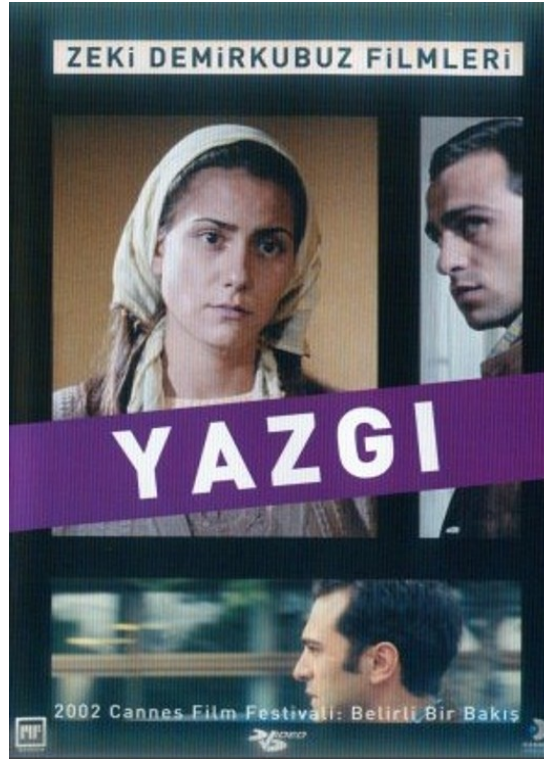


Figure 6: Poster of *Yazgı* (Fate).

Source: Beyazperde, n.d.; film directed by Zeki Demirkubuz and released in 2001.

In his film adaptation, Demirkubuz takes many elements of *L'Étranger* to even further extremes. His narrative choices and subtle visual details offer insights into the unique context of existential alienation within Turkish society and culture. Turkey is a symbolic corridor, a door that opens and closes, the threshold or passage between East and West.

Musa Demircan agrees to marry his coworker, Sinem, despite her being his boss's mistress. He accepts her ongoing infidelity even after they marry. He is aware of it but says nothing. When he is arrested for three murders he did not commit, he does not bother to proclaim his innocence or defend himself legally because he sees that as irrelevant. He silently accepts the verdict and the death sentence. After four years in prison, the actual murderer confesses. Still, Musa remains indifferent to his own life and his release from detention.

At the beginning of the film, Musa is at home in his small apartment, watching TV, sleeping poorly, eating breakfast, and caring for his sick mother. He takes the bus to work. We see the bus through a camera shot from the other side, viewed through the glass of a bus stop shelter. Musa eats lunch with his coworkers. We see him slouched at his computer, staring at the screen with poor posture. While walking on the street in the evening, the neon lights of a McDonald's are

visible in the background. Musa returns home, falls asleep fully dressed, and oversleeps. The next morning, after discovering his mother dead in her bedroom, he makes a hot drink and watches more TV. When he goes back to his office and tells his boss, Naim Tuglaci, that his mother has died, the boss asks him when it happened. Musa responds, echoing the opening lines of the novel *L'Étranger*: "This morning. Or maybe last night. I don't know."

Musa's neighbor across the hall is Necati Pinarçik, the equivalent of Raymond in Camus's novel. Necati asks Musa for help. His hand is wounded and bleeding. As in the novel, Necati was involved in a physical fight with his former mistress's brother. The door to Musa's apartment constantly squeaks and creaks as it is opened or closed. A squeaky door symbolizes unresolved problems or communication blocks. It signifies negative energy. The door is rubbing against its frame. Something needs fixing. The two friends attempt to fix it, but they do so incorrectly. Necati asks Musa to write a letter to his mistress, who has betrayed him.

Musa walks down the street toward the movie theater. We see shots of Mailboxes, Etc., and FedEx. In the cinema lobby, large posters advertise Hollywood films like *Independence Day* and one starring John Travolta. He encounters his young female coworker, Sinem, and they sit together during the movie. He caresses her thigh. She spends the night in his bedroom. The next morning, they discuss his mother. She comments that he almost sounds glad she died. He replies: "We more or less wish the death of those we love, even if it's our own mother."

Sinem: Do you want to marry me?

Musa: I don't mind. But we can get married if you want.

S: Well, do you love me?

M: I don't know.

S: Why would you want to get married then?

M: It doesn't matter. If you want, we'll get married.

S: But marriage is serious.

M: No, it's not. (Demirkubuz, 2001)



Figure 7. Musa and Sinem in *Yazgı (Fate)*.

Source: *Yazgı (Fate)* (Demirkubuz, 2001).

Soon after this exchange, Musa and Sinem marry. Musa is supposed to be at work, but he goes across town on a business errand and returns home unexpectedly. He senses someone in the apartment. He says nothing, and no one notices him. He hears someone in the shower. He sees his wife's naked back as she lies asleep in bed. In the closet, he notices another man's shoes.

The two brothers of the woman whom Necati abused follow him around. Necati obtains a pistol for self-defense and shows it to Musa. Musa and Necati go to a pool hall and hang out. Later, they step outside onto the street, and the two brothers follow them. The two rival pairs face each other directly. As the brothers run away, Musa grabs the pistol and fires six shots at them. However, unlike Camus's novel, the story's twist is that this is just a subplot and a distraction. The lesser importance of the conflict with the pimp's mistress's brothers might be because there's no racial element. Both groups are Turkish, so there's no racial or colonial tension between the French and the Arabs.

A couple of days later, the police arrive at Musa's building to arrest him. For a brief moment, the scene doesn't make sense to us viewers because, just before, we saw the two brothers alive in the pool hall. It turns out that Musa is being arrested as a suspect in a different set of murders. Key scenes in the film take place in the corridor between Musa and Necati's ground-floor apartments, especially during their encounters with the police. After Necati beats up and throws out his mistress, the police arrive to question him and take him to the station. Musa is arrested in the corridor, suspected of murdering his boss Naim's wife and two children. A corridor symbolizes a pathway, representing transition or a crossroads. For the filmmaker Demirkubuz, this is the situation of Turkey's culture or nation.

Musa is arrested, found guilty, and sentenced for a crime he did not commit. There is a direct intertextual reference to *L'Étranger*. The police interrogator tells Musa, "I read this French novel when I was young. You're just like the hero." Musa is convicted of a capital crime because he did not cry when his mother died. He is indifferent to his wife's affair with her boss. He does not believe in God.

Ultimately, there's a powerful dialogue between the prison governor and Musa that carries philosophical implications. Musa has spent four years in prison but is about to be released because the real killer, Musa's former boss, has confessed to murdering his wife and two children. The governor or prosecutor is perplexed by Musa's behavior and beliefs.

The prison governor's office door won't stay closed; it swings open by itself. The prosecutor stands up and tries to shut it, but moments later, it opens again. The open door symbolizes Musa's freedom, yet societal institutions might try to take it away from him once more. The governor summons a maintenance worker to repair the door. The bolt is worn out.

Prison Governor: You never defended yourself during questioning or in court. You haven't even contested the charges. Not once have you ever said you're innocent... This is tantamount to murdering justice (Demirkubuz, 2001).

Even though it has now been proven that Musa is innocent, the prosecutor still wants to convict him.

PG: Do you feel guilty?

Musa: No. I don't feel innocent either.

PG: What do you believe in?

M: Nothing.

PG: Do you believe in God?

M: No.

PG: I hear what you're saying, but don't you realize this is behind all the stuff you've been through and the death of four people? Isn't that why your boss took in a young girl? Isn't that why he murdered his wife and kids? (Demirkubuz, 2001).



Figure 8. Musa's conversation with the prison governor in *Yazgı (Fate)*.
Source: *Yazgı (Fate)* (Demirkubuz, 2001).

The high official in the judicial system seeks to link Musa's alleged "nihilism" or "atheism" to criminal activity.

Musa leaves the prison system and takes a taxi to his apartment. His wife is there with a young child. Sinem quietly accepts his return and makes him coffee. Necati's mistress is back, living with the tough guy in the apartment across the hall. She comes to borrow some eggs. Musa turns on the TV and stares blankly at the screen.

3. The Italian Adaptation of *The Stranger*

Lo Straniero, directed by Luchino Visconti and starring Marcello Mastroianni, was released in 1967. The Italian film adaptation looks stunning and feels very sensual. You can sense the Mediterranean influence of Italian culture in Camus's sunlit, gritty seaside Algeria. The cinematography, with its attention to every scene and detail, immerses the viewer in the events and locations surrounding a murder that the perpetrator claims was caused by "the sun." Mastroianni's Meursault runs to catch the loud, rickety bus that will take him to the town of Merengo and the old-age home where his mother has been living and dying. The bus is almost empty, and he falls asleep for most of the trip. "Oggi la mamma è morta. O forse ieri, non so. Ho ricevuto un telegramma dall'ospizio: 'Madre deceduta. Funerali domani. Distinti saluti.'"

Mastroianni is an exceptionally talented and charismatic actor. He elevates Meursault to passionate, dramatic heights. He infuses every moment of the story with a distinctive Italian artistic aesthetic, a uniquely stylistic version of existential alienation. It is well known that Camus loved the warmth of the Mediterranean sun. In the Italian version, the perspiration-soaked shirts and foreheads, and the tottering of European rationality when blinded by the light, are at the forefront. As Meursault states during the trial, the reason he pulled the trigger was the sun. Central to the Visconti interpretation is *angoscia*, or anxiety, the question of fear or courage in the face of death, the legitimization of atheism, and an optimistic existentialist philosophy of life when surrounded by Christian or Catholic believers.



Figure 9. Poster of *Lo Straniero*.

Source: IMDb, n.d.; film directed by Luchino Visconti and released in 1967.

The desire that Mastroianni's Meursault feels for Marie, played brilliantly and radiantly by 1960s European film icon Anna Karina, is palpable on screen. Marie loves Meursault, but for the sensual man, love remains an abstract idea, beyond his attachment to tangible life.

Other people are present in the world. The faces and heads of residents at the old folks' home during their overnight vigil for Meursault's deceased mother show stoicism, even when the camera captures them out of focus. Those closest to the mother break down, some sobbing and others collapsing at the burial site, overcome by grief and the sun's intensity. Just after the murder, before he is moved to solitary confinement, Meursault is taken to a large communal detention hall inside the prison, where he spends part of the first night. He is the only colonizer among several dozen colonized men, who look at him with curiosity and some sympathy. A young man playing the flute says to him, "I was caught robbing a store. What did you do?" Meursault replies, "I killed an Arab." They all stare at him in stony silence. As the credits roll at the conclusion of Ozon's film, we hear the song "*Killing an Arab*," a 1978 single by the English rock band *The Cure*.

The next day, the court-appointed defense lawyer visits him in his cell for a serious conversation. The lawyer advises Meursault to plan his testimony carefully, but the only rule the young Frenchman knows about speech is to tell the truth, regardless of how it might affect others. He is then taken to the office of the examining magistrate. After questioning him about the facts and circumstances of the crime, the high representative of justice pulls a silver crucifix from a filing cabinet drawer and shows it to Meursault. "See this? You realize what it means?... Do you believe in almighty God?" "No," he replies. A few moments later, before being handed back to the police, the judge says to him, "That will be all for today, Monsieur Antichrist."

Meursault is a man who prefers to stay silent. But now, during his trial in the justice system, he must endure the discomfort of frequent speaking, answering questions, and defending himself. It is partly his refusal or inability to speak much that leads to his guilty verdict and death sentence. Because they are not married, Marie may visit him only once. A 10-meter space separates the visiting spouses and families from approximately 15 prisoners. Because of the distance and the large number of people present, Meursault and Marie must speak loudly and can barely communicate.

Even during his trial, Meursault feels detached, as if he's just an observer and the trial isn't really about him. The judge and public prosecutor present a series of nonsensical, absurd arguments, focusing not on the facts of the crime but on Meursault's supposedly amoral, asocial, and agnostic character. According to the prosecution, out of respect for the body of the woman who brought him into the world, a proper son should have refused the cup of coffee offered to him during the nighttime vigil before the funeral! He should have drunk black coffee instead of coffee with milk! On the evening after the funeral, the accused accompanied Marie to a film starring Fernandel. After her testimony, the prosecutor rises dramatically from his seat and declares, "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the day after his mother's death, he went to the beach, began an illicit liaison, and watched a comedy at the movies!" "The way in which this man buried his one and only mother is evidence that at heart he is a criminal!" "This man is morally guilty of his mother's death!"

There is a row of newspaper reporters seated just below the row of jurors. A large crowd of spectators, eager for blood, watches intently. With sighs and laughter of contempt, the audience expresses its outrage at Meursault, hoping he will be sentenced to the guillotine. The trial feels more like a metaphysical debate than a matter of real events. "The presiding judge told me in a bizarre language that I was to have my head cut off in a public square in the name of the French people."

Now in a different prison cell, he is part of a chain of what we might call "death row." He sleeps during the day and stays awake all night, waiting for the first light of dawn, which signals he has at least twenty-four more hours to live. He is now filled with the Italian *angoscia*: anguish, anxiety, distress, fear. He hears his own rapid breathing, like a dog's panting.

The prison chaplain enters Meursault's cell. When asked questions, Meursault says he's not interested in God.

Prison Chaplain: Aren't you talking to me like this because you feel desperate?

Meursault: I'm not desperate. I am just afraid.

PC: God can calm your fears... We're all condemned to die... You have to die someday, whether it's now or later. And then the same question will arise. How will you face that terrible hour?

M: Exactly as I am facing it now.

PC: Do you truly believe that nothing remains after you die?

M: Yes.

PC: You are bearing the burden of great sins which you must atone for. Man's justice is nothing at all. Only God's justice matters.

M: It was Man's justice that condemned me. They've condemned me for an act I've committed. So, I'm paying the price. You can't ask more from me than that.

PC: You're wrong, my son. You'll be asked to pay more. A lot more than you imagined.

M: What's that?

PC: You'll be compelled to see, to confront.

M: Confront what? (Visconti, 1967)



Figure 10. Prison cell scene in *Lo Straniero*.
Source: *Lo Straniero* (Visconti, 1967).

After the chaplain says he will pray for Meursault, the condemned man finally reaches his limit. “I don’t know why, but something inside me snapped. I started yelling at the top of my lungs, and I insulted him and told him not to waste his prayers on me.” Meursault has at last achieved a self-confidence that allows him to recognize insights into life and death beyond what the chaplain, with his closed worldview, could possibly understand.

M: I don’t want you to pray for me! You’re so certain about everything. Not one of your certainties is worth a strand of a woman’s hair. You’re not even sure if you’re alive because you act like a dead man. I look like I have nothing, but I’m sure of what I am, sure of everything, sure of my life, and now even my death. I only know that what I’m sure of is the truth for me... You’ll die just as I die, but I’m sure of what I’ll face. (Visconti, 1967)

The final lines of the novel and the Visconti adaptation: “Staring up at that night sky, for the first time, I opened myself to the sweet indifference of the universe. And I felt that it was so much like myself, almost like a brother. I felt happy, and I still do. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I only wish there would be a huge crowd of spectators at my execution, and that they greet me with cries of hate.”



Figure 11. Final prison scene in *Lo Straniero*.
Source: *Lo Straniero* (Visconti, 1967).

4. The Argentinian Opera *Der Fremde*

In the twenty-first century, many dramatic adaptations of *L'Étranger* have been staged in well-known theaters across cosmopolitan cities such as Paris, Berlin, and Hamburg. The first musical version was staged as a chamber opera at the Studio Workshop of the Nationaltheater Mannheim in Germany in 2024. The piece was composed by Cecilia Arditto Delsoglio, directed by Annette Müller, and conducted by Pierre-Alain Monot.

The orchestra, comprising about a dozen musicians, is positioned on both sides of the stage. Multimedia technology supports the production. Laptop computers and software display subtitles for the German audience. The opera is sung in French, with German text displayed on a large background screen, which is controlled as an external monitor via a projector.



Figure 12. Performance scene from *Der Fremde*.

Source: Nationaltheater Mannheim, 2024; composed by Cecilia Arditto Delsoglio and directed by Annette Müller.

Argentina, a country outside Europe, is deeply influenced by European culture. Its rich classical and popular music traditions made it a fitting context for a composer like Delsoglio to achieve a significant breakthrough by transforming Camus's literary work into another expressive form. This genre crossover reflects Camus the thinker's transdisciplinary nature. In addition to writing novels and philosophy, he was also a playwright, journalist, political theorist, and activist.

L'Étranger, in this new genre of hypermodern opera, embodies the philosophy of "taking the side of objects." Delsoglio is the dramaturg of a versatile poetry that brings together human voices, sound art, the sun and the sea, and everyday physical objects such as bowls of water and circulating air ventilators. It is a musical language of *musique concrète*. The music is strong even when the objects humans employ are weak. One of the Arabs on the beach, Musa's companion, is a musician playing a primitive flute. "He was blowing through a small reed over and over again, watching us out of the corner of his eye. He kept repeating the only three notes he could produce from his instrument," Camus writes in the novel.

Camus is a philosopher of objects. It is enough to recall the famous Sisyphus and his rock. The rock is the embodied, metaphorical object that Sisyphus must carry for eternity.

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless

labor... At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. (Camus, 1955)

Joachim Goltz, the opera singer who plays Meursault, is a baritone. He sings mostly on a single pitch and makes subtle quarter-tone shifts from one note to the next. This creates a sense of peace and an inner monologue in the music. The orchestra plays in a subtle, minimal style. The atmosphere is brought to life through sensory and tactile elements. The soundscape immerses the audience in the 1930s Algerian setting.

5. The French Adaptation of *The Stranger*

The latest film adaptation of *L'Étranger*, directed by French filmmaker François Ozon, was released in 2025. The film is shot entirely in black and white. Actor Benjamin Voisin plays Meursault, and Rebecca Marder plays Marie. One of the film's main goals is to translate Camus's literary art, as expressed in words, into a parallel cinematic form. Ozon largely succeeds in that ambition. The film is an aesthetic masterpiece. It is visually stunning. The recreation of 1930s Algiers is brilliantly executed (although the film was shot in Morocco). There are beautiful underwater shots. The cinematography by Manu Dacosse is gorgeous. The music by Fatima Al Qadiri is deeply moving and haunting. The acting by Voisin, Marder, and others, such as Pierre Lottin as Raymond Sintès and Denis Lavant as Salamano (the lonely elderly neighbor who mistreats his dog), is superb. Watching this film, one is forcefully reminded that *The Stranger* is a great work of world literature. The narrative's ultimate meaning remains enigmatic, just as in the original novel. Ozon captures Meursault's existence well. The young *Pied-Noir* is indifferent to everything French society expects him to conform to. He is a sensualist. He enjoys male friendships. He takes pleasure in the sun, the sea, swimming, his food, hopping on the back of trucks, coffee, cigarettes, and the erotic body of his girlfriend.

His motive for killing the Arab remains unclear. He feels no remorse for his act of violence, only a sense of boredom (*l'ennui*). Perhaps he pulled the trigger to finally feel alive. He destroys the happiness that awaited him and Marie. The courtroom and interrogations force him to talk a lot, which is the last thing he wants. Why did he have a revolver with him? Why did he return to the exact same spot on the beach where earlier altercations with the Arabs took place? Why did he pause between firing the first and second shots? Why did he continue to fire at a man who was already clearly dead?



Figure 13. Film still from *L'Étranger*.
Source: *L'Étranger* (Ozon, 2025).

Yet in some important ways, the film is more an interpretation than an adaptation of the original novel. Ozon is deeply concerned with revising Camus's novel in the direction of "political correctness" from a feminist, homoerotic, and, most of all, postcolonial standpoint. The women in the narrative are given significantly larger roles than in the novel. There is more focus on Marie, Djemila (the sister of the Arab man whom Meursault murdered), and Meursault's mother, who appears to him in a highly symbolic nocturnal dream (reminiscent of a similar dream in the Steve McQueen *Papillon* film). Meursault's decisive encounter with the Arab he is about to shoot on the beach features eroticized close-ups of the man's muscles and sweating body. Historical colonialism in Algeria is a deep trauma of French history and of the French progressive consciousness. The film begins with several minutes of newsreel-like documentary footage depicting the misery of the Algerian Arabs in the 1930s under colonial rule. This is bookended by the very last scene of the film, when we see Djemila mourning at her brother's grave. We see the engraving of his name: Moussa Hamdani. Following the lead of *The Meursault Investigation*, Ozon gives a name to Camus's nameless "the Arab." He provides much socio-historical context about the institutionally racist second-class status of the colonized, revising the fact that Camus himself partly ignored that political reality in this specific work. Ozon postpones the famous first lines of the novel, "Maman died today..." and replaces them with the line "I killed an Arab," spoken by Meursault to a large number of Arab prisoners in a holding cell just after he is arrested and before he is moved to a solitary cell, in response to their question: "Why are you here?"



Figure 14. Meursault and Marie in *L'Étranger*.
Source: *L'Étranger* (Ozon, 2025).

It is a beautiful film, but I think it betrays Camus by focusing on colonialism. Camus was always a critic of French colonialism, but in the late 1950s, he advocated a peaceful solution and did not support the Algerian Revolution. For better or worse, Meursault is, and has always been regarded as, an existentialist hero. He lives in the moment. He refuses to say anything untrue, though this attitude can be self-damaging. He loves life itself, as shown in his contemplation of insects. His atheistic speech at the end about the meaning of life, his rejection of religious dogma, his critique of capital punishment, and his eventual aggression toward the priest are especially compelling. But he has no thoughts about the colonial situation. Nothing about politics or morality. His neighbor beats his dog, and Raymond beats his mistress, and Meursault tolerates it. Raymond is a bad guy and a "bad influence" on him. Raymond is at the heart of the French-Arab conflict, particularly in its lower socioeconomic-class dimension. Meursault naively becomes involved with Raymond by writing the letter and passively accepting his many gestures of friendship, which lands him in serious trouble. Plunged into that circumstance, combined with his "nihilistic" sensual existentialism, Meursault suddenly finds himself fundamentally at odds with both the

French institutions and the Arabs. He ends up hated by both. He violates all the requirements of being a good French citizen. He did not cry at his mother's funeral. He did not respect the rituals of mourning. He does not believe in God. His soul is empty, as the prosecutor declares.

In the sequence of cinematic moments during the scene at the beach house, something crucial is omitted. After Raymond is stabbed by one of the Arabs, Marie tells Meursault twice that she wants to leave, implores him. In the next camera shot, Meursault walks on the beach under the hot sun, experiencing vertigo and heading inexorably toward his fatal meeting with the Arab. What is omitted is any exchange between the two heterosexual lovers that would reveal how Meursault responded to Marie's pleas to get on the bus back to Algiers. Did he simply ignore her words? Did he justify going back onto the beach in some way?

I think, strictly in terms of "universal" legalistic principles (putting aside for the moment the racist French judicial system), Meursault is innocent of the crime. Ironically, it is Raymond who says this as he makes his flamboyant sashay to the witness stand. Meursault technically fired the first shot in self-defense. Or, as Meursault and his defenders argue several times, it was arguably an accident, a coincidence, a misunderstanding. The four additional shots are his psychological "symptom." That is the unanswered question for me. Why? They show that something was boiling inside him. The four extra shots do not make him guilty, because the guy was already dead. Was it an automatic behavior? Did the further shots make him feel "real"?

The French justice system does not care that he killed a man. That man was merely an Arab (a "native"). Djemila makes this clear to Marie at the trial. Meursault is convicted because the system concludes that he buried his mother with a "criminal heart," as the prosecutor puts it in both the Italian and French film versions. He hesitated to stand in church. He declined to look at his mother's corpse.

In my view, there is no need to give the Arab a name, as Daoud does in *The Meursault Investigation* and as Ozon follows suit. Yes, Daoud and Ozon are perfectly entitled to do so. It reflects their political worldview and anti-colonialist values. I have nothing against it. But I would not have done it. In my view, it is disrespectful to Camus because Camus was obviously not a classic postcolonial thinker. Whatever one may think of his late-1950s position on the Algerian War, his stance at that time expressed one of the major concerns of his philosophy of rebellion: questioning the moral illegitimacy of murder in the sense of "the ends justify the means." No political goal can justify the taking of the lives of bystanders to the conflict. Murder is the moral equivalent of suicide, which Camus had rejected after pondering the question of taking one's own life at length in his masterful meditation *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Those who have not reflected on the meaning of their own lives can take the lives of others with less hesitation. Estimates of the number of civilians killed during the 1954 to 1962 Algerian conflict range from 350,000 to 1.5 million. In 1963, in post-revolutionary Algeria, Ben Bella consolidated dictatorial power as the combined chief of state, head of government, and supreme commander of the armed forces, rendering the legislature powerless and eliminating any institutional accountability for his actions. Perhaps the first shot into the young Arab man's body in *The Stranger* symbolizes what Camus, the young philosopher, considered necessary murder in exceptional circumstances, already quite morally ambivalent. The four extra shots symbolize the act of murder to which he was so philosophically opposed. He unconsciously put that into this early story.

Camus was certainly aware of the suffering of the native Algerian Arabs. In 1939, Camus was sent by the daily newspaper *Alger républicain* to the northern region of Kabylie, which includes all or part of nine Algerian provinces, to write journalistic accounts of poverty there. The result

was a series of articles titled “Misère de la Kabylie.” In 1945, Camus wrote a series of articles for the Parisian daily *Combat*, a French Resistance newspaper, about famine, injustice, and political malaise in Algeria, and endorsed the ideas of the political party “Les Amis du Manifeste,” which advocated citizenship rights for Arabs. From July 1955 to February 1956, Camus (1958) wrote a series of articles for *L'Express*, advocating a “civilian truce” amid escalating hostilities between Arabs and French in Algeria.

Another way to show that it is wrong to give the Arab a name is to reflect on the fact that Meursault himself has less than a name. He has no first name – throughout the novel. This is important. Camus knew what he was doing. It is part of the narrative's general atmosphere of existential alienation. The Arab, without a name, is connected to Meursault, who has no first name. Plus, we know how important Kafka was for Camus (see the section “Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka” in *The Myth of Sisyphus*). Kafka's (1998a, 1998b) protagonists are named Josef K. (in *The Trial*) and K. (in *The Castle*).

Conclusion

I explore existential alienation across five national cultural contexts, following the method that the theory should emerge slowly and organically from the stories themselves. In Camus's Algeria of the 1930s, estrangement led to others' deaths. In Turkey, alienation is closely linked to the country's uncertain position at the crossroads of East and West. Italy's experience involves *angoscia*, an artistic-philosophical anguish that is passionately engaged with in the face of death. The Argentinian composer performs a genre transfer of Camus's great literary work, serving as an essential example of modernizing opera. The French filmmaker creates an aesthetic cinematic masterpiece, renders Camus “politically correct,” assuages French guilt over its historical colonization of Algeria, yet neglects to consider the relation of *The Stranger* to Camus's overall position opposing “revolutionary violence.”

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Albert Camus'un *Yabancı* romanının dört sinema uyarlaması üzerinden Türkiye, İtalya, Arjantin, Fransa (ve Cezayir)'de varoluşsal yabancılaşma*

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Metin, Albert Camus'nün *Yabancı* (*L'Étranger*, 1942) adlı eserini merkeze alarak, varoluşsal yabancılaşma kavramının farklı ulusal ve kültürel bağlamlarda nasıl tezahür ettiğini karşılaştırmalı bir perspektifle incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, söz konusu romanın yalnızca felsefi bir metin olarak değil, aynı zamanda farklı kültürlerde yeniden üretilen bir anlatı olarak nasıl çeşitlendiğini ortaya koymaktır. Bu doğrultuda metin, romanın kendisinin yanı sıra Türkiye, İtalya, Arjantin ve Fransa'da üretilmiş uyarlamalar üzerinden çok katmanlı bir analiz sunmaktadır.

Camus'nün eseri, modern edebiyatın en önemli yapıtlarından biri olarak kabul edilmekte ve özellikle "varoluşsal yabancılaşma" kavramının edebi temsili açısından merkezi bir konumda değerlendirilmektedir. Romanın başkahramanı Meursault'nun annesinin ölümüne karşı gösterdiği duygusal kayıtsızlık, onun toplumsal normlardan kopuşunun ilk göstergesi olarak sunulur. Meursault'nun işlediği cinayet ise yalnızca bireysel bir eylem değil, aynı zamanda anlamdan yoksun bir dünyada bireyin konumunu sorgulayan bir kırılma noktasıdır. Ancak metin, bu eylemin yargılanma sürecinde Meursault'nun cinayetten ziyade toplumsal normlara uymaması nedeniyle mahkûm edildiğini vurgulayarak, birey-toplum ilişkisini eleştirel bir düzlemde tartışmaya açar.

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Çalışma, varoluşsal yabancılaşmayı yalnızca bireysel bir psikolojik durum olarak değil, aynı zamanda tarihsel ve kültürel bağlamlarla iç içe geçmiş bir olgu olarak ele alır. Bu noktada, özellikle sömürgecilik bağlamında Cezayir'de geçen romanın, Fransız yerleşimciler ile yerli Arap nüfus arasındaki gerilimleri arka planda barındırdığına dikkat çekilir. Meursault'nun öldürdüğü Arap karakterin isimsiz oluşu, postkolonyal eleştiriler açısından önemli bir tartışma alanı yaratmıştır. Bu bağlamda Kamel Daoud'un *Meursault Soruşturması* adlı eseri, bu sessizliği bozarak mağdur karaktere bir kimlik kazandırmakta ve anlatının etik boyutunu yeniden düşünmeye davet etmektedir.

Metin, varoluşsal yabancılaşmanın evrensel bir insanlık durumu ile belirli tarihsel koşullar arasındaki ilişkisini sorgularken, bu iki düzeyi birbirinden ayıran ikili karşıtlıkların yetersizliğine işaret eder. Buna göre, bireyin yaşadığı yabancılaşma ne yalnızca ontolojik bir kaderdir ne de sadece toplumsal koşulların bir sonucudur; aksine, bu iki düzeyin kesişiminde ortaya çıkan karmaşık bir deneyimdir. Bu yaklaşım, edebi ve sinemasal uyarlamaların incelenmesini, belirli kültürlerin kendine özgü yabancılaşma biçimlerini anlamak için bir araç haline getirir.

Türkiye bağlamında Zeki Demirkubuz'un *Yazgı* (2001) filmi, Camus'nün anlatısını yerel bir kültürel zemine taşıyarak özgün bir yorum sunar. Filmde Musa karakteri, Meursault'ya benzer şekilde toplumsal normlara karşı kayıtsızdır; ancak Türk toplumunun kültürel ve dini yapısı içinde bu kayıtsızlık farklı anlamlar kazanır. Musa'nın annesinin ölümüne verdiği tepki, evlilik kurumuna yaklaşımı ve suç karşısındaki tutumu, bireysel nihilizmin yerel değer sistemleriyle çatışmasını gözler önüne serer. Ayrıca filmde kullanılan mekânsal metaforlar (koridor, kapı vb.), Türkiye'nin Doğu ile Batı arasında bir geçiş alanı oluşunu simgesel düzeyde yansıtır.

İtalyan uyarlaması olan Luchino Visconti'nin *Lo Straniero* (1967) filmi ise Akdeniz estetiği ve duyusallığı ön plana çıkararak romanın atmosferini görsel açıdan zenginleştirir. Bu versiyonda güneş, yalnızca fiziksel bir unsur değil, aynı zamanda karakterin eylemlerini belirleyen metaforik bir güç olarak öne çıkar. Arjantin'de bestelenen operatik uyarlama ise müzik ve dramatik performans aracılığıyla yabancılaşmayı sahne sanatlarının diliyle ifade ederken, François Ozon'un 2025 tarihli filmi modern sinema teknikleriyle metni yeniden yorumlamaktadır.

Sonuç olarak metin, *Yabancı*'nın farklı kültürel bağlamlarda yeniden üretilmesi üzerinden varoluşsal yabancılaşmanın tekil ve çoğul boyutlarını birlikte ele alan bütüncül bir analiz sunmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, edebi metinlerin yalnızca estetik nesneler değil, aynı zamanda kültürel ve tarihsel deneyimlerin taşıyıcıları olduğunu ortaya koyar. Böylece çalışma, hem varoluş felsefesi hem de karşılaştırmalı edebiyat ve sinema çalışmaları açısından önemli bir katkı sağlamaktadır.