

The Midnight express phenomenon: a historical materialist approach to the reception of the film Midnight express.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the Midnight Express phenomenon focusing on the film's reception by audiences in Europe, North America, and Turkey between 1978-2003. Using and enhancing the "historical materialist approach" to film reception developed by Janet Staiger, the thesis considers the historical determinants of the film's nationally and culturally differential readings in different periods and of the transformations in those readings. The thesis argues that while Midnight Express was most likely read in the late 1970s as an attempt to reaffirm American social identity by projecting Turks as an instance of the negative Other, there has been an important shift in the reception of the film in the West during the 1990s due to the changes in the discursive contexts in which the film has been circulating. One does not

observe any specific reference to Turkish prisons as a part of the issue of human rights violations in Turkey in the initial reception of the film by European and American critics, whereas these issues appear to be important constituents of a particular reception of the film in the West in the present. The thesis explains this shift by pointing to the constitution of a particular discourse on human rights violations in Turkey after 1980, and especially throughout the 1990s, which has become a part of the discursive repertoires of the Western audience. Therefore, the thesis argues that today, *Midnight Express* functions as a more legitimate political statement about Turkey in the eyes of some Western audiences than it had been in the 1970s. On the other hand, parallel to the increasing desire of Turkey to connect itself to the West, particularly to become a member of the European Union, one observes an immense increase in the belief in and defense against the negative effects of *Midnight Express* on Turkey's international representation since the 1990s. The historical and current discourses that audiences, both in Turkey and abroad, bring into play suggest that these audiences engage with *Midnight Express* by assuming or denying not only the subject positions constructed by the film text but also certain history-specific extra-filmic subject positions produced by other social and discursive formations.

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The *Midnight express* phenomenon: a historical materialist approach to the reception of the film

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