

Fiche

Migration and exile take a fundamental place in the English-speaking world due mainly to the past British Empire and its thirst for expansion. Whether it be linked to a geographical or social dimension, be it collective or individual, the fact of being removed from one's territory, the fact of feeling estranged and uprooted are often associated to contradictory emotions and mixed feelings in people. The fact of being forced to leave, of being chased away from our homeland is quite harmful in the sense that people feel they have lost their bearings. They are disorientated, destabilized and confused and this confusion along with a feeling of alienation are detrimental to their self-construction and self-achievement. It forces them to think about their place in their new "world" and to build a new relationship to a new territory and thus build a brand new identity. It questions the place they have in a new society with a feeling of "uprooting", of rootlessness and statelessness having lost all their connections to their origins and their homeland.

A Promised Land?

Emigration can be chosen by those who wanted to leave their country out of fear or because they felt oppressed and persecuted. For them an **elsewhere** is like a **Promised Land**, a new place where they could start from scratch and build a new life full of opportunities. This is the **American Dream** that attracted waves of immigration to the USA which appeared like an Eldorado. Many people from European countries wanted to find a refuge there, attracted by the promises and prospects of a better future. This promise is symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, which looks like a **lighthouse** lighting the way to newcomers. The country is willing to open the "Golden Door" but how many remain on the threshold? Is this US dream just an illusion?

This need for immigrants and their importance in the construction of their new nation is enhanced by Walt Whitman in his poem, *I bear America singing*, where he describes all the jobs put together to build America and all the workers, mainly coming from abroad, are just creating a whole new symphony, enabling America to be a great country. The same idea is present in the movie by Martin Scorsese, *Gangs of New York*, in which the filmmaker describes the arrival of Irish immigrants and their fight against the so-called true Americans. It shows the difficulty for those immigrants to find their place and to be accepted in this new world; but the ending of the movie salutes the work of those populations who were, as U2 sing in the credits of the film, *The Hands that Built America*. It is reinforced by the skyscrapers rising from the ashes of those immigrants killed by the hardships of their new life.

Therefore, emigration can also be linked to economic reasons, as was the case for the Irish community forced to leave their country in the mid-nineteenth century because of the Great Famine and the Potato Crisis. Finally, this emigration also has a social and political dimension. Many people, like the Pilgrim Fathers, for instance, were so persecuted for religious reasons that they were compelled to leave Plymouth and Great Britain. They sailed to the New World where they settled as the first thirteen colonies. All these examples deal with the causes of migration and exiles but also their effects on the rootless individuals.

Children of immigrants

The memories of an exile or the recollection of a traumatism experienced by ancestors can foster the next generations and fashion their way of thinking. The children of immigrants thus write their own stories of exile full of nostalgia for a country they know only through the accounts of their parents who told them about the wealth of their homeland. They can only imagine their links to their country, and imagine how life over there could be.

It can also be quite interesting to read or watch the way artists and authors describe and analyze events they have not experienced by themselves. Art Spiegelman who is a Jewish artist, one day, decided to interview his father about the concentration camps, which led him to write and draw *Maus*. Even if he did not know anything about the life of a deportee in a camp, writing and drawing this graphic novel was a way for him to connect with his Jewish blood and origins. He felt at last his Jewishness and while doing so he felt closer than ever to his father.

Hybrid identity

We can also tackle the painful exile experienced by those who go back to their homeland after many, many years or even decades. They have the impression of not belonging anywhere. This exploration of a true "rootlessness" enables the authors to question the notion of a certain cultural "hybridity" and of their identity. This identity must be quite blurred and torn between different feelings and contradictory reactions: the author is both an insider and an outsider, both right in the middle and estranged and in the margins of this world, split between acculturation, love for their origin and uprooting which makes it difficult to assert a true self and to reach self-achievement.

Feeling estranged

Migration and exile do not necessarily mean crossing a border or traveling miles and miles. It can be inside a country when people leave the place where they were born to go to an unknown place. This is the case of the rural exodus described by John Steinbeck in *the Grapes of Wrath*, where the Joad family has to leave Arkansas to the land of milk and honey, that is to say California. Sometimes, we do not even need to move to feel on exiled, to feel estranged from our own country. This is what South African authors like Andre

Brink, J.M Coetzee or Nadine Gordimer decided to do by staying in their country during the awful and dreadful years of Apartheid. They were completely at odds with the politics of their country, they felt like strangers in their own territory but their choice to stay was motivated by their determination to document and show the chaos of townships under Apartheid and thus to raise people's awareness.

Positive experiences

Migration can be tackled in a positive and humane way. It can enable migrants, refugees to have access to new forms of power and freedom. It is the main subject of Ken Loach's movie *Ae Fond Kiss* where a young Indian man falls in love with a young Scottish girl. This love helps him transcend his condition as an immigrant which is no longer the main issue because now he knows that his future is full of opportunities.

Besides, the experience of a new life as an immigrant is also a boost in some authors' careers and they feel reinvigorated by this new impulse: it was the case for James Joyce, T.S Eliot, Joseph Conrad, D.H Lawrence or W.H Auden who was British before being given the American citizenship. In his poem, the *Refugee Blues*, he describes this shift in his life without putting a lid on his origins while enhancing his new country as the only country being able to accept persecuted Jews and to welcome the brain drain from Europe. He was besides the perfect epitome of this brain drain situation. These writers had left their native countries without having been forced to and they succeeded in going beyond their situation of exile by praising it in their works of art.