



fresh film festival 2002

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# Journey Of Hope

Study Guide: **Brendan Maher**

## Journey Of Hope

### Cast

Haydar Sener	<i>Necmettin Çobanoğlu</i>
Meryem	<i>Nur Sürer</i>
Mehmet Ali	<i>Emin Sivas</i>
Turkmen	<i>Yaman Okay</i>
Adama	<i>Erdinc Akbas</i>
Ramser (Truckdriver)	<i>Mathias Gnädinger</i>
Massimo	<i>Dietmar Schönherr</i>
Schweizer	<i>Herbert Leiser</i>
Doctor	<i>Joseph Scheidegger</i>
Christen	<i>Andrea Zogg</i>

### Crew

Director	<i>Xavier Koller</i>
Cinematography	<i>Elemér Ragályi</i>
Film Editing	<i>Daniel Gibel and Galip Iyitanir</i>
Art Direction	<i>Kathrin Brunner</i>
Costume Design	<i>Grazia Colombini</i>
Second Camera Operator	<i>Pio Corradi</i>
Assistant Camera	<i>Géza Gonda</i>
Original Music	<i>Terje Rypdal</i>
Script	<i>Xavier Koller and Feride Çiçekoğlu</i>
Producer	<i>Peter-Christian Fueter</i>
Producer	<i>Alfi Sinniger</i>

### Xavier Koller

Xavier Koller was born in Switzerland in 1944. After graduating from acting school in Zürich he worked in film and television before his directorial debut with the experimental film 'Fano Hill' (1969). His 1973 film 'Hannibal', received critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival. He directed numerous films for Swiss television (some of which were based on the works of Swiss poet Meinrad Inglin), which led to him being described by one newspaper as a "connoisseur of the sturdy and rugged". His other films include, 'Squanto: A Warriors Tale' and 'Ring Of Fire'.

### Selected Filmography

- 'Highway' (2002)
- 'Ring of Fire' (2001)
- 'Gripsholm' (2000)
- 'Squanto: A Warrior's Tale' aka 'The Last Great Warrior' (1994)
- 'Reise der Hoffnung' aka 'Journey of Hope' (1990)

## Introduction

American Academy Award winner in the Best Foreign Film category in 1991, Xavier Koller's film details the journey of a Kurdish family attempting to get into Switzerland as economic refugees. The refugee journey, as suggested by the film, is a trek repeated countless times each year by those experiencing political and economic hardships in their own countries, believing that the freedoms and prosperity of the West will provide them with a better way of life.

Disenchanted with life on a small holding in Turkey, the father, Haydar decides to sell up their holding and livestock, believing life to be better in Europe. He arranges that his wife and a son will travel with him and he will then send for the rest of the family once settled in Switzerland. Their journey is one of promise initially and then disenchantment, as the film details the inherent dangers involved in illegal migration. Dealing with unscrupulous agents and swindlers – some, their fellow countrymen – the small family must finally rely on its own means to get across the treacherous Swiss frontier and then must deal with further despair and the realities of being far from home.

Koller's film is set in two distinct worlds, the poverty-stricken but perhaps idyllic sitting of rural Turkey and the shadowy world of the refugee attempting to reach the West. The film calls into question the reasons why so many have to endure such hardship to achieve their goal of reaching the west. Above all, the film outlines the peril involved in the refugee journey and the sometimes misplaced dream that there is a more desirable existence somewhere else.

**'Journey Of Hope' aka 'Reise der Hoffnung' aka 'Umud'a Yolculuk'**

*dir. Xavier Koller, Switzerland/Turkey, 1990, 105 mins*

## The story



## Journey Of Hope

The film opens with the killing of a sheep in a town in Turkey. Haydar, a small farmer, discusses with his cousin Cemal a plan to emigrate. Cemal plans to go to Switzerland and offers the name of a contact who can also get Haydar and his family there.

Some time passes and Haydar receives a postcard from Cemal telling him that he is in Switzerland and that it is 'paradise'. Haydar decides to emigrate. He sells his herds and his lands and obtains false passports for himself and his wife. Haydar's father warns him that he will lose his roots if he leaves. His wife Meryam is also reluctant, reticent about leaving their seven children. They decide to take one of them with them, seven-year old Mehmet Ali, who is considered the brightest. The rest of the children are taken in by other villagers.

Haydar has no passport for his boy and this presents a difficulty. It is arranged that they will stowaway on a freighter leaving Istanbul bound for Naples. Arriving there, Haydar and family don't join their connection who will bring them further, but accepts a lift from a friendly Swiss truck-driver. He plans to take them all the way to Switzerland, but they are stopped at the border and Haydar and his family are forced to return to Milan.

In the main train station they meet with another Turkish man who is also attempting to go to Switzerland. They link up again with some refugee traffickers who will provide passage for them, but at an exorbitant price. Meryam is forced to sell her jewellery and they make up the shortfall through a loan.

They, with a group of other refugees, are driven to the mountains to meet a guide, who will escort them over the terrain. The guide warns the traffickers that the weather is too bad and that it would be 'suicide' to attempt to cross over. He is beaten for his troubles; the traffickers flee and the band of refugees are forced to go it alone.

The climb is treacherous. The families lose or discard their possessions to lighten the load. They reach the border cold and tired. The group decides to split, knowing they can ask for political immunity from the police once inside the border. Meryam and the women go in one direction, reach safe passage and surrender themselves to the authorities. A guard dog splits up the other group. Most of them become lost in the snow. Haydar and Mehmet Ali wander the mountains, while search and rescue teams attempt to locate them. In the morning, still lost, Haydar vainly attempts to resuscitate his son.

A car finally picks him up and the driver takes him to a nearby doctor. The boy is dead and Haydar is taken for questioning, to be charged with illegal entry and neglect of his child. He is reunited briefly with Meryam in a refugee centre and is then returned to jail. The Swiss truckdriver visits him offering help but Haydar's pain can't be eased.

### First Impressions

Your initial reaction soon after watching a film is very important as you will still be emotionally involved with the story. You may change your views later, but let's see what you thought:

*Did you like or dislike the film? Why?*

*Were you moved by the family's journey? Did the title of the film accurately reflect what you saw?*

*What did you think was the central message or theme of the film?*

*What did you think of the father, Haydar, in the film? What sort of person was he? What was his relationship with his wife?*

*Was the journey a success? Was there an emotional journey undertaken by the characters? Trace this journey through the film.*

### Opening images

From the opening sequence (where the sheep is killed) we see very quickly that we are not in a westernised country. Visual clues telling us this include the landscape, the buildings, the villagers dress and appearance onto more technical elements such as the quality of light seen in the image.

*(1) What elements in the sounds (the soundtrack) we hear in the opening sequence tell us we are not in a Westernised country?*

*(2) What social class do you think the villagers are from?*

*(3) The method of killing the sheep is relevant also. Why are the knives washed in such a manner? Is this related to hygiene or what other function could it perform?*

### Context

#### Migration: A Modern History

Migration is as old as mankind itself. Climate changes and food sources would have



dictated early man's need to migrate, often moving in seasonal patterns. The development of tools, the training of horses and the seemingly inherent need to visit and/or conquer new lands all created huge movements of people throughout the world. Whilst these factors are still very much evident in human society, the increasing concerns of human rights advocates and individual countries or economic blocs have led to attempts at a more structured control of human movement.

In the west, following the Second World War, the rights of refugees and asylum seekers became an important issue. In the mid-fifties, states realised that to encourage economic growth, workers would need to be 'invited' into their countries to provide labour. Germany had a 'guestworker' programme in which agreements were made between it as host country and other nations to allow workers to enter on a temporary basis. Australia allowed almost two million European nationals to enter between 1945 and 1964 in order to continue its economic development. Irish people, as migrants, also formed a relatively large proportion of those entering the United States in the 1980's. Since the 1990's however, Western European nations (including Ireland) have tightened border controls and access, to refugees. Those ethnic minorities that have been allowed to settle in the West have been increasingly affected by racism as right-wing political viewpoints have become more evident. Concerns over the economic and cultural 'damage' a large influx of non-national people would cause to a country continue to be the core reason for stringent immigration laws. The question which does not seem to be addressed is the ongoing inequalities in living standards among nations which necessitates migration.

### Migration: Modern trends

The director Xavier Koller speaking to 'Sight And Sound' magazine in 1991 told of his reasons for making the film: "Millions of people are on the move today, looking for a future somewhere in the world. I think it's important for people to pick this subject up, to work on it and to keep the discussion going."

Migration is an element in all our lives. As young people, many of us left or will leave our homes and villages to go, mostly, to cities and enter Third-Level colleges or take up jobs. This internal migration is common to most countries. For those that leave, opportunities arise that we may not be able to access at home. We leave (like Haydar) in an attempt to secure better prospects for our future.

Cross-national migration occurs for two main reasons – the *economic* one outlined above and in the film and also for *political* reasons. Political migration occurs when the political situation in a country makes it dangerous to stay for those who are excluded from the political process, because of their views or their ethnic or social difference. The most common situations which cause such migration is when a centralised power controls society under one ruler or ruling party/class to the detriment and/or exclusion of other persuasions or viewpoints living in that country; or when war breaks out and it is too dangerous to remain in one's country.

Many who have been forced to leave because of political or economic reasons become refugees. A refugee is 'any uprooted, homeless, involuntary migrant who has crossed a frontier and no longer possesses the protection of his/her former government.'

### Migration: 'Ireland Of The Welcomes?'

People or groups of people become economic or political refugees for the above reasons. In Ireland, at present, there is much discussion about immigration issues. The strength of the Irish economy and the fact that Ireland is a democracy and a place of political freedom has encouraged migration into the country. The country prides itself as being 'a land of welcomes', however various laws govern immigration to ensure that those requesting asylum fulfil certain criteria in order that they are allowed to remain in the country. Needless to say, the process of achieving refugee status is long and drawn out and especially daunting for those arriving in a new country with little possessions and who may not speak English very well.



The following are two websites which will aid your understanding of the process: The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform website – [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie) – details the application procedure and offers information about the various Acts governing asylum and refugees seekers. The Irish Refugee Council – [www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie](http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie) – provides information for asylum seekers and operates services on their behalf.

*Imagine you are one of the officials who first meets Haydar's family at the Swiss Border. Would you regard them as economic or political refugees? Should they be allowed to stay in the country?*

*Are the migrants in the film manipulating the country they enter by claiming refugee status? Would they have been in danger if they had stayed in Turkey?*

*Many people fear that allowing refugees free access to a country will both decrease available employment for existing citizens and also cause a dilution of the culture of that country. Do you think these fears are well-founded?*

### Life in Turkey/Life in the West

Film critic Roger Eberts review of 'Journey of Hope' in 1991 stated: "Because the motion picture camera has a tendency to make everything it photographs look picturesque, life in Turkey seems fairly idyllic for the family. Their small home nestles next to olive trees on a beautiful hillside, and they have a secure place in the daily life of their village."

There is a confusion here, in the sense that the director of the film is stressing two opposing forces. The imagery of the scenes in Turkey, does indeed suggest an idyllic existence i.e. the sun, a simplicity of life etc. which would be the envy of many westerners. However, the need to go to the West is strong enough for Haydar to uproot his family from this existence. In emigrating, the family are led into a world of interminable roads, disreputable characters, an inhospitable climate and confusing officialdom.

*What images in Turkey suggest an idyllic life and what images or moments tell us that the family's life is actually difficult? Why is the image of Switzerland so attractive to Haydar?*

*Is Haydar correct in persuading his family to go? Are the grandfathers comments on life in the west correct at the end of the film? What is the significance of Haydar's selling of the land?*

### Traces of the West

When arranging his passage in Turkey, Haydar stops off at a shop to buy Swiss chocolate and some jewellery for his family. These can be seen as parting gifts to his family but also as a method to 'prime' his family for their prospective life of plenty in Switzerland. Haydar is offering these gifts to show them what can be available to them if they leave. The gesture is especially meant to encourage his wife to agree to their leaving.

*What other images in Turkey, prepare us for their life in the West?*

## Characterisation

### Haydar

Haydar is a complex character in the film. He exhibits both strengths and weaknesses. Some critics have suggested that he is foolish. There are various reason why this could be regarded as being correct e.g. his belief in what others are telling him about Switzerland; his trust in the traffickers, people who are obviously swindling him; and the fact that he signs some of his future earnings away to a trafficker in order to secure a job.

His strengths include a strong will to make the journey; a sense of hope for the future; a physical strength and love for his son in attempting to bring him through the mountains.

*The film's end suggests that Haydar's weaknesses are more prominent than his strengths. Do you think this is the case?*

*Do you think he is an educated man? What factor does his education play in the film?*

*To what extent is Haydar a victim of circumstances?*



### **Meryam**

Meryam, as Haydar's wife and mother of his children, is seen as a woman who values family life and wishes to have her children around her. Despite this, she gives in to her husband's wishes to break up the family. This reflects her role in the society she comes from. She too, can also be seen as a physically strong person in overcoming the perils of the mountains.

*What scenes in the film show that Haydar is in a dominant position to Meryam?*

*What factor does religious belief play in their relationship?*

### **Mehmet Ali**

The seven-year old son of the couple is brought along by his parents on the journey. They bring him with them, as he is regarded as the brightest and due to the grandfather's suggestion that he will aid them in putting down roots in their new homeland. Mehmet Ali is as mischievous as any child and this is borne out by the Railway scene at the start of the film. His role in the film is to be a pair of innocent eyes to watch his parents as they struggle through adversity. Allied to this, his presence weakens them, as they must take care of him as well as fending for themselves. Despite this, the truckdrivers response to the child aids in breaking down barriers between him and the parents.

*Were the parents right to bring their son with them?*

*Does Mehmet Ali add to the danger of the journey?*

*Do you think Mehmet Ali's presence in the film adds to the storyline? Why?*

### On Location

'Journey Of Hope' was shot on location in Turkey, Italy and Switzerland. A location can be defined as 'any place other than a film studio where a film is in part or completely shot. Such a place is an actual location, and not a constructed set within a studio or on its lot.' The idea of shooting on location is old; by necessity, the early silent films were shot outdoors to utilise sunlight and many sequences in westerns, for example, were often shot outdoors because of the naturalistic scenery required by their storylines (see director John Ford's series of Westerns; many shot in Monument Valley in Utah).

The return to the Studio lot to shoot films in the early part of the last century was caused by developments in camera and lighting equipment. Creating sets in Studio buildings or lots gave film-makers greater control over scenery and the vagaries of the weather.

In the post-World War II period, lighter camera and sound equipment and new types of film stock were developed which offered film-makers the chance to shoot on location more easily. The works of Italian neo-realist directors and French Nouvelle Vague (New Wave) directors are especially relevant in this regard, in that shooting on location was a reflection of both political and stylistic ideologies about how a film should be made.

Shooting on location is a difficult task. Requiring the movement of perhaps a crew of over a hundred people and actors lends it comparison to the organisation of a small army. The central reason for shooting on location is that a truthful appearance of a land or townscape can be realised by the film-maker. However, there are many things to consider before deciding on such a mammoth task. Initially a *Location Scout* will look over a proposed location and assess the merits of shooting in that area. Permits are required from local authorities and police to ensure that shooting on location will not unnecessarily inconvenience those living and working in that area. The Locations Manager will contact these authorities and liaise with Departments in the crew such as transport and catering to enable the cast and crew to get to the specific destination and ensure that they will be housed and fed in that place. A centralised base-camp will be set up for the duration of the location shoot, usually in an area big enough to hold several trailers, wagons and large departmental trucks. If the crew is staying overnight, accommodation must be available near the location. Traffic management is another issue: Large trucks need solid foundations to park and move around on, not to mention the fact that some roads may need to be closed off to facilitate shooting. We've all heard of stories of a Morris Minor parked just at the edge of the frame or the telephone wire, barely visible, in a so-called period piece, seemingly forgotten by all, but sure to be mentioned on an internet site or a 'bloopers' section of a TV programme.

Shooting on location can be a frustrating and difficult experience. The weather, human error and the intervention of curious onlookers all suggest that it would be better to just stay in the studio, however for the film-makers the rewards of a location shoot are often too tempting.

*Find information about the Screen Commission of Ireland – [www.screencommireland.com](http://www.screencommireland.com) – which has been integrated into the Irish Film Board. They offer information to film-makers interested in location shoots in Ireland.*

*The next time you are in an area where you know a film was shot, have a look around to see what difficulties might be present for the film-maker. Suggested Irish locations to view include: The Crescent in Limerick City ('Angela's Ashes'); The Dingle Peninsula, Kerry ('Ryan's Daughter'); Curracloe Beach, Wexford ('Saving Private Ryan')*

### Image as metaphor

Two images are very striking in the film and offer broader value to the film.



### **(a) The Railroad Scene**

In the opening sequence, Mehmet Ali and his siblings lie down on a rail-track as a train is approaching. Haydar hears that the children are there and must leave the village to get them off the track. Mehmet Ali has to be physically pulled off the track by his father.

The director of the film uses this sequence to suggest various themes in the film. We see that the boy is strong-willed (and therefore is strong enough to be involved in the emigration journey) We see that Haydar is responsible for Mehmet Ali and that this responsibility is a task that he will inevitably fail at (he berates the children for not looking after each other); We are also forewarned that travel is dangerous, the train acting as a precursor to the dangers of travel to Switzerland.

### **(b) The Swimming Pool Scene**

Near the end of the film, a group of the refugees arrive from the cold of the mountain to a town inside the Swiss frontier and stand outside a glass fronted swimming pool. The man who owns the pool goes to the glass, in his swimming trunks, and asks them to leave.

There are various elements at play in this scene. The glass front of the pool tells us that the refugees will be allowed to 'see' Switzerland, but will not gain entrance; the glass acting as a physical and metaphorical barrier to their entrance. The swimming pool is obviously a luxurious item in a home and is contrasted to the material poverty of life in Turkey. The appearance, also, of the owner in trunks is set against the dishevelled appearance of the refugees after their ordeal. The semi-naked appearance of the man is one of a person enjoying a leisurely pursuit, a freedom which the refugees aspire to, relative to their essentially 'hand-to-mouth' existence in Turkey. The image is linked to the classic Biblical image of the holy family finding that there is 'no room at the inn.'

### Relating to difference

The director says "...my goal was to give the audience an experience of who these people are and how it feels to get close to them. I wanted the audience to ask themselves: 'How am I affected by these people? How do I relate to them?'" And I wanted to talk to them through their hearts rather than by arguments."

*Has the director succeeded in achieving this aim? How?*

*What cultural differences are evident between the family and those they meet on the journey. How do the Swiss Authorities relate to the refugees? Do you think the Authorities are depicted realistically?*

*Has the film brought the experience of the refugee journey closer to you ?*

### Last Word

We have looked at issues of migration, characterisation and the idea of shooting 'on location' in this guide. The film could be discussed under many other headings but we hope this guide is a starting point. The last word goes to the director: "My motive is basically humanistic, and if there is a message in my film, it is that I wish people to be more open in their hearts and minds towards people of other languages, other nationalities, other skin colours...towards foreigners, towards people we don't know. If we go closer, we will lose our fear and become friends...we will also change ourselves."