



## WHAT DOES THE "CHEF" FILM TELL US? A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS VIA THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

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### Abstract

This study aims to reveal how the phenomenon of alienation is conveyed in the 2014 movie "Chef". Semiotics was utilized in the study. The movie Chef is about a chef working in a luxury restaurant. The plot and indicators in the film are depicted based on social, professional occupational, and personal alienation. It reveals how the practices of domination and control in the workplace alienate a talented chef from his work and himself and what he does to escape it. It is seen that individuals who take part in society as part of the bureaucratic wheel experience alienation from their professions over time and seek escape.

**Keywords:** Domination, Control Practices, Restaurants, Semiology, Alienation

### Introduction

The phenomenon of alienation has been discussed and analyzed by researchers. One of the most in-depth discussions of alienation is Karl Marx. According to Marx (1906), the concept is the alienation of people from both their labor and their potential working power within the capitalist system. This means a kind of dehumanization. The commodification of the individual's labor in the standard production process puts him into a social crisis (Güler Aydın, 2010: 20-21). Kohn (1976: 114) stated that alienation emerges as a result of individuals' thoughts about the external world they live in and their selves. In other words, alienation is related to people's adaptation to the internal and external world.

Alienation can occur in any field where capitalist production relations exist. It is also possible to find elements of alienation in the service sector. Because the service sector also includes standardized service patterns. We encounter standardization of jobs, simplification by dividing them into parts, and ultimately unskilled by blunting the creative labor of the employee (Çıvık and Besler, 2022; Erköse, 2020). Besides, emotions are important in the sector. Employees make various efforts to hide their emotions while satisfying the customers in service delivery (Sezgin, 2019: 745). Most of the time, since they do not have the authority to take initiative in their work, they act in line with the orders of their superiors and manage their emotions accordingly. In connection with Weber's iron cage concept, this situation may result in people losing their creativity and self-respect (Güler Aydın, 2010).

There are many studies on alienation in the tourism literature, which is an important part of the service sector. For example, Aktaş Polat and Polat (2016) investigated the psychological dynamics of the relationship between tourism and alienation. Develioğlu and Tekin (2012) examined the alienation of hotel employees in terms of their demographic characteristics. DiPietro and Pizam (2008) considered the alienation of employees in the restaurant business; Xue and Buzinde (2016) analyzed existing alienation research. Yumuk and Kurgun (2020) also discussed the alienation of tourism workers from their jobs. However, it has been observed that studies on the phenomenon of alienation in the service sector using semiotics are limited. This study aims to reveal how the phenomenon of alienation in the 2014 movie "Chef" is conveyed. It is aimed to describe the plot and indicators in the film based on the phenomenon of alienation. The study analyzes how domination and control

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practices in the workplace alienate a talented chef from his job and himself and seek escape. In this way, examining the feeling of alienation in restaurants constitutes a concrete example. In this respect, it is thought that the study will contribute significantly to both the literature and service management. It can be said that tourism employees can contribute to understanding emotional states such as feelings of alienation and burnout and ensuring work-life balance.

The semiotic analyses conducted in tourism-specific semiotics have commonly focused on tourism promotion and marketing (Pennington and Thomsen, 2010; Aşan, 2014; Belber, 2017; Civelek Oruç and Türkay, 2018; Aşan, 2022). It is thought that analysis of alienation with semiotics will contribute to the literature. In film analysis using semiotics, the messages are examined beyond what is seen in frames. By using signs, symbols, and meanings are extracted from narratives (Çilingir and Can, 2021; Sayıcı, 2021; Aydınçüler, 2023). Semiotics, which is a part of linguistics, provides an understanding of the issue at hand in terms of analyzing the messages conveyed through metaphors, words, and images (Çilingir and Can 2021: 164). In this context, examining the movie with semiotics helps to reveal the messages more clearly.

The main reason for choosing this movie is that it reveals the alienation situation in the service sector. Despite the entertaining nature of the film, it is seen that a talented chef is alienated from his job, his social environment, and himself. The movie was analyzed with the method of semiotics. There are several studies on the movie *Chef*. Qurrota (2016) analyzed the phenomenon of hyperreality in *Chef* and the effect of social media use. Fahrian (2017), using Barthes' semiotics model, aimed to identify the connotation and meaning of signs in the movie. Setiawan et al. (2020) analyzed the interaction of the father and son characters in the movie and the patriarchal ideology in the movie's content using John Fiske's semiotic approach. Fauzan et al. (2022) examined the “continuous cutting” method and editing aspects of the movie. In this study, the movie *Chef* is analyzed based on the concept of alienation.

## **Literature**

### **The Concept of Alienation**

The phenomenon of alienation has been discussed by Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Ludwig A. Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Erich Fromm, and Melvin Seeman, who have made significant contributions to the development of the concept. Hegel first addressed the concept. The phenomenon of alienation was analyzed in depth by Marx. Marx and Weber showed a critical understanding of capitalism with the phenomenon of alienation.

The concept refers to disconnection and separation individuals may experience in their social and economic lives. Karl Marx discussed the idea of alienation in the context of labor and capitalism. Marx argued that in a capitalist society, workers have no control over the product they produce. They are merely cogs in the wheels of the capitalist system and often feel alienated from the products they produce (Marx, 1906). Alienation is an important burden that industrialization places on social life. Industrialization has created mechanical individuals who start work at the same time every day, eat at the same time, perform the same tasks, and leave work at the same time. According to Marx, the monotony of the workers alienates them from the product they produce, their co-workers, and ultimately themselves. In short, the worker has become a part of production. Regarding alienation in the workplace, Marx (1906) states that the worker is impoverished and devalued as much as what they produce, and that labor is objectified.

Weber stated that in modern capitalist societies, individuals may experience alienation due to the rationalization and bureaucratization of institutions, which may lead to disillusionment and loss of meaning in life (Weber, 1992). In this context, Weber's “iron cage” metaphor provides a significant offer an insight into understanding the concept of alienation. Weber's concept of an “iron cage” is a state of “dehumanization”. As a man falls under the yoke of the product he produces, he is imprisoned in an iron cage along with his future. This situation deepens with bureaucratization. The human being, who is a part of the bureaucratic wheel, is separated from self over time and condemned to live in an “iron cage” (Güler Aydın, 2010: 25)

Emile Durkheim discussed the concepts of social integration and social alienation in his work “Suicide”. Durkheim emphasized the social dimension of alienation in this respect. Accordingly, he concluded that individuals with a low level of social integration or who feel disconnected from society are more prone to commit suicide (Durkheim, 2013). As for psychological alienation, psychologists such as Erik Erikson and Erich Fromm emphasized the psychological dimensions of alienation. Erikson (1968) stated that psychological alienation is related to one's inner sense of self, identity, and purpose. Turkle (2011), on the other hand, brought a different dimension to the subject and addressed the issue of technological alienation. He argued that the

intense presence of technology in human life causes disconnection and alienation by affecting individuals' relationships, mental health, and sense of belonging.

One of the first studies to reveal the dimensions of alienation belongs to Dean (1961). Dean argued that alienation has three dimensions: powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation. Middleton (1963) added new dimensions to these dimensions and stated that alienation has different dimensions such as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural alienation, social alienation, and job alienation. Seamen (1959) made a classification similar to Middleton and revealed that alienation has five dimensions. These are powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-alienation. Neal and Rettig (1963) state that the dimensions of powerlessness and normlessness put forward by Seamen have been put forward in the political and economic fields. Burbach (1971), on the other hand, put forward the dimensions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social alienation. Lang (1985) classified alienation according to the environment in which the person is located and divided it into personal alienation, social alienation and professional alienation. As can be seen, there are different views and classifications of alienation. There are many similar studies in the field (Kohn, 1976; Korman et.al, 1981; Mottaz, 1981).

In this study, Lang's classification of alienation was adopted. Accordingly, alienation is classified as social, professional and personal alienation. Social alienation is the alienation of people from other members of the society in which they live. Occupational alienation occurs with the conflict between the professional values and goals of the person and the organization. In this context, people are moving away from professional values. Personal alienation is the alienation of individuals from their nature, needs and desires (Lang, 1985: 172-175). Occupational alienation can also be said to be the disappointment of the individual in fulfilling professional norms (Aktaş Polat and Polat, 2016: 240). Unmet expectations, conflicting demands, a sense of external control, and loss of satisfaction within relationships are believed to lead to personal and social alienation (Lang, 1985: 172). Escape-seeking is also discussed in the context of alienation in the study. This is because seeking escape is seen as a process resulting from alienation. Someone who feels alienated and cannot direct their life tends to escape from their environment (Cohen, 2010: 3).

### **Alienation in the Tourism Industry**

The tourism industry offers many opportunities for job creation, country promotion, cultural exchange, and economic growth. However, beneath this glittering exterior, there is a dark side that often goes unnoticed: alienation. Alienation is a phenomenon particularly emphasized in the field of sociology and has been studied in the context of various industries. There are many studies on alienation in tourism literature (DiPietro and Pizam, 2008; Develioğlu and Tekin, 2012; Xue, Manuel-Navarrete and Buzinde, 2014; Aktaş Polat and Polat, 2016; Xue and Buzinde, 2016; Gök, 2019; Kurt, Hamarat and Gümüş, 2019; Zhang and Lee, 2022).

One of the most prominent forms of alienation in the tourism sector can be observed in the negative impact of unfavorable working conditions in the sector (Çıvık, 2023) on the lives of tourism workers (Kurt, Hamarat and Gümüş, 2019: 205). Tourism workers often face long working hours, low wages, and weak job security. As Marx and Engels (1844) pointed out about alienation, these conditions might push tourism workers away from the sector (Seymen et al., 2017: 413).

Due to the labor-intensive nature of the service sector, employees in service businesses interact with both their colleagues and customers. However, to ensure customer satisfaction, employees are expected to be friendly and have high communication skills. So, they are expected to use emotional labor intensively. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), emotional labor is appropriate of emotion to the situation. Employees who spend intensive emotional labor and act have various negative consequences such as turnover, job dissatisfaction, negative performance, psychological discomfort, burnout, and alienation (Keleş and Tuna, 2018: 133).

When we look at the labor process in the service sector, it is seen that especially in hotels working with the all-inclusive system, the work has become routine, the tasks have become simplified and devalued, and therefore the employees have become unqualified (Erköse, 2020). Timmo (1993) draws attention to devaluation in the sector. Çıvık and Besler (2022) state that managerial control mechanisms have transformed a tool of exploitation and domination. All of these include results that may cause alienation in the service sector. However, looking at restaurant businesses, DiPietro and Pizam (2008) state that restaurant management style and practices can cause alienation. They investigated the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of the employees and their alienation level. They presented that alienation was mainly caused by the management and leadership styles (DiPietro and Pizam, 2008: 35).

In addition, businesses are looking for ways to eliminate the problems caused by routine by creating more flexible structures. These rapid changes in the business world are leading to a shift from long-term commitments to flexibility and individuals feel the pressure to constantly adapt to new situations and reinvent themselves. This constant adaptation can lead to character erosion as individuals are forced to maintain a consistent sense of self and identity in an ever-changing work environment (Sennett, 2002). As a result of the precarization caused by seasonality in the service sector, employees may experience alienation. As is known that seasonality has consequences negative effects on employees' job satisfaction (Günel, 2009: 203). The alienation of employees from their jobs leads to a decrease in service quality and an increase in workforce turnover (Yumuk and Kurgun, 2020).

## **Methodology**

In this study, semiotics, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was utilized. Semiotics focuses on the social and cultural meanings of signs and codes. Semiotics does not try to define the structure of the work. It tends to explain the moving structure of the text (Barthes, 1981). Semiotics is one of the main methods used in the study such as text, sign, application, advertisement poster, movie, and show. Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) made significant contributions to the emergence of semiotics. In addition, Roland Barthes' method of plain meaning/semantic meaning is used in semiotic analysis.

Semiotics is the study of the use of language and symbols and is a powerful tool for film analysis. For film analysis, it examines the use of various symbols and the meanings these symbols convey to the audience. Films are an important instrument that conveys social messages to the masses. "Meaning in movies is created through signs. A sign consists of two parts, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical part or the concrete thing we see or hear. The signified is the psychological part. In other words, it is the reaction to the object. It is the mental picture evoked by the signifier or the internal reaction to the signifier" (Zaimar, 2017). In this study, the phenomenon of alienation in the service sector is discussed through the movie "Chef". The focus of the study is what type of messages this movie gives about alienation.

Roland Barthes is a semiotician known for his influential contributions to semiotics and the study of signs and symbols in various forms of communication. Barthes (1968) emphasized the importance of understanding signs and signifiers. He argued that signs consist of two elements: the signifier (the form the sign takes) and the signified (the concept or meaning associated with the sign). Barthes (1957) discussed several semiotic codes such as cultural and symbolic, analyzed how signs function in different contexts, and revealed how myths are constructed. Barthes (1968) distinguished between connotation and literal meaning to show how signs can carry both literal and figurative meanings. Barthes (2018) used connotation to identify hidden meanings in texts. Plain meaning, on the other hand, refers to a linguistic feature.

Within the scope of the study, Barthes' connotation/denotation theory was used in analyzing the movie Chef. The framework of the research includes the analysis of alienation.

## **Findings**

### **Fundamentals About "Chef" Film**

The movie "Chef" (2014) is a comedy-drama film written and directed by Jon Favreau, who also plays the lead role. It is about chef Carl Casper, the main character of the film, who leaves his prestigious job at a restaurant due to the problems he encounters at work and buys a food truck to reunite his family, whom he cannot spare time for. Carl Casper is a chef who is always busy with his job and whose job is at the center of his life. He had to quit his job due to the misfortunes he experienced at the restaurant where he worked. The most important reason for this situation is a famous food critic whom he cannot cope with. While the successful chef wants to offer the menu, he wants the food critic who comes to evaluate his restaurant, the owner of the restaurant tells him not to go beyond the standard menu. Carl Casper quits his job when the food critic who does not like the menu they offered, openly criticizes the chef. He then embarks on an adventure that he thinks will make him happier and tries to get both his family life and business back on track. Although the film primarily focuses on themes related to a passion for food and personal fulfillment, it can also be analyzed from the perspective of alienation. From the perspective of alienation, "Chef" tells the story of a talented and passionate chef named Carl Casper, who works in a prestigious restaurant in Los Angeles but becomes increasingly alienated from his creative personality and personal values.

At the beginning of the movie, Chef Carl Casper is shown as a creative and innovative chef. However, he feels constrained by the restaurant owner Riva who insists on serving the same old menu. This alienation from his creative expression leads to frustration and disconnection from his passion for creativity. Carl's alienation deepens when he loses control over the menu and is forced to offer conservative and uninspiring food choices. This lack of autonomy and control over his creative process further alienates him from his work. Carl's busy schedule also distances him from his son Percy and his ex-wife Inez. The long working hours and the pressure to conform to the restaurant's standards cause a rupture in his relationships with his family. This alienation from his loved ones further increases his sense of disconnection.

Carl's alienation dissipates when he buys a food truck and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Through this venture, he rediscovers his passion for cooking, reconnects with his son, and regains control over his creative process. The food truck represents a return to his authentic self and a rejection of the alienating constraints of the restaurant industry. Finally, "Chef" has messages about finding one's true vocation and resisting the pressures and alienating forces. It shows how breaking free from these constraints can lead to a more authentic and fulfilling life. The film follows the journey of reconnecting with one's passions and overcoming feelings of alienation.

**Table 1. Information About the Movie**

Movie Title	Chef
Director	Jon Favreau
Scenarist	Jon Favreau
Year	2014
Original language	English
Genre	Comedy/Drama

The study focuses on the disconnection between Carl Casper's private and working life, and his social, personal, and professional alienation. In this study, Lang's classification was used and a thematic path was followed.

### Social Alienation

Social alienation is the individual's moving away from his social environment (Lang, 1985: 172). From the beginning of the movie, there are some descriptions of Carl Casper's professional and private life. First of all, Carl appears before the audience as a divorced father. As it is understood from the later scenes of the movie, the reason for Carl's divorce is that he does not devote enough time and dedication to his marriage and family due to his work. In the first scene, he is seen as an excited chef working in the kitchen. Later, when he realizes that he forgot to pick up his son, it is noticeable that he is not successful in fulfilling his responsibilities towards his family and environment.



**Visual 1. He Forgot to Pick Up His Child from School (00:01:38)**

**Table 2. Social Alienation Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Panic expression	Suddenly asking the time while working	Workaholic chef

*Denotation:* The chef appears to be a person who is strictly devoted to his work, to the point of being a workaholic. In this scene, the chef remembers to needs to pick up his child.

*Connotation:* The fact that the chef forgets to pick up his child from school represents his workaholism and how he is detached from his family. It is understood that he was not aware of the clock while working and got carried away. In this scene, it is seen that the chef puts his family in the background while focusing on his work.

In the following minutes of the film, sections show how excited the lead character is about his job. In Visual 2, it is seen that he is grocery shopping for work with his son, without hearing what he says.



**Visual 2. Grocery Shopping for Work (00:03:06)**

**Table 3. Social Alienation Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Grocery shopping	The chef is focused on getting vegetables to cook at the restaurant while his son tries to talk to him	Workaholic dad

*Denotation:* Percy wants to come along with his father’s grocery shopping for work so that he can spend time with him. Carl, on the other hand, is very meticulous when choosing products from the market.

*Connotation:* While Percy tries to attract his father’s attention, Carl seems to be more interested in the work-related groceries he buys. Percy tries to create opportunities to spend time with his father. But Carl is very busy, as he states many times to his son.



**Visual 3. Focusing On Business-Related Messages (00:04:58)**

**Table 4. Social Alienation Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Hot dog and phone	The chef was talking to his son and stopped listening when work-related messages came	Indifferent father

Denotation: Carl is not very involved when planning a trip with his son. He focuses on work-related messages while pretending to listen to his son.

Connotation: By placing all these details in the first minutes of the movie, an important idea is given about the main character. Carl Casper appears before the audience as someone who does his job meticulously and therefore forgets to spare time for his family. While his child makes a trip plan, he does not pay attention to him and reads the work-related message on the phone.

### Occupational Alienation

According to Marx, creative activity is a fundamental aspect of human nature and this “need” is best fulfilled at work. According to him, occupational alienation is the loss of control over capacity at work (Marx, 1906). Employees feel powerless when they cannot control the production process (Blauner, 1964: 84).

Carl Casper’s professional alienation becomes apparent early in the movie when he clashes with the restaurant owner Riva. Riva insists on serving the same unexciting menu, which Carl feels stifles his creativity. This is revealed in the heated argument in the kitchen, which shows how Carl's passion for creating unique dishes clashes with the rigid structure of the restaurant and leads to his alienation from culinary art. Carl becomes alienated from his work as he loses control over the menu and is forced to conform to the restaurant's unchanging standards. The pressure of power over his creative process makes him feel like the executor of someone else's vision. This deepens professional alienation.

Carl’s self-confidence takes a hit when he serves ordinary food. At this point, although he is a talented and creative chef, his professional identity is blurred under the power of his boss. The professional alienation of “Chef” is revealed in specific sections and character dynamics of the film. In particular, the importance of regaining autonomy and creative control over one's work to find satisfaction and happiness in one’s chosen profession is emphasized.

In the later scenes of the movie (Visuals 4 and 5), the owner of the restaurant where the protagonist works scolds everyone in the kitchen and asks to speak to the chef. In this scene, the restaurant owner says condescendingly that he can replace the chef whenever he wants and that he owes everything he needs to work well. Therefore, it can be seen that he ignores the chef’s hard work.



**Visual 4. The Argument Between Chef and Owner (00:08:12)**

**Visual 5. The Argument Between Chef and Owner (00:07:37)**

**Table 5. Occupational Alienation Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Argument	The owner’s expression and the chef’s disappointment	Managerial Hegemony

*Denotation:* Even though the chef talks about his efforts, the owner ignores him. Since a famous food critic will come to the restaurant, the chef wants to present his extraordinary menu, but the owner says that their usual menu is sufficient. The chief consents unwillingly after the argument.

*Connotation:* The chef is forced out of his own creative space. Although he wants to prove himself to the food critic, he cannot implement his ideas and is forced to follow the rules of his workplace. It can be observed that there is a great disappointment on his face. Work commitment ties his hands.



**Visual 6. Chef Explaining the Old Menu That the Team Will Present (00:09:15)**

**Table 6. Occupational Alienation Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Sad expression	Explaining to the kitchen team that the menu will not change	Frustration with poor job performance

*Denotation:* The chef tells his team that the usual standard menu will be prepared upon notification of the restaurant owner.

*Connotation:* It is seen that the chef is deeply disappointed because he cannot realize the menu he dreams of. A situation arises that ties his hands to his job, which he is passionate about. At the point where he wants to prove himself against the food critic who comes to the restaurant and tries new recipes, the bureaucratic structure of the restaurant puts an obstacle in his way. The chef feels trapped because he cannot go beyond the standards of the job, he devoted his life to.

**Personal Alienation**

Personal alienation means people become isolated from their values and thoughts over time. Personal alienation occurs when employees feel their work does not fulfill them (Mottaz, 1981: 516). In the film,



personal alienation is portrayed through the character of Carl Casper, who is passionate about his job but gradually becomes distanced from values. Self-alienation is evident at several points in his life.

At the beginning of the film, Carl's alienation from himself is evident in his frustration with the menu restrictions imposed by the restaurant owner Riva. He feels creatively stifled and trapped in a repetitive and uninspiring menu. The disconnection from his creative instincts is a source of frustration for Carl. Carl's alienation gets deep when he loses control over his work. He is forced to serve a menu that does not match his culinary vision, which makes him feel like a cog in a machine rather than a master of his craft. The lack of autonomy over his work is a critical aspect of personal alienation.

Carl's alienation from himself extends to his personal life. His demanding job keeps him away from his son Percy and his ex-wife, as he's trying to prove himself in his workplace. This separation is an appearance of his alienation from his family and the disconnect between his work and personal life. The scenes in which Percy expresses his desire for a stronger relationship with his father underline this alienation from family.



Visual 7. The Restaurant Owner Announced That the Standard Menu Will Be Offered (00:31:04)

Table 7. Personal Alienation Indicator

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Menu	Firing from work	Underestimating the chef's job

*Denotation:* The chef gets into a fight with the critic online, and the owner reacts harshly to this. He warns that he should offer the same menu again and not bring his creativity. The owner tells him that everything from the kitchen staff to the equipment they use and the menu belongs to him and that the chef can be replaced. Because the wheel will continue like this, and the customers will continue to come. The owner tells him that he can quit if he wants, and at this point, the chef resigns from his beloved job.

*Connotation:* He feels that he cannot find the happiness he wants because he works in a certain mold and in an environment where his labor is disregarded. This conflict between the capitalist who owns the means of production and the employee who rents his labor shows that the employee is at a disadvantage in every aspect.



**Visual 8. The Chef Questions His Job After Negative Comments from The Food Critic (00:46:08)**

**Table 8. Personal Alienation Indicator**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Indicant</b>	<b>Indicated</b>
Anxious gestures and facial expressions	The chef and his friend communicate	Questioning the meaning of one's work

*Denotation:* In the following scenes, the Chef's sadness is reflected. Carl's co-worker tells him how unhappy he is while working at this restaurant. The co-worker states that this workplace is not suitable for him.

*Connotation:* Carl questions the meaning and importance of his work. Carl says he's not a good father, he's not happy, and he feels lost about his life and his job. It can be said that this scene is the moment that Carl's alienation from his profession is shown most transparently. It seems that he thinks that the professional conditions do not reflect Carl's principles and outlook on life. Perhaps, Carl's inability to show himself as he wanted in his profession made him ambitious to work harder.

### **Escape-Seeking**

Cohen (1979) suggested that alienation plays a role in the need for escape and rest. Seeking escape is a concept examined by various researchers in the context of alienation (Cohen, 1979; Maoz, 2006). One of the motivations for seeking escape stems from the anxiety caused by the feeling of alienation (Vidon and Rickly, 2018: 69). Escape-seeking describes the desire to get away from the daily life environment that contains negative emotions. Search for escape; It includes processes such as psychological readiness and separation (Aktaş Polat and Polat, 2016: 240).

While there are indicators of alienation in the first half of the movie, the search for escape is noteworthy in the second half. Accordingly, Carl's journey of self-discovery by starting a food truck business represents the search for escape. This decision is a rejection of the alienation he experiences in the restaurant industry. In a way, he shows resistance to the situation he is in.

The food truck represents her return to authenticity and reconnection with her true self. The film depicts his journey of recovery from self-alienation. The chef rediscovers his passion for cooking and reconnects with his son during the travels. It is portrayed as a multidimensional experience that affects Carl professionally and personally. But through his journey of self-discovery and his decision to reclaim his creative autonomy, he begins to overcome this self-alienation and find a more authentic and fulfilling path in his culinary career and personal life. The film emphasizes the importance of letting go of self-imposed constraints and returning to one's true self to achieve happiness and fulfillment.

The early part of the film shows Carl Casper trying to escape the monotony of his job at the restaurant. His frustration with repetitive menus and lack of creative freedom pushes him to explore alternative ways to rekindle his passion for cooking. The main element of the search for escape in the film revolves around Carl's decision to start a food truck business. This entrepreneurial endeavor represents a radical departure from his previous career and becomes a symbol of his escape from the constraints of the traditional restaurant industry.

The escape from professional and personal alienation is intertwined with the search for a new culinary adventure. The food truck represents a new beginning. Because it offers him the opportunity to reconnect with

his creativity and authentic personality. By escaping the confines of the restaurant, Carl manages to escape his alienation.

Another dimension of the search for escape in the film is Carl's desire to reconnect with his family, especially his son Percy. His cross-country journey in his food truck allows him to spend quality time with Percy and rekindle the father-son relationship. This escape from his busy work offers an opportunity to rebuild his connections.



**Visual 9. Starting A New Business with A Food Truck (01:16:43)**

**Table 9. Escape Seeking Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Food truck	Colorful environment and summertime	Food truck traveling in a fun and colorful environment

*Denotation:* Carl started his new job, taking his son with him. Carl’s new food truck travels among the joy and colorful nature of the streets of Miami.

*Connotation:* The colorful summer environment represents the colors that come into Carl’s life. Fun music, smiling people, and the happiness of summer are the symbols of the happiness he finds in his new life.



**Visual 10. Chef At His New Job (01:32:34)**

**Table 10. Escape Seeking Indicator**

Indicator	Indicant	Indicated
Chef's happiness	Working with his son and close friend	Pleasure about new job

*Denotation:* Carl starts his new job at the food truck with his son and close friend. While he is talking to his ex-wife on the phone and working, his happiness is reflected on his face.

*Connotation:* Carl is seen to be quite excited. When asked how he is, he says he’s “amazing”. He pays closer attention to his son and spends plenty of time together. It can be seen that the traces of alienation have been erased.



**Visual 11. Family together (01:43:49)**

**Table 11. Escape seeking indicator**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Indicant</b>	<b>Indicated</b>
Wedding	Family having fun together	Chef reconnects with family

*Denotation:* Carl is reunited with Inez. They have fun with their son at their wedding.

*Connotation:* Carl is freed from his chains by starting a new job. Carl, who was able to re-establish the bond with his family, reconnects with his ex-wife. Thus, it can be said that he got rid of the feeling of alienation from his environment.

## Conclusion

In this study, the movie *Chef* is described based on the phenomenon of alienation by using Barthes’ theory of connotation/denotation. Although the passion for cooking and embarking on a new adventure in the movie are treated entertainingly, it is thought that the movie depicts alienation, exhaustion, and the search for escape in terms of both subject and content. The alienation in the film is parallel to Weber’s definition of an “iron cage”. According to Weber, bureaucracy is the most logical way to establish authority over people. The iron cage means that as a result of modernization shaped by bureaucracy, individuals lose their values, and their talents are ignored and uniformized. As a result of the iron cage, human characteristics such as creativity and self-realization are destroyed and disregarded (İmadođlu and Çavuş, 2022: 34). Therefore, the iron cage depicts mechanized people who are forced to follow strict rules, whose creativity is taken away, and who can only act on orders from the top.

The presentation of the standard menu in the film shows that the work is simplified and standardized by functioning like a band system of the factory. This situation reveals that over time, the employee is devalued by being detached from their professional skills (Çıvak, 2021; Çıvak and Besler, 2022). However, it was observed that there were simple elements of supervision, which proved that it was not possible to go beyond a standardized workflow.

When the labor process highlighted in the film is carefully examined, the chef works under the strict control of the capitalist as an employee. As a capitalist, the main goal of the restaurant owner is to achieve maximum output through the efficient use of the means of production (Marx, 1906). What is profitable for the restaurant owner is the continuation of the order. It is seen that issues such as dulling creativity, alienation, decreasing quality of life, or job satisfaction become insignificant. At this point, it is possible to say that labor has become a commodity (Braverman, 1998).

Marx’s (1906) concept of alienation is basically about the alienation of people from their labor. In this movie, it was found that even a chef with a creative capacity became alienated from his work due to strict supervision and bureaucratic structure. In this study, Lang’s (1985) classification of alienation was adopted and the film analysis was analyzed based on social, professional, and personal alienation. It was determined that the chef

experienced three different elements of alienation at certain levels. In the first half of the movie, it is seen that the family ties of a workaholic chef are at the point of breaking. This situation, which we include in social alienation, was found to be experienced intensely. In addition, it has been determined that the chef has entered into a vicious cycle at the point of increasing his creative possessions and is faced with professional alienation.

Traces of alienation are depicted through signs in the film. In the second period of the movie, there is a search for escape. This represents resistance to the system. The fact that the chief, whose creativity is restricted and who is in a deadlock, quits his job and establishes an independent business represents emancipation. Although Weber argues that escape from the iron cage is not possible in modern societies, as seen in the movie Chef, it is shown that people who question their work and life and decide to resist can regain their productivity.

In future research, films related to the service industry can be analyzed through semiology. Because visual resources are important in terms of revealing the current situation in the service industry.

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