

BALKAN CITIES AND CULTURE IN TANZİMAT ERA TURKISH NOVELS

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Abstract

The life in Balkan that has called attention through its polyphony all along takes its place in Tanzimat era novel. In Tanzimat period novel, it is possible to encounter to a significant part of Balkans' historical, sociological, cultural and economic trace since some part of Balkans was tied up with Ottoman Empire. Greece and Bulgaria's cities being first, most of today's cities and sites connected with countries like Albania and Romania are used as places and reflected to the works in question. Some certain parts of Balkans that Ottoman Empire maintained its sovereignty along 5-6 centuries becomes a place that can be traveled easily and mentioned frequently in daily life. It is essential to add the geography of Balkans, being a battlefield especially between the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century, is handled around the themes of war and sorrow in Tanzimat era novel. In this frame, the novels of Ahmet Mithat Efendi called Gönüllü and Arnavutlar-Solyotlar should be considered the most important novels of us reflecting the cities and cultures of Balkans with their historical atmosphere. Balkans in the novel of Mizancı Murad which is called Turfanda mı Turfa mı is subject to around the theme of war. On the other hand, Tanzimat era novels in which Balkan cities and cultures could be encountered and we can not mention in our summary. In our work, historical, cultural, sociological and economic features of Balkan cities will be studied considering the fictive atmosphere in Tanzimat era novels in question.

Introduction

Balkans has had strategical importance because of being an entrance point between Europe and Asia throughout the history. It has always hosted all colours with its ethnical and cultural diversity. Indeed, this situation is an affluence for Balkans, but unfortunately, Balkans has been remembered as a geography of great wars throughout the history. 19th century which is recorded the century of rebellion to the history of Ottoman Empire, disorders started to prevail again. Therefore, Balkans is reflected with an atmosphere in which continuous wars take place in

early period Turkish novelty. In terms of the issues of custom, belief, city, architectural construction, social and economic life, the Ottoman novel is effected with Balkan culture.

What is the novelty of Tanzimat period? It contains the time period which starts from the coming into appearance of novel in Turkish society to the modern novel come out by Servet-i Fünun period. Historically, it starts in 1872 with first writing Turkish novel called *Taaşuk-ı Talat u Fitnat* and it covers 30-35 year time period until Servet-i Fünun novels published at the beginning of 1900s. Together with this, it is not convenient to limit the idea, literary, political, social and artistic movements by calender years. Ahmet Mithat Efendi who is the most important figure of Tanzimat period novelty without a doubt writes his last novel called *Jön Türk* in 1908. Therefore, historical periods, idea and art movements can exist together in some periods. Then we can say Tanzimat period novelty includes a period starting from 1870s and continueing to 1910s, which covers a 40 year-time period. Tthis 40 year-time period is also the second part of “rebellion century”.

In Tanzimat period novelty, there are two Turkish novels that choose Balkan geography as main regions called *Arnavutlar-Solyotlar* (1888) and *Gönüllü* (1897). These two novels are written by Ahmet Mithat Efendi. The common feature of these two novels are to be given a significant part to Balkan culture and cities. Generally, events take place in Greece, Albania and Bulgaria though it is possible to say there are many Balkan cities mentioned. Şipka battle is the subject of last episode in the novel of Mizancı Murat called *Turfanda mı Yoksa Turfa mı?* (1892). Again, Şefik serves a sentence in Balkan lands in the novel of Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* (1879).

Gönüllü (1897)

The novel called *Gönüllü* starts with the scene of knife cleaning (in Turkish, bıçak silimi). Depiction in the novel is related with the rural area between Yenişer and Serfiçe. The knife cleaning is reflected an important part of Balkan culture. Even, an anectode is told in *Gönüllü* by mentioning this knife cleaning festival is also a matter of Bektaşî anectode. Knife cleaning is an important festival of people that deal with farming. An assembly is prepared last time when Ramadan is about to come. Last wine chatting (sohbet-i meynûşâne) is performed in this assembly. Bego who is the owner of a farm in the novel of *Gönüllü* has börek, baklava cooked and turkey, goose and lamb slaughtered for dinner. It is mentioned in the novel that Bego sustains this custom for five-six years. Gipsies, dancers (köçekler) and villagers present every type of their play and music talents in knife cleaning. The novelist reserves a significant part in the novel for performing of festival. A lot of information is given in the *Gönüllü* about monasteries constructed in Teselya. Starting with the Triadha monastery, the novelist that says “ All of the mountains surrounding Teselya plain on the northern east side is a thing consisting such a step rock. There is also a monastery on almost all of every hill.” (Ahmet Mithat Efendi,

2000a: 72) tells the monastery is made up of huge stones like chest and this stones are integrated with lime to get a firm fortress shape. The roof of the monastery of Aghia Triadha has been made up of stones called “pilaka” as being the characteristic of regional architecture. The writer indicates that “pilaka” is called as “piloça” in different Balkan cities and its width is several meters and its height is about ten-fifteen cm. In *Gönüllü* novel, it is mentioned that the Aghia Stephanos monastery is also constructed with the same style like the Aghia Triadha. The writer mentions that it is not true that the reason that Greeks built the monastery in heigh and sheltered place was because of fear related to the jannissaries and Muslim Albanians. The writer expresses the actual reason as defending against pagan (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2000a: 79).

The village mentioned in *Gönüllü* is located between Yenişehir (Larissa) and Serfiçe (Serbia) cities. The novelist mentions there are forty five-fifty families in the village and half of them are Greeks, quarter is Bulgarians and the remaining of them are Vlaches called “Koçovalık” and “podarlık” that is Albanian people working as guard. In addition, in *Gönüllü*, the population of Yenişehir (Larissa) is mentioned as fifty-sixty thousand during Ottoman-Greek war in 1897.

During knife cleaning gipsies from Serres city come to Bego’s farm and village with their köçeks and instruments. It is said in the novel that the local people like those musicians very much. (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2000a: 13). Gipsies use tambourine. Novelist Ahmet Mithat Efendi talk about gipsies with glory. Mehteran drum is mentioned with playing 4-5 tambourines together. The teller of *Gönüllü* novel says gipsies of Serres are incomparably superior in terms of clothing and beauty to gipsies of Ayvansaray and Sulukule.

It is said sirto to the dance danced by instrument named sirto or gusla by the Greek. During knife cleaning Greek men and women dance sirto. As it is known, even if it has different appliance types, sirto is known as Greek natioanal folk dance. Bringing those ancient folk dances to his novel shows Ahmet Mithat Efendi has important information about culture and tradition of nations living in the Balkans geography. In fact Ahmet Mithat Efendi spends his early youth in the Balkans geography (Korkmaz 2010, 44-78).

Filomene doesn’t want to get married to Andrea Kostopolo since she loves Recep Köso. As Filomene doesn’t know what to do against his father force, her mother death gains her some time. Because, according to the novelist, when a Greek that lose any relative have to mourn at least one year (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2000a: 217).

The hero of the *Gönüllü* novel called Kahramanoğlu Mehmet Bey is a blockhouse and farm owner between Yenişehir and Serfiçe (the writer doesn’t give the village). He settles to the village at the beginning of summer to have pasture and plantation reaped, harvest beaten, milk converted to cheese, if it rains, to have the land fallowed. Sometimes, he stays in the winters to hunt duck and carp, too.

Again in Balkan lands it is accepted sinister when a rooster crow untimely. The writer states that the villagers who live there cut and eat the roosters crowing untimely and he points to that as a superstition.

When Recep Köso joins to the Ottoman force directed by Ethem Paşa, he is assigned to draw into Greece and learn the situation of Greek army. On this occasion, Recep Köso stops by so many cities in the southern Greece to fulfill his spying mission. Recep Köso comes around Trhala (Trikala) and Golos (Volos). As Ethem Paşa, the commander of the army, gives the informations to Recep Köso about what he will do, he talks about so many cities. He wants Recep Köso to enter Golos, a port city, by using Meçova (Metsovo) and Katarin (Katara) passages through Pindus mountains. The commander wants him to introduce himself as a Greek from Zanta or Narda. He will work at Sakrib journal as a war correspondent. Serez (Serres), Debre, Niş, İşkodra, Kalkandelen (Tetova), Elbasan (Rrethi i Elbasanit), Selanik (Thessaloniki) are the other cities mentioned in *Gönüllü*.

Another attractive place in *Gönüllü* novel is Aghia Triadha monastery near Kalampaka (Καλαμπάκα). As a result of our research the situation of today's Aghia Triadha totally overlaps the novelist's expressions. The novelist almost figures the monastery with a realistic description. The father the Greek girl Filomene ,that Recep Köso loves, abducts her to that monastery to prevent marriage. It is impossible to enter the monastery except for the cage that is hanged with thick ropes. Because the monastery is built on a thirty meter stiff rock. Recep Köso will be able to enter the monastery only with the help of a servant there and by giving money. There are many monasteries like this in Teselya.

It is said that there is a delicate eating and drinking culture in Rumelia which is mentioned as the Balkans geography. In *Gönüllü* novel, the Balkan geography's this pleasure is mentioned in this way: "... türlü hamur taamları, etler, hele tatlılar cihetiyle Rumeli mutfakları âdetâ İstanbul mutfaklarına iddiâ-yı rüchana bile çıkışabilirler." (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2000a: 13). The dinner table is laid on the floor. The European style hasn't fitted to the Balkans geography yet. First the dinner table is laid on the floor, then an big table cloth is spread over it. Bread and spoons are put on the table cloth, the guests sit around the table cloth on the floor and take a side of it on their knees. Since the food is prepared as stuffed lamb, turkey and goose, they are put in wide copper trays and are brought in the middle of the table cloth.

As a result of the treaty of Edirne (1829), Greece that gains independence continues to struggle with Ottoman Empire to get Teselya. The Greek forces that don't obey the treaty of Berlin (1878) since they claim that it must be given more lands to theirselves struggle again to progress towards the northern side. Anyway, so many episodes in *Gönüllü* novel is envisaged to tell this war. According to the treaty of Berlin signed in 1897, Ottoman empire leaves Epir (Ipiros) and some part of Teselya to the Greeks. This treaty shapes the new Otoman-Greece's border. There

are two important reasons of war exploding in 1897. As a result of Greece's encouragement of Girit rebellion and not obeying the border of Alasonya (Ellasona) and Yanya (Ionnina), another war explodes again. The hero of novel is from Yenişehir. However, Recep Köso who is forced to migrate here settles in the northern lands. Recep Köso and his family settle in Manastır (Bilota). There is always a migration phenomenon from the lands captured by the Greeks to the lands of Ottoman in the novel. Especially, people remaining on the Greeks' side leave their lands and migrate to the Ottoman lands. The sadness of leaving from the lands inhabited for centuries is great.

During dinner an important tradition that belonged to Albanians by the teller revealed. This tradition is, the Gentleman's nicely peeling and cleaning of the lambs blade bone after the stuffed lamb being eaten. This blade bone will be given to somebody by the Gentleman. But the person who will get this will be the most elite and intellectual of the community. So during every knife cleaning it becomes a matter of interest that who will get the blade bone. On the other hand giving the blade bone to somebody is a kind of fortune telling. Because according to the information that the teller gives us in the *Gönüllü* novel, by looking the signs and spots on the blade bone, an estimate will be made about the future. Again the teller stresses that this tradition isn't found in Islam and Christianity, it continues to live as a habit from the time of polytheist religions. The teller says that the tradition being talked may be from the era of the Alexander the Great, the ancestor of Albanians. Ahmet Mithat Efendi stresses in *Gönüllü* novel that the blade bone is very important in fortune telling for Albanians and the things that is said must be believed. Ahmet Mithat Efendi who adds an event that he experienced before, described an experience that he faced the danger of condemnation for not to believe in an exaggerated example in a community. In *Gönüllü* novel, Bego gives the blade bone to an old traveler, Ömer Neşo. The old man looks at blade bone and declares a Turk-Greek war in the near future.

Arnavutlar-Solyotlar (1888)

The region of events passed in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's novel called *Arnavutlar-Solyotlar* is Albania. So many social, political and historical features of Albania is reflected to this novel. In the novel, it is expressed that the people called "ağa" or "bey" live in Albania as a feudal and don't obey the politic authority much. It is mentioned in the novel that whatever extent the governor has this "beys" obeyed, to that degree the governor has power. Otherwise, the governor does not have certain respect.

The struggle undertaken by Tepedelenli Ali Paşa (1744-1822) against people living in Soli called Solyot (Solili) is told in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Arnavutlar-Solyotlar* novel. The epic struggle performed by Solyots against Tepedelenli Ali Paşa and his army is the main topic of the novel. Tepedelenli Ali Paşa who is the governor of Yanya (Ionnina) and has the Ottoman government accepted this governorship unwillingly desires people living in his region to be in his domination. He forces the

Christian Albanians from Soli living in high mountains between Yanya and Parga to relocation. Tepedelenli Ali Paşa who is reflected in the novel as a cruel governor almost makes genocide to that Christian people. Therefore, most cities between today's northernwest Greece and southern Albania are mentioned in the novel. The leading people in Berat, Delvino (Delvinaki), Paramitya (Pramithia) and Konispolis (Konispol) swears allegiance to Tepedelenli Ali Paşa unwillingly only to protect their community from cruelty. Parga is the region where the Christian Albanians living in Soli keep in touch commercially and socially. When people from Soli have controversy, the leading ones like Boçaris and Fotos come and settle in Parga. Ohri is another region mentioned and it remains in the frontier of today's Macedonia.

Solyots who live in the frontier of Greece and between the strong hills of Yanya preserve their customs and traditions since they live in a geography not exposed to external effects. The folk dance of Solyots is played between two people. There is no importance of the gender of pair. The folk dances mentioned in the novel of *Arnavutlar ve Solyotlar* is similar to the Greek folk dances. "Grasping is organized by hand to hand or belt to belt or handling the ends of handkerchief. Sometimes, performers don't align like circle, they constitute a curved line. Then, no matter male or female, the most adept performer stands ahead of everyone shaking the handkerchief in his or her hand and saying couplets. After then, everyone repeats the chorus of these couplets." (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2002: 60)

The main topic of the Albanians-Solyots novel is the name of the nation. Many ethnic, religious and cultural features of Solyots are sprinkled in the novel. The warrior and cruel personality of Tepedelenli Ali Pascha created internal chaos and could hardly beat Solyots which is reflected as a hero nation. Solyots are Greeks that the teller sees as from "Soli". Soli, which is a region among the sharp rocks in the northwest of Greece, is depicted by the novelist in this way (Ahmet Mithat 2002: 29) Consisting of 4 villages including 560 houses Solyots live among mountains hard to reach. The language of Solyots, who are Albanians, is Albanian. Since they are Christian, they know the Greek language because of they religion. So according to the sayings of Ahmet Mithat Efendi in *Arnavutlar-Solyotlar*, Solyot nation is Christian Albanians.

In Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Arnavutlar-Solyotlar* novel, an important place is taken for Newroz and Hıdırellez (Spring Festival). Since newroz is more suitable for Iran's climate and the effect of winter continues in the geography in northwest (İstanbul and the Balkans), Hıdırellez festival, which is held in the early May, is more common. The importance of Hıdırellez in Albania and in the Balkans described in the novel in this way (Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2002: 71). Eating lamb meat is seemed equal to sin before Hıdırellez. The meat diet which is continuing for a few months is finished and on that day some elite people cook lamb meat and offer to people. During Hıdırellez festival bagpipe, drum and clarion is used as instruments.

Everything like rings, jewelleries and gem stones belonging to girls are put in earthenware one day before Hidirellez. The next day while taking things from the earthenware beside the young rosewood, various poems are read. The poem is seemed as the fate of the girl who owns the thing that is taken from the earthenware.

Easter holiday is celebrated other than Hidirellez festivals among Solyots. About Easter, which is a part of Christian culture, it is said that only festival is celebrated and everybody danced “hora”(round dance) as couples(Ahmet Mithat Efendi, 2002: 67). People living in Soli never harm people they have danced.

Turfanda mi yoksa turfa mi? (1892)

At last of part of Mizancı Murat’s novel called *Turfanda mı Yoksa Turfa mı?*, Şıpka struggles occurred during the war of 93 are mentioned. A war breaks out between Turkish and Russian army to have Şıpka passage situated in the middle of today’s Bulgaria. Mansur, working as a doctor in the army, writes the events experienced by him to Zehra Hanım. He tells the Şıpka passage war in his letter like that: “The strait way which takes hours to reach from one end to the other end is like a mud mixed with people’s meat and cloth” (Mizancı Murat 2008: 317). On this occasion, İsveti Nikola Hill, Gabrova, Tiraya Strait, Aline, Plevne, Servi Plain and Kızanlık in Bulgaria is mentioned in the novel.

Yeryüzünde Bir Melek (1879)

A significant part is allocated to the Balkan lands in the novels written by Ahmet Mithat Efendi in Tanzimat period novels. The biography of Ahmet Mithat Efendi is influential in this without a doubt. Because, Ahmet MithatEfendi who misses his father spends his first adolescence years in the Balkans. He has been Vidin, Niş and Sofya. In the novel called *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek*, Şefik is a doctor. He is sent to prison in Vidin as a result of neighbours who see Şefik and Raziye in a house together. It is reached to Vidin by using the overland route of Edirne and Filibe. He reaches to Vidin in three and a half months (Ahmet Mithat Efendi 2000b: 212). It is pointed out that Danube of Vidin is constructed and because of the overflow of Danube, the malaria disease turns to epidemic. It is also pointed out Paspanoğlu Palace attracting attention in the city. The prison that Şefik stays is so bad that it is not different than toilet. Şefik turns to İstanbul after he completes his sentence. The novelist also gives information about the return route: The return route of Şefik from Vidin is told to readers with this sayings: “ If staying and rest in Niğbolu, Plevne, Tırnova and Filibe is taken into account, twenty-seventh day of his exit from Vidin when he reached to Edirne...” (Ahmet Mithat Efendi 2000b: 245). Then, Ahmet Mithat Efendi transfers the Balkan geography to his novel in *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek*.

Conclusion

The Balkan cities and culture mentioned in Tanzimat period novels are not only trapped to the regions separated by today's borders. All of the Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Gipsies and Turks lives in the whole Balkans together. Administrative organisations doesn't exactly reflect the society anytime. How much the borders determined in ancient Rome is closed to the reality, today's borders of the Balkans reflect the reality at the same extent. In Tanzimat period novelty, the most mentioned Balkan geographies are a big triangle constituted by today's border of Albania, Macedonia and Greece. The culture and life of people living in this triangle is especially mentioned in Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Gönüllü* and *Arnavutlar ve Solyotlar* novels. Ahmet Mithat Efendi who doesn't neglect any society living in the Ottoman geography gives comprehensive information mostly about the way of life of the Greek and Albanian people in his novels. The Balkan geography is mentioned in Mizancı Murat's *Turfanda mı Yoksa Turfa mı* and Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Yeryüzünde Bir Melek* novels, too.

The Balkan region is narrated in realist depictions and information about social, political and economic ways of life of people is given in these novels. The knife cleaning ceremonies, superstitions, bravery; geographic, economic, social and politic life are expressed in the atmosphere of 19th century. The most important subject attracting attention in the novel is that the reason of bitter existing in the Balkans is attributed to external powers that interfere in the way of life of people. It is mentioned Greece, Albania and Bulgaria cities in Tanzimat period novels, especially. Mostly, town life is narrated in the novels. The characteristic feature of the novels is that the rural life depends on livestock. It has been found that selected regions as living area are usually sheltered and high. The Greeks and Russians, the Turks and Albanians battle with each other in the Balkan geography mentioned in 19th century Turkish novels. Therefore, Christian- Muslim conflict is dominant in this lands in 19th century. Great sorrow is usually experienced in these mentioned wars, the societies come to the point of extinction. It is revealed that the politic struggles are exterminated elements of nature and people. Particularly, experiencing extensive relocation and migration events because of changing frontiers is a characteristic feature existing in Tanzimat period novels.

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