THE PLACE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OTTOMAN JUDICIAL RECORDS IN THE NOVELS OF LUAN STAROVA AS REPRESENTATIVE OF MACEDONIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract
Since the ancient times the humankind has established various civilizations and every nation has created its own history. Under the auspices of the geographical region the empires were influenced by different social and cultural structures. The Ottoman Empire had a deep impact on the politics, economy, religion, culture and society as well as on the protection of the roots of the Balkans. Therefore its splendor, reign, government understanding and traces have been topics of research in many studies. Regardless of their religious and ethnic identities Balkan nations, in their essence, carry several identities and cultures. After the retreat of the Ottoman Empire from this land Balkans faced a turbulent period. New states were established and people that remained in this region started searching for their identities and cultural roots. One of the persons that felt and faced this processes his entire life is the topic of our study Luan Starova. Starova was born in Albania but due to various political reasons his family was often forced to migrate. Living in the Republic of Macedonia Starova has become one of the significant writers whose works have placed their mark on Macedonian literature. The head of Starova family, who had his share of forced migrations, is the father who is also the protagonist of Starova’s novels. In order to discover the roots of the family Luan Starova’s father starts to explore the Ottoman judicial records in Bitola as the only reliable source. In most of his works Luan Starova writes about his father’s quest for their past roots through the exploration labyrinths and his efforts to establish an identity. The significance of the Ottoman judicial records is emphasized in this point. As a result of this research we conducted, starting our journey from the works of Luan Starova, we saw the importance of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, the way it looked after its people regardless of their race and religion through the records kept and the way it became a beacon of light in the dark historical period. Moreover, despite the smear policy of the Ottoman Empire and the Turks contained in the novels in the past and present, we can still state that the most glorious and prosperous period of the people living in this land is the one under the Ottoman Empire.

Key words: Luan Starova, Balkans, Ottoman Judicial Records, novel.

1 INTRODUCTION
Centuries long rule of the Ottoman Empire over the Balkans as well as the splendor, reign, government understanding and traces it left behind have been topics of research in many studies. When first Balkan countries
under the Ottoman Empire declared their independence some speculative historical and literary works have
defended the idea that Ottomans forced people to proselytize and this idea still persists and is reflected in
historical as well as literary works. By depicting Ottomans as barbarians and the people as oppressed slaves they
tried to insert religious and national animosity and provoke hostility towards Turkish people. Yaşar Nabi Nayır,
who was born in Skopje and was one of the founders of the Seven Torches society and a prominent writers who
takes a significant place in Turkish literature in his book The Balkans and the Turkishness published in 1936
referred to this topic. First of all I would like to point out that when Balkan countries first declared their
independence in order to intensify religious and national animosity they deliberately instigated hostility towards the
Turkish people and even today it continues to exist among friendly and allied nations regardless of the actions and
conduct of the official authorities. Unfortunately Yaşar Nabi’s assertion about propaganda for instigating
animosity towards the Turkish people made 82 years ago is sustained to this day by the enemies of the Turkish
people

1.1 Relation between literature and history
There are many definitions about literature but all of them could eventually be reduced to the following
contrasts transitive – intransitive and extraverted – introverted. Plato in his famous work Republic emphasized
that in the context of art, literature in its general and broad sense of the word is a kind of reflection. There is
analogy between mirror and literature. Literature should reflect the world the way mirror reflects things and
entities. (Özdemir, 1980, p. 1)

Literature is a written or verbal expression of one’s feelings, thoughts, dreams, the past, one’s worries, and
helplessness using an idiosyncratic language and all within the frames of esthetic rules. As these types of works
are closely related to many fields they are also tightly related to history. Changes that occur in the course of
history and influence the social life interest literature as well. Mehmet Kaplan describes this relation in the
following way: Literary work is without a doubt closely related to the writer’s life, history and social environment
(Kaplan, 10). Kundera, on the other hand, as a novelist feels as if being within history all the time, in the middle
of a road, engaged in a dialogue with the ones before him or maybe the ones that will come after him.

Ottoman Turkish novels in the 19th century are in close relations with ideas of freedom and sovereignty of
nations. Dreams of freedom as a reaction to absolute imperisl domination, an obstacle against all types of human
rights; while the concept of sovereignty is seen as the end of the rebellious movements which resulted in the
independence of Balkan nations (Seyhan, 2014, p. 45). Thus the type of novels related to nations’ ideas of
sovereignty as part of history, longing for freedom and traces of desires about exploring roots is visible not only
in Turkish novels but also in the developing literatures in the Balkans.

In order to understand its past and evaluate the findings a nation should examine works that contain traces of
the past. It is common knowledge that man is a social being surrounded by those around him/her. To understand
the present based on the past, to find our roots in order to advance to the future, we should receive correct data
from real and reliable sources. At this point, Ottoman judicial records, as one of the most reliable sources that
contain true information and have gained an important place during the course of history, come into play. Lexical
meaning of the word record defines it as a list of official documents and information about people (Özkan, 2007,
p. 518). Therefore besides the Turks other Balkan nations can undoubtedly discover their cultural roots and
historical past in these records. Culture has a number of basic components. One of them is history. History
provides the political and social flow of culture as well as its durability through time (Turan, 2002, p. 189). As a
result, the utmost advantage of culture related concepts and classifications we have in our heads and carry with
us is the fact that it makes us think about things whether they are there or not or even if they never existed (Hall,
2017, p. 82).

2. LUAN STRAOVE AND OTTOMAN JUDICIAL RECORD IN HIS NOVELS

The past historian works on is not a dead past, it is a past that in a certain sense still exists today (Carr, 2002, p.
26). The topic of our study Luan Starova, is also after the history and past left to die among the dusty records. As
observed by Bernard Lewis “the downfall of great empires has always been a fascinating topic of interest” and
the downfall of the Ottomans is not an exception (Seyhan, 2014, p. 46).

Starova was born in Albania but due to various political reasons he was often forced to migrate. Living in the
Republic of Macedonia we will study Starova as a Macedonian man of literature and while studying his works,
especially his novel Ash Castle we notice the significance of the records.

We would like to show the significance of the Ottoman judicial records by presenting a short summary of the
novel by underlying this phenomenon. After his passing the father figure in the novel (the protagonist in his
novels is his real father) bequeaths his sons the books in his possession as well as the thought to solve the codes

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of the judicial records and clarify their messages. He gave his heart and soul into these records and he was aware that they did not contain just his past but a period that lasted for 500 years, the past of all the Balkan nations that were under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire.

The story narrates about the migration labyrinth which occurred by the decisions made by the father. When we look back at the mankind’s history we can easily notice that the phenomenon of migration is an indispensable part of history. As migration is a consequence of social issues, the pioneer of nihilism Pisarev defends the fact that one of the characters of Dostoevsky’s Demons Shigaliev expresses the social issues with a maxim. He finds a solution of the social issue in starting from an unlimited freedom and arriving at an unlimited despotism (Oktay, 2008, p. 60). He defends the idea that this maxim is the only solution for the existing, imposed dictatorships in the society.

The center or the direction of the family i.e. of the father that runs away from this type of dictatorship is the books he took with him. When the son (the narrator in the novel) enters his father’s library after his passing and notices his father’s secret library. He notices that these books write about a clash among new ideologies. He puts the books from the secret library in a suitcase and settles in their house near the lake. While going through the books his attention mostly turns towards the judicial records. Records taken by his father contain information about his life adventure in Istanbul. Records which had ashes and tears of over them turned into a maze of ash and tears.

While his father’s voice from every page of the records which kept his memories alive the boy’s eyes fill with new fresh tears. The metaphor of the records designates hopelessness and the son’s new quest and his journey to the past begins...

Afterwards his eyes turn and he feels as if standing on a centuries old fortress marked by fallen empires and past emperors’ troops. He starts to think about the real downfall of the Balkan empires. He especially concentrates on the reasons that caused the downfall of the Ottoman Empire.

While walking between the fortress and Mustafa Pasha mosque and going down towards the old part of the city the father visits Sultan Murat mosque which draw his interest and about which he heard so many things. During his walk he filters the history in his mind. A moment of doubt he lived in his youth comes to life before his eyes. Under the auspices of the Ottoman Empire, many of his friends after finishing their education in Ottoman law took their families, joined Ataturk and went to the South. Should he have done the same or should he have returned to his birth place and tried continue his father’s melancholy in the Balkans! As if seeing all the liveliness, authenticity and tangibility of the Ottoman period the father’s head is filled with different questions and meditates whether he would be able to track the handwritings from the Ottoman period.

He thinks his mission is to discover and revive the language and the culture of those who were sent to die under the Ottoman wreck by his god and accepts it as such. At the same time the father gets the impression that he witnessed the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and returned to the Balkans to face another Ottoman period.

While thinking, the father turns his eyes to the books. Wanting to break this silence the mother tells him that she and the children cleaned up the house and carried the books according to the predetermined order. Only thing left is to place the books. Because the father knows the essence of the words spoken by his wife he places the books in the following order: Sacred books will be placed on the top shelf; encyclopedias on the middle shelf after that my Istanbul books… Starova, 2008, p. 23)

Noticing the uneasiness of the mother in order to satisfy her curiosity starts his sentence my darling and tells her about his dream. He tells her that in his dream his mother went to his uncle Fethi Okyar Bey and even went to Ataturk to beg for the return of his son to the Balkans and asks him to convince him to come back. The uncle answered his mother in the following way:

My dear sister, we always believed that happiness only lied in our departures. We broke away from our roots, reached our peaks but our souls remained empty. By going to foreign places we get into a state of victims… Let your son go in the way he determined his fate… despite all the objects we own, despite the peaks we reached we are still at the bottom. Let him discover who we are. Everyone has a mission in his life! (Starova, 2008, p. 24)

The head of the household, continuing his life spent in the bumpy Balkan exile roads filled with the same oddness, the morning of the day he was to apply for a job in the court remains confused about how to prove his identity with the documents he owned from different Balkan regimes.

Alal Kombi’s eagerness grows and he waits for an opportunity to start an argument. Disregarding him Chapaev continues his speech:

Until our candidate recommended for the magistracy arrives at the court one of the persons that was screened comes to mind. He studied sharia law and Islamic philosophy in Istanbul University. He received judicial education in the years Ottoman Empire started to downfall. He is also familiar with the modern
He was asked to present his thoughts on the judicial system in the Balkans during the sovereignty of the latest empires during the period when Macedonian legal system was still being structured. The father begins to talk:

"I'm in no position to state all the experience I had in the field of law in the past in this speech. You know well that justice is the most complex and the most complicated aspect of the human life. My life past in defending and moderating every discrepancy, whether it was alevi, ethnic or religious. The judicial tradition started in my mother's family long time ago. Almost all men in the family were educated in law. When the foundation of the Ottoman Empire stated to shake almost all of them went to Turkey. There, they continued to receive education in law and remained loyal to the tradition. With the help of my close family members most of who work in the new state, administrative and judicial institutions established by Ataturk I too received law education in this unique city on Bosporus. When I returned to my native land I wasn't welcomed the way I hoped. I could not work beside the King. In this situation my only option was the law, remaining loyal to justice."  
(Starova, 2008, p. 51)

Alal Kombi thought that the father was presumptuous and strayed from the real issue. He asked him how he would defend a socialist revolutionary law with Ottoman diploma. The father continues his speech with the same tranquility and states the following:

"In order not to put at risk their sovereignty and avoid contradiction the Sultans did not want to destroy the foundations of the legal traditions of the nations they subdued. Thanks to this they have been able to retain the joint existence of Ottoman tradition codes, attested by life itself, with Christian and Muslim laws. The Ottoman Empire did not harm the religions of the nations under their sovereignty and made use of their laws. Empires that ruled in the Balkans and even in the world have rarely showed this kind of conduct"  
(Starova, 2008, p. 52)

He leaves home and in order to learn the truth of the matter goes to talk with comrade Chapaev. Chapaev verifies the things spoken and as they get one step closer to the project they dreamed about they become very happy. They will both head off to Bitola. Whenever they speak about the cities in Macedonia, the father always dreams about going to Bitola where he believed he could find the Ottoman judicial records. As he believed in the aforementioned and Chapaev concurred he never turned down his business trips and always signed them.

The journey to Bitola starts. As they approach Bitola through one of the shorter tracks of Balkan Express, he feels closer to the Ottoman period. He has been attached to this town where the friendship seeds between Ataturk and his Uncle Okyar Bey have been sown, since the day he took his first steps. He read about this town in almost every book he brought from Istanbul. After leaving the train station the father heads towards the center of the town, towards the mosques, madrasahs and foundations which could hide the old Ottoman documents. Knowing that the discovered records contain the old times, the Father, although difficult, tries to contain his excitement. In a moment he unleashes himself towards the documents which broke the link between his inner and outer world confined in himself. He starts to read the book titles enthusiastically loosing the concept of place and time while the ones around him wait for an explanation. At last he composes himself and starts to speak in a way that would allow everyone to understand him. Due to the things said he has an argument with the secretary of the party.

**Father:** These documents will have a revolutionary effect on enlightening both the Bitola judiciary of the time as well as four hundred year long history of a broader region...

**Party secretary:** Despite everything do not go too far. Do not be a dreamer more than it is necessary. The revolution you are talking about was already done by our party. Try to finish the task we took upon ourselves sooner without going too far and explain to these people what
kind of records are these. Your duty is just to make interpretation not to pass a judgment! There are others for that.

**Father:** Esteemed comrade secretary. Balkan nations are not without a history! In fact they are victims of an excess of history; but this history has not been enlightened enough because we have not consulted key sources. Those sources are right here, in front of your eyes inside these dusty crates! These are the three hundred years old history! We were deprived of many authentic documents. All the other centuries collapsed on our century. History buried us.

**Party secretary:** This is not the time to argue. If you were a member of the party we would have had a different discussion. After these discovery your task is to inform our leadership about what kind of records are these so they could decide what to do with them in due time and in a responsible manner (Starova, 2008, p. 112)

The discovery of the Bitola records takes the Father to his youth spent in Istanbul. He believes that with this discovery he will actually have discovered his mother's Balkan family circle. Returning from the building where Ataturk and Fethi Okyar Bey attended military high school the Father learns that the expected decision about the records arrived. The crates are placed in a special railway car and the journey starts. The number of documents is not small. Hundreds of thousands of documents, every document contains one fate, hidden, peeking through the gateway of time. The Father feels as if being face to face with the Ottoman period. Examining the documents he plans to connect the past to the present and future.

According to the Father the records contained years, life codes entered into carton paper, the task of the printer the publisher’s task would be so easy, he would only have to add few words to describe the records, struggling with these thoughts he went home late. The Mother as always serves his husband his dinner and tea. She notices he is sad but doesn’t attempt to ask him why. The father takes out a sum, which none of the family saw before, from his pocket and hands it to his wife. He states that the money was given to him for the records which will be published but complains as well: *They through few crumbs at me to ease my consciousness. Until they bury the documents again they will need me more.* (Starova, 2008, p. 145)

The last conversation they had was related to the comments about the three records he brought for translation. These records help him complete his monograph titled *Islamization of Balkan Christians between XVI and XIX centuries according to Bitola judicial records* (Starova, 200, p. 211).

He carefully reads one of the stories written by his son after he was influenced by an event that took place in one of the monasteries titled “The Dead God” which recollected the period of Stalinism when Albania was made godless. After reading his son's works whenever there was need of criticism he used soft words and this time was no different and he tries to tell his son about the Balkan reality until exhaustion: *What you have written is a masterpiece. Without knowing whether God exists or not, why do you declare him dead in your story my son?* (Starova, 2008, p. 219). When he feels tired he falls asleep. Being influenced by the things his father said the son continues to watch him.

In fact in his novels the writer is trying to tell us about the feeling that by crossing the border we get closer the freedom lost or rather escape the death which is so close to us. (Starova, 2017, p. 14) They underline the journey through history as well as the significance of the roots in the places. The places in the novels have different functions. Although they are mostly just a décor the place where the event takes place is a place where characters live or a place where they distinguished themselves. They help us understand the persons’ economic and social state and reveal their true characters. Apart from real places where events take place novels also use some symbolic places as well. The “fortress” used in the title of the novel “Ash Fortress” has been used symbolically. But “no matter whether the place is real or imaginary, being linked to the action or the flow of time, it is closely connected and fused to the characters”. (Bourneuf, Ouellet, 1989, p. 91)

During one of the interviews with Starova while preparing this study we asked him the following in regards to this topic and perception and the answer we received proves that the things he writes about in his novels are not just fiction.

- Apart from the “Pax Romana” reality when we take into consideration the “Pax Ottomana” reality as well do you think that there is mutual respect and intercultural understanding among Balkan nations or more precisely how does these facts reflect on your works?
- The identity which is subject here is not imaginary but complex. The empires that ruled the Balkans *(Divide et impera (divide and rule) in the name of imperial obligations and management models Roman, Byzantium, Austrian Hungarian, Ottomans)* with the mediation of migrations and changes

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mixed the identities, divided and scattered them through various interventions. After the downfall of the empires there were pursuits to homogenize the perception of state – nation. Result: wars, ethnic tragedies. In the novel “Ash Fortress” the person that discovers Bitola judicial records and records the Ottoman judicial records also gains access to the list of persons that converted from Christianity to Islam. In other words, in time one would also discover historical records. Discovering the truth about one’s own identity is not just a pre-thesis for the homogenization of identities, but it determines the quest for the real meaning of life or rather it determines that the last country is actually one’s real homeland.

In order to convince the majority to like them from political or cultural point of view Balkan nations even today abandon their values and turn towards different cultures. No matter how nationalist a Balkan country wants to be the Ottoman legacy is an integral part of each individual's life which cannot be erased easily. For example in every language there are many Turkish words. (Jelavish, 2009, p. 109) No matter how much the Balkan people complain about the Ottoman sovereignty at the same time they took advantage of it in many ways. Ottoman architecture displayed in mosques, bridges, little caravanserais and state offices and public buildings or personal houses was much superior to anything that replaced (Jelavish, 2009, p. 110). While spending his last days and during his last moments in life Luan Starova's protagonist the Father tells him about the significance of the records for Balkan people. The same words are stated in the rear cover of the book. With it he made a bald determination of the situation of the Balkan people with no words left to be spoken:

_We are the records my son, all of us. We, the damn Balkan people. Blended but unable to melt in a single melting pot. Migrated, but unable to keep a home. Converted, but unable to adopt the new religion. Taken from their roots but unable to break away from them completely. Divided by borders but unable to fit into the borders. Without these records our history is incomplete. Not having them is equal to centuries missing. At least we lived the past, but without today there is no future my son. The records are the best witnesses of this truth. The identity of every Balkan nation remains a mystery. The records witness how much the Balkan nations blended._

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