

Looking Turkey-Balkan Relations from Civilizational Perspective or Making Geography Common

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ABSTRACT

Balkans, Anatolian and Middle-Eastern geographies have played global roles three times in the history: The reign of Alexander the Great, Roman Empire and Ottoman Empire. Definitely, one of important factors for this condition is the fact that the said states made the geography common. In the present situation as a result of the globalisation processes, making the geography common is also possible by means of a multilateral integration which lets the political borders remain but dominates all sides of the life. In this perspective, those countries of the region which do not have any importance on their own because of a turmoil and a crisis of identity might gain depth and value. However, those who will have the greatest benefit from making the geography common will be the populations of the region who would get the chance to move in a wide region ranging from Balkans to Middle-east rather than limiting themselves within the existing political structures. What needed for this is to consider the relationship through the civilisation perspective and keep away from defining these efforts which are at the very beginning level. Such definitions as Great Macedonianism, Neo-Hellenism or Neo-Ottomanism would make a negative effect and prevent the region from bringing up its potentials. Today, what we need to do is not to give priority to definitions but giving priority to action, function and activity. What we need to do is to think about the steps to be taken for making the geography common, from which everybody will derive multilateral profits. The efforts for putting a name should be left to contemporary Dede Korkuts when the time is due, and when it is deserved.

Key Words: Civilizational Perspective; Balkans; Turkey

Türkiye-Balkan İlişkilerine Medeniyet Perspektifinden veya Ortak Coğrafya Oluşturma Penceresinden Bakmak

ÖZET

Balkanlar, Anadolu ve Orta Doğu coğrafyaları tarihte üç dönem boyunca çok önemli bir yere sahip olmuştur: Büyük İskender dönemi, Roma İmparatorluğu ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu dönemleri. Yaşanan bu koşulların en önemli faktörlerinden biri; mutlak surette bu devletlerin ortak coğrafyaya sahip olmasıdır. Globalleşme sürecinin bir neticesi olarak, günümüzde ortak coğrafya oluşturmak politik sınırların sabit kalırken hayatın diğer alanlarını kapsayacak çok yönlü bütünleşmelerle de mümkün olabilmektedir. Bu bağlamda, karışıklar ve kimlik krizleri nedeniyle önemini kaybeden, bölge ülkeleri, derinlik kazanabilir ve değer yaratabilirler. Bununla birlikte, kendi mevcut sınırları içinde kalmaktansa Balkanlardan Ortadoğu'ya kadar geniş bir coğrafyada hareket etme şansına sahip olan ülkeler, ortak coğrafya oluşturmadan en fazla faydalanacak ülkeler olacaktır. Bunu başarmak için; basit ve kalıpsal tanımlamalara sıkışmak yerine kimlik ilişkilerine uygarlık perspektifinden bakmak gerekmektedir. Büyük Makedonyacılık, Neo-Helenizm veya Neo-Osmanlılık gibi tanımlamalar; olumsuz etkileriyle bölgelerin gerçek potansiyellerini ortaya koymalarına engel olacaktır. Günümüzde ihtiyacımız olan şey bu tanımlamalara değil; eylem, fonksiyon ve faaliyetlere öncelik vermektir. Herkesin çok yönlü fayda sağlayacağı ortak coğrafya kapsamı için gerekli adımlar hakkında düşünmeye ihtiyacımız vardır. İsim bulma çabalarını gerektiği zaman ve bu isimler hak edildiğinde çağdaş Dede Korkutlara bırakılmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medeniyet Perspektifi; Balkanlar; Türkiye

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Early last year (26 February 2011) Martti Ahtisaari, Former President of Finland and the President of the Independent Commission of Turkey, made a presentation to a small group with the title “New Dynamics and New Actors of the International System” in Ankara Palas Hotel. After the presentation, which was moderated by İbrahim Kalın, the Principal Advisor of Prime Ministry, during the Q&A I also asked him about the transformation of world politics and the roles we are expected to play. The said question and relative discussions constitute the subject matter of this presentation.

The question literally was as follows: How do you imagine the world of 2050? If you were to make this presentation in 2050, would we be living in a world which would be composed by nation-states as it is today? Or would we face a “new medieval age” where the obscurities and grey regions have increased and where the organised authorities have increasingly vanished while the individual and volunteer organisations becoming more active, as the French philosopher Alain Minc stressed?

Ahtisaari expressed special thanks for this question after the session.² Actually, the question is very important because our future will be shaped according to the answer to this question. If in 2050, the definition of “international” still exists (because in a world where the “nation” is exceeded, the concept of international may not give the meaning as it does today), the new dynamics and actors of the world will come into being accordingly.

CONCEPTUAL QUEST: A NEW MEDIEVAL AGE?

Minc’s “New Medieval” (1995), Toffler’s “Third Wave” (1980) Drucker’s “Post-Capitalist Society” (1993a) or “Information Society” (1993b), Giddens’s “Late Modern” (1992) or “Globalisation of modernity” (2009) and other authors’ “imperialism (Kagarlitsky, 2009; Nyang, 2002) “post-modernism” or “post-Marxism” concepts are all efforts to define the new condition of humanity taking into account that we are opening up to a new world or starting a new phase of history.

We will emphasize not all of those concepts but Minc’s New Medieval as we started with it.

“New Medieval..... vanishing of organised systems, vanishing of every kind of centres, emerging of slippery and faint solidarities, indefiniteness, coincidence, blurriness... New medieval means the reason’s vanish as the founding principle, for the favour of primitive ideologies and superstitions.” (Minc, 1995: 9)

2 Martti Ahtisaari started his words by saying that he would be honored to participate to a such meeting in 2050 but regretted that his life would not be long enough for this. He emphasized that “nations” would hardly lose their meaning and importance. According to Ahtisaari, nations would continue to play an important role for long. Ahtisaari having lived in the era of nation-states and presided one, the answer appears quite reasonable for him.

The French philosopher refers to these concepts with negative meaning. David Held and Antony McGrew also draw parallelism between the Europe of Medieval age and the development of today (Held, McGrew et al.: 1999: 85). According to those philosophers, recent developments recall the simultaneous authorities of local, transnational and supra-national structures, in definite regions.

Medieval Age may have a different meaning for the Western and Eastern societies. For Westerns, this concept refers to such sectional political institutions as feudal authorities, kings, emperor, church and non-existence of a definite centre while it refers, for Eastern people, to rather centralised structures. By the concept of new medieval, I refer to vanish of the idea of belonging to a nation and central authorities whereas individual and communal initiatives become more prominent.

GLOBALISATION PROCESSES OR GLOBALISATIONS

The conceptual quest about what kind of a world we are evolving, “a new medieval age” or other concepts are all a consequence of the globalisation processes. Therefore, we should first explain what the globalisation is and who the main actors of the globalisation process are.

Globalization can be subject to very different evaluations, taking attitudes and approaches by various social segments and individuals who are from different sectors, countries and who have different experiences. One should see the adoption of those different attitudes vis-à-vis a process like globalization, which creates winners and losers, as normal. Mexico, Cuba or Australian aboriginals may have negative opinions about the benefits and costs of the “global discovery” but for the followers of Marco Polo, Magellan, Colombus and Captain Cousteau and for European businessmen, these developments are extremely “heroic” and “noble.” Again, the experiences of Bill Gates or Rupert Murdoch and the evaluations of the women and children who work in the free trade zones in Mexico, China or similar countries with very low wages would not be the same (Wiseman, 1998:26).

Therefore, there are very different definitions and approaches to globalization in the literature, which is in a way similar to the well-known elephant story belonging Mevlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi. Those definitions and approaches can range from “neo-imperialism to “the common accumulation of the humankind.” Leaving the differences in approaches to another study, one can define globalization as “a process of being affected at an increased rate at the individual, community, state and international levels in areas of politics, economics, sports, art, trade, culture and so on.” (Bülbul, 2009: 31). In this sense and with reference to Gramsci (1986), one can say that globalization = coercion + consent

Another point that needs to be indicated with regards to globalization is that globalization is a dialectical process that does not only unite, but also fragments and divides (Kloss, 2000:291; Bauman, 1999: 8; Sassen, 1998: xxxiv; Karan, 2000: 204-205; İçduygu and Keyman, 2000: 387-8; Raymond, 1995: 1075; Mittelman, 2001: 7-8). Within this context, the processes that are experienced are not one-dimensional but multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. From politics to economics, art and culture, these processes can affect each country, region, city and even family in a different way. Therefore, it would be more accurate to speak of globalizations or globalization processes rather than a linear globalization process. In fact, these processes can have a negative effect on a family that has a small business due to the entry into the market of big firms while at the same time offering new opportunities such as Erasmus to the children of the same family.

What is in question in terms of this study is not the new actors of the globalization processes or what kind of contradicting, overlapping, distinct globalizations are experienced, but the impact that is created by these processes from a civilization perspective³. Within this framework, it can be mentioned that globalization processes have been creating new situations in three main areas.

The first one can be defined as nation-state age when civil societies, communities and civil initiatives become more prominent, in comparison with the previous periods. With the globalisation processes, communities and civil initiatives can be very important actors, either positive or negative.

The fact that civil society, civil society organizations, civil initiatives and individuals have become quite prominent with the globalization processes can be easily observed in almost all areas of life today. With the changing conditions, individuals and communities are able to engage in activities at the local, national, regional and global levels without needing the intermediary role of big organizations such as states. Global companies are spreading their production throughout the planet and the consumption preferences of individuals at the global level are directing the inclinations of these companies.

We cannot just talk about the positive examples of individuals and communities becoming prominent. One should point the negative examples as well. In the past, few states could dare to attack a country like the USA, which is a super power, but today one young person or a few young persons who know the internet technology well

3 We analyzed earlier the meaning of discussions about culture and civilization for Turkey, see Kudret Bülbül, "Kültürve Medeniyet TartışmalarınaTürkiyeden Bakmak", in *Küreselleşme, Kültürve Medeniyet* içerisinde, ed. by Kudret Bülbül, (Ankara: Orient Yayınları, 2007). You can see also another essay on the responsibilities of Turkish and Azerbaijani intellectuals from the perspective of civilization in the new millennium, see my article "Intellectuals, A civilization Perspective, Turkey and Azerbaijan in the New Millennium", in *Economic, Political and Cultural Cooperation in Caucasus and Central Asia*, eds. by Mehmet Bulut & Recai Aydın, (Ankara: Adam, 2011).

are able to crash the web site of the US Department of Defense or Pentagon. Again previously, a super power starting a war against a community or an individual would not seem possible since it could lead to the questioning of its power, yet today the USA is trying to form an international coalition against an organization and its leadership (al-Qaida and its killed leader Osama bin Ladin)

In terms of the subject of this article, the second change that is experienced within globalization processes is that traditional ideological and national identities fail to offer the same meanings to the individuals as before. Sub-national and supra-national or trans-national definitions are becoming more prominent and grand ideologies such as liberalism, socialism and nationalism do not create as much excitement in individuals and communities as before. While it can be said that the history of humanity had been more based on religion until the 20th century and therefore, identities had been shaped on the basis of religion, to view the 20th century as an era of ideologies and a period in which ideological identities became prominent would not be incorrect. Although it is early to make predictions about the 21st century, it can be said that ideologies and national identities are causing less excitement in people and they are providing fewer meaning codes.

In the 1950s, Daniel Bell (1960) noted the loss of meaning in ideological identities and it does not seem to be correct to read the “End of History” thesis of Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1992, 2001) only as a loss of meaning on other ideologies. At the point that we have reached today, “grand narratives” such as liberalism and socialism, which humanity chased in the 20th century, are not received with as much enthusiasm as before.

A very similar situation is valid for nationalist thoughts. Whether identities for which individuals felt very comfortable with and which they defined in that way and concepts such as “homeland”, “flag” and “nation”, for which maybe they easily decided to die now give individuals their previous meanings is being discussed. Although the situation seems to be the opposite in the newly established nations for the time being, these concepts are attracting less interest in those societies that have completed the process of becoming a nation. For example, while it could easily have been said before that the German society felt to be more German, today one can observe that Germans identify themselves with more different identities (such as environmentalist, green, Christian, anti-globalization, gay, etc.) but less German.

The third big change has been realised with the prominence of civilisation perspective. As it is crucial to our presentation, we will handle this condition under another title because of the subject of the presentation.

TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES AND CIVILISATION PERSPECTIVE BECOMING MORE PROMINENT AGAIN IN PARALLEL WITH LOCALISATION

Civilization debates undoubtedly exceed the boundaries of this study. What needs to be pointed out in terms of this study is that there was a return to the civilization debates as of the end of the 20th century and we face efforts to redefine identity and identification on the basis of civilization. Some philosophers interpret this as a return of religions. The rise of Christianity in the West once again, Islamophobic statements, examples showing that societies are becoming increasingly more conservative constitute the bases of these interpretations. Parallel to the approach of the English philosopher Stuart Hill, which states “a concept returns from the window on the right as soon as it leaves from the door on the left. But it does not return to the exact same place” (Hall, 1998: 70), it seems to be more meaningful to name this return as a return to the civilization perspective rather than a return to religion.

On the one hand local identities are becoming prominent and supra-national identities are rising at the same time. Supra-national identities may be based on religion and they can also be independent of religion such as “anti-globalization”, “environmentalism”, “greens”, “regionalization.” In some cases identities that clash within the nation can express themselves more comfortably within the identities that transcend the nation. Like the Northern Irish and the Basque in defending the EU identity against the English and Spanish respectively.

As for the debates related to the issue of civilization(s) in the recent period, we owe the actuality of the debate to the “Clash of Civilizations” thesis of Samuel Huntington (1993). In response to this thesis, many studies have been written such as “The Clash of Ignorance” by Edward Said (2001). The Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, which is run under the auspices of the United Nations and for which Turkey and Spain are co-chairs, is an extension of the initiatives to create a peaceful world as opposed to the pro-conflict world created by philosophers like Huntington.

In short, with the globalization processes, local identities become more prominent on the one hand, higher identities that are supra-national, non-ethnic based and that can be named “civilization-based” are becoming prominent on the other.

From Turkey’s and Balkan countries’ perspective, the local identities’ and civilisation perspective’s getting prominent have important consequences. Although Turkey and Balkan countries include those who are belonging to more than one ethnical, religious and local identity, they have a wide common belonging and a common historical experience thanks to the fact that they lived together within the long historical process. Contemporary developments which result from globalisation make it finally possible to create communities respectful to differences, which is the most needed thing in this geography. Globalization

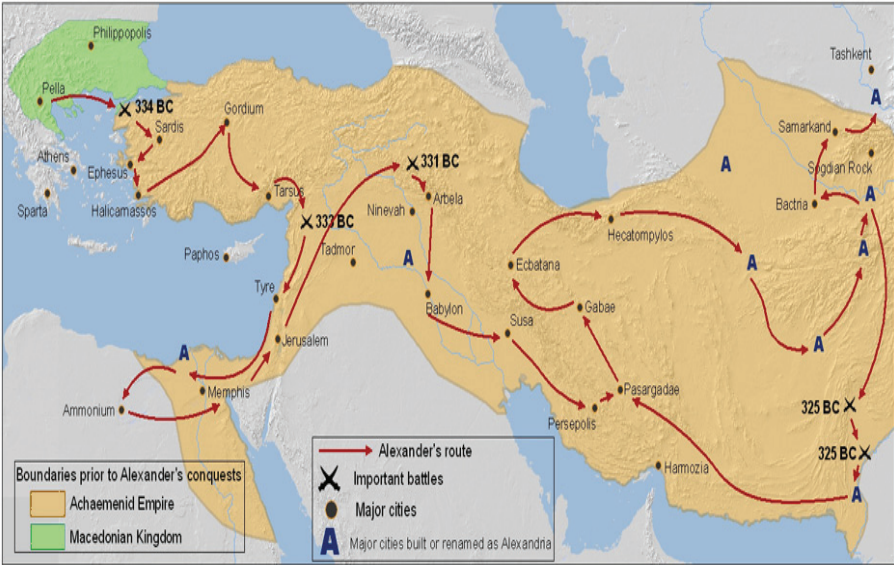
serves in a silver plate the opportunity of belonging to a larger community as a consequence of this common geography, while preserving local identities.

At this point, the questions about how the civilisation is defined, what are the main principles, whether the people of this geography are a part of a common civilisation or not; whether Macedonians, Greeks and Turks belong to the same civilisation or not; all these kind of questions can be asked relatively. However, when we look from the perspective of the benefits that can be gained by means of making the geography common, the heat of discussion will decrease. No matter whether they are defined within the same civilization or within different civilisations, the people of this geography made this geography common in different period of history; in this way, each of them became a global actor. In the following paragraphs, we will focus on the examples of this fact.

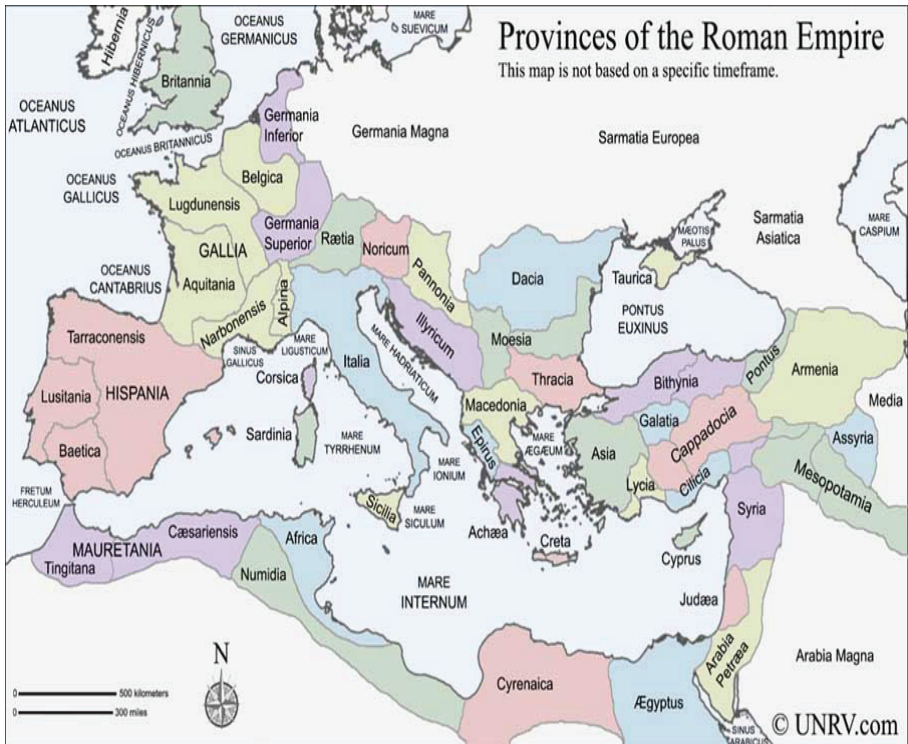
GLOBAL ACTORS OF GEOGRAPHY: ALEXANDER THE GREAT, ROMAN AND OTTOMAN EMPIRES

The collective region of the Balkans, Anatolia and the Middle East played a great role three times in history and that the region exercised global power three times. (It should also be stated that this collective region constituted a great part of the world before the “New World” was explored). The eras of three global powers are Alexander the Great, Roman Empire and Ottoman Empire. (Ilber Ortaylı refers to Ottoman Empire as a Muslim Roman Empire or the Third Roman Empire). Many different factors contributed to the success of those global states which extended from Europe to Middle East and even to India from time to time. Meanwhile, it can be stated that an important factor, certainly, was that those states made the geography common. To our knowledge, Alexander the Great lived only 33 years. However, he extended his empire from Balkans to the Great Wall of China within these 33 years. With this empire, he ended the city-state model in history and started empire-state model (Ağaoğulları, 2009). The other two empires followed his way and turned the whole of this geography into a state which included all differences and all colours. Therefore, in historical films or TV series, it can be observed that the social life of this region is not homogeneous like that of nation-states but it includes all kinds of differences. (Those who have watched “The Magnifique Century” Turkish TV series must have noticed it. In some scenes, camera is turned to the shopping district of Istanbul with people from different ethnicities and regions of the Empire. In this TV series, Macedonians, Ukrainians, Middle-eastern people can be observed in the shopping centre of Istanbul). Showing the borders under the control of those three Empires on the one hand, the following maps reveal on the other hand the free movement potential of people and the reasons for the colourful social tissue mentioned above.

Map of Alexander the Great 334 to 323 BC (2012)



Map of Roman Empire (2012)



Map of Ottoman Empire (2012)



MAKING THE GEOGRAPHY COMMON?

As it is seen in the maps which show the widest borders of all of three Empires mentioned above, under the conditions of that time, making the geography common was equal to revoking the political borders. Making the geography common with the political borders which represent different dominations and making a multilateral integration was not easily possible because of the historical conditions of that time. However, today, this condition is a phenomenon in which we live *de facto*. Today, a world in which the political borders remain but nations cooperate is not anymore a pure imagination. Therefore, by suggestion of making the geography common, we never refer to revoking the borders as it was done in the history. On the contrary, my suggestion is that the political borders should remain as they are; however, the political borders should never prevent the multilateral cooperation in any way so that the region becomes a centre of attraction. The region's peoples would imagine and constitute their "intellectual atlas" at a regional level going from Macedonia to the Great Wall of China rather than through limited borders of nation-states if they are allowed to engage

without any prevention in every kind of economical, cultural, academic, intellectual and religious activities freely as individuals or within institutional structures and NGOs.

Making the geography common is not only a regional economic integration. By using this concept, we refer to a network or a chain of networks which exceeds the economic integration, wide opens the doors to individuals, groups, NGOs and universities and that connects the whole geography to one another just as it is possible within a country. Therefore, to me, it is not so wrong to refer to the processes we go through as “New Medieval” in which not states but individuals, groups of goods and services, volunteer institutions are prominent as the new actors. Of course, there were wars and big conflicts in the medieval age. However, big communities which were different from one another could live together at the end of these wars. On the other hand, these wars made the free movement of a large section of communities possible. Today, not wars but multilateral cooperation and making the geography common which will bring the individuals and big section of the community are needed. Considering the history of Balkans and Middle-East, we see that the more the region realises that, the more it becomes a regional and global actor; otherwise, with small belongings and political structures it is pre-dominated by the actions throughout the world. To make the geography common and develop relations from a civilisation perspective, there is no need to be a big power and consider the facts from the perspective of big powers. Admittedly, if a multilateral integration is brought into being, it will open the way for this region to become pre-dominant in the whole world. In this perspective, the countries of the region which have no a very great importance by themselves will have a great deepness. On the other hand, those who will have the greatest benefit from making the geography common will be those who will not have to establish or realise themselves within the limited political structures but become dominant in a wide region ranging from Balkans to Middle-East. An ordinary individual from Macedonia, Turkey or Middle-East will be able to travel in all of these countries and he/she will have economic, commercial, social and cultural relations and intellectual mind map not limited with his own country but so that they include the whole region. Putting common belongings forward, thinking on the region again from the civilisation perspective will help softening the approaches which appear as the demand for different identities in different countries of the region and cause the region to deal with the unrest within itself and prevent the potential opportunities and savings of the regions from being seen. Therefore, it will pave the way for potential opportunities and savings of the region to be seen more easily. When such concepts as Balkanisation

and Brazilation⁴ which refer to conflict of identities, cultures and belongings in the literature on the religious and national basis and the risks of the countries' withdrawing into themselves caused by the potential of conflict are considered, the opportunities and means of making geography common will be seen better.

AS A CONCLUSION: AN EFFORT FOR GREAT MACEDONIANISM, NEOHELLENISM OR NEO-OTTOMANISM?

The efforts for making the geography common would provide new perspectives and opportunities to the peoples of the region, help those people to deal with with civil strives and identity crisis, urging them to think bigger. That is why it would be inappropriate to name such a process from the very beginning. Such definitions as Great Macedonianism, Neo-Hellenism or Neo-Ottomanism would make a negative effect and prevent the region from bringing up its potentials. Today, what we need to do is not to give priority to definitions but giving priority to action, function and activity. What we need to do is to think about the steps to be taken for making the geography common, from which everybody will derive multilateral profits. We should imagine projects which would make each of the peoples of the region set their "mind maps" and "worlds of meaning" not limited with their own countries but at the scale of the whole region. Maybe, there are similarities in the history but nothing amounts to the same thing. If, someday, we need to name it, we will call Dede Korkut, he would put the most appropriate name when the time is due.⁵ What we mean is that we should do is to support multilateral efforts. If there is a need, the next generations would name it by themselves.

4 Livings of the rich and poor people have been separated each other more and more in contemporary cities. Only familiar people live in private complex. Private neighborliness, private security, private roads, hospitals are built for this kind of complex. On the other handethical, religious and class based ghettoization processes have been lived in such cities. Brazilation concept is used for this situation in literature (Featherstone, 1995:9; Wiseman, 1998: 60)

5 In ancient Turks, parents used to give a temporary name to the new born. The individual had to achieve some success in order to receive his permanent name. Individuals used to get their permanent names determined by the respected personalities of the community in conformity with their character and achievements. In other words, action preceded naming. Dede Korkut represents the figure of respected people having authority to give a name to the young who deserved it. Such a method, which gives priority to action rather than naming, would be appropriate today as well.

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