



ISTANBUL'S BALAT AS A MULTICULTURAL SPACE: A TAYLORIAN ANALYSIS OF BARBARA NADEL'S BELSHAZZAR'S DAUGHTER

ÇOK KÜLTÜRLÜ BİR ALAN OLARAK İSTANBUL BALAT:
BARBARA NADEL'İN BELSHAZZAR'IN KIZI ROMANININ
TAYLORCU ANALİZİ

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Barbara Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter*, a crime novel set in Istanbul's Balat district during the 1990s, through the perspective of Charles Taylor's ideas on multiculturalism. Taylor's notion of the "politics of recognition" forms the basis of the theoretical approach, providing a way to examine how different communities interact within a shared urban setting. The novel depicts a space inhabited by a wide range of cultural and religious groups, including Turks, Jews, Armenians, and immigrants from other backgrounds. These characters come together in a neighbourhood historically known for offering protection and tolerance. As such, Balat is represented not merely as a physical location but as a symbolic space of cultural diversity. The novel centres on Inspector Çetin İkmen's investigation of a murder, but through this storyline, readers gain access to the deeper tensions and solidarities among the residents. Rather than presenting a one-dimensional view, the narrative offers a layered portrayal of individuals attempting to live side by side. Through close reading of specific scenes, the study considers whether the novel affirms a vision of mutual acceptance or presents obstacles to that ideal. This approach contributes to ongoing academic conversations about literary depictions of urban coexistence and shared spaces, with a specific focus on Istanbul's historical and cultural backdrop.

Öz

Bu çalışma, İngiliz yazar Barbara Nadel'in 1990'lı yıllarda geçen *Belshazzar's Daughter* (Belşazzar'ın Kızı) romanını Charles Taylor'ın çok kültürlülük felsefesi üzerinden inceleyerek, İstanbul'un tarihi ve çok katmanlı Balat semtinin çok kültürlü bir alan olarak tasvirini ele alır. Taylor'ın kültürel kimliklerin karşılıklı tanınmasını vurgulayan "tanınma politikaları" kavramı, romanda Türkler, Yahudiler, Ermeniler ve diğer etnik-dini gruplar arasındaki etkileşimleri değerlendirmek için analitik bir araç olarak kullanılır. Roman, Türk toplumunun hoşgörülü, kapsayıcı ve güvenli yapısını öne çıkararak, şiddet nedeniyle ülkelerini terk eden bireylerin Balat'a yerleşmesini ve semtin zamanla kültürel açıdan çeşitlenmesini anlatır. Müfettiş Çetin İkmen'in bir cinayeti soruşturduğu ana sahneler analiz edilerek, Nadel'in anlatısının Taylor'ın kültürel bir arada yaşama vizyonunu destekleyip desteklemediği veya bu vizyonu karmaşıkleştirdiği değerlendirilir. Balat'ın göçmenler için tarihi bir sığınak olması ve sinagoglar, kiliseler ile camilere ev sahipliği yapması, semtin kültürel çeşitlilikteki önemini gösterir. Çalışma, romanın çok kültürlülüğü karmaşık bir biçimde yansıttığını ve karşılıklı saygının öne çıktığı anlarla dengeli bir yaklaşım sunduğunu öne sürmektedir. Disiplinler arası bir bakış açısıyla hazırlanan bu makale, edebiyatta kentsel çeşitlilik ve kültürel kimlik üzerine yapılan tartışmalara katkı sağlayarak İstanbul'un çok kültürlü mirasına dair bir perspektif sunmaktadır.

Introduction

Culture encompasses the practices, beliefs, languages, and values that define how a community lives and interacts. Building on this, multiculturalism describes a social setting in which several cultural groups live side by side, each preserving its unique identity while participating in a broader, shared society. Rather than blending into a single dominant culture, these groups contribute to a complex social landscape where difference is acknowledged and sustained. This concept involves both an observation of cultural mosaic and an ethical stance that promotes mutual respect and understanding within a shared civic space (Galeotti, 2010, p. 443; Colombo, 2015, p. 801). Thus, multiculturalism is both a descriptive term, acknowledging the presence of multiple cultures, and a normative principle, advocating for the acceptance and respect of cultural variety. In this regard, multiculturalism represents a complex and evolving set of ideas and practices that emphasize the coexistence, recognition, and appreciation of diverse cultural identities within a society. The reasons for multiculturalism are rooted in historical, social, and ethical developments, including migration patterns, the legacy of colonialism, globalization, and the philosophical push for social justice (Harris, 2001, p. 14; Ratts, 2011, p. 24).

At its core, multiculturalism recognizes that societies are composed of individuals and groups with varied cultural backgrounds, including differences in language, religion, traditions, and values. Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994, p. 25) defines it as a response to the reality of cultural pluralism, emphasizing the need for mutual acceptance to foster equitable coexistence. This situation involves acknowledging the worth of diverse cultural identities, ensuring that no group is marginalized or forced to assimilate into a dominant culture. Kymlicka (1995, p. 10) further clarifies that multiculturalism seeks to balance individual rights with the preservation of collective cultural identities, particularly for minority groups. For instance, policies supporting bilingual education or religious places exemplify multicultural practices that affirm cultural multiplicity while promoting social cohesion. Thus, multiculturalism is not merely a passive acceptance of difference but an active commitment to creating conditions where diverse identities can thrive. One primary reason for multiculturalism is the historical movement of people across borders, driven by migration, trade, and conquest. As Modood (2007, p. 15) notes, migration has transformed modern societies, particularly in urban centres where diverse populations converge. For example, post-World War II labour migrations to Europe and North America brought significant numbers of immigrants from Asia,

Africa, the Caribbean, and also Türkiye, contributing to the emergence of culturally plural societies (Modood, 2007, p. 17; Yıldız, 2022, p. 25). These demographic shifts necessitated policies and social attitudes that could accommodate variety, giving rise to multiculturalism as a practical response to changing realities. Similarly, the legacy of colonialism has contributed to multicultural societies, as former colonies gained independence and their diasporas settled in metropolitan centres, bringing their cultural practices with them.

Indeed, globalization has further amplified the conditions for multiculturalism by facilitating the exchange of ideas, goods, and people across national boundaries. Parekh (2002, p. 3) argues that globalization has made cultural plurality a defining feature of modern societies, as individuals increasingly experience and engage with different ways of life. This interconnectedness, while fostering cultural exchange, also raises questions about how societies can manage diversity without erasing distinct identities. However, multiculturalism emerges as a strategy to address these questions, promoting dialogue and mutual respect among cultural groups. For instance, global cities like Istanbul or London exemplify how globalization creates spaces where multiple cultures coexist, necessitating multicultural policies to ensure social harmony (Parekh, 2002, p. 5). Kymlicka (1995, p. 108) adds that multiculturalism is justified by the need to rectify historical injustices, such as the marginalization of indigenous or minority groups, by granting them cultural and political rights. Therefore, multiculturalism is not without its complexities. Critics argue that it can lead to social fragmentation if cultural differences are prioritized over shared values (Modood, 2007, p. 22). Yet, proponents like Parekh (2002, p. 196) contend that multiculturalism strengthens societies by fostering inclusivity and dialogue, provided it is accompanied by a commitment to common civic principles. This balance between diversity and unity is central to the ongoing relevance of multiculturalism, as it responds to the realities of pluralistic societies while addressing ethical imperatives for fairness.

The philosophical discourse on multiculturalism, particularly as articulated by Taylor, offers a compelling lens through which to examine the complexities of cultural coexistence in diverse societies. Taylor's seminal work, *Multiculturalism*, posits that identity formation is inherently dialogical (1994, p. 32). His concept of the "politics of recognition" emphasizes the necessity of acknowledging cultural identities to prevent marginalization and promote a sense of belonging within pluralistic communities (Taylor, 1994, p. 37). This perspective is particularly relevant in urban settings where

diverse populations converge, creating spaces of both harmony and tension. Istanbul, a city historically defined by its cultural multiplicity, serves as an exemplary case for such analysis. Within this vibrant metropolis, the neighbourhood of Balat, with its rich history of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim inhabitants, emerges as a microcosm of cultural interaction. Barbara Nadel's novel *Belshazzar's Daughter* situates its narrative in this storied district, weaving a tale that engages with the dynamics of cultural mosaic through its characters and setting.

Ultimately, this study asks how Barbara Nadel's portrayal of Balat in *Belshazzar's Daughter* reflects or questions Charles Taylor's vision of multicultural coexistence. Combining literary analysis with philosophical reflection, it investigates how the novel presents Balat as a culturally diverse urban setting through the lens of Taylor's "politics of recognition." The analysis has two main goals: to examine the depiction of Balat's mosaic and to illustrate how philosophical ideas can inform literary interpretations of identity and coexistence. The primary method is close reading, with attention to scenes and dialogues that show cooperation or tension among Balat's residents, especially during Inspector Çetin İkmekçi's investigation. These interactions reveal how different communities, including Turks, Jews, and Armenians, respond to difference within a shared space. The focus remains on moments that reflect acceptance, misunderstanding, or silence, placing them in dialogue with Taylor's emphasis on mutual respect and acknowledgment. Rather than offering a straightforward affirmation or rejection of Taylor's ideas, the study presents a balanced interpretation of multicultural life as portrayed in the novel. By grounding the discussion in Balat's historical and cultural reality, it contributes to wider conversations about how fiction engages with themes of diversity in urban spaces like Istanbul.

Charles Taylor's Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition

Taylor's contribution to multicultural thought, especially through his notion of the "politics of recognition," offers a compelling way to consider identity formation and cultural interaction in pluralistic societies. In *Multiculturalism*, Taylor (1994, p. 32) asserts that approval from others plays a central role in how individuals and groups understand themselves. Identity, he argues, is not developed in isolation but through relational contexts, where acknowledgment or its absence significantly influences self-perception and belonging (Taylor, 1994, p. 25; Ober, 2012, p. 828). This relational conception of identity holds particular significance in culturally diverse urban environments, where various communities encounter one another

regularly. According to Taylor (1994, p. 36), ignoring or distorting another's cultural identity can generate feelings of alienation and injustice, weakening social cohesion. The city of Istanbul, with its layered past as a site of cultural convergence, provides a vivid illustration of this tension. In districts such as Balat, located near the Golden Horn, historical and contemporary patterns of cultural richness present opportunities for dialogue to mutual understanding.

The argument of Taylor extends beyond sociological observation to ethical claims. He contends that acceptance is not a superficial courtesy but a necessary condition for affirming an individual's humanity and cultural worth (Taylor, 1994, p. 26). This position parallels human rights discourses that emphasize dignity irrespective of background. When respect is denied or distorted, the result is not only social exclusion but a form of symbolic violence that can limit individuals to misrepresented identities (Taylor, 1994, p. 25). To further clarify this point, Taylor outlines two distinct approaches: the politics of universal dignity and the politics of difference (1994, p. 38; Cooke, 2009, p. 77). The former promotes equal treatment regardless of cultural context, while the latter emphasizes acknowledging the particularity of cultural identities. Each approach has consequences. While universal dignity promotes fairness, it risks disregarding cultural specificity. Conversely, the politics of difference affirms identity but may unintentionally strengthen group boundaries.

Furthermore, Taylor's distinction is crucial for understanding his vision of multiculturalism, as it highlights the tension between universal equality and cultural particularity. He does not advocate an either-or approach. Instead, he calls for a balance that respects individual autonomy while affirming collective identities (Taylor, 1994, p. 40; Keba, 2010, p. 14). In practical terms, especially in settings like Balat where cultural variety is embedded in the social fabric, this dual respect informs how communities share public space and negotiate cultural boundaries. Central to Taylor's view is the importance of communication across difference. He argues that respectful dialogue enables communities to foster understanding and prevent misrecognition (Taylor, 1994, p. 34). This exchange is vital not only in public policy but also in cultural production, including literature. Fictional representations of multicultural settings can either reinforce divisions or propose possibilities for shared understanding. Accordingly, this study considers how literary narratives reflect these dynamics, especially within a historically diverse locale such as Balat.

Barbara Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter*

British novelist Barbara Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter*, the first in the İkmek series, establishes the author's signature approach of embedding crime fiction within Istanbul's culturally textured landscape. Published in 1999, the novel introduces Inspector Çetin İkmek, a sympathetic, intelligent, middle-aged Turkish detective working for the Istanbul police force. His investigations are deeply intertwined with the rhythms and realities of the city. Nadel's depiction of Istanbul is not incidental, in fact the city shapes and informs the narrative at every turn. Besides, through İkmek's experiences, readers face a setting that is both historically layered and socially complex, where past and present constantly intersect. The enduring appeal of Nadel's work culminated in the 2023 adaptation of her novels into the television series *The Turkish Detective*, further extending İkmek's presence into visual storytelling and reaffirming Istanbul's centrality to the narrative.

Belshazzar's Daughter is a murder mystery set in Balat, a district historically known for its cultural plurality, including people from different ethnicities. This location serves not just as a geographical setting but as a lens through which the novel contemplates the implications of cultural proximity and difference. The tensions, alliances, and misunderstandings that emerge during İkmek's murder investigation reflect broader patterns of interaction within pluralistic societies. In this regard, Nadel uses Balat not as a passive backdrop but as a living space where cultural legacies and current social realities converge, offering a subtle commentary of living together in ethnic variation. On the other hand, the novel's title, *Belshazzar's Daughter*, evokes historical and biblical imagery, drawing on the figure of Belshazzar from the Book of Daniel (Horne, 1856, p. 933). Known for his sacrilegious act during a Babylonian feast, Belshazzar symbolizes a defiance of cultural and religious boundaries (Chipao, 2017, p. 60). While Nadel's story does not directly follow this biblical account, the allusion adds symbolic gravity to the narrative, suggesting an inherited or unacknowledged transgression that haunts the characters. The identity of the "daughter" remains deliberately opaque, raising questions about cultural lineage and the enduring effects of historical acts on present circumstances.

In the novel, inspector İkmek's inquiry brings him into contact with individuals representing Istanbul's diverse communities. These encounters, layered with suspicion, empathy, and misunderstanding, dramatize the lived experience of multiculturalism. Characters demonstrate inherited prejudices, demonstrating the delicate balance required to sustain social cohesion. In this sense, the novel reflects

Taylor's (1994, p. 25) assertion that identity is shaped through approval by others. Definitely, Nadel does not offer an idealized portrayal of cultural harmony; instead, she presents a more realistic depiction in which dialogue and awareness are often tentative and incomplete. Moreover, Balat's urban landscape, marked by its synagogues, churches, and mosques, serves not only as a reflection of the city's layered histories and cultures but also as a visible sign of the liberties once afforded to its inhabitants. These structures are more than architectural evidence of a multicultural past; they also signify the freedom once granted to individuals to practise their faiths openly. Similarly, the presence of schools associated with different communities points to the right to education in one's own language, which further exemplifies the inclusive character of the neighbourhood. Despite demographic changes in the twentieth century, the district retains symbolic significance as a place where diverse identities have long coexisted (Mills, 2010, p. 20; Altıntaş, 2016, p. 119). In choosing this locale, Nadel supports her narrative with Istanbul's multifaceted identity and subtly engages with philosophical questions regarding the conditions for mutual acknowledgment. Therefore, the coexistence of cultural traditions in Balat mirrors the complex negotiations at the heart of Taylor's multiculturalism, offering a narrative field in which the ethics of acceptance can be examined through fiction. In this regard, Nadel's novel does more than tell a story of crime which constructs a portrait of a city negotiating its cultural inheritance. By embedding a murder mystery within the social fabric of Balat, Nadel creates a context where the reader can observe the consequences of perception and misrecognition in everyday life. The novel becomes a literary terrain where Taylor's reflections on identity and justice find narrative expression, offering a space to consider how urban life is shaped by the interdependence of culturally distinct individuals.

Migration Reasons to Balat in the Novel

In *Belshazzar's Daughter*, Nadel presents Balat not only as a physical setting but as a multicultural living space shaped by waves of migration. Unlike the affluent neighbourhoods of Yeniköy or Bebek, Balat emerges as a poorer district defined by its cultural mosaic, where different people found a place to call home (Nadel, 1999, p. 161). This cultural richness is not coincidental since the novel indicates that Balat's multiculturalism developed through the cumulative arrival of people fleeing conflict and persecution, especially in their home countries. One important factor behind this demographic richness is the Turkish tradition of hospitality, which has historically allowed minority communities to settle and maintain their distinct

cultures. Nadel (1999, p. 3) praises the Turks and states that the Ottoman Empire and later the Turkish Republic welcomed displaced populations, particularly Jews escaping European anti-Semitism, creating an atmosphere of safety and coexistence. Through its characters, the novel offers a layered account of such movements. Leonid Meyer, a Jewish intellectual who fled the 1917-18 Russian Bolshevik Revolution, becomes the victim of a brutal murder in Balat, which recalls the very violence he once escaped (Nadel, 1999, p. 14). Although the murder of Meyer momentarily disturbs the tranquillity of Balat, the broader context of the novel affirms the neighbourhood's continuing legacy as a haven. This situation has been built not merely on historical events, but on a culture of tolerance that allowed successive waves of newcomers to live together while sustaining their individual heritage. Also, Maria Gulcu, another refugee of the same revolution, represents the Christian diaspora that also found refuge in Balat before relocating to other parts of Istanbul (Nadel, 1999, p. 178). Furthermore, Jewish survivors of the Nazi regime are mentioned among those who sought sanctuary in the city during World War II, adding to the historical layering of displacement and settlement in the district (Nadel, 1999, p. 279).

The case of Dolores, a Gypsy flamenco dancer, further broadens the narrative's portrayal of migration. Her family's roots trace back to Spain, and she still speaks Ladino, a Judeo-Spanish dialect passed down through generations (Nadel, 1999, p. 8). The continuity of this language in Balat reveals how migrants preserved cultural identities across centuries. Turkish acceptance of such traditions made it possible for Ladino, among other minority languages, to persist. As described above, Balat's interfaith texture, marked by synagogues, churches, and mosques situated in close proximity, not only reflects a long history of coexistence but also indicates the role of architecture in supporting the free exercise of religious practices. These structures continue to hold meaning beyond their cultural and historical value, serving as reminders of the personal liberties once afforded to individuals in practising their beliefs without restriction. Nadel's depiction also includes more recent migration patterns. In Ayvansaray, near Balat, the London Language School where Robert teaches caters to students from Egypt and Syria, indicating that Istanbul remains a destination for those escaping unrest in the contemporary world (Nadel, 1999, pp. 27, 315). The presence of historic landmarks such as the Kariye Museum, an ancient Byzantine structure (Yılmaz, 2016, p. 227), and the Italian Church of St. Anthony, described in the novel as being close to Balat, with its neo-Gothic architecture and

resounding church bells (Atıcı & İnceoğlu, 2020, p. 1499; Nadel, 1999, pp. 294, 348), contributes to Balat's layered identity as a crossroads of faith and culture.

A Taylorian Reading of Multiculturalism in the Novel

Taylor's philosophical perspective on multiculturalism offers a compelling lens for analysing the depiction of cultural mosaic in Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter*. As mentioned earlier, Taylor (1994, p. 32) argues that identity is dialogical, formed through interactions with others, and that mutual respect is essential for fostering social cohesion in pluralistic societies. He emphasizes that misrecognition, when cultural identities are ignored or devalued, can lead to alienation and conflict, making acceptance a moral imperative (Taylor, 1994, p. 25). In the novel, the multicultural neighbourhood of Balat, Istanbul, serves as a narrative stage where diverse characters interact, reflecting or complicating Taylor's vision of multiculturalism. One of Taylor's key assertions is that acceptance involves affirming the worth of cultural identities to prevent oppression (Calhoun, 1991, p. 233; Taylor, 1994, p. 26). In the novel, Balat is depicted as a melting pot of Turks, Jews, Armenians, Russians, Spaniards, and Poles, with synagogues, churches, and mosques symbolizing its plurality (Nadel, 1999, p. 348). A notable scene that engages with Taylor's concept occurs when Inspector İkmén interacts with Şimon, a Polish Jewish resident born in Balat. Şimon speaks of his people's 500-year presence in Istanbul and the respect they earned from Turkish society, indicating the longstanding bonds between host and migrant populations (Nadel, 1999, pp. 67–68). This dialogue reflects Taylor's (1994, p. 34) ideal of understanding through a reciprocal acknowledgment of cultural contributions, as Şimon's pride in his community's history is met with İkmén's professional respect.

Conversely, the novel presents instances where misrecognition disrupts multicultural coexistence, reflecting Taylor's warning about its harmful effects. The murder of Leonid Meyer (Nadel, 1999, p. 14) with Nazi symbols on his forehead and wall, signalling anti-Semitic violence. This act of violence represents a severe form of misrecognition, denying Meyer's cultural identity and humanity, as Taylor (1994, p. 25) describes when discussing the oppressive consequences of such acts. The shock of the murder in Balat, a neighbourhood portrayed as generally peaceful, affirms the fragility of multicultural harmony when perception is withheld (Nadel, 1999, p. 3). İkmén's investigation into Meyer's death functions as a narrative device through which social and historical tensions are brought to the surface. During the investigation, he engages with various residents, including the Orthodox Christian

Maria Gulcu, who, like Meyer, fled the Bolshevik Revolution (Nadel, 1999, p. 178). Meyer, however, is not portrayed solely as a victim; he has also been responsible for taking lives in the past.

One source had expressed the opinion that Meyer had been a member of the Bolshevik party when a young man back in Russia, and Maria Gulcu's reaction had seemed to confirm this. Quite naturally, for those troubled times, he had killed people in the course of his duties (Nadel, 1999, p. 213).

Maria's backstory and her move from Balat to Beyoğlu suggest a partial withdrawal from the neighbourhood's multicultural fabric. Maria, a Russian refugee who arrived in Türkiye in 1918, has lived with Mehmet Gulcu, a Muslim Turk, and raised three children with Russian names, maintaining her Russian lifestyle without legally marrying Mehmet or adopting Turkish nationality (Nadel, 1999, pp. 169, 290). This arrangement reflects the era's social constraints, as "Christians and Moslems didn't marry back in those days, it was too complicated" (Nadel, 1999, p. 290). Taylor's framework would view their relationship as a form of multicultural coexistence, where Mehmet's acceptance of Maria's Russian identity which is evident in her Russian dress, speech, and customs (Nadel, 1999, pp. 254, 290), demonstrates her distinct cultural heritage. Besides, Maria's limited Turkish fluency and her daughter Anya's overtly Russian identity further suggest a preservation of cultural distinctiveness within a Turkish context (Nadel, 1999, pp. 103, 254). However, Maria's relationship with Meyer, a friend in Balat who shared her Russian background, adds complexity to this multicultural dynamic (Nadel, 1999, p. 170). Although Maria and Meyer can no longer see each other due to old age, Maria still assists Meyer.

Every week one of the younger members of the family would journey across the Golden Horn to Balat and present the old man with a parcel of food. He was rarely sober, but always grateful. Maria apparently maintained that it was only by virtue of her parcels that the old man survived (Nadel, 1999, p. 170).

Maria's provision of meals for the struggling Meyer reflects solidarity rooted in their shared cultural displacement, yet their eventual drift apart due to age indicates the limits of such connections in sustaining community (Nadel, 1999, p. 170). From Taylor's perspective, Maria's life in Balat exemplifies partial acceptance: Mehmet's indulgence of her Russian lifestyle matches with Taylor's ideal of valuing cultural difference, but the lack of formal marriage and Maria's non-integration into Turkish nationality suggest societal barriers to full inclusion. This tension highlights

multiculturalism in practice, where personal acceptance may not fully overcome structural or historical divides. Nadel's portrayal thus captures a nuanced balance, affirming Taylor's vision of mutual respect while acknowledging the complexities of cultural coexistence in a diverse urban setting like Balat.

Taylor's philosophy of multiculturalism, emphasizes the importance of mutual acknowledgment and respect for diverse cultural identities within a shared societal space (Arrese Igor, 2019, p. 306). This framework can be applied to the relationship between İkmén and Arto Sarkissian, a Christian Armenian, as depicted in the novel. Although the text does not specify whether Çetin and Arto currently live in Balat or did so in the past, their deep friendship and the memories shared by İkmén's father, Timür, offer a lens to examine Taylor's ideas:

Timür smiled. His two sons had grown up with the Sarkissian children, Arto and Krikor. Every summer for fifteen years the two families had gone on holiday together. Wonderful holidays. There had been other benefits too. The Sarkissian boys had always been studious. Their diligence had rubbed off on Timür's elder son, Halil, the accountant. Çetin, on the other hand (Nadel, 1999, p. 54).

As noticed, Timür's memories of the two families' shared summers over fifteen years highlight a lived multiculturalism, where cultural differences between the Muslim Turkish İkmén family and the Christian Armenian Sarkissian family did not hinder their bond. The annual holidays, filled with joy and togetherness, suggest a mutual acceptance that resembles to Taylor's vision of recognizing and valuing each other's identities. This is further evidenced by the positive influence of the studious Sarkissian brothers, Arto and Krikor, on Çetin İkmén's brother Halil, indicating that cultural exchange fostered personal growth across religious and ethnic lines. Applying Taylor's perspective, the friendship between Çetin and Arto exemplifies how approval of cultural identities can foster meaningful relationships in a diverse setting like Balat, a historic hub of Turks, Armenians, and others. Their bond, rooted in shared experiences rather than assimilation, reflects Taylor's (1998, p. 143) ideal of coexistence where differences are respected, not erased. Yet, the subtle contrast between Halil and Çetin suggests that multiculturalism is not uniformly experienced, as personal traits can shape how individuals engage with cultural others. Thus, Nadel's portrayal supports Taylor's view that multiculturalism thrives on mutual respect but also acknowledges the complexities of individual responses within such dynamics. Timür's reflection that his son Çetin and Arto Sarkissian grew up like brothers, inseparable in their youth (Nadel, 1999, pp. 54-55), further enriches the application of Taylor's multiculturalism, to their relationship in Nadel's work. This

depiction of a Muslim Turk and a Christian Armenian as near-siblings affirms a deep, familial bond that transcends cultural and religious divides, embodying Taylor's (2001, p. 123) vision of a society where diverse identities are mutually acknowledged and valued. Their inseparability suggests a shared history in Balat's multicultural tapestry, where daily interactions fostered intimacy rather than division. Nadel's portrayal thus affirms Taylor's belief in the possibility of harmonious coexistence through personal relationships but leaves open the question of whether such individual connections can fully bridge larger cultural divides.

Taylor's (1994, p. 38) distinction between the politics of universal self-respect and the politics of difference is also relevant to the novel's portrayal of multiculturalism. Universal dignity emphasizes equal treatment for all, while the politics of difference acknowledges unique cultural identities (Lee, 2008, p. 3). In *Belshazzar's Daughter*, İkmën's approach to the investigation reflects universal dignity, as he treats all residents with equal professionalism (Nadel, 1999, p. 72). However, the novel complicates this approach through characters like Dolores, a Gypsy dancer whose Spanish-Ladino heritage is celebrated yet stereotyped as "wild and passionate" (Nadel, 1999, p. 8). This portrayal risks reducing her identity to exoticism, a form of misrecognition that Taylor (1994, p. 39) critiques as undermining cultural worth. The tension between equal treatment and cultural specificity in the novel thus mirrors Taylor's argument that multiculturalism requires balancing these principles to avoid assimilation or stereotyping. Furthermore, the novel's depiction of Balat's physical spaces, such as the Kariye Museum and the Italian Church of St. Anthony, reinforces its multicultural character, inviting tourist and local engagement with its cultural richness (Nadel, 1999, pp. 35, 294). These spaces facilitate cultural dialogue, supporting Taylor's (1994, p. 34) view that perception thrives through interaction. Yet, the presence of Syrian and Egyptian students at the London Language School in Balat's Ayvansaray area introduces contemporary migration dynamics, suggesting that multiculturalism is an evolving process (Nadel, 1999, p. 315).

Conclusion

This study has analysed Barbara Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter* through the philosophical lens of Charles Taylor's multiculturalism, focusing on the depiction of Istanbul's Balat district as a dynamic multicultural space. By employing Taylor's concept of the politics of recognition, the analysis has illuminated how the novel portrays the dynamics of cultural coexistence among Balat's diverse inhabitants,

including Turks, Jews, Armenians, Russians, and others. The narrative captures moments of mutual respect, such as the cooperative exchanges between Inspector Çetin İkmén and the Jewish resident Şimon, which reflect the potential for dialogue to foster cultural understanding. However, it also portrays instances of misrecognition, exemplified by the brutal murder of Leonid Meyer, marked by anti-Semitic symbols, which emphasizes the fragility of multicultural harmony in the face of prejudice. These contrasting elements suggest that Nadel's portrayal of Balat presents a complex, multifaceted view of Taylor's cultural coexistence.

Moreover, the novel's vivid depiction of Balat's physical and historical landscape enhances its exploration of multiculturalism. The presence of synagogues, churches, and mosques, alongside cultural landmarks like the Kariye Museum and the Italian Church of St. Anthony, establishes Balat as a tangible space where diverse identities converge. The London Language School, with its Syrian and Egyptian students, further illustrates Balat's role as a contemporary site of global migration, reflecting the evolving nature of multiculturalism. These spatial elements ground the novel's themes in a specific urban context, demonstrating how literature can bring philosophical ideas to life through the lived realities of a neighbourhood. By situating its narrative in Balat, Nadel's work invites readers to consider the broader implications of cultural diversity in cities like Istanbul, which have long served as crossroads of civilizations.

The interdisciplinary approach adopted in this study, combining literary criticism with philosophical inquiry, affirms the power of fiction to engage with abstract concepts like cultural identity and coexistence. By analysing Nadel's novel through Taylor's lens, this study can contribute to ongoing discussions about urban spectrum, particularly in the context of Istanbul's multicultural heritage. It highlights the relevance of literature in addressing pressing social questions, offering a perspective on how narratives can reflect the aspirations and tensions of pluralistic societies. Furthermore, the analysis presents the value of examining specific locales, such as Balat, to understand the broader dynamics of multiculturalism, as these spaces embody the historical and contemporary realities of cultural interaction.

Looking ahead, this study opens avenues for further research. Future analyses could examine other literary depictions of Istanbul's neighbourhoods, such as Beyoğlu or Fener, to compare their representations of cultural richness. Alternatively, applying Taylor's principles to contemporary narratives of migration in global cities could provide fresh perspectives on multiculturalism in the 21st century.

Additionally, exploring visual adaptations, such as the television series *The Turkish Detective*, could offer insights into how Nadel's themes translate across media. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *Belshazzar's Daughter*, through its portrayal of Balat, engages with Taylor's philosophy to depict multiculturalism as a dynamic process. By doing so, it enriches our understanding of cultural perception and its significance in shaping inclusive urban communities, affirming Istanbul's enduring legacy as a multicultural metropolis.

Summary

This article centres on the representation of Istanbul's Balat district as a multicultural environment in Barbara Nadel's *Belshazzar's Daughter*, analysed through Charles Taylor's ideas on multiculturalism. The study gives particular attention to Taylor's concepts of "universal dignity" and "politics of difference" as they relate to the characters, setting, and events in the novel. Balat is depicted as a district that holds within its borders a diverse population composed of different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Through both historical allusions and present-day observations, the narrative constructs Balat as a symbolic space where coexistence is continuously tested by the realities of urban life, personal biases, and lingering historical tensions.

The novel introduces readers to a murder mystery set in 1990s Istanbul, investigated by Inspector Çetin İkmén. Although the crime itself is central to the plot, the investigation process becomes a channel through which various forms of cultural and individual identity are presented. The murder victim, Leonid Meyer, is a Jewish intellectual with ties to different generations of immigrants and survivors, and his brutal death triggers conversations about belonging, prejudice, and memory. The crime carries symbolic elements, including anti-Semitic writing, which point to the persistence of discrimination even in spaces long known for tolerance. As İkmén interviews residents, questions are raised not only about who committed the murder, but also about how people see each other and whether true respect is possible in a shared space.

Taylor's idea of "universal dignity" is reflected in certain characters who insist on treating everyone with equal respect, regardless of heritage or religion. For instance, İkmén himself expresses this attitude, displaying compassion and patience in his communication with different members of the Balat community. However, the limitations of this approach become visible when cultural specificities are dismissed or misunderstood. Some characters, although well-meaning, fail to comprehend the emotional weight of historical trauma or the particular customs that shape group identities.

On the other hand, the concept of "politics of difference" emerges in scenes where distinct identities are acknowledged, and the right to cultural expression is defended. The presence of synagogues, mosques, churches, and multilingual schools all serve as proof that Balat is a mosaic of traditions. However, the novel shows that recognition of difference can also lead to suspicion or self-isolation. Some groups withdraw into their own communities, avoiding full engagement with others out of fear or habit. Thus, while the novel supports the preservation of cultural identities, it also addresses the tensions this can generate.

The study argues that *Belshazzar's Daughter* neither idealizes nor condemns multiculturalism. Instead, it presents Balat as a district shaped by long histories of migration and coexistence, but also by episodes of trauma, forced adaptation, and silence. The past is ever-present in the characters' memories and often influences their behaviour. For example, Jewish characters speak of family members lost in earlier waves of persecution, while Armenian residents carry intergenerational trauma. These stories add emotional depth to the plot and remind readers that multicultural life is not without hardship.

The physical setting of Balat also plays a significant role in the novel. Its narrow streets, aging buildings, and religious institutions create a landscape where daily life intertwines with history. Rather than offering a neutral backdrop, Balat becomes an active participant in the story. It shapes how characters relate to each other, how they move through space, and how they view their own place in the world. Barbara Nadel's detailed description of the neighbourhood enhances the reader's understanding of multiculturalism as something lived and felt, rather than abstract or theoretical.

This article uses close reading of selected scenes and dialogue to support its arguments. Special attention is paid to moments of communication across cultural lines, as well as to instances where communication fails. These moments are weighed in light of Taylor's views on the necessity of recognition in building healthy societies. The analysis also considers whether multiculturalism, as presented in the novel, offers hope for future harmony or remains a fragile arrangement vulnerable to disruption.

By applying Taylor's ideas to literature, the study opens a conversation between philosophical thought and fictional storytelling. The result is an analysis that sees literature as capable of capturing everyday dilemmas related to identity, respect, and living together. It shows how fiction can mirror urban reality, especially in cities like Istanbul, where ancient civilizations, modern challenges, and cultural diversity intersect. *Belshazzar's Daughter* becomes more than a detective novel which portrays the city and its people.

Looking forward, the paper suggests that further literary examinations of Istanbul neighbourhoods might enrich our understanding of cultural coexistence in urban settings. Beyoğlu, Fener, or even Kadıköy could serve as examples in future research. The article also encourages looking into how adaptations such as *The Turkish Detective* may transfer or alter these multicultural themes for new audiences. In sum, the article presents Barbara Nadel's novel as a meaningful literary engagement with the idea of multicultural life and offers a reading that appreciates both its beauty and its fragility.

Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Barbara Nadel'in 1999 yılında yayımlanan *Belshazzar'ın Kızı* adlı polisiye romanında İstanbul'un tarihî semtlerinden Balat'ın çokkültürlü bir mekân olarak nasıl temsil edildiğini Charles Taylor'ın çokkültürlülük kuramı doğrultusunda incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Taylor'ın "evrensel onur" (universal dignity) ve "farklılığın siyaseti" (politics of difference) kavramları, romandaki mekân tasvirlerinin ve karakter etkileşimlerinin çözümlemesinde kuramsal temel olarak kullanılmıştır. Çalışmada, romanın merkezî olay örgüsünü oluşturan cinayet vakası yalnızca polisiye türünün bir gereği olarak ele alınmamış; bunun ötesinde, Balat'ta bir arada yaşayan Yahudi, Ermeni, Müslüman ve farklı kökenlerden bireylerin tarihsel ve güncel kimlik mücadeleleri bağlamında analiz edilmiştir. Böylelikle romanın, İstanbul'un çokkültürlü yapısını anlamaya yönelik edebi ve felsefi bir araç sunduğu öne sürülmüştür.

Barbara Nadel'in yarattığı Müfettiş Çetin İkmen karakteri, bir yandan modernleşen Türkiye'nin resmi kimliğini temsil ederken diğer yandan farklı etnik ve dini gruplara duyduğu saygı ve empatiyle evrensel insan hakları anlayışına da işaret eder. Romanın başında Leonid Meyer adındaki yaşlı bir Yahudi'nin öldürülmesiyle başlayan olaylar zinciri, Müfettiş İkmen'in Balat'taki farklı kültürlerle temasını ve bu temaslar esnasında açığa çıkan tarihî travmaları gözler önüne serer. Roman boyunca Balat yalnızca coğrafi bir mekân olarak değil, aynı zamanda hafızası olan ve geçmişten bugüne pek çok kimliği taşıyan sembolik bir alan olarak öne çıkar.

Charles Taylor'ın "evrensel onur" kavramı, her bireyin yalnızca insan olması nedeniyle eşit saygıyı hak ettiğini savunur. Bu bağlamda, Müfettiş İkmen'in karakteri üzerinden romanın temel etik yaklaşımı şekillenir. İkmen, cinayet mağduru olan Yahudi karaktere ve tanıklık eden diğer etnik gruplardan kişilere eşit mesafede durur, önyargılardan uzak durur ve herkesin hikâyesini dinler. Ancak Taylor'a göre bu tür evrenselci bir yaklaşım, bireylerin kendi kimliklerinin tanınması yönündeki ihtiyaçlarını karşılamada yetersiz kalabilir. Roman da bu noktada eleştirel bir bakış sunar. İkmen'in iyi niyetli ve eşitlikçi tavrı, zaman zaman bazı karakterlerin kimliklerinin özgün yanlarını göz ardı etmesine yol açar. Bu durum,

Taylor'ın vurguladığı gibi, kimliklerin tanınma ihtiyacının yalnızca eşitlik ilkesiyle giderilemeyeceğini gösterir.

Öte yandan “farklılığın siyaseti” yaklaşımı, bireylerin kendi kültürel ve tarihsel kimlikleriyle tanınma haklarını vurgular. Bu anlayış, romanın Balat tasvirinde daha somut biçimde görünür olur. Roman boyunca mahalledeki sinagoglar, kiliseler, camiler ve farklı dillerin bir arada konuşulduğu gündelik yaşam alanları, çokkültürlü yapının fiziksel ve sembolik göstergeleri olarak karşımıza çıkar. Ancak bu çokkültürlülük, her zaman barışçıl ya da dengeli bir biçimde işlemez. Karakterler arasında zaman zaman ortaya çıkan ayrımcılık, kuşku, iletişimsizlik ve geçmişe dair kırılmalar, Balat'taki kültürel çeşitliliğin hem bir zenginlik hem de bir gerilim kaynağı olduğunu ortaya koyar.

Romanın işaret ettiği bir diğer önemli unsur, tarihi belleğin bireysel ve kolektif kimlikler üzerindeki etkisidir. Leonid Meyer'in geçmişi, Holokost'tan kaçışı ve İstanbul'a sığınması, yalnızca bireysel bir trajedinin değil, aynı zamanda Yahudi toplumunun sessiz tarihinin temsili olarak okunabilir. Benzer şekilde, romandaki Ermeni karakterlerin kendi geçmişlerine dair hissettikleri kırgınlık ve belirsizlikler, tanınma ve kabul edilme yönündeki tarihsel arzuları yansıtır. Bu noktada Balat, yalnızca fiziksel bir yer değil, aynı zamanda travmatik hafızaların, bastırılmış kimliklerin ve yeniden tanımlanma taleplerinin mekânıdır.

Romanın mekânsal tasvirleri, çokkültürlü yaşantının gündelik hayattaki karşılıklarını yansıtır. Dar sokaklar, eski evler, semt pazarları ve dini yapıların iç içeliği, bir arada yaşamaya dair hem fiziki hem de sembolik göstergelerdir. Mekânın katmanlı yapısı, geçmiş ve şimdi arasındaki geçişleri kolaylaştırır. Yazarın detaylı betimlemeleri, okurun Balat'ı salt bir arka plan olarak değil, aktif bir karakter gibi algılamasını sağlar. Bu da çokkültürlülüğü yalnızca bir sosyolojik durum değil, aynı zamanda deneyimlenen ve hissedilen bir gerçeklik olarak sunar.

Makale, edebiyatın felsefi kavramların somutlaştırılması açısından taşıdığı potansiyeli de ortaya koyar. Polisiye türü genellikle olay çözümüne odaklanmakla birlikte, *Belshazzar'ın Kızı* romanı bu türün sınırlarını aşarak kültürel analizlere alan açmaktadır. Balat üzerinden yapılan çözümler, İstanbul'un çokkültürlü tarihinin bugünkü yansımalarına dair edebi bir panorama sunar. Charles Taylor'ın teorik çerçevesi, bu edebi metnin kültürel çoğulculuğu nasıl yapılandırdığını anlamada işlevsel bir araç olarak kullanılmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, Barbara Nadel'in romanı çokkültürlülüğü ne idealize eder ne de toptan reddeder. Bunun yerine, bu olgunun karmaşıklığını, tarihsel yüklerini, duygusal izlerini ve toplumsal gerilimlerini gösterir. Balat, roman boyunca kültürel çoğulculuğun somutlaştığı, çatışma ve uzlaşının iç içe geçtiği bir alan olarak temsil edilir. Bu çalışma, edebi metinlerin sosyolojik ve felsefi yaklaşımlarla birlikte ele alınmasının, hem edebiyat eleştirisine hem de kültürel analizlere katkı sağlayabileceğini göstermektedir.

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