



SOCIAL

# PARADIGM

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

*Social Paradigm, 2022, 6 (2): 218-236*

## Bir Çocuğun Gözünden Balkan Dramı

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### Özet

93 Harbi olarak bilinen Osmanlı-Rus Savaşı (1877-1878) ile birlikte Balkan topraklarını bir ateş sarar. Bölgede hızla yayılan savaşlar, I. Dünya Savaşı'nın bitimine kadar devam eder. Balkan ülkeleri bu süreçte teker teker Osmanlı Devletinden koparak bağımsızlıklarını ilan eder. Bulgarlar, 1908'de kendi ulusal kimliklerini merkeze alarak yeni bir devlet kurar ve başta Müslüman Türkler olmak üzere diğer azınlıkları tecrit etme yollarına başvurur. Bu tecrit, II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası ve 1980'lerde sistemli bir asimilasyona dönüşür. Azınlıkların özellikle Müslüman ve Türklerin günlük yaşamına müdahale ederek özgürlüklerini kısıtlamaya başlar. Kültürlerini, dinlerini ve hatta isimlerini değiştirmek için baskılar uygular. Tarihe Bulgar zulmü olarak düşen bu durum, başta tarih ve sosyoloji olmak üzere sanatın, edebiyatın hatta çocuk edebiyatının da konusu olur. Çocukluk ve gençliği Bulgaristan'da geçen Dr. Hristo Slavov Kyuchukov, 1980'li yılların Bulgar zulmünü bizzat yaşamış, yaşadıklarını nesillere aktarmak istemiştir. Bir çocuk edebiyatı yazarı olan Kyuchukov, bu isteğini *My Name was Hussein* kitabı ile bir çocuğun gözünden aktarmaya çalışır. Eser, kurgusal bütünlük ve resimlerin çarpıcılığıyla dikkatleri çeker. Bir çocuk bakışıyla kaleme alınan kitap, eğitim bakımından da incelemeye değer bir yapıdadır. Balkan dramı gibi savaş ve şiddet içerikli tarihsel olayların bir çocuk kitabında nasıl anlatıldığını amaçlanan bu çalışmada nitel araştırma şekli temel alınmıştır. Çalışmada, verilerin analizinde içerik ve tematik analiz yöntemlerine başvurulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çocuk Edebiyatı, Bulgar zulmü, Benim Adım Hüseyin'di.

## Balkan Drama from a Child's Eyes

### Abstract

With the Ottoman-Russian War (1877-1878), known as the 93 War, a fire surrounded the Balkan lands. The wars that spread rapidly in the region continued until the end of the First World War. In this process, the Balkan countries broke away from the Ottoman Empire one by one and declared their independence. Bulgaria, one of these countries, declared its independence in 1908 and left the Ottoman Empire. Like other European

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## Balkan Drama from a Child's Eyes

*states, Bulgarians left the Ottoman Empire and established a new state by centering their national identity. However, while doing this, they resorted to ways of isolating other minorities, especially Muslim Turks. This isolation turned into a systematic assimilation after World War II and in the 1980s. Trying to implement its own ethnic cleansing, Bulgaria limited the freedoms of other minorities, especially Muslims and Turks, by interfering in their daily lives. Bulgarians pressured them to change their culture, religion or even their names. This situation in the history of Bulgaria has been the subject of history and sociology as well as literature and even children's literature. Romanian-born researcher and academician Dr. Hristo Slavov Kyuchukov is also a children's literature writer. Kyuchukov, who spent his childhood and youth in Bulgaria, personally experienced the Bulgarian persecution in the 1980s and wanted to convey his experiences through the eyes of a child through literature. The author strikingly expressed those years with both fictional integrity and illustrations in his book *My Name was Hussein*, which he wrote for children. It is important that the Bulgarian persecution is the subject of children's literature and that those years are conveyed through the eyes of a child. *My name was Hussein*, which is the subject of the study, will be evaluated in terms of subject and content on a historical basis. In the study document analysis technique was used as one of the qualitative research methods.*

**Keywords:** *Children's Literature, Bulgarian persecution, My Name was Hussein.*

*Received/Makale Geliş Tarihi: 01.06.2022*

*Accepted/Makale Kabul Tarihi: 25.12.2022*

## Introduction

The word “Balkans” takes its place in minds as a geographical term denoting the southeast of the European continent in the XIXth century. This name, which has been used since the beginning of the century, was inspired by the Balkan mountains in the region in question. The word “Balkans” is used in dictionaries in different meanings such as “a steep and forested mountain range; heap, cluster, reed, swamp”. This word, which is of Turkish origin, has been transferred to other world languages from the Turkish language (Buran, 2015: 65). The Balkans, which have

the characteristics of a peninsula in terms of geographical structure, do not have a large area. However, Turkey's Thrace part, Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia. It is home to many nations and states, including Turkey and Greece. The region, which has a multicultural structure, has an important place with its natural beauty, cultural richness, and geopolitical position.

Regions with a multidimensional structure and strategic importance have unfortunately witnessed many wars throughout history. The Balkan lands also experienced wars known by their own name. The first of the Balkan wars took place between 7 October 1912 and 30 May 1913. This war, also known as the 93 War, was between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Union, which consists of the Kingdoms of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. The Russian state, after the Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-1878, wants to reorganize the region according to its own interests. First, new states were established in the region with the Ottoman Empire; then it clashed the newly established states among themselves. In this process, the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbia showed rapid expansion activities in the Balkans. These two kingdoms started the process of expelling the Turks from the Balkans with the support of the Russian Empire in order to spread easily in the Balkans (Hall, 2000).

Every war causes great destruction and countless loss of life and property. Then it drives people into forced migration. However, some people prefer to live in their own land rather than migrate. Whatever the

choice, people experience great traumas in the post-war period. One of the most striking examples of migration and migration drama in recent history took place in Bulgaria after the Balkan wars. The Bulgarians, fed by the understanding of the nation-state, forced the Muslims and Turks living in these lands for hundreds of years to emigrate during the process of establishing a new state.

The basis of forced migration waves is based on the 93 War. Migrations continued from those years until the 1980s. In the first wave, also known as the 93 Migration, a genocide took place with the negative conditions brought about by the Ottoman-Russian War. In a short period of seven months, nearly one million Rumelian Turks were forced to leave their homes. In simple terms, a million Turks broke off like flies; they had to migrate with hunger, misery and diseases (Şimşir, 1986: 201). In the second wave of uninterrupted migration, about 200,000 people were forced to leave their lands. Other waves of immigration took place after 1923, when Turkey was governed by the Republic. The first migration in this period took place according to the "Turkish-Bulgarian Residence Agreement" dated 18 October 1925. In this wave of immigration, immigrants were only allowed to take their valuables with them. Turks and Muslims were forced to leave their countries by selling their houses and lands at very cheap prices. Other migration waves can be classified as the forced migration movement that occurred with the change of government in 1950 - 1951, the 1968 "immigration of close relatives" and the "forced change of Turkish names (1985-1989)" movement, which is described as the last blow of the Bulgarians (İnanç and Yazıcı, 2018: 78).

It is seen that a strict assimilation policy has been implemented in the migration movements in Bulgaria since 1950. There have also been times that “Bulgarian historians and anthropologists have put forward thesis that Turks are of Bulgarian origin” in order to legitimize this practice (TASAV Report, 2012). However, when this thesis was not accepted, psychological pressures continued to increase, as well as economic and physical pressures on Turks and Muslims. People’s religious and cultural life has been forcibly hindered. In Muslim villages, whose religions were forcibly changed, celebrations were held and people were given Christian names. Holy water was applied to the foreheads of these people, who were given Bulgarian names, and baptismal certificate was given by eating pork (Aganoglu, 2001: 88). Despite these events, people who did not leave Bulgaria were forced to migrate to the last wave, 1985-1989. Those who resisted changing their names, beliefs and cultural lives were either tortured or deported to labor camps. Among those who could not digest such pressures, there were also those who committed suicide (Kuyucuklu, 1993).

Many of the migrations can be considered as the children of wars that have been a disgrace to history. Migration and the events experienced in the migration process are of interest to other branches of science and arts, especially social sciences. The phenomenon of migration takes its place as one of the main topics that all branches of art deal with. Recently, besides visual arts such as cinema, literature and even, which is the subject of the study; For the theater, “Tumble Pigeons” can be given as an example, and for the novel “Dirina Bridge” can be given as an example.

There are also children's books in which the migration waves briefly described above are reflected in children's literature and this migration process is conveyed through the eyes of children. One of the most striking of these books is about the assimilation events in Bulgaria. This book is a children's book called *My Name Was Hussein*, which met the readers in the USA in 2004 and attracted children's literature deal with the issue of migration. "Pocket Hercules: Naim Süleymanoğlu" and "Escape 1950" for the cinema, which is about the Balkan migration and Bulgarian oppression attention with its different aspects.

*My Name Was Hussein*, a picture book, was written by Prof. Dr. Hristo Kyuchukov (Born 19 July 1962-). The paintings were illustrated by Allan Eitzen (1928-2008). The events described in the book are conveyed by filtering from the realities of the author himself. This is expressed in the author's note at the end of the book. This note is:

"Bulgaria is located in southeastern Europe, between Romania and Turkey. Today, is a democracy. But it wasn't always so. After the Second World War, Bulgaria fell under the rule of communists, who determined that the country should include only ethnic Bulgarians. Over the course of a few weeks, more than one million Muslims, including Roma, Turks, and other minorities, were forced to choose Christian names. It happened to me. This story is based on events in my life. Until I was twenty-two years old, my name was Hussein" (Kyuchukov, 2004).

This author's note adds both a historical context and a biographical aspect to a children's book. Thus, the book gains richness with its different dimensions.

## **2. About 'My Name was Hussein'**

Considering the picture, sentence structure and expression of *My Name was Hussein*, it can be said that it appeals to children aged 8-12. An educator, who stated that he had difficulty in finding the book, emphasizes the importance of the book by reminding that it is "unfortunate as it really sheds light on a recent history not known in the US at all, and one that should be known and remembered." The book describes only a fraction of the last waves of immigration (1985-1989) in Eastern Europe. In this section, cultural shock scenes based on identity rejection are included. In the book, where the first person narrator takes place, everything is conveyed through the eyes of a child.

The event begins in the first days of the holy month of Ramadan and ends in a week or two. In the book, which is a memory in fact, the longing for Ramadan months are explained. At the center of the events is a boy of about eight years old, who says his name was Hussein before. Everything is transmitted through his eyes. The narrator first gives information about himself and his family. He is of Roma descent, his grandfather immigrated to Bulgaria from India years ago. He lives happily and peacefully in a Bulgarian village with his grandparents, uncle, aunt and cousins. Hussein, the son of a Muslim family, tells how the holy months of Ramadan are lived and the preparations for Eid al-Fitr in a heartfelt style. In this holy

month and holidays, various dishes are prepared, desserts and cakes are made; new clothes and gifts are bought; Henna is applied to the hands, which is the sign of the holiday, and party plans are made. Hussein looks forward to Ramadan and the holiday that will follow. But everything suddenly changes, Bulgarian soldiers raid the village with their guns, tanks and dogs. It is the first day of Ramadan. Hussein goes to the mosque to pray with his father. However, the mosque is closed by the Bulgarian soldiers, and it is forbidden to pray. Like praying, going out on the street, speaking a foreign language, visiting and celebrating are also prohibited. Later, the soldiers raid the houses with their guns and dogs and take the families to the police station. They tell them that if they want to live in Bulgaria they have to change their names to Christian names and they tear up their identity cards. They also give Hussein and his family new ID cards with Christian names. The author conveys the traumas of Hussein, who could not make sense of what was going on, to the reader in a sad and striking way with pictures.

### **3. Hussein's Culture and Identity Crisis**

The book can be divided into two parts. In the first part, it is explained how the holy month of Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr are experienced in the cultural and traditional context for Muslims. In the second part, a part of the oppression of minorities by the Bulgarian government in Bulgaria in the mid-1980s is tried to be explained by making references to history. In the first part, the happiness of a child who is at peace with his identity and living his culture; In the second part, the drama of individuals whose



identity is rejected and who are removed from their values is told. The first part contains references to the fact that individuals and societies can lead a happy and peaceful life only with their beliefs and cultural assets. Culture and belief are undoubtedly two important elements that make up identity construction. In its simplest definition, the concept of identity is “Who am I or who are we?” and consists of answers to the question. For this reason, names reflecting their own characteristics have been given to individuals and society, and even to all living and non-living beings. Hristo Kyuchukov called this book “My name was Hussein.” gave his name. Has the name of Hussein changed in the reader, with the emphasis on the past tense? If it has changed, why might it have changed and what is its current name? It brings many more questions to minds. There are strong ties between identity and the concept of culture. Because the culture that constitutes the way of life of a nation consists of the combination of elements such as religion, language, race, geography and history of that nation. In the first part of the book, the author gives a picture of a family living a peaceful and happy life. The narrator first recalls his own name in the story ‘My name was Hussein’. He begins and gives information about other aspects that make up his own identity. “I was born in this village. I belong to a Roma family. Some call us Gypsies, but we are the Roma people. Our people came to Bulgaria many years ago from a place called India. In our family, we are Muslims. That is our religion” (Kyuchukov, 2004). After his name, the narrator reminds him of the geography he lives in, the religion he believes in, the race to which he belongs and the characteristics of his race. By enumerating these elements

he has adopted, he clearly states that he has strong ties with his own identity and culture.

The author repeats the name of the hero in the story in six places, Hussein in five places and Hughsy in another. Hussein, of Arabic origin, is known as one of the names most commonly given to Muslim boys. This name, in the history of Islam, is the name of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and he has an important place in the history of Islam. The narrator says that he likes this name very much and that his grandfather and great-grandfather have the same name. Thus, he makes references to their attachment to Islam and their family roots. These expressions in the book are quoted as follows: "I love my name Hussein. In Arabic, it means handsome. My grandfather was named Hussein. His grandfather was also named Hussein. I am proud of my name. Even so, everyone in my family calls me Hughsy. It is their special name for me" (Kyuchukov, 2004).

The author, who begins the book with "My name was Hussein", says these statements right at the end of the first chapter of the book. Thus, it not only puts the fiction of the book on a solid ground, but also tries to give the message that it wants to give to the reader in a strong way. The narrator shows that he loves his name very much and is proud of it, showing that he has established a physical and spiritual unity with it. He says the name means handsome. Hussein is depicted with big eyes and thick black hair in the illustrations in the book. The illustrations and the narrator's statements above show that the story character is a self-confident type.

This indicates that it is a reflection of the type of a person who is at peace with his own identity, living his belief and culture.

In the first part of the book, we read the peaceful life scenes of a large family of Romanian origin, Muslim, who came to Eastern Europe from India and is called Gypsy. The narrator states that they are Muslims and immediately after that, in the context of faith, there are many holiday celebrations. It tells that special meals, cakes and desserts are made during the holidays and that friends and relatives are invited. It talks about the month of Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr, which are the most important for Muslims. He says the following about it:

“For a month, my parents do not eat during the day. During this time, they pray extra prayers. At night, we eat a special meal called iftar. The last day of Ramadan is the best. My father goes to the mosque. When he comes back, he gives us candies. My little brother and I kiss our parents’ hands to say thank you” (Kyuchukov, 2004).

Hussein continues to talk about the preparations for Eid al-Fitr and the celebrations. He tells about her visits to her grandparents and how they treated her. This narrative is conveyed with the purity and cleanliness of a child as follows:

“We also visit my grandparents on holidays. I love my grandparents. They are happy when they see me. They hug me and hold me on their laps. They give me candies that smell nice, like roses. My grandmother cooks puddings made of rice and nuts. She knows exactly what I like to eat”.

In addition to her own experiences, Hussein observes what other people do before and during the feast and continues with the same naivety as follows:

“Before each holiday, my mother and grandmother paint their hands. They put henna color on their palms and fingers. They wear special clothes. This is to show that the holiday has started. My father buys new shirts for me and my little brother. He buys new pants and shoes for us. We have good clothes for the holidays.”

These are important statements that reflect the faith and cultural differences of Hussein and his family. The narrator tells that he has a big and happy family with his uncles, aunts and cousins. Thus, it also reminds us that cultural values are the elements that keep unshakable big families alive. Although the narratives have made these connotations to the reader, it can be said that throughout the narrative, not the size of the family, but the belief and cultural elements are brought to the fore. In other words, it can be said that real happiness will be possible when individuals and societies live their beliefs and cultures at peace with their own identity.

The second part of the book displays a contrasting character to the first part. Because the second part is “Then one day everything changed.” It starts with the statement. Eid celebrations in the last scene of the first episode; In the first scene of the second part, the Bulgarian army enters the village. This contrast is also tried to be emphasized by turning the colors in the pictures into black and white. This scene is narrated as follows in the narrative “The army came with tanks, cannons, guns, and

dogs. No one was allowed to leave the village. We could not visit our relatives. We could not go outside at night. We could not speak our Romani language in the streets.” () Hussein, who has been waiting for the coming of Ramadan for days, wants to visit his grandparents this Ramadan, but his mother does not allow him. Because his mother is very afraid of Bulgarian soldiers.

The month of Ramadan has started, despite all the prohibitions, Hussein comes to the mosque with his father. However, mosques were closed by Bulgarian soldiers, and praying was prohibited. This situation is described as follows: “The soldiers did not let us inside to pray. They stood in front of the doors. We had to go back home.” Hussein, who cannot understand why the soldiers came to their village and why people are persecuted, experiences a psychological drama. This drama, which is deeply felt to the reader by the pictures, is also experienced by the mother, father and younger brother. Hussein and his family, who set up plans to spend a peaceful Ramadan and Eid, are in great disappointment. This scene is like this:

“My father could not buy us new shirts for Ramadan. He was not allowed to go to the shops. My little brother was crying. He wanted a new shirt. He wanted to see our grandparents. I did, too. My father sat in a chair by the window. He did not speak to me. He would not play with me. I did not understand why.”

Bulgarian soldiers are not content with the atrocities described above, they force individuals to change their names and religions. They take families

to the police station under pressure and threats, tear off their ID cards and give them new ID cards. "A policeman in the office tore my parents' identity cards into little pieces. "You must change your names," he said. "You must choose Christian names. Come back with new names and you will get new identity cards." Hussein, who experienced this scene, asked to himself, "Why? I wondered. What did we do?" Even though they do everything they say, they cannot understand why they are treated badly. They give his family new identity cards replaced with Bulgarian names. In this scene, one encounters the drama of a father and family who are overwhelmed by despair.

Unable to show a verbal or physical reaction, the family exhibits a silent and fragile protest within itself. The narrator describes this situation as follows:

"My father's name was Selim. He did not want another name. My mother's name was Sanie. She did not want another name. My brother's name was Hassan. He did not want another name. And I did not want another name. On my way home, my father said, "I am not a Christian. I do not want a Christian name." My mother said, "We have no choice. We need our identity cards."

In this sad scene, the mother says they have no other choice, and they need their ID cards. Thus, with the involvement of a mother's affection, both the tension was reduced a little and the narrative was brought to reality. Although the psychological drama has been alleviated a bit, the fact that losing one's identity is equivalent to losing one's memory is not forgotten.

Because a person can lose money, home, valuables and even loved ones. Every individual is shaken by these losses, but they can get used to it over time. But how hard it is to lose your identity and get used to it, perhaps, can be understood through empathy. The fact that Hristo Kyuchukov wrote this book years later is a sign that he has never forgotten his identity.

Hussein is also given an identity card with the Christian name. Hussein, whose new name is Harry, this time spends his days with the depression of being stuck between these two names. This situation is conveyed with the purity of a child as follows. "At school, my teachers call me Harry. On the streets, my parents call me Harry. But at home, my parents still call me Hughsy. What would you call me? My name was Hussein." The name of the book, which is a true life story, and the first and last sentence of the story are "My name was Hussein." The author's repetition of this sentence is a reflection of his longing and love for his origin, belief, and culture.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Hristo Kyuchukov is a writer who experienced the blows and sufferings inflicted on the identity, belief, and culture of Turks and Muslims by the Bulgarian Communist Party and President Todor Jivkov in his childhood. The author wanted to transfer these drama scenes to the younger generations through a children's book years later. Thus, with this book, the author has shown that people can never forget and change their identities for whatever reason. Because he built the book on two types of identity: the original identity, which is built by assimilation in the context of culture and belief, and the foreign identity, which is forced to be

adopted by oppression and persecution. The first identity is happy and peaceful in the first part of the book; the second is the scene of lives full of drama.

Works of art have a feature that encompasses time. The book, which is the subject of the study, is realistic and interesting with its biographical structure and references to historical events. Through a children's book, the author sheds light on the fact of assimilation in Europe in the recent past (1980) and reminds us that similar events are taking place in today's world. Because, as in every period of human history, oppression and oppression are also experienced in countries such as India, East Turkestan and Palestine in the middle of the 21st century. *My Name was Hussein*, a children's illustrated book, has a rich structure in terms of its fiction, content, and pictures. The book can be studied sociologically as well as other social sciences such as psychology and history, and has a structure suitable for different interdisciplinary evaluations such as educational sciences.

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