

The Meritocracy as the Basic Paradigm of Public Space: According to an Ottoman ‘Intellectual’ Mustafa Ali (1541-1600)

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Abstract

The social functions consisting of principles such as “being able to embody, express and represent a message, a view, an attitude, a philosophy or an opinion” are basic criterion of being intellectual. From this point of view, it is possible to say that every country, every age, every class, every ideology has suitable intellectuals for its structure. For this reason, the intellectual can not be assessed as a creation of modernity, that is, monopoly of a certain time and society.

In parallel to the social functions of the intellectuals, Mustafa Ali who came to prominence as a creation of socio-political and economic conditions of the Ottoman State in the 16th century. Despite the monarchic and autocratic character of the Ottoman State, Mustafa Ali who revealed a paradigm about state and society life, not only at a theoretical level but also in a practical context, above all, exhibited an intellectual attitude with a critical, sharp, brave language and style. One of the most important determinations of Mustafa Ali about the Ottoman state and society life is erosion of meritocratic management mentality which ideally based superiority of the individual and talents of persons. Mustafa Ali, who regarded the erosion of the meritocracy as one of the most basic management problems, built his paradigm about state and society on this basis with examples of stories from near and distant pasts as well as religious references such as verse and hadith.

In spite of the quantity of studies based on different aspects of Mustafa Ali, the absence of a study in a special sense on the basis of his emphasis of intellectuality and his demand of meritocracy which has vital values in the state and society at every stage of the historical process made it essential to carry out such a study.

Keywords: Ottoman State, Mustafa Ali, Intellectual, Meritocracy

Introduction

According to Antonio Gramsci (1971: 09), when the intellectual is evaluated in the context of thought criteria that makes people different from each other such as understanding, reasoning, creativity; naturally all people actually become intellectual people. Because, at every stage of the historical process, the formation and movement of social systems sometimes individual, sometimes collective, but ultimately has been the product of a certain mental activity. However, the basic measure of an intellectual's definition is the operational dimension of his/her on social structure, system, mechanisms and process in society. On this basis, who the intellectual is directly related to the quality of his/her social functions. These social functions consist of principles such as "being able to embody, express and represent a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or an opinion". At the same time, the intellectual is the person who produces original and antidotal ideas which will awaken the masses bringing up concerns to the agenda in the name of the public to whom he is concerned (Said, 1996: 11). One of the most important task of the intellectuals who undertake that being representative of 'public conscience' is effort to break down the 'stereotypes' and 'reductive' categories that are limiting to human thought and communication (Said,1996: XI). Within this framework, it is possible to have counted factors such as creating a unique way of life and style, staying in opposition in most places where conformism is widespread, not performing in relation to the quality or not behaving according to a reflex of a community among the characteristics of the intellectuals.

While dominate understanding of intellectuals are the creation of modernity, in other words, creation of the educational possibilities provided by modernity, historical facts prove that is a misleading understanding. Even if referred to a change in the functionality of intellectual with modernity, it does not prove that it first appeared in this period. This understanding can only be evaluated as a reflection of a 'modern world centered' perspective. Because, in every phase of historical processes, almost in every society there are people who produce discourses that protect the bases of life, bringing these discourses to time and space and because of these social functions, they can be described as intellectual. At all times, human typologies fulfilling this social function have existed (Mahçupyan, 2006: 11). In short, it is not possible to evaluate intellectuals over a certain period and society monopoly because of every country, every age, every class, every ideology has intellectuals suitable for its structure.

When we look at the 16th century Ottoman Empire in the light of the social functions of the intellectual, we see Mustafa Ali⁸⁰ as the socio-political and economic creation of his period. The most important reason in order to count Mustafa Ali as an intellectual is his efforts to express an opinion to, as well as, for a public to power.⁸¹ Despite the monarchic and autocratic character of the Ottoman State, Mustafa Ali revealed a paradigm about state and society life, not only at a theoretical level but also in a practical context. This paradigm said, which is the most important determination of Mustafa Ali about Ottoman state and society life, is that the erosion of meritocratic management mentality which ideally based superiority of the individual and talents of persons. Mustafa Ali, who regarded the erosion of the meritocracy as one of the most basic management problems, built his paradigm about state and society on this basis with examples of stories from near and distant pasts as well as religious references such as verse and hadith. In this context, the paradigm revealed by Mustafa Ali naturally can be understood and interpreted analytically by analyzing the socio-political and economic conditions of the period in which he was originally created .

Socio-Political and Economic Background of Mustafa Ali's Consciousness

Even if human nature is not a social entity, the factors such as the necessity of living in a society in accordance with natural conditions, naturally cause that being the activity of language and thought as a product of social inclusion. The fact that, as a law of nature, humans do not have the chance to live as isolated from society and it ensures that humans can reach a real and meaningful essence with life only within a society. From this point of view according to Carr (1990: 33), “that elusive entity ‘human nature’ has varied so much from country to country and from century to century that is difficult not to regard it as a historical phenomenon shaped by prevailing

⁸⁰ Mustafa Ali, who was born on April 24/25, 1541, in Western Anatolia on the peninsula of Gallipoli and died in 1600, is not only an important statesman who fulfilled duties such provincial treasurer, divan clericalism and sanjak beyliği, but also because of his nearly sixty works in Turkish, Arabic and Persian from the history to literature, ethics, politics and daily life is an intellectual with a respectable place in the world of thought of the Ottoman Empire. for Mustafa Ali see. Fleischer, C. (1986). *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali, 1541-1600*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press; Bursalı Mehmed Tahir. (1972). *Osmanlı Müellifleri. III*. İsmail Özen (ed.), İstanbul: Meral Yayınevi; Babinger, F. (1992). *Osmanlı Tarih Yazarları ve Eserleri*. (C.Üçok, Trans.). Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İsen, M. (1998). *Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli*. Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları; Kütükoğlu, B. (1989). Âli Mustafa Efendi. *DİA*, 2, 414-416.

⁸¹ This paper was prepared basing on Mustafa Ali's work published in a model edition with annotated English translation titled “Mustafa ‘Âli's Counsel for Sultans of 1581” by Andreas Tietze in 2 volumes. The first volume of this work was published in 1979 and the second volume in 1983.

social conditions and conventions.” In the same way, Foucault also points to the idea that the role of society is the determinant of human nature on the basis of Marx’s praxis concept and chooses that the society has the function of ‘a form maker’ as his starting point (Hutton, 1998:127). In this context, it is possible to say that, in a way, all works are a product of unconscious factors of writer as well as the socio-political and economic conditions of the period in which the writer lived. Each writer is the product at the same time the spokesman of his age.

Mustafa Ali lived in a period in which ‘change’ and ‘transformation’ occurred in the structure of the Ottoman State, which is based on a rooted tradition, and in the basic dynamics of the society. In the mid-15th century, the conquest of Istanbul which was the Byzantine capital, as a conclusion of political and military policies followed by Mehmed II, made the Ottoman State a power of emperorship. With the becoming of more systematic and functional institutions performed at the the first period of the empire became a dominant ‘classical’ state and society, transforming depending on circumstances. Thus, while the conquering politics gained a new impetus, the Ottoman Empire became decisive and directed by settling in the center of European politic, especially since the beginning of the 16th century until 1596. However, when it reached the second half of the 16th century, the Habsburgs in front of Vienna in the west, the Iranian Plateau in the east and the Safavids formed the ultimate limits of Ottoman expansion. At the same time, the desert in Africa, the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and the Russians in the North had meant the end of the conquest of the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, in the last quarter of the century, the long, weary but ultimately unprofitable wars first against Iranians and then the Habsburgs in the west, between 1578 and 1606, shook the state and society order with the influence of great social fluctuations occurred inside at the same period and resulted in a large loss of human and financial resources. Besides, in addition to the economic factors such as the loss of transit trade opportunities with the discovery of the American continent and the inflation caused by the American silver in the Ottoman borders, the intensification of population in parallel to the whole Mediterranean geography and unemployment caused a tremor in the state and society order (İnalçık ve Quataert, 1997: 17, 22-25, 41-45; Lewis, 2002: 24; Öz, 2010: 38-48). Thus, principles such as “*the circle of justice (dâire-i âdliye)*”⁸² and “*four pillars or estates (erkân-i*

⁸² It represents the formulated form of justice that settled in the center of the state theory in the Middle East. According to this understanding on the axis of “army-treasury-reaya-justice” which is the basis of the philosophy of justice of the Ottoman Empire, there is an interactive link among these elements. Thus, the future of state can be settled only on the basis of a justice that would establish the balance among the classes mentioned. see Kınalızâde Ali Çelebi, (2012). *Ahlâk-ı Alâ’i*. Mustafa Koç (ed.). İstanbul: Klasik Yayınevi;

erba 'a')”⁸³ based on “ *order of the world (nizâm-ı âlem)*”, which denote that the state and society order of Ottoman was eroded massively due to the practices such as the illegal behaviors of the administrators representing the administrative and executive powers of the sultan, irregular transitions among social classes mentioned, bribe in appointment of ranks etc.

While the changes that started to emerge from the second half of the century were being first noticed and ideas put forward about their reasons by the Ottoman statesmen themselves, Mustafa Ali had been the first person to reveal pragmatic solutions and criticisms of the Ottoman administration practice. Mustafa Ali, who lived in these historical conditions and formations, regarded the corruption faced by the state and society as a “revolution” that can be qualified as a pioneer evaluation for the statesmen after him who interpreted this situation in the form “*revolution to the worldly order and indignation to the (subjects nizâm-ı âleme ihtilâl ve reâyâ ve berâyâyâ infîâl)*” (Öz, 2010: 16). While Mustafa Ali’s views about the Ottoman ‘classical’ order as a result, practices contrary to the “*kânûn-ı kadîm (old laws)*” are not so different from his successors, the factors which made him different were his analysis of a meritocratic system in addition to the sharp style and criticism approach.

Mustafa Ali’s Intellectual Mission

Mustafa Ali was the first person to produce the first pragmatic analysis and critique Ottoman administrative practice with the awareness of intellectual responsibility, observing changes in the basic dynamics of the Ottoman administration and society structure. The new historical conditions urged Mustafa Ali to meditate in the society he had served as a man of learning, a bureaucrat and a soldier for all of his adult life. Eventually, he was able to distinguish that the society in the grip of a moral apocalypse, a cultural and a political crisis and a decline from an ideal order had existed in fact a few decades (Fleischer, 1996: 6-8). In such a climate, Mustafa Ali first of all acted with the intellectual mission of Gramsci “functional” and Saidci “telling the rule truth”.

Yücel, Y. (1988). *Osmanlı Devlet Teşkilatına Dair Kaynaklar: Kitâb-i Müstetâb/ Kitabu Mesalihi'l Muslimin ve Menâfi'i'l-Mü'minîn/ Hırzû'l-Mülûk*. Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi; Inalcik, H. (1993). “State and Ideology under Sultan Suleyman P, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire-Essays on Economy and Society*, Bloomington.

⁸³ It states that four basic classes supposed to be constitute the basis of philosophy of Ancient Greek, Medieval Islam and Christianity and the social equilibrium among these classes. These social classes consist of such as ‘soldiers, reaya, Ottoman scholars (‘ulemâ) and merchants-artisans-craftsmen’ classes. see İnalcık, 2000: 65-69; Öz, 1999: 31.

Mustafa Ali, whose movement point, legitimacy ground and terminology is Islamic, in this context, based his sayings and rhetoric on verses and hadiths. Thus, the view of classical Islamic writers that with the motive of human nature emphasize existence of a ruler who has absolute authority in every society was stated by Mustafa as well and for Mustafa Ali, the most important reason of the deterioration in the state and society was that can not be fulfilled sovereign duty. Mustafa Ali did not stop from criticizing the sultan stating his views. According to Mustafa Ali (1979: 20), one of the most common rules in society since ancient times has been “the mistake of consenting to cruelty and tolerance.” Therefore, the sultan⁸⁴ himself should not be a source of persecution while he must secure justice as the performer of justice, which is the basic condition for establishing social order. In the Ottoman state understanding, the sultans who are at the top of the social hierarchy should not transfer his obligations to the viziers by preferring isolation to mixing with the people rather than dealing with the problems of the people different from the previous periods (Mustafa Ali, 1979: 21). In such a case, according to Mustafa Ali (1979: 23), helping the sultans through counsel and advices, and naming him in their prayers with sincerity, in fact necessary for all creators that possess speech, but the responsibility of the scholars is to overcome all. At first the scholars need to be their sultan’s seeing eyes and holding his grasping hands. They should put aside fear and awe, should embolden themselves to offer the sultan truth on the affairs openly. However, despite the fact that there were many well-known persons of learning in the Ottoman State, they preferred to remain silent in the face of the disintegration of the state and institutions (1979: 24).⁸⁵ According to Mustafa Ali (1979: 23), there is a clear command to say, “*say truth albeit bitter!*”. For this reason, uttering these thoughts bravely is accordance with the both discretion of Allah and the path followed by men of learning such as Master Firdevsî of Tûs, Master Sa’dî of Shiraz, Master Hâfiz of Shiraz, Master Nûreddîn Shiraz. Mustafa Ali states that “*all people bound to help their sultans by counsel and advice in addition to when they see them in growing trouble because of disasters and catastrophes they should rush to their aid with word and deed, with (possessions) and (good) intentions.*” referring to the hadith, “*The truth is high and cannot be*

⁸⁴ In the sources on Ottoman society and state organization, one of the most commonly handled idea is that “the sultan is shadow of God on earth (Zillu’llâh-ı fi’l arz)” and for this reason, he is at the center of the philosophy of rule by justice. see Tursun Bey. (2014). *Târih-i Ebu’l Feth*. institution (ed.), İstanbul: İlgi Kültür Sanat Yayınları; İdrîs-i Bidlîsî. (2016). *Selim Şah-nâme*. Hicabi Kırılancık (ed.), Ankara: Hece Yayınları; Uğur, A. (2001). *Osmanlı Siyâset-Nâmeleri*. Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları.

⁸⁵ In fact, it is not possible to consider this situation as a preference made by men of learning as a result of their own will. This situation can be seen as a reflection of the political conjuncture of the period.

surpassed.” (1979: 24). In parallel to this understanding, first of all, he considers that expressing his thoughts as a responsibility.

The Meritocracy as the Basic Paradigm of Public Space: According To Mustafa Ali

In the new historical conditions in which Mustafa Ali lived, basic education institutions had begun to become ineffective due to the fact that short-term political calculations and this situation resulted in an increase in ordinary literacy as well as an unbalanced increase in civil servants. Also, as a result of the institutionalization of the bureaucracy, the degrading of literature-based amateurs had led to a great disappointment for those who had been well educated and committed to himself to meritocratic promises of the Ottoman Empire like Mustafa Ali. Thus, Mustafa Ali, who believed his talents to be unrequited, as a duty had developed a unique style on expressing the structure of the state and institutions, through his own disappointment, without hesitation in bringing personal interpretation and experience to his works. In this context, Mustafa Ali, first of all, dwelt on the meritocratic order in his works (Fleischer, 1996: 9).

Mustafa Ali as the basis of meritocratic order based his concept of justice on the “*Justice means puttings things in the places where they belong.*”⁸⁶ principle that handled by classical Islamic writers as well as later authors of Ottoman political treatise and advice for kings (nasihat-nâme) . Mustafa Ali revealed his paradigm by emphasizing that the principle said should be reference and must be applied to all practical administration of state and society by the administrators in commanding positions. According to Mustafa Ali (1979: 17), as can be understood from the ruling “*All grades of rank are just for these.*”⁸⁷ that being at a position of rank is a form of testing; because, “*Injustice is burried in the soul: weakness hide it, strength brings it out.*” Therefore, men of wisdom, the owners of intelligence and sagacity, are cognizant and aware of incontestable truth that the well-meaning great philosophers and eminent thinkers of penetrating mind have regarded justice and equity as coins of standart purity on the scales of popularity and prestige, and reliability and integrity as gold currency of high validity and value on the goldsmith’s balance of the era (1979: 17). Again, according to Mustafa Ali (1979: 18), Allah had ordered that the sultans and the statesmen should investigate all details of justice by rule “some are over others”⁸⁸ while appointing. However, Mustafa Ali has stated that a large part

⁸⁶ It states the inference of 58th verse of An-Nisâa sura of Koran that means “God bids you to deliver all that you have been entrusted with unto those who are entitled thereto, and whenever you judge between people, to judge with justice. Verily, most excellent is what God exhorts you to do: verily, God is all-hearing, all-seeing!” .

⁸⁷ Koran, Al-Anâam: 165.

⁸⁸ Koran, An-Nûr: 40.

of those who have the power to rule have appointed their supporters to the positions they desire without any merit violating the principle of justice during their period. While the viziers in pleasure and luxury, enjoying themselves no end in their places and gardens, the members of the imperial council occupied with the acquisition of money and property. Some members of the imperial council have obeyed to the viziers orders unconditionally. Even those closest to the sultan and occupied high offices have remained indifferent to bribes that given to come high positions. Mustafa Ali, who expressed that all these were hidden from the sultan, at the same time has stated that even the most honest appearances have done the opposite and left the sultan alone (1979: 19).

Mustafa Ali also have made practical analysis of the determinations made in the administration of the state as well as society structure. According to Mustafa Ali (1979: 18), the sultan of the period Murat III, must command the army in difficult times and take care of affairs of people by justice. Even if It is not possible to regard the sultan as responsible directly for behaviours of the viziers, in accordance with the verse “Nor does any laden bear another's load.”⁸⁹, since the sultan who takes over the whole burden of the people must act fairly in the matter of delegation. To ignore the work conducted by the deputies appointed prevent that respond correctly on the day of the judgement. To appoint ignorants when there are wise men available, to choose those who excel in flattery and eulogy rather than those who are truthful and just, is not only equal to condoning the oppression of the people but also a shining example of the maxim: “*He who delegates an act to a person betrays God and His Prophet and His community, the true believers.*” As a result, “*Consenting to the darkness of the persecution causes the sun of justice to sink.*” As a result, to consent the darkness of the cruelty causes that sink the sun of justice.

Mustafa Ali, in order to legitimate his paradigm with historical persons and events, had taken advantage of stories such as:

The story is told that Sanjar Khan,⁹⁰ a might kind of inherited greatness, when he was a powerless captive of Sultan Ghazan and downcast by the loss of his kingdom, was asked by some understanding person about the cause of his downfall. This was his apt reply: “I gave the high post to low people and expected people of high status to accept low positions. Then the low people were unable to cope with high offices, and the high grade men found it dishonorable to accept posts that were below their rank. There can be no doubt that the absurdity of these two

⁸⁹ Koran, Al-Anâam: 40.

⁹⁰ Sanjar Khan, the last ruler of the Greater Seljuk Empire, 1086-1157).

orders caused the colopse of my kingdom and empire and led to disaster, self accusation, and remorse.” (1979: 22).

As it is seen in this story, the basic deduction of all of the mentioned stories is that does not attach importance to the merit causes the destruction in the life of the state and the society. From this point of view, the task of the authorities and those in high positions is to take lessons from these historical facts and arrange the state and society order accordingly.

Conclusion

It is not possible to evaluate the emotions and thoughts in other saying basic characteristic of human being regardless of the society in which they live. Because, the human characteristic is the result of imagination and interpretations composed of historical conscious as well as unconscious elements. Therefore, in the general sense, all intellectuals are the creation and the spokesman of their age. From this point of view, Mustafa Ali can not be evaluated in a vacuum. He is also the spokesman of his own historical conditions. The criticism that Mustafa Ali has developed this type of writing under the influence of his inability to come to the desired position is groundless. Because, the influence of the erosion of the values related to the merit in the state bureaucracy and society not only emphasized by Mustafa Ali’s followers autors of political treatise and advice for kings but also can be verified by the archive documents of the period. This kind point of view is only due to the inability of a person to be in the effort of seeing the world with the limits of his own horizon.

Because the only way to understand a work in real sense is to share the same feeling by establishing empathy with the person who made the work. It is relatively easy to establish this empathy with Mustafa Ali. Because the values put forth by Mustafa Ali are valid for every society in every era, and these values carry himself ahead of the time. Despite the period that repressive and monistic, Mustafa Ali’s writing was determined by the political urge and a criticism of system in a brave manner and this factor makes him very valuable.

The determinations about violating meritocracy that emphasized by Mustafa Ali as a fundamental paradigm of the public space have the characteristic of lesson both the period we live in and foreseeing the future. In the socio-political circumstances in which we live, the fact that one of the most important complaints of the people is that not being arranged the state bureaucracy and institutions on the basis of merit. Instead of this, To the elements such as spouse, friend, affiinity or belief and ideological uniformity have taken as criteria and this situation has caused the corruption in society. All these realites exhibit the biophotonism of Mustafa Ali’s paradigm.

However, as the German philosopher Frederich Hegel says, “the experience teaches us that states and societies have never learned anything from history”. Because, the points identified by Mustafa Ali also can be seen in different shape and forms but in terms of their effects and results likewise in our day as well.

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