

The Role of Traditional Dances in the Creation of the Bosniak Ethnic Identity in Istanbul

Zdravko RANISAVLJEVIĆ¹ 

¹Assoc. Prof. Dr., University of Arts, Faculty of Music, Department for Ethnomusicology, Belgrade, Serbia

**Corresponding author/
Sorumlu yazar :** Zdravko RANISAVLJEVIĆ
E-mail/E-posta : ranisavljevicz@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the current presentational dance practices of Bosniaks in Istanbul. In May 2022, field research was carried out in two Bosniak associations in Türkiye's metropolis of Istanbul with the aim of determining the dance and music repertoire practiced by the members of these associations. The research collects basic information about the aforementioned community in relation to the interpretations of the (re)creation of the Bosniak ethnic identity in Türkiye. In a broader sense, this process should be understood in light of the complex historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical relations between the country regions of Türkiye and the Balkans. This paper presents basic information and theoretical interpretations about the Bosniak associations' presentational dance repertoire in Istanbul.

Keywords: Bosniaks, kinetics dance form, presentational practices

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Introduction

Bosniaks¹ started migrating to Anatolia in the 19th century as a result of ethnic and religious conflicts. The migration of Bosniaks to Anatolia is recorded by historians as comprising five major mass migrations². During this time, which includes the period from the Treaty of Berlin (July 13, 1878) to the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (November 29, 1945–April 27, 1992), dance elements from the Bosniak communities that migrated to Anatolia have further enriched the multi-layered cultural color of traditional dances in Türkiye.

The founders of the Bosniak associations in Istanbul had moved to Türkiye in the second half of the 20th century. The majority of this population originates from the anthropogeographical region of Raška in Serbia (Petrović, 2010), which is called Sandžak by the local community as a reference to the Ottoman period in the history of this region. The administrative center of this region is Novi Pazar. The geographic location of Novi Pazar is defined by the mountain massifs of Golija and Rogozna, the Pešter-Sjenica plateau, and the river Raška, which runs through the city. Novi Pazar was founded in the 15th century. The city's foundations were laid by Isa-beg Ishaković, who had 'a complex of buildings constructed' (i.e., a mosque, a caravanserai, a hammam, and 56 shops) near the town of Ras (Kahrović-Jerebičanin, 2014, p. 17). The city grew as an artisanal and mercantile center that has largely remained to this day. The Ottoman rule of Novi Pazar lasted quite some time until the First Serbian Uprising in 1804, when many Serbs moved away as a large number of Montenegrins and Herzegovinians came to settle in the city. Large migrations also occurred following the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In other words, while the Muslim population left the city, it was then settled by people from Montenegro, Herzegovina, Bosnia, and central Serbia, as well as by a number of Circassians (Kahrović-Jerebičanin, 2014, p. 25). After the Balkan Wars, Serbs liberated Novi Pazar from Turkish rule in 1912 (Kahrović-Jerebičanin, 2014, p. 26). With World War I came Austro-Hungarian rule, replaced by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the war. Interestingly, Novi Pazar during all those years was home to a large number of Jews who'd been exiled by Germans after World War II (Kahrović-Jerebičanin, 2014, p. 27). During this period, Novi Pazar was settled by people from Pešter, Golija, Bihor, Rogozna, and the valley of the river Lim.

My research in Istanbul collected basic information about the Bosniak community from Novi Pazar and its surroundings in relation to the interpretation of the (re)creation of their ethnic identity in Türkiye. Members of Bosniak associations practice newly-composed folk music from the former Yugoslavia (predominantly from Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the traditional dances of various regions. As a rule, folk songs are performed in a massive participatory context, while traditional dances are predominantly performed in a presentational (stage) context. The dance repertoire is rehearsed with children who attend primary school (ages 7–14) and functions as a part of various stage programs. This practice shares basic characteristics with the dance practices of the cultural-artistic societies of former Yugoslavia that still exist in this area. Children are taught by what one would describe as the choreographer, a person who has experience as a dancer in ex-Yu amateurism. Namely, the people who lead the dance groups said they had been members of various cultural-artistic societies in Yugoslavia before coming to Istanbul.

The recorded dance repertoire is presented in the form of a choreography of traditional dances lasting about 6 minutes. The mentioned choreography form in an ideological sense refers to the lost traditional dance practice and has the aim of preserving the dances (as per Andriy Nahachewsky [Nahačevski], 2012). This kind of stage performance currently practiced in Serbia is included in the concept of preserving intangible cultural heritage and involves presenting and interpreting heritage (Rakočević & Ranisavljević, 2021). Since its beginnings in the mid-20th century as initiated by the *Kolo* Foundation of the Folk Dances and Songs Ensemble of Serbia in 1948 and by the work of choreographer Olga Skovran, choreographic practices in Serbia have been predominantly based on the idea of preserving traditional dances and their kinetic forms. In the ethnochoreological practices in Serbia, the dances and kinetic forms have previously been explained using the terms "types of dances" (Janković & Janković, 1949, p. 45) and "dance types" (Vasić, 2002, pp. 266–274), while current ethnochoreological practices make use of the theoretical concept of formal types, or formal types of kinetics (Ranisavljević, 2022). By applying this concept, one can say that the stage presentation of traditional dances in Serbia, as well as in the wider territory of former Yugoslavia, predominantly involves adhering to the formal types of kinetics recorded in the field. Repertoires of amateur cultural and artistic societies in this region, as well as those of professional ensembles, are largely based on the ethnochoreological concept of dance dialects, which refer to anthropogeographical entities (i.e., dance zones according to Ivančan, 1971 or ethnochoreological entities according

¹ The term Bosniaks is the construct of the political context regarding the first decade of the 21st century in ex-Yugoslavia territory.

² Yugoslavia's first internal migration movement to other Balkan lands and partially toward Anatolia started with the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, continued with the Balkan War of 1912–1913, and took place at the individual and family levels between 1923–1951, at a mass level in 1952–1967 and again at the individual and family levels between 1968–1996 (Tekin, 2018).

to Vasić, 2011), with integrated individual smaller anthropogeographical areas. These entities differ according to the predominant recognizable formal types of kinetics.

In the era of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage based on the idea of preserving the continuity of traditional kinetic forms while referencing specific traditional dance (kinetic and music) content, the presentational dance practices in the territory of Serbia and former Yugoslavia have become a medium for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Consequently, through the practices in cultural and artistic societies, dance heritage becomes an instrument in the creation of national identity (Rašić, 2022). In the same way, Bosniaks in Istanbul use dance practices to create their ethnic identity. A detailed analysis of the dance repertoire in the case of one of the two largest Bosniak associations indicates a specific hybrid identity for this community. Through the performance of dances that refer to the wider area of the so-called Sandžak, this community clearly expresses its ideological affiliation.

The choreography performed by the children in this association involves the following six dances: 1) *čačak*, 2) *Po potoku sitna riba* [Small Fish in the Stream] (a popular song from Novi Pazar), 3) *čoček*, 4) *a la turka*, 5) *gajdarsko oro* (*oro gajde*), and 6) *kunješte*. The kinetic components will occur the focus of the dance analysis, which is the main carrier of the semantic meaning. The musical examples represent the original general-purpose recordings, which in this sense have a lower semantic potential.

The Traditional Dance *Čačak*

Čačak is a traditional dance that is performed in the live participatory practice of southeastern Serbia (the Sandžak region is located on the opposite side of Serbia in the south-west). This dance has a characteristic ten-measure asymmetrical basic step pattern (like the Bulgarian *horo*) and is usually performed in a round-chain dance formation. In the performance of the group from the Bosniak association, the kinetic pattern of *čačak* is realized 1) as a symmetrical step pattern of two measures to the right and two measures to the left, then four measures to the right and four measures to the left, as well as 2) as a solo dance formation. The basic indicator of *čačak* in this case is the melody. This group simply used the most famous melody of this dance in the sphere of choreographic folklore in Serbia. Radojka Živković (1923–2002) recorded this melody on the accordion in the mid-20th century³. *Čačak* has many different melodies that are combined during the performance in Serbia's current participatory practice.

The Popular Novi Pazar Song *Po Potoku Sitna Riba*

One of the basic characteristics of the dance tradition in Novi Pazar is dancing accompanied by song. The song *Po potoku sitna riba* is the most popular song in current practices in Novi Pazar and a specific symbol of the musical tradition of Novi Pazar. The kinetic patterns of the dances with song accompaniment, in both participatory and presentational practice, as a rule imply a three-measure basic step pattern and a round-chain dance formation. In the performance of the dance group from the Bosniak association in Istanbul, the kinetic pattern with the song *Po potoku sitna riba* was realized as 1) a symmetrical step pattern of two measures to the right and two measures to the left, or 2) in a solo dance formation.

The Melody *Čoček*

Čoček in Serbia is primarily a part of the brass orchestra repertoire in the Vranje region of southeastern Serbia, where *čoček* is predominantly performed by the Roma people using very specific trumpet melodies in 4/4 rhythm and a slow tempo. *Čoček* in Novi Pazar is performed with different melodies that are usually played on a keyboard with the characteristic Latin American rhythm known as the Rumba. The kinetic pattern of *čoček* in the participatory practice in Novi Pazar implies a symmetrical basic step pattern (2+2) and a dual formation of 1) a pair formation of a man and a woman, and 2) a round-chain dance formation that circles around the separated pair (Ranisavljević, 2022). In the performance of the dance group from the Bosniak association in Istanbul, *čoček's* kinetic and musical patterns refer to the participatory practice of Novi Pazar, with a difference in the parameter of the dance formation. In the case of the Bosniak association, this was a solo formation. Knowing that *čoček* has a same rhythm as a Turkish *köçek* (4/4) as well as very similar melody patterns is important.

The Dance *A la Turka*

The *a la turka* dance from Novi Pazar, being a so-called old Turkish dance, is not very present in the current dance practices in Serbia. More precisely, it is typically performed only by educated dancers. According to Nazim Ademović,

³ Suvosr. (2012, October 11). Radojka Živković – *Čačak kolo* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IWO9V3Bv_0

a dance choreographer from Novi Pazar, *a la turka* is a dance suitable for competition, which is why in the first half of the 20th century it was performed separately in male and female communities, in pairs of two men or two women (Ranisavljević, 2014). A few versions of *a la turka* are found to have been recorded in the literature. The terms *jedno* (Turkish: *bir* [one]), *dvoje* (Turkish: *iki* [two]), and *troje* (Turkish: *üç* [three]) refer to different elements that are added to the basic step pattern, such as stomps, triple-steps, or hops.

Performing *a la turka* as well as other old Turkish dances in the urban environment involves a few skilled dancers dancing separately in the center of a circle formed by an open mixed round chain dance. These individuals perform a specific dance to appropriate music accompaniment, while the other dancers in the outer *kolo* commonly perform a uniform three-measure step pattern. In the performance of the dance group from the Bosniak association in Istanbul, *a la turka*'s kinetic and musical patterns directly refer to the participatory practices from Novi Pazar, with a difference in the parameter of the dance formation. In the case of the Bosniak association, it again was a solo formation. The referencing of Turkish by using the term *a la turka* is a consequence of the need for religious and ethnic differentiation in the Muslim community of Novi Pazar. This differentiation is explicitly realized in the form of the names of dances (e.g., *a la turka*), the specific types of performed kinetics (e.g., soft dancing), and elements of folk costumes.

The Melody *Gajdarsko Oro (Oro Gajde)*

Gajdarsko oro, also known as *oro gajde*, is a little-known instrumental number recorded in the mid-20th century by the Macedonian accordionist Kočo Petrovski (1926–1988), and then by the Serbian accordionist Dušan Radetić (1923–1967) in 1962. This melody clearly refers to Macedonian traditional music, but its rhythm and tempo are in some ways more closely resemble the Bulgarian *horos* than the Macedonian *horos*. The Bosniak association in Istanbul can be assumed to have chosen this piece because of its attractive melody, rhythm, and fast (*presto*) tempo. This dance group realized the kinetic pattern of this performance with the melody of *gajdarsko oro* identical to most other dances: 1) as a symmetrical step pattern of two measures to the right and two measures to the left, and 2) in a solo dance formation.

The Dance *Kukunješte*

The *kukunješte* dance is one of the most popular dances of the earlier dance tradition in central Serbia. The name of this dance was first recorded in the literature in 1876 (Milićević, 1876). *Kukunješte* is not present in the current participatory dance practice, but it is very often included in the choreographies of traditional dances from central Serbia. The ethnochoreology literature of the second half of the 20th century has many versions of *kukunješte* with different basic step patterns and melodies. The basic common characteristic of all *kukunješte* versions include an eight-measure kinetic form with two dichotomous lateral kinetic phrases (1.3+1.3 patterns) and performed in a round-chain dance formation. The dance group from the Bosniak association in Istanbul performed the version with the melody called *arapsko kukunješte*, which is the most popular melody in choreographic folklore in Serbia⁴. The kinetic pattern of *kukunješte* is realized without referring to the source as 1) a symmetrical step pattern of two measures to the right, two measures to the left, then four measures to the right and four measures to the left, and 2) in a solo dance formation.

Based on the kinetic and musical analysis of the selected dances, the main criterion for their identification can be concluded to be the musical component. In other words, the dances performed within the stage programs of the Bosniak associations in Istanbul refer to the original melodies of particular dances, while their kinetic component (primarily kinetic format) has been changed and retains no basis in its traditional heritage (except for fragments of *a la turka* and *čoček*). Specifically, the dance patterns of *čačak*, the songs from Novi Pazar, *čoček*, *gajdarsko oro*, and *kukunješte* do not correspond to the original kinetic forms of the referenced dances. In the dance tradition of Serbia, the basic step pattern of *čačak* as a rule has 10 measures. The songs from Novi Pazar are most often performed on the basis of a three-measure step pattern, while *čoček* is performed as an improvisation, and *gajdarsko oro/oro gajde* has no authentic step pattern. In addition, *kukunješte* has a recognizable pattern of 8 measures (like the *kolo* dance, currently the most popular dance in Serbia). Specifically, the kinetic forms of the five dances from the analyzed choreography are based on the universal formal principle of symmetry.

Kinetic form represents the basic fundamental indicator of dance heritage on stage (Ranisavljević, 2022). For example, the processes of registering elements of dance heritage on the National Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and various UNESCO lists are primarily based on identifying a dance through its kinetic form. Using the notion of kinetic form, one may identify concrete relationships between local and regional traditions⁵.

⁴ One example is the choreography *Narodne igre iz Šumadije* by Desanka Đorđević (see Ranisavljević, 2011).

⁵ For example, a pattern with a three-measure kinetic form in Serbia is known as *lako kolo*; however, this form is represented in the wider area of south-eastern Europe (as well as in Türkiye) under different names of individual dances, with different melodies and variations in kinetic content.

The dance repertoire practiced in the Bosniak associations in Istanbul, or more precisely the kinetic patterns, does not overtly correspond to the kinetic forms and dance formations of traditional heritage. At this moment, the question of reference relations arises. Namely, what is the source of the dance kinetic patterns of the analyzed dances? By looking into the traditions of choreographic folklore in Serbia (see Bajić-Stojiljković, 2019; Ranisavljević, 2011, 2018), one can conclude the use of the principle of symmetry to create new dance patterns accompanied by well-known traditional melodies to have been the basic characteristic of creators in the amateurism of Belgrade (the capital of Serbia) in the second half of the 20th century. Stepping away from traditional kinetic forms in this practice had the meaning of distancing oneself from rural tradition with the aim of creating a new Yugoslav stage art. This type of choreography is based on universal symmetrical basic step patterns (e.g., 2+2, 4+4, 8+8), well-known melodies from traditional dances, and universal kinetic motifs (e.g., basic triple step, crossing step, hop up, hop down). The case of the group from the Bosniak associations in Istanbul performing all dances in a solo formation implies a separation from the round-chain dance formation as an immanent formation of the referenced dance traditions and a closer relation to the current dance practices of Novi Pazar where solo dancing is popular (e.g., in *čoček*).

The stage dance practices in the Bosniak associations from Istanbul is motivated by the idea of preserving ethnic dances, but the concrete selection of dance repertoire implies a non-referential creative process. In other words, it represents a hybrid practice in which the following are represented: 1) the melodies of the dances of southeastern Serbia (i.e., *čačak*), Novi Pazar (i.e., songs and *čoček*), and central Serbia (i.e., *kukunješće*); 2) a popular instrumental melody from Macedonia (i.e., *gajdarsko oro*), and 3) only one specific dance from Novi Pazar (i.e., *a la turka*). If one looks at the analyzed presentational dance practices together with the live participatory music practices in Bosniak associations, this community can be concluded to have created its own ethnic identity based on the Yugoslav ideological heritage. In this process, they have used the iconic symbols of former Yugoslavia (and other places) that they still recognize as their own, such as the most popular dance melodies and composed songs, as well as particular elements of the dance heritage of Novi Pazar (i.e., dance and dance formation), as markers of local identity (i.e., Bosniaks from the so-called Sandžak region).

Traditional dance in migration societies serves as an important social phenomenon in the context of social communication. Today, the so-called Sandžak region's Bosniak dances are grouped under a separate classification with their unique structure within Turkish dance culture. Bosniak migrants have a political commitment to the dances of the geography that they were separated from under the psychology of a return to the motherland. For them, traditional dance is an identity that reveals their ethnic existence in the motherland, and they own their traditional dance as an indicator of their ethnic society. In environments surrounded by different cultural structures, Bosniaks resist interaction and change, and a desire to preserve traditional culture in the form of a closed society is observed to be present. Bosniak societies use their dances to communicate messages to internal and external groups and include the political, ideological, educational, religious, and economic features that define their ethnic culture.

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ORCID ID of the author

Zdravko RANISAVLJEVIĆ 0000-0002-7873-2098

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