

# Urban Folk Music Legacy from Former Yugoslavia in Contemporary Istanbul

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*In honor of dear Prof. Dr. Selena Rakočević (1971–2022). Memory eternal!*

## ABSTRACT

This article presents initial observations from the fieldwork in Istanbul in 2022, where short-term research of immigrant communities from former Yugoslavia was conducted within the project of bilateral cooperation, *Exploring the Tracks of Balkan Culture: Serbian–Turkish Connections in Music and Dance from Ottoman Period until Today (TRackeRS)*. Nowadays, these communities are specific because of their atypical migration direction, from Serbia and former Yugoslavia – toward the East. They cherish their traditions through choirs, and nostalgically remember their homeland through two types of urban folk music related to Serbia (and former Yugoslavia) – *sevdalinka* (which evokes their Ottoman ancestry) and *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (‘newly-composed folk music’, which evokes their Yugoslav reality from the time of their youth). The article examines the role of these popular folk music practices, their potential in safeguarding the culture of origin (especially because of the threatening oblivion of the language), as well as the potential for social cohesion in choral singing.

**Keywords:** *Sevdalinka, novokomponovana narodna muzika*, urban folk music

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## Introduction

The main motif of the Serbian team working on the project *Exploring the Tracks of Balkan Culture: Serbian–Turkish Connections in Music and Dance from Ottoman Period until Today (TRackeRS)* was to initiate a demystification of the ‘Ottoman’, ‘Turkish’ and ‘Eastern’ inherited influences in Serbian folk music, especially attributed to urban folk music genres. Another aim was to examine ethnographically contemporary field situation regarding Serbian–Turkish music and dance connections. The project *TRackeRS* addresses a wide period of asymmetrical influences in culture, albeit with limited sources available – covering the centuries starting from the Ottoman rule, but predominantly from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until today. Inspired by “post-Eurocentric historical thinking” (Strohm, 2018, p. XIII), we use available historical sources and also gather ethnographic primary sources in an attempt to establish a dialogue between two national ‘ethnomusicological schools’. Our aim is to write histories of direct relations of music cultures at the periphery of Europe, having in mind diachronic focuses on political circumstances such as late Ottoman rule, the independence of Serbia after the liberation, the monarchist Yugoslavia, socialist Yugoslavia, the 1990s wars in former Yugoslavia, and today’s status of ‘the diplomatic relations at the highest level in modern history’ between Serbia and Türkiye (MFA, 2021; Politika, 2022). In these periods there were different cultural contacts and each one of them can be a fruitful topic – starting from the curiosity for establishing mutual coexistence in the past in several regions, or cultural understanding today, which altogether resulted in the presence of available data which we endeavor to collect. At the same time, the lack of information could lead to questions which will remain unanswered, such as the oblivion of Ottoman heritage, on the one hand, and the assimilation of Slavic minorities’ cultures, on the other.

These relations are especially interesting if the problematization of Orientalism and Balkan studies context is applied<sup>1</sup>. The Balkans’ position of ‘Orient within Europe’ brought through various historical interpretations of the region’s geographical borders, political renaming (Southeastern Europe), and division (resulting in the establishment of the so-called Western Balkans), whose axis is related towards the previous Ottoman Empire and heritage and today embodied in Türkiye. Contemporary states in the Balkans are rooted in national renaissance paradigms, and their independencies were gained with immanent tendencies of national growth and neighboring conflicts. However, our idea was to search for commonalities in music and dance practices, according to the perspective that cultures in the Balkans have shared heritage and the necessity for international collaborative research<sup>2</sup>.

This article presents the results of initial short-term fieldwork, which was held in Istanbul in 2022, where we met immigrant communities from former Yugoslavia who, having lived in Türkiye for several decades, still cherish their traditions and nostalgically remember their homeland through two types of urban folk music related to Serbia (and former Yugoslavia) – *sevđalinka*, which for them evokes their Ottoman ancestry, and *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (Eng: newly-composed folk music), which evokes their Yugoslav reality from the time of their youth.

## The Setup of Collaborative Research in Istanbul

Although every ethnographic research is collaborative (in terms of direct interaction during the fieldwork), with this project we wanted to improve professional collaboration in our region and to research topics that are interesting to the two teams in the partnership, and also with an awareness that so far it had been impossible to research these topics without international cooperation. This project crosses national and language boundaries (although through communication in English) and implies an aim for scientific reciprocity. So far, through the project, we had mutual study visits, which included the external addition of three historians’ lectures from both sides who are experts in Ottoman–Serbian relations and written sources about culture, joint conference, as well as the plan for the publications (such as this special issue). Above all, we have bilateral ethnomusicological, musicological and ethnochoreological collaboration for research of primary sources about folk music and dance. The planned collaboration can be described as follows: “We might sum up collaborative ethnography as an approach to ethnography that deliberately and explicitly emphasizes collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, without veiling it – from project conceptualization to fieldwork and especially through the writing process. Collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops” (Lassiter, 2005, p. 16). Our realization of collaborative research in these politically sensitive circumstances included: the definition of common project goals, fieldwork facilitation by Turkish team members, with accompanied field expeditions supported by translations, consultations during data analysis, a team approach (among Serbian ethnomusicologists, ethnochoreologists, musicologists, as well

<sup>1</sup> Especially metaphorical interpretation of the area between the East and West: Bakić Hayden, 1995; Todorova, 1997; Bjelić and Savić, 2002 etc.

<sup>2</sup> Local ethnomusicological and musicological discourse about the Balkans produced important edited volumes (e.g., Peycheva & Rodel, 2008; Despić, Jovanović, & Lajić Mihajlović, 2011; Medić & Tomašević, 2015; Medić 2020; proceedings of ICTM SG for Southeastern Europe from 2008 onwards: cf. ICTM SEE, 2023), and even before that, the region has been an interesting topic for foreign researchers, and most of them are from the USA and the UK (e.g., Buchanan, 2007; Laušević, 2007; Bohlman & Petković, 2011; Samson, 2013).

as bilateral group teamwork, and we also formed bilateral micro teams after that). Toward the end of the project, we will develop a common shared database (with recorded material and literature), which will foster the production of individual research results.

In the first phase of this project, a four-member Serbian team (Dr. Katarina Tomašević, Dr. Ivana Medić, Dr. Zdravko Ranisavljević and Dr. Marija Dumnić Vilotijević as the Principal Researcher) visited Istanbul in May 2022. We were in search of the legacy of Serbian/Yugoslav immigrants, but we did not find it – the lack of tangible historical musical sources (scores and recordings) was the first obstacle. That is why we turned to ethnographic fieldwork with the associations. On that occasion, we did not focus on examining their minority ethnic self-identifications, hence we did not directly enquire whether they were of Slavic origin (although their country of origin and the language that they used strongly suggested that they were), or of Turkish origin (because, at the time of their emigration from Yugoslavia after World War II, Yugoslavia was also home to Muslims of other ethnicities, including Turks). Instead, we focused on music and dance performances as forms that are similar to the heritage that is known today in the area of former Yugoslavia, especially in Serbia.

### **Bosna–Sandžak Associations and Migrations to Istanbul**

As explained to us during the lecture by the historian Dr. Cengiz Çağla, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Serbs were members of a higher social stratum in Istanbul, which implied their Western worldview in this cosmopolitan city, their affiliation to the Greek Orthodox Church, and preservation of some customs (e.g., customs related to weddings and *slava* celebrations), but later on, they were affected by assimilation. Therefore, we focused on recent immigrants from the present-day southwestern Serbian region of the Raška District, who are of Muslim faith and do not self-identify as ethnic Serbs. During our short-term research, together with a three-member team from Türkiye (Dr. Abdullah Akat, Dr. Belma Oğul and Dr. Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin), we visited two main associations in Istanbul which serve as gathering places for immigrants and their descendants who originate from former Yugoslavia. Our fieldwork with the Pendik association was more rewarding during this visit because we had the opportunity to be present, to record their singing and dancing (audio and video), and finally to participate in one choir rehearsal. With both choirs' conductors (Selahattin Bilir from the Türkiye Bosnia–Sanjak Association, from the European side of Istanbul, and Reşat Sipahi from the Istanbul Anatolian Side Bosnia–Sanjak Social Assistance and Culture Association) I had separate semi-structured interviews in the Serbian language (S. Bilir, personal communication, May 16, 2022; R. Sipahi, personal communication, August 9, 2022). Both conductors were born in former Yugoslavia in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and came to Istanbul as children; they do not have any formal musical education, but Bilir has a career as a vocal soloist in Turkish art music (he described it to me as *turski sevdah* – Turkish music genre similar to *sevdalinka*). In addition to these two conductors, in both associations, we met leading persons and we were present at children's folk dance rehearsals (which was a research topic for ethnochoreologists from both teams).

Türkiye Bosnia–Sanjak Association (*Türkiye Bosna Sancak Derneği*) was the first established association, founded in 1989 in the Yıldırım neighborhood of Bayrampaşa District of Istanbul. It operates in the social and cultural fields and has the status of Associations Operating in the Public Interest by the Council of Ministers. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment, it took the word 'Türkiye' at the beginning of its title with the approval and decision of the Turkish Ministry of Internal Affairs. The association aims to ensure the cooperation and solidarity of its members in the socio-cultural field, in addition to finding jobs, shelter, and support in the field of education for the compatriots who have recently migrated to the Republic of Türkiye. The association has been actively involved in charity activities since the first day and carries out cultural activities. As was presented to us at this association, the first arrivals from the area of former Yugoslavia were in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There were several bigger waves of migrants and refugees, displaced into today's Türkiye: after the Congress of Berlin (1878), the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), World War I (1918), during the 1950s and 1960s when Yugoslav authorities tacitly supported the emigration of poverty-stricken Muslims to Türkiye via (North) Macedonia<sup>3</sup>, and finally during and after the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. The former two groups are today the majority among the population which originates from the area of former Yugoslavia.

<sup>3</sup> As Ejup Mušović claimed in his detailed research: "The emigration of Sandžak Muslims to Türkiye was intensive from 1953 to 1957 and from 1965 to 1971. In the beginning, Sandžak Muslims immigrated to Macedonia, where they stayed temporarily and continued to Türkiye because it was easier to get a release from citizenship there" (Mušović, 1979, p. 113). It should be explained that it was also the period when the so-called *gastarbeiters* emerged in Yugoslavia – namely, numerous citizens of Yugoslavia went abroad, especially to Western countries, with the idea to earn a certain amount of money that would help them to resolve existential issues in the homeland. Their staying was often long (even lifelong) and their second and third generations would be born in that country – nevertheless, the *gastarbeiters'* transition was never completed and they stayed "trapped" between two countries and cultures (Rašić, 2022, pp. 16–17). In the aforementioned periods, it was noticeable that low-qualified men were mostly going to foreign countries, and in 1963 there were official 'Instructions' about temporary employment of Yugoslav workers in Western Europe (Rašić, 2022, pp. 22–23).

The second association, the Istanbul Anatolian Side Bosnia–Sanjak Social Assistance and Culture Association (*İstanbul Anadolu Yakası Bosna–Sancak Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Kültür Derneği*) was founded in 1992. According to information from their TV program, the first Bosnian settlement in Pendik was established in 1956 (during our visit, we noticed that the entire neighborhood is marked with symbols of ‘the Balkans’ through the naming of restaurants, shops, and small business places after typical personal names and toponyms). Ejup Mušović visited immigrant communities in Istanbul and Bursa in 1968 and 1973 and gave illustrative observations about the hard beginnings of these communities in the new environment:

Muslims from Sandžak, who emigrated to Türkiye in the post-war period<sup>4</sup>, settled in the following cities: Istanbul, Bursa, Adapazarı and Izmir. Almost none of them settled in a Turkish village. Overall, they were poorly received there and experienced huge disappointments. [...] They formed special settlements on the outskirts of the mentioned cities: Kuçukoj, Pendik – in Istanbul, Budža – in Izmir, etc. They built houses there, with the help of loans that they obtained under very unfavorable conditions. [...] As soon as they built houses, men went to Western European countries to look for jobs. Women and children, even as young as twelve, were employed in private factories, working for twelve hours a day for low wages. [...] A large number of immigrant children remained out of school; the number of those who attended secondary schools is quite small, and those who studied can be counted on the fingers of one hand. There they took new surnames: Aksoy (bright genus), Yıldız (star), Demir (iron), Ak-Bayrak (bright flag), Sancaklı (Sandžaklije), etc. They had nothing in the Serbo-Croatian language: schools, press, cultural-artistic associations or anything else, so they were exposed to absolute Turkization. The life of the majority of Muslims who emigrated to Türkiye is difficult and arduous, but it is not worse and more difficult than the life they had in Sandžak at the time of emigration. (Mušović, 1979, p. 115)

Both associations are today important nodes for Slavic immigrants from Türkiye’s west. The Anatolian side association organizes many cultural activities and opens some courses such as folk dance, painting, chess, rug weaving, etc. They have a small library, conference hall, classrooms, wedding/performance hall, and lounge including a small ethnographic exhibition area. There are several important remembrance days for the association (such as Srebrenica Commemoration, 11<sup>th</sup> May Sanjak Flag Day, Islamic holidays, Çanakkale Martyrs Remembrance Day, and some other Turkish national days and festivals – based on the information available in their bulletins)<sup>5</sup>.

### Liminality between Ottoman and Yugoslav Lost Homelands

Members of these communities have complex identifications, and the main ones are: religious – they are Muslims, and migrational – they emphasize their origin and, to a lesser degree, their liminal position and its consequences. They are voluntarily gathered in associations that are named after and based on a legacy of ‘Bosna’ (part of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and ‘Sandžak’. The former refers to the Ottoman administrative district Sandžak of Novi Pazar, which existed from 1865 to 1912, when it was divided between Serbia and Montenegro after the end of Ottoman rule. ‘Sandžak’ is today used by Bosniaks (which is an ethnic category today, mostly declared in the state Bosnia and Herzegovina, defined by religion) as an unofficial synonym for the Raška District in Serbia. So, the prior homeland of members of these communities, even their citizenship in some cases, is usually in Serbia, Montenegro, or Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their Turkish identity is marked by their religion, names, use of language, and finally by today’s living place and citizenship. Except that, in the exhibited forms of expression of their cultural identity which were present during fieldwork (e.g., music, pictures, and costumes), there are obvious references to Ottoman legacy. As Belma Oğul wrote after her research of ‘Balkan communities’ in Istanbul, they “have common emotions constituted by their earlier social and political connections with the Ottoman State (Bosna and Herzegovina 1463–1878), later dispersed family members living both in Türkiye and Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia. In other words, they consider themselves as sharing the same ancestry. The fact that Islam and Turkishness are considered as equivalents in the Balkans gives the feeling of common consanguinity” (Oğul, 2019, p. 181). Their migration toward the East, which is close geographically, but above all to the perceived historical homeland, encouraged an interesting theoretical interpretation of Oğul: “Migrants have mixed and contradictory feelings about the old and new homeland since they are influenced by emotions, caused by the similarities and differences within both homelands; therefore, they may feel the belonging to more than one homeland. So, we can call this kind of mobility the ‘interhomeland migration’” (2019, p. 190).

The thing that attracted me the most in the given field situation was the openness of members of the associations with whom I had contact toward our Serbian–Turkish project, which actually evoked an understanding of their migration, but also revealed their essentially Yugoslav narrative in the present-day middle and older generations. Namely, during our meetings they often underlined the aspect of ‘togetherness’ through recalls of ‘our’ (*naše*, which avoids ethnical naming and carries the implication of understanding): ‘our homeland’ (despite the fact that Yugoslavia fell apart), ‘our

<sup>4</sup> Here is described post-World War II period.

<sup>5</sup> I cordially thank Prof. Dr. Abdullah Akat (from the State Conservatory of the Istanbul University, the Principal Investigator from the Turkish team at the project *TRackeRS*) for the general information about both societies and their activities, which were originally in the Turkish language.



ancestry' (despite historical ethnic and religious clashes), 'our language' (despite recent stratification and state-political renaming of some languages), 'our music', and 'our dance'. In addition, they recognized our professional, institutional and bilateral interest in common music and dance practices as very welcome. It should be mentioned that our choir hosts did not perceive our joint professional project in a neo-Ottoman-Empire light – their nostalgia was more restorative than reflective, to use Svetlana Boym's (2001) terminology.

In this situation, their Yugoslav narrative was essentially Yugonostalgic, although with implied significant deflections in terms of religion. This narrative is based on the idea of 'brotherhood and unity' and longing for a distant homeland, not on longing for a complex socialist past and (at the moment of research) without consumerist mythologizations of Yugoslavism which are present in various forms and levels in post-Yugoslav countries (more in Volčič, 2007; Velikonja, 2010). In terms of migration from socialist (non-aligned) Yugoslavia as 'neither-East-nor-West', this community is interesting because it migrated to the east, opposite of the majority of economic migrants of the time, although this time we did not focus on their Yugoslav memories.

### **Affective Potential of *Sevdalinka* Choirs**

The main activities of the associations which were in our focus are music and dance (more about the importance of choreographed dances of Yugoslav diaspora in Austria: Rašić, 2022), and they are organized similarly to 'cultural-artistic societies' (*kulturno-umetnička društva*), known all over former Yugoslavia, in order to make a cultural bridge to the homeland and preserve its memory and their identity from before their arrival to Istanbul. My focus on this occasion was on '*sevdalinka* choirs', which are present in both associations. This type of choir is known in other locations as well: in Serbia (in Novi Pazar), in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there is data in the literature about Sweden (Talam, 2019). These choirs sing in unison and have instrumental harmonic-rhythmical accompaniment (accordion, keyboard, melodic parts of violin and/or clarinet may be added, for example). Inspired by existing ethnomusicological literature about amateur activist choirs from the post-Yugoslav space (Hofman, 2020a), here we should point to the function of these choirs as social groups in the communities. According to Ana Hofman, choir singing has a special affective capability: "Collective singing and listening are able to affectively mobilize and even unify people with often different stances and opinions into one sonic collectivity. Choir members value the erasing of the boundaries between the singers and the audience as a special quality and purpose of their performances. In order to make the performance more inclusive they invite people to join in and interact with the listeners in between songs" (Hofman, 2020b, pp. 4–5).

During our visit on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the choir of the Pendik Association had a rehearsal. For example, among others, they performed the song *Harmoniko moja*, written and recorded by prominent Serbian accordionist Milutin Mića Stojanović in 1964. In comparison to the original version, this sad love song addressing the accordion is performed in double-rhythm in a slightly more vivid character, with body movements typical for participatory performance, to use Thomas Turino's term (2008) – swinging in the rhythm (in some upbeat examples accompanied with hands clapping). Also, this instrument is in the communities perceived as 'Serbian'. Namely, the accordion in Serbia enjoys a special popularity in folk music performance (both as a solo instrument and as accompaniment), and it had a great expansion after World War II in mass media. Gradually, the number of performers increased and new styles of playing emerged, with a special appreciation of virtuosity (more in Ivkov, 2016).

This choir was established in 2003 or 2004 by its conductor Sipahi and several other men who liked to sing *sevdalinka*. However, I noticed that it is changed today – the majority of singers are women, middle aged and older. This leads to several interesting points. As Sipahi said to me, the choir is a place for women to gather. This was similar to female members of cultural-artistic societies in Yugoslavia (according to Hofman, 2010). But at the same time, this gender and age structure is an obstacle for the conductor to make more serious steps – namely, they do not attend rehearsals regularly because of obligations at home. In contrast, in this choir men have the roles of instrumentalists and leaders. The purpose of this choir is participatory gathering in order to keep cultural contact with or evocation of the homeland, with a particular repertoire that implies knowledge of the language, and at the same time to embody the affective potential of nostalgia by collectivity and "high energy, passion and emotional and bodily investment (*naboj*)" (Hofman, 2020a, p. 97), to which I would add – entertainment and recreation.

The choir of the European-side association was established in 2018, but they paused their activity during COVID-19 restrictions. Their motivation is to travel and give concerts at festivals (presentational performances, in Turino's terminology) and they are satisfied with their successes in that activity thus far – by that time, they had performed five or six concerts. Bilir emphasized to me that he observes music as 'international', i.e., with a border-crossing capacity. As he explained, there were eight male and eighteen female members, and four members of the accompanying orchestra (two accordions, one violin, and one clarinet). So, this group was mixed in terms of the singers' gender.

The choirs consist of amateurs, with open membership, so their unison aesthetic can be interpreted as an additional tool to achieve social unity with music. It is interesting how conductors reflect on it. For Sipahi, it is a consequence of their limited capability for any complex intervention (also in terms of ornamentation), while for Bilir it is proof of the choir's good quality because it is harder to achieve a compact unison sound.

Both choirs have had rehearsals at the same time – every Tuesday, starting at 8 pm. The rehearsal of the Pendik Association is structured as singing of 20–30 songs in continuo (starting at 8 pm and going until 11 pm sometimes). However, at that moment they did not have a satisfying level of performance for festivals and they would like to improve their knowledge and motivation by better accordion playing and rejuvenation of the ensemble. The Bayrampaşa Association has a repertoire currently of around 30 songs and the conductor described them as the songs which both they and their audience like.

From the aspect of heritage preservation, it is interesting that transmission to the next generation will not be easy because their children and grandchildren speak Turkish (very few of them speak Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian languages). However, children are directed toward *folklor* (a dance training group, the particular one in Pendik was established in 1995 or 1996), where they are motivated to sustain their heritage through non-verbal methods, i.e., instrumental and dance practices. Dance repertoire is gathered around choreographies based on *kolo* (a very popular dance and representative ICH of Serbia, performed in various social gatherings and celebrations, based on interlinked dancers usually in a semi-circular line who are moving according to a particular steps-pattern of *kolo u tri*) and combinations of some basic steps motifs.

### The Repertoire of Urban Folk Music: *Sevdalinka* and Newly-Composed Folk Music

The repertoire of these associations is based on regional popular music which I refer to as ‘urban folk’ music when discussing traditions in Serbia (cf. Dumnić Vilotijević, 2018). Urban folk music synthesizes various local musical genres, it is widely accepted, practiced and transmitted within broader social strata, orally and by various media, and the most important performance context is in taverns. It is different from global popular music because it encompasses national practices that were immanent to urban environments in a wider diachronic continuum (its development has been traceable from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards). In examples from Serbia, I noticed general characteristics which are perceived as a local adaptation of both West European (temperament, instrumentation, harmonization, square forms) and Eastern influences (scales with augmented second hemiolic metro-rhythm, Turkish loanwords). Songs that these associations perform belong to two genres: *sevdalinka* and (in their terminology) *narodna*<sup>6</sup>.

The etymology of *sevdalinka* is from the Turkish language — *sevdah* in Serbian translation means “love, love longing, love exaltation” (Škaljić, 1966, p. 561), originally ‘black bile’, but it can be described as melancholic love, and *sevdalinka* is a song in that mood and generally about that theme. However, *sevdalinka* was very hard to define in 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnomusicology and there are two main directions in doing that: the first one regards it as music that originates from Bosnia and Herzegovina (this is advocated especially among Bosnian ethnomusicologists) and the second one as ornamented kitschy music of sad character (this reception was common before World War II). One fresh perspective should review what concrete influences existed and acknowledge fascination with the Orient among Serbian poets, embodied in lyrics about fatal love, beautiful and mysterious women and with the use of Turkish words, but also about *sevdalinka*'s dissemination by Belgrade-based publishing and broadcasting houses (more about Serbian roots of the genre in Tomić, 2017). In any case, I had the impression in this particular field that *sevdalinka* is perceived as a folk song typical for Bosniak communities (although it is not de facto limited to it). Conductors distinguished as valuable the interpretation style and recorded repertoire of Safet Isović (1936–2007), a famous male performer of *sevdalinka*.

<sup>6</sup> In one unofficial songbook in the Anatolian side association (made by a choir member) there were typed lyrics (basically in Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian languages, but in Turkish transliteration) of the following songs: *Ah, moj Aljo; Blago suncu i mjesecu; Crven fesić; Čudna jada od Mostara grada; Dani dugi, svaki ko godina; Karanfil se na put sprema; Karanfile, cvijeće moje; Kiša pada, trava raste; Oj, djevojko pod brdom; Sinoć ja i moja kona; Sve behara i sve cveta; Tamna noći, tamna li si; Volim, majko, siroticu; Trepeljka trepetala; Harmoniko moja; Moj zumbule; Moj dilbere; Oj, Safete, Sajo Sarajlijo; Oj, golube, moj golube; Jutros mi je ruža procvetala; Sejdefu majka buđaše; Sjela Hajra kraj bunara; Sanak me mori; Sjavna zvijezdo; Sve behara i sve cveta; U đul bašči kraj šimšira; U čaršiju poslala me nana; Je l ti žao što se rastajemo; Zvezda tjera mjeseca; Bulbul mi pjeva, ruža mi cvjeta; Hadžina Fata, izadi na vrata; Snijeg pade na behar na voće; Sarajčice, hajdemo; Zapjevala sojka ptica; U Stambolu na Bosforu; Proljeće na moje rame sljeće; Voli, voli srcem; Čudila se, aman, ja; Misli Mile da je meni žao; Oj, javore, javore; Mogu l, Hanko, noćiti; Ja sam čovjek od meraka; Svi mi kažu da moj dragi pije; Rosna livada, trava zelena; Moj dragane, što me zaboravljaš; Sudbina te meni dala; Ječam žela (bresanske devojke); Moj behare; Kahvu mi, draga, ispeci; U lijepom starom gradu Višegradu; Oj, golube, moj golube; Kakve Ajka crne oči ima; Mehmeda majka budila; Haj, došla Drina; Dani dugi, svaki ko godina; Prolazi jesen, na pragu je zima; Kad pogledam sa bedema; Bulbul mi pjeva, ruža mi cveta; Nad izvorom vrba se nadnijela; Mila majko, šalji me na vodu; Razbolje se srce moje; Put putuje Latif aga; Od izvora dva putića; Blago suncu i mjesecu; Dela Fato, dela zlato; Vihor ružu niz polje tjeraše; Bosno moja, divna, mila; Razbolje se sultan Sulejman; Anadolko; Šećer Mujo i bjesede tvoje; Platno bjeli Sarajka djevojka; Moja draga, moja mila; Kolika je u Prijedoru čaršija; Srdo moja, ne srđi se na me; Oj, djevojko pod brdom; Tamburalo momče uz tamburu; Stade se cvjeće rosom kititi; Sjela Hajra kraj bunara; Sviće, sviće rujna zora; Otkako sam sevdah svezio; Kaharli sam, večeral a nisam; Svi su ljudi isti; Kaži, Namko, otkud si; Gledaj me, draga; Kad odlaziš, sunce milo; Kad sam pošo, Cveto, u tuđinu; Sabah zora; Sarajevo, od sevdaha grade; Mnogo lijepih cura ima; Jahao sam konje, ašikovo, pio; Jedna reka u mom kraju; Kćeri moja. Turkish songs were: *Samanyolu, İzmirin daglarında*.*

The members of the associations equally and eagerly perform *narodne pjesme* (folk songs) which belong to the genre of so-called ‘newly-composed folk music’ i.e., *estrada* songs written in a folk-style<sup>7</sup>. It is usually repertoire from the 1960s–1980s, but through the interviews, it was obvious that members of the Balkan associations and their offspring also listen to more recent popular folk music, especially from Serbia. Although this genre of music is not exclusively Serbian (neither in terms of the ethnicity of its authors and performers, nor the location of the recording houses, not to mention that it is popular all over the Western Balkans and its diaspora), they referred to it as ‘Serbian’, especially if the songs are in a steady even metro-rhythm and accompanied by accordion. The findings of Ljerka Vidić Rasmussen (2002) should also be mentioned here because she has distinguished three characteristic ‘styles’ within this genre: Serbian, Bosnian and Romani (the last one was not noted during this fieldwork). These songs’ “lyrics tended to be realistic representations of existentialist and romantic sentiments that thrived on the condition of emotional unfulfillment, typically unrequited love” (Vidić Rasmussen, 2002, p. XVIII), and their main function is entertainment. NCFM actually owes its existence to one more type of migrants – those who came mainly because of jobs from the villages to the cities. The ‘Easternness’ of this genre was explained in two ways: the majority of the audience was in the southeast of the former Yugoslav federation (the republics of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia) and the performance itself was colored by an ‘orientalist’ singing style (Vidić Rasmussen, 2002, p. XIX). The conductors of the choirs pointed out famous singers of the genre: Šaban Šaulić, Dragana Mirković, Miroslav Ilić. What I found to be especially interesting is the Yugonostalgic potential of NCFM in the Istanbul context in addition to the usual description of e.g., YU rock or other popular music genres related to *zabavna muzika* (entertainment/light music)<sup>8</sup>. Actually, in diaspora communities, popular folk music has huge importance, from *turbofolk* up to today’s genre of *trepfolk*, which is basically oriented toward the ‘Balkan’ market, i.e. former Yugoslavia and its diaspora (usually in the West). Although ethnomusicologists often regard ‘newly-composed’ folk music and its derivatives as worthless and kitsch, this type of popular music apparently has become a non-ignorable Serbian export, especially NCFM.

## Conclusion

With the *TRackeRS* project, we aim to demystify ‘Ottoman influences’ in Serbian music, but also to document elements of Southern Slavic music and dance in Türkiye (most obvious in the language), which has survived cultural assimilation until today. In the last process, the individual memories of music and displacement should be examined in more detail, in order to better understand the intersection of ethnic identities in music and dance in Istanbul’s Balkan associations. Special attention will also be devoted to collaborative research of Romani musicians’ communities both in Serbia and in Türkiye because they represent another musical bridge between today’s national cultures. If the music and dance of ‘Balkan’ associations are representing liminality between Ottoman and Yugoslav legacies, Romani music and dance practices would be read in the key of cultural mobility.

This research was the first opportunity to observe the music and dance of Yugoslav immigrant communities in Istanbul in the light of mutual influences of Türkiye and Serbia. After doing preliminary fieldwork with the immigrant communities in both the European and Anatolian parts of Istanbul, the importance of *sevdalinka* choirs’ effort to express and preserve their pre-immigration identities with music and dance should be emphasized. It is marked with nostalgia for a distant homeland, historical Ottoman ancestry, and concrete Yugoslav origin. Their choral and *folklor* (i.e. dance) gatherings contribute significantly to the social cohesion of immigrant communities, as well as to the safeguarding of sung language and bodily-dance patterns, especially to the successor generation. The genres of *sevdalinka* and *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (NCFM), despite the fact that they are perceived with ethnical demarcations (the former regarded as ‘Bosnian’, the latter as ‘Serbian’), demonstrated the potential of crossing boundaries and coexistence. This confirms that urban folk music can be observed in the light of joint regional practice and that it requires the development of regional research in the Balkans.

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<sup>7</sup> This interpretation of the term ‘folk’ is the opposite of the usual ethnomusicological meaning in local ethnomusicologies, which in that context implies rural folk music of assumed archaic origin.

<sup>8</sup> See also Petrov, 2016, where the reconciliation and musicians’ border crossing in concerts in the post-Yugoslav space is described.

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