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Transformation of Ilahiya and Qasida During the National Revival of Bosniaks: From the Expression of Piety to the Bosniak National Song

Mustafa Krupalija¹

Abstract

Although very complicated, the relationship between religion and music is often the subject of very close complementarity. Such a close encounter is noticeable in the life of religious Sufis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who for centuries used the ilahiya and qasida as an expression and reflection of their piety. In this paper, we will try to define the socio-political context in which the ilahiya and qasida, as an expression of piety, experienced a transformation into a song of national character. This period was the 1990s when ilahiyas and qasidas served Bosniaks not only as an important differentiating religious basis but also as an important element in the national revival and the construction of their national identity. As a basis for our claims, we will analyze the repertoire of ilahiyas and qasidas from before the 1990s, as well as ilahiyas and qasidas which were composed and published during the 1990s. As such, they have also gotten the role of war songs, combat songs of vigorous emotional intensity, with a Bosniak as the central theme, who is presented as a devout believer and a sincere Muslim.

Keywords: Ilahiya, Qasida, Bosniak, National revival, National song.

¹ Dr., Professional Associate, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, International University of Sarajevo, Orcid: 0000-0002-1555-6840, E-mail: mkrupalija@ius.edu.ba

Introduction

Society can be said to be woven from a series of interconnected and interdependent social institutions and networked relationships. Politics, economics, and religion, as some of the most influential and advanced social institutions, have a direct impact on the development of each social institution separately. These social institutions also have an immeasurably important role in the development of every aspect of art, whether they define, shape or completely dispute it (Ulusoy, 2005). Therefore, the development of musical art cannot be observed and researched independently of the current socio-political context, primarily because every major event in the history of humanity has left, almost without exception, some trace in the field of art.

The mutual relationship between religion as a social institution, and music, as an essential expression of art, can be viewed from several angles. Some researchers believe that music originated together with the first religious rituals. In their opinion, religious rituals have been accompanied by melodic verses from the earliest times as an expression of devotion and faith in supernatural beings. In some ancient cultures, music was considered a gift from God, which strengthens the thesis about the ancient roots of music as an expression of holiness and piety (Uçan, 1996). In any case, the historical roots of the interconnectedness of religion and music are a topic that goes beyond the intentions and scope of our research, which is why we will be satisfied with the statement that these roots are often linked to the very beginnings of human history.

The issue of music is such a complex issue that it is not possible to talk about a clearly defined position of any religion when it comes to music. For example, while some Islamic philosophers considered music a separate science, others treated it as a religiously strictly prohibited activity. Sufis and Sufi orders had the mildest attitude and the greatest interest in music in the history of Islam. In the Sufi ranks, music is often considered one of the ways to elevate the believer and bring him closer to God (Göher, 2009).

The subject of our research is the musical form that has been one of the primary forms of expression of the piety of Sufi orders in Bosnia and Herzegovina for many centuries. In the recent period, this musical form has undergone a great transformation and with a radical change in the socio-political context of the environment in which it has survived; it has received a new note. In this paper, we will look at the mentioned context and try to establish how the new situation has paved the way for understanding *ilahiyas* and *qasidas* as Bosniak national songs.

Ilahiya and qasida as an expression of the piety of Bosnian Sufis

The emergence and development of ilahiya in Bosnia and Herzegovina are closely linked to the position and role of Sufi orders during the Ottoman Empire. Sufi orders played a significant role in the rise of Islam, especially in the first centuries of Ottoman rule. As a Sufi gathering place and a place of ritual ceremonies, tekke² first performed the role of an educational institution. However, as the popularity of madrasas³ grew and, with the development of the school system, the role of tekkes in Sufis' social and religious life has changed and become a place of gathering, spiritual education, and ritual ceremonies.

Until recently, ilahiya was exclusively related to the area of the tekke, while its themes were completely harmonized with the principles of particular order activity. Through its verses, the writer behind the text of the ilahiya reflected his spiritual and general education, a degree in the spiritual journey, and the level of his intimacy with God (Kovač, 2013, p. 189). It was often possible to find more than just praise to God in the ilahiya; they expressed various features of practical instructions, values of Islamic beliefs and obligations, the need for constant search for God's mercy, etc. As the ilahiya had an educational note, it is also not uncommon for them to be called *nasihat* (advice).

Although ilahiya was a characteristic of Sufi tekkes throughout the Muslim world, different social contexts enabled the development of different indigenous versions. In the second half of the 15th century, literary achievements of *alhamijado* and *divan* literature appeared in Bosnia, and oral-literary genres that emerged from the intertwining of oriental and old Bosnian. *Sevdalinka*⁴ and ilahiya can be cited as ideal examples of these achievements. At the level of the text, the choice of themes is particularly recognizable, while at the level of the musical background and performance techniques, a subtle layer of *sevdalinka* sensibility was recognized. Indigenous tekke ilahiya of Bosniaks experienced an expansion in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. The most important order sheiks of this period are Abdulwahab Ilhami, Abdurrahman Sirri, and Muhammad Mejli. Most of the tekke ilahiyas that have survived to this day actually come from these three sheiks (Šemsović, 2019).

² Tekke is an Islamic institution where Sufis gather, stay and perform religious ceremonies. They appeared in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the arrival of Islam in the 15th century, although some were built even before the arrival of the Ottomans, such as the Mevlevi tekke built by Isa-beg Ishakovic in 1461.

³ A religious Islamic school. Gazi Husrev-bey's madrasa is the first educational institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is one of those few in the world that has continually been operative for 470 years. It was established in 1573.

⁴ *Sevdalinka* (also known as *Sevdah*) is a traditional genre of folk music from Bosnia and Herzegovina. This form of music is an integral part of Bosniak culture but is also spread across the ex-Yugoslav region.

The development of alhamijado literature⁵ in Bosnia and Herzegovina enabled the development of qasidas as a different type of song. Unlike the ilahiyas, which were most often focused on God and the religious aspect, the qasidas additionally also reflected the characteristics of the social and political environment in which they originated. Over time, the ilahiyas and qasidas became inseparable in publications, which enabled the difference between them to be often blurred in their everyday usage. We believe that this inseparability and close connection have contributed to a more flexible understanding of the subject of the ilahiya, which will be clearly and unambiguously noticed through the analysis of the texts of some of the newer ilahiyas.

With the arrival of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy in 1878 and the new system of education, ilahiyas written in the Ottoman language lost their significance. The ilahiyas written in the Bosnian language gradually prevailed, and with the banning of tekkes in the middle of the 20th century, many ilahiyas completely disappeared from use. During the socialist rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina, song and music completely acquired a new role, which is why we think it is very useful to briefly look at the socio-political context of this period, primarily because it preceded the period in which ilahiya was re-popularized and strongly affirmed.

From the very beginning of the socialist rule, music has been recognized as a very useful and functional ideological tool. Revolutionary songs, works of cultural and artistic ensembles, and popular music are the most widespread types of musical activity with which the new government constantly popularized and maintained the survival of atheist-socialist ideology in public space. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that religious music, and thus religion, lost its popularity after the Second World War and was reduced to closed spaces and households, far from the public eye and the supervision of the communist authorities. The status of religious music in public is perhaps best illustrated by the increasingly frequent criticism of turbo-folk music⁶, which in its text did not contain religious connotations but because of the melody, it was under attack as an oriental art that threatens "Yugoslav brotherhood and unity" (Ceribašić, et al., 2008, p. 40).

The socio-political context of the re-popularization of ilahiyas and qasidas

In the period of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, religious identities and religion from "private-legal" managed to gain "public" status and become one of the prominent social institutions and

⁵ Alhamijado literature is literature in the Bosnian language written in Arabic letters "arebica".

⁶ Turbo-folk (sometimes referred as pop-folk or popular folk) is subgenre of contemporary pop music with its origins in Serbia, that initially developed during the 1980s and 1990s, with similar music styles in Bulgaria, Romania and Albania.

identity bases in the coming turbulent period. Ivan Cvitković cites the lack of security closely related to the disintegration of the Yugoslav identity, increased unemployment, and the resulting moral crisis as the main reasons for the development of these events. Religion has been deprivatized in this context, while piety has become an integral part of elegance. Religions and religious representatives have thus turned to the struggle for national rights, and the problem of piety and religion increasingly became problematized in the public and media (Cvitković, 2006, p. 92). The role of religion in the early 1990s was considered so important by some researchers that they viewed emerging conflicts and misunderstandings solely through the prism of interreligious misunderstandings.⁷

Markešić explores the close connection between religion and the nation in this period through "sacralization of the nation" and "nationalization of religion". The term "sacralization of the nation" implies the transfer of functions and expressive forms of religion to the nation, creating a structural analogy between the modern nation and religion. In that case, national leaders were given religious legitimacy and had the right to determine which religious officials were sufficiently national and which were not. On the other hand, the "nationalization of religion" indicates the process of adjustment and harmonization during which the religious man, in his opinion and action, takes over the value system of the nation (Markešić, 2010, pp. 534-535). These two terms indeed indicate the interdependence of religion and nation in the construction of social identities of all peoples after the breakup of Yugoslavia, including Bosniaks and their attitude towards Islam.

The role of religion in the national awakening of Bosniaks can be cited as one of the main reasons why in the cultural revival, the *ilahiya* had much greater potential than *sevdalinka*. Although *sevdalinka* was clearly and unequivocally mentioned and treated as a unique national value of Bosniaks as early as 1991,⁸ due to its prominent territorial and secular character, it was unable to meet religious needs in the field of art in these new times. *Sevdalinka* had its own special place during the socialist period, in which, despite certain pressures on its oriental note (Halilbegović, 2000, pp. 17-18), it could not represent a radical change in the national awakening of Bosniaks. In addition, its subtlety and elegiac nature did not allow for functional use, especially when it comes to the political aspect of the national awakening of Bosniaks. On the other hand, the *ilahiya* was much more compatible and appropriate with the transition of

⁷ See more, Jevtić M., "Uloga religije u identitetu južnoslovenskih nacija". Beograd: *Godišnjak Fakulteta Političkih Nauka (1)*.

⁸ See more, Jahić Dž., (1991). *Jezič Bosanskih Muslimana*. Sarajevo: Biblioteka Ključanin, 61-74.

religion from "private" to "public", and as such, it underwent a transformation in accordance with the main characteristics of the national revival of Bosniaks.

The expansion in the popularity of ilahiya and its functionality during large-scale conflicts can be understood through Coser's theory of the functionality of conflict in the cultural unification of peoples. Coser's approach can be summarized in four functions of conflict: conflicts have a unifying role in the narrower circles of society in which broader integrity and unity are disrupted; conflict with one side enables the formation of a broader consensus on the other side, and the affirmation of closeness in hitherto non-existent coalitions; conflict offers an opportunity for affirmation until then on the margins of muted ideas and individuals; conflict allows for forms of communication that have been neglected until then, and it offers clear frameworks by which a hostile position can be established (Ritzer, 2011, p. 130).

If these assumptions are applied to the national revival of Bosniaks on the example of ilahiyas and qasidas, the following conclusions can be reached: Even before the breakup of Yugoslavia, ilahiya began to take place as one of the unifying cultural elements of Bosniaks. With the introduction of a multi-party system and after the establishment of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), as the most important Bosniak political party, ilahiya became an inevitable aspect of pre-election and post-election rallies and gatherings (Laušević, 1996, p. 128). In this way, ilahija was given the opportunity to be one of the cultural elements that enabled a stronger mutual self-identification of Bosniaks during the conflict. The ilahiyas also, because of their religious note, made it possible to foster a sense of closeness to other Muslim nations. This aspect was especially important during the war because the door was opened for closer cooperation with Muslim countries that had a certain role at the international level. Until then, the suppressed ilahiya, from the margins, managed to reach the very center of the cultural life of Bosniaks. The sense of belonging to Islam also contributed to a clearer distinction from Serbs and Croats, who did not share the ilahiya as their cultural value, but because of that Bosniaks found in it a strong enough symbolism of their national identity.

Ilahiyas and qasidas as Bosniak national songs

After a brief presentation of the socio-political context in which the ilahiya underwent a transformation, it is clear that the ilahiya gained a significance and role that it did not have or could not have had in the previous period. Ilahiya was an element of a culture whose role was almost completely marginalized during the socialist regime. When the first cassette of ilahiyas

and qasidas appeared in 1988, it failed to attract any significant attention. Only two years later, the same cassette was reissued in audio and video format and then managed to gain great popularity and great interest among the Bosniak people. The choir of the Gazi Husrev-beg Madrasa, the publisher of that cassette, shortly afterward began participating in concerts throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. These concerts were often organized in stadiums, while the transport of believers can be said to have been organized with the support of Bosniak political and religious representatives (Laušević, 1996, p. 125).

An insight into the repertoire of ilahiyas and qasidas from that period makes it clear that most of the songs are original versions from Arabic and Turkish languages, while those in Bosnian are translated versions from Arabic or Turkish.⁹ Indeed, the ilahiyas and qasidas in Turkish and Arabic contributed to an even more pronounced symbolic rapprochement of Bosniaks with Islam and a clearer distancing and definition of their uniqueness from Serbs and Croats, who did not share the same religious affiliation. However, the reproduction and consumption of ilahiyas and qasidas did not stop emphasizing Bosniaks' religious affiliation. On the contrary, in the 1990s, they were discovered as a space where national affiliation could be even more clearly underlined. Drawing attention to the role of music in the construction of national identities, Frith points to its unique emotional intensity through which it not only represents, but also participates in the creation of separate entities (Frith, 1996, p. 273).

Music, in its form and efficiency, has the potential of subjective but also objective, as well as an individual and collective character when it comes to its role in social movements. Through ritualized performance and the memory it enhances, it transcends the boundaries of individual self-identification and binds the individual into a much broader framework of collective consciousness (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998, p. 163). It was the ilahiya, which had previously been reduced to the expression of individual piety, that became one of the main expressions of national consciousness in the turbulent period. Its significance is even greater given that music not only contributes to the creation of collective identity with its functionality but, as an integrated component in unfolding performance, creates a space in which participants can actively participate in creating new meanings (Johnston, 2009, p. 17). These meanings can potentially be used as a "mobilizing tradition", creating a sense of historical connection between current and earlier times and leaving vivid memories for future generations (Eyerman and

⁹ For a list of the mentioned ilahiyas; Discogs. (2022, July, 01). <https://www.discogs.com/release/6963383-U%C4%8Denici-I-U%C4%8Denice-Gazi-Husrevbegove-Medrese-Sarajevo-Ilahije-I-Kaside-U-Povodu-450-Godina-Gazi-Hus>

Jamison, 1998, p. 45). In the case of Bosnian ilahiyas, music was given a clear outline of the national revival that lasted among the Bosniak people during the 1990s.

The national character of ilahiyas and qasidas in the Bosnian language can be clearly seen from analyzes of collections published as early as the late 1990s. These collections, almost without exception, united the ilahiyas and the qasidas into one work, which contributed to the shifting of thematic boundaries and the legitimization of the ilahiya as a song that, in addition to devotion to God, also deals with secular themes. Religious terminology has been retained; however, in addition to expressions of love and devotion to God, love and devotion to the homeland has become an almost indispensable theme of the newly composed ilahiyas.

The abovementioned statement can be clearly noticed in the collection of ilahiyas and qasidas published in 1998. In the foreword to the collection, the collector of ilahiyas notes that ilahiyas and qasidas are "images of the hearts and souls of Bosniaks" and as such, give an accurate picture of their homeland (Džinić, 1998, p. 5). Most of the ilahiyas from the abovementioned collection can be characterized as dervish or Sufi songs. The collector of the ilahiyas collected a large number of ilahiyas that were recited and sang throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in one book. What was new and not the case before the 1990s was the presence of dozens of ilahiyas and qasidas about Bosnia and Bosniaks.

The ilahiyas and qasidas in which Bosnia is mentioned can be divided into several thematic units. The most numerous are those in which the fighting spirit of the Bosnian soldier is praised, and his loyalty to the homeland and religion is raised. That is how Bosnia is called the mother who is kept safe in the trench (Džinić, 1998, p. 43), the fight for her flows through the veins of her fighters (Džinić, 1998, p. 56), and their blood is gladly given for her (Džinić, 1998, p. 61 and 75). The blood of martyrs is mentioned as a guarantee of Bosnia's eternal survival (Džinić, 1998, p. 123), and it is claimed that it is worth dying for (Džinić, 1998, p. 168). Bosnia is also compared to a prayer rug (Džinić, 1998, p. 124), while its rivers and cities are compared to various parts of paradise (Džinić, 1998, p. 33). The Bosnian soldier is extolled in the ilahiyas and qasidas as brave (Džinić, 1998, p. 103) and pious (Džinić, 1998, p. 151), while the Bosnian army is a lush river in front of which enemies kneel in fear (Džinić, 1998, p. 57). The struggle for Bosnia is equated with the battle in the name of God (Džinić, 1998, p. 104), and its martyrs are said to have laid the foundations of the homeland (Džinić, 1998, p. 119). It should come as no surprise that the most common themes of newly composed ilahiyas and qasidas are related to fighting and willingness to sacrifice on behalf of the homeland, primarily because the 1990s were the scene of great conflicts and aggression in which the survival of Bosnia and Bosniaks

was often questioned. It is evident that ilahiyas and qasidas also served as a special kind of motivationally proper and functional battle and war songs.

In this context, the second most common topic can be mentioned, and that is the suffering and pain that Bosniaks go through. In the texts of the ilahiyas and qasidas, God is being prayed for help for the Muslims in Bosnia (Džinić, 1998, p. 50), Bosnia is wounded (Džinić, 1998, p. 77), her children are mourning (Džinić, 1998, p. 73) and her helpless groans in agony (Džinić, 1998, p. 131). In these cases, we see the ilahiya and qasida as an expression of compassion for their people, in which the pain of the individual is consistently portrayed and allows for an even stronger attachment to a nation that is openly threatened with extinction. The third theme of these ilahiyas and qasidas is the religious devotion and piety of the Bosnian people (Džinić, 1998, p. 56). That is why God protects Bosnia (Džinić, 1998, p. 11), why Muslims will stay in it forever (Džinić, 1998, p. 53), and why its children will drink from the rivers and streams of Paradise (Džinić, 1998, p. 127). The symbiosis of religious and national is most clearly seen in these examples, in which the ilahiyas and qasidas reflect its characteristics as a still surviving expression of piety but now of an already prominent and established nation.

Conclusion

From the earliest period of Ottoman rule, the Sufi orders had a noticeable presence and activity on the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. In tekkes, as the central gathering places of dervishes, the ilahiyas were present as an expression of piety, through which, in addition to praising God, various practical instructions, values of religious beliefs, and obligations, as well as the constant search for God's grace were expressed. It can be argued that over the centuries, the ilahiya in Bosnia and Herzegovina acquired unique characteristics that made it characteristic of Bosnian Muslims and that distinguished it from ilahiyas recited in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. In addition to the ilahiya, the qasidas were a different expression of piety through song; however, in addition to the religious aspect, the characteristics of the social and political environment were much more pronounced.

The establishment of the socialist administration and its ideological form in the public life of Bosnia and Herzegovina directly influenced the change in the position of religious music. The ilahiyas and qasidas were completely marginalized and, as such, were reduced to closed spaces and households, away from the public eye and the supervision of the communist government. However, the position and role of the ilahiyas changed radically even before the breakup of

socialist Yugoslavia. Religion and religious identities became one of the main cultural elements in the national revival of Bosniaks, which paved the way for the re-popularization of religion. The ilahiyas also, because of their religious note, made it possible to foster a sense of closeness to other Muslim nations. This aspect was especially important during the war because the door was opened for closer cooperation with Muslim countries that had a certain role at the international level. Until then, the suppressed ilahiya, from the margins, managed to reach the very center of the cultural life of Bosniaks. The sense of belonging to Islam also contributed to a clearer distinction from Serbs and Croats, who did not share the ilahiya as their cultural value, but because of that Bosniaks found in it a strong enough symbolism of their national identity.

During this transformation, ilahiya did not remain only at the level of a religious song, which enabled Bosniaks to differentiate more clearly through their religious affiliation. It became an indispensable companion in publications with qasidas, which allowed her flexibility in choosing topics and, through newly composed collections, to reflect on the current socio-political context. Thus, as one of the almost indispensable themes in these collections, Bosnia and Bosniaks took their place. In this way, ilahiyas and qasidas became national Bosniak songs, in which love for the homeland is openly expressed and in which the Bosnian soldier rises as a brave and pious soldier. On the other hand, the pain and suffering of the Bosniak people in the midst of the war are also vividly reflected, which enabled even stronger emotional attachment among Bosniaks and their self-identification as a single nation. The ilahiya, together with the qasida, in this way, stand out as war, combat song of strong emotional intensity, in which the Bosniak is portrayed as a devout believer and a sincere Muslim.

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