

CURRENT SITUATION OF TRADITIONAL COSTUMES IN KOSOVO

Diba Celina Baymak
Independent Researcher, Prizren
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Abstract: Culture is the totality of material and spiritual values that nations have built over centuries and passed on from generation to generation. The language characteristics, religious beliefs, perspectives on art and habits in daily life of each nation are integral parts of this cultural structure. Clothing also appears as a concrete indicator of this cultural structure. In this study, we examine the clothing cultures of different nations and how these cultures are preserved and transferred to the future, especially through the example of Kosovo.

Kosovo, as geographic region with a rich cultural history and where various ethnic groups live together, constitutes an important example in terms of protecting and sustaining traditional clothing. In this study, in the light of the data obtained as a result of field research in various regions of Kosovo and interviews with local people, we aimed to reveal how traditional clothes are preserved, to what extent they are preserved and how this cultural heritage is transferred to future generations.

In addition to evaluating intercultural interaction in terms of clothing, investigating the effects of cultural change resulting from globalization on dressing culture, there is also the intention to understand how much we witness the traces of the past in today's fashion of traditional clothing, and how devotedly is there the approach to the subject.

While investigating the current situation of traditional costumes in Kosovo, it would be appropriate to focus on two important main headings. The first is the existence of museums and exhibitions, and the second is the clothes worn by cultural and arts associations in performances and concerts.

This research emphasizes the importance of preserving and keeping alive the traditional clothing cultures of all nations living in Kosovo. It aims to shed light on what needs to be done to ensure that this cultural heritage, extending from past to present, is not lost in the rapidly changing balances of the modern world and can be safely transferred to the future.

Keywords: traditional clothing, cultural heritage, Kosovo, ethnic identity, folk costumes

Introduction

Clothing is no longer just an object interpreted as an artifact from ancient times; it now serves as a window into our modern society. It is crucial to examine how popular clothing is influenced by commercialization, its role in tourism, and its impact on gender dynamics. Culture is the whole of the material and spiritual values that nations have built over centuries and whose continuity is maintained by being transferred

from generation to generation. Factors such as language, religion, and art, significantly shape a nation's identity, forming the backbone of its cultural heritage. Culture has neither fully completed its formation phase nor it is a concept that is coming to an end. It's a living entity that adapts and evolves alongside the people who embody it, ensuring its relevance and vitality for future generations (Tezcan 1983: 263).

The dynamic nature of cultural values allows for their continuity, yet it also necessitates vigilant protection, observance, and scrutiny. Traditional clothing culture plays a pivotal role as a channel between past traditions and future generations. Traditional clothing culture products have also been affected by the negative effects of the developments of the modern age. Neglecting the preservation of these cultural treasures damages the history of the nations, undermining their rich heritage (Türkoğlu 2002: 22).

This article documents the exploration of various regions in Kosovo, compiling firsthand information from different localities. By employing interviews as the primary research method during fieldwork, we were engaged with cultural and artistic associations across Kosovo, by seeking insights from individuals familiar with the preservation and integrity of traditional folk costumes. Additionally, we investigated the extent to which local and regional governmental institutions or organizations are involved in safeguarding this cultural heritage. Through these efforts, this paper should contribute to the preservation and transmission of Kosovo's clothing tradition to future generations to some degree.

A Short History of Kosovo

Since ancient times, Kosovo has been a region where many civilizations have thrived as settlements. It came under the dominion of the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire, resulting in diversity within the region's cultural structure. This diversity is also reflected in the architecture of the cities, with many old churches and mosques, baths, and historical buildings present.

Kosovo has a multiethnic structure. It is a place where people who have embraced different religions and belong to various religious groups – such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and various sects – can equally practice their beliefs. With this feature, religious life in Kosovo is similar to the one in Bosnia, North Macedonia and Albania.

Kosovo, which was incorporated into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the First Balkan War, remained within the borders of Serbia after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1992. However, following the Kosovo Operation conducted by NATO in 1999, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. With negotiations regarding Kosovo's status reaching a deadlock between the United States, the EU, Serbia, and Russia, Kosovo declared its independence on February 17, 2008. Today, in Kosovo, with a

population of 2 million, live Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Bosniaks, Roma, and Gorani.

Current Situation of Traditional Costumes in Kosovo Society

Individuals and communities with diverse cultures living in Kosovo have encountered a rich and colorful treasure, yet sufficient care and attention have not been given to protection and ownership. Due to material constraints and the pressure of a corrupted popular culture, it is somehow destined to lose existing richness over time. One of the factors influencing the clothing culture of societies is their long-held beliefs and traditions, which have evolved through interaction with other cultures over centuries.

People have been in constant contact with each other due to migrations, trade relations, and invasions, engaging in cultural exchange. It is possible to say that while some geographical and moral reasons led to restrictions in belief systems, these limitations also manifested in clothing cultures, with certain clothing habits being limited to specific regions, while others spread to other societies. For example, in Kosovo, where there is a multi-ethnic population, the motifs used in clothing as well as in carpets and fabrics generally reflect living or inanimate objects found in nature. Dependence on nature due to living conditions and the reflection of this in their belief systems, as well as their devotion for nature and its beings, have resulted in the incorporation of these elements into garments and motifs.

The current situation regarding the traditional attire of the ethnic groups and communities in Kosovo is not very promising, as this research indicates. However, recent two significant projects demonstrate that there is optimism about this issue.

The first project, aiming to document the folk costumes of Kosovo, involves three anthropologists named Arbnora Kolgjera-Rexhaj, Miridone Sylaj, and Rilinda Gjonbalaj, under the supervision of Arsim Canolli from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Prishtinë / Priština. Researchers state that the materials discovered in dowry chests, preserved for nearly a century, in various regions of Kosovo are quite intriguing and in need for preservation. With a six-month-long fieldwork, this team drew attention to traditional folk costumes through a project delving into the depths of Kosovo's spiritual and material heritage. Through their research, they successfully brought to light the stories and symbols hidden beneath the fabrics of these garments, which hold unquestionable cultural significance in shaping the country's identity. In recent months, the team, which embarked on fieldwork, divided the municipalities and villages among the three researchers, conducting separate and joint interviews and meticulously photographing each garment they encountered. While the primary focus was on families and their inheritance clothing, in some cases where they struggled to find items from family collections, they conducted research in museums and private collections to complete missing pieces.

The data indicates that there are 1.745 traditional garments found in Kosovo. Searches were conducted in 7 regions, 53 villages and cities, 5 communities, 12 private collections, and numerous public museums. Amidst countless visits, the intensive work resulted in numerous photographs. Representing the volume of this documentary effort, 7.000 photographs emerged, and according to researchers, concrete plans were considered to materialize this research through a catalogue (“Folk Costumes of Kosovo” Catalog – Arbnora Kolgjeraj-Rexhaj, Miridône Syla and Rilinda Gjonbalaj).

In the 1999 Kosovo war, a significant number of garments, especially in villages, were damaged. However, it was discovered that even after the war, many families disposed of them, considering them insignificant. Another shortcoming was the accurate identification of garments in private and museum collections; there was limited information available, making it difficult to understand the historical context and other details of the garments.

Another aspect of the researchers’ work was undoubtedly the inclusion of other communities living in Kosovo, not just Albanians. Thanks to their efforts, they managed to document the folk costumes of Croatian, Bosnians, Serbian, Turks and Gorani communities, aiming to enrich this aspect of the project by including other communities living in Kosovo.

In the second significant project, initiated by the “Doğru Yol” Turkish Culture and Art association, a series of activities were launched in Prizren to develop and preserve Turkish folklore and traditional costumes. With the support of Samir Hoxha, the director of the Regional Centre of Cultural Heritage in the Prizren Region, efforts are being made to register cultural heritage in accordance with Regulation 11/2022, which pertains to the protection, inventory, and selection process of cultural heritage. Ethnologists and officials have begun documenting the history, stories, folk costumes, customs, and traditions of Turkish folk dances in Prizren, utilising the rich information provided by representatives of the associations (Hürriyet Newspaper – May 2023).



Pic. 1: Turkish Culture and Art association “Doğru Yol”

Preservation of Cultural and Art Associations and Traditional Costumes in Kosovo

In Kosovo, as a multicultural country, the role of associations is undoubtedly significant in the struggle of the peoples and communities that constitute its rich cultural heritage. In fact, associations serve as a vibrant bridge extending from the past to the future. In these lands, the associations play a role in preserving and nurturing the traditional attire of the living communities. Over a period of more than 70 years, the prominent cultural and art associations in Kosovo, notably the “Shota” Culture and Art association, and particularly the “Agimi” Culture and Art association in Prizren, have played a significant role in promoting Albanian traditional costumes internationally, and passing them down to future generations. The city of Prizren, hosting various religions and peoples, forms a unique mosaic of its own. Established in 1951, the “Doğru Yol” Cultural and Arts association has played an important role in promoting Turkish culture, especially traditional Turkish costumes, without a break. Here, the “Şarski Behar” association showcases the traditional clothing culture of the Bosniak people in the best possible way. Before the war, the “Budućnost” association promoted Serbian culture and clothing in Prizren and its surroundings for years. Two points cannot be overlooked in this study. Firstly, the services provided by the aforementioned associations actually involve the efforts of preserving nearly lost inherited costumes and transferring them to the present and future, all thanks to the efforts of these associations. Secondly, due to the multicultural nature of Kosovo, visible cultural assimilation is observed. For example, it is often witnessed that traditional Turkish clothing “dolama”, typically found in Turkish cultural

inventory, transitioning into Albanian culture. It is possible to encounter this transition in events such as weddings and concerts (Virmića 2024: 25).



Pic. 2: The National Ensemble of Songs and Dances “Shota”

Ethnographic Museums in Kosovo and Studies on the Subject

In Kosovo, there are 9 public museums. The results obtained from museum visits were not very encouraging. In fact, both local and central institutions do not seem to make efforts, both financially and willingly, regarding this issue. The state does not invest enough in this regard. Due to financial difficulties, the inventories mentioned are being damaged in museum storages due to inadequate conditions. High humidity levels in storages are also a separate threat. In conversations with museum staff, it is learned that there are many historical clothing costumes with significant value still present in many villages and towns. However, due to financial constraints, museum staff are recording and documenting them and returning them to the families that originally own them. The optimistic side is that there are exhibitions in museums that can be visited by the public (February – Back 2023 personal archive).



Fig. 3: Serbian folk costumes from Kosovo (National Museum – Prishtinë/Priština)

The Place of Traditional Folk Costumes in Today's Fashion

In today's fashion, as women's and men's clothing is shaped by trends, traditional costumes, although abandoned in everyday use, still carry regional characteristics. Therefore, in Kosovo, on the Balkans, they are generally worn by folk dance groups, showcased at official holidays, celebrations, liberation days, festivals, receptions, and farewells. The display of these costumes, which are a tangible representation of the cultural heritage carried by the region from past to present, alongside folk dances, further emphasizes their significance.

Every society carries with it a historical experience, and this experience is reflected in the cultural elements of the society, forming the traditional structure. As a result of modernity, lifestyle changes have led societies to drift away from their traditional structures, causing significant changes in both material and spiritual aspects. One can observe the most notable examples of these changing forms in wedding ceremonies and bridal clothing.

Methodology

This study was designed as qualitative research on the preservation and change of traditional clothing culture in Kosovo. The qualitative research method allows for in-depth examination of the subject and focuses on the opinions and experiences of the participants.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process was carried out through field research and interviews. The regions selected for the research are areas of Kosovo where different ethnic groups live densely. The following techniques were used during the data collection phase:

Preservation of Traditional Clothing

As a result of the research, it was seen that many ethnic groups in Kosovo are determined to preserve their traditional clothing. During the interviews, officials stated that traditional clothing reflects their cultural identity and therefore should be protected. It has been determined that traditional clothes are still widely used, especially on special occasions such as weddings, religious holidays and festivals.

- **Dragash/Dragaš Village Example:** Observations made in Dragash/Dragaš village show that, Gorani women also use their traditional dresses in daily life. These dresses are handmade by family elders and passed down from generation to generation.

- **Turkish Community:** Preservation of traditional clothing in the Turkish community is supported by institutions and local associations. Awareness raising activities are carried out on the historical and cultural value of traditional clothes.

Modernization and Change

The findings revealed that some changes have occurred in traditional clothing under the influence of modern life and globalization. Younger generations prefer more modern clothing in daily life, but return to traditional clothing on special occasions.

- **Youth and Fashion:** Young participants stated that modern clothes are more comfortable and practical, but traditional clothes are important in the cultural context. Reinterpreting traditional clothing with modern designs and materials attracts the attention of younger generations.

- **Ethnic Differences:** Differences have been observed between different ethnic groups in the preservation and change of traditional clothing. Some groups are more open to modernizing traditional clothing, while others tend to maintain its original form.

Cultural Importance of Traditional Clothing

The research revealed that traditional clothing is an important cultural symbol for communities in Kosovo. This finding is consistent with other studies in the literature. In our research, it was determined that the participants similarly viewed traditional clothing as a part of cultural heritage and conservation efforts gained meaning in this context.

Effects of Modernization

Modernization and globalization have led to significant changes in traditional clothing. This is a frequently discussed issue in the literature (Jones 2009). In our research, it was observed that although younger generations prefer modern clothes in daily life, they continue to use traditional clothes on special occasions. This situation shows how cultural values interact and transform with modern life.

Social and Cultural Ties

The use of traditional clothing in social events and rituals strengthens the ties between communities. This finding is also supported in studies conducted by Anderson (Anderson 2016). In our research, participants stated that traditional clothing increases social solidarity and provides cultural information transfer, which provides important data on this subject.

Limitations of the Research

This research was conducted in a specific geographical region and with a limited number of participants. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Future research can obtain more comprehensive results by covering larger participant groups and different regions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could evaluate the impact of educational programs developed to preserve traditional clothing. Additionally, the effects of the integration of modern designs into traditional clothing on younger generations can also be examined. Developing strategies to increase social awareness about the protection of cultural heritage can be an important part of the work to be done in this field.

Conclusion

It is our effort to preserve the traditional clothing of the nation and people in Kosovo, to bring the issue from the past to the future and to keep it alive. Until the early 1990s, there had been no significant change in the field of traditional costumes. Growing economies worldwide began to form strong global sectors. The clothing industry grew during this period and assumed a position of influencing consumption worldwide through fashion. Since the early 1990s, the concept of fashion and design has entered new realms with the increasing interest of the media and the widespread use of the internet in communication.

As a result of these developments, traditional clothing has begun to regain the attention it once received in the context of today's fashion phenomenon. Drawing inspiration from the past, details adapted to the conditions of the present day are finding new spaces in this field through clothing designs.

The two important projects highlighted above, as well as the diligent work carried out by the associations, are commendable. Additionally, the situation encountered during museum visits is cause for concern. Necessary measures must be taken urgently regarding this issue. It is inevitable that today's designers incorporate the beautiful classic and delicate images of the past into the designs of modern clothing as soon as possible.

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СОСТОЈБАТА СО ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНИТЕ НОСИИ ВО КОСОВО ДЕНЕС

Диба Целина Бајмак
Независен истражувач, Призрен

Резиме

Во трудот беше даден краток осврт на сегашната (моменталната) состојба на традиционалните носии во Косово. Традиционалните носии беа земени како пример преку кој требаше да се покаже дека облеката може да биде показател за одредена културна структура. Трудот се темели на теренско истражување низ различни региони во Косово и на интервјуа со локалното население, чија цел беше да се открие до кој степен е зачувана традиционалната облека од која носиите се дел, и како (и дали) ова културно наследство се пренесува на идните, помлади генерации.