

SYNCRETISM OF ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN FORMS - DEFINING SYNCRETIC SITUATIONS ON THE EXAMPLE OF SARAJEVO ČARŠI

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Abstract: The main value of architectural heritage is defined by the selected set of attributes ranging from the substantial ones, such as form or design for example, to the intangible ones, including relevant social processes and cultural production (UNESCO). Within complex historical urban areas, characterized by historical-stylistic stratification, spatial and architectural forms have been observed in which many incoherent practices, traditions and logics are confronted, and whose ambiguity requires that their nature and the product itself (urban or architectural form) are being better explained.

The Sarajevo historical core is the area where the described multifaceted contacts were observed. They are a consequence of the confrontation of two cultural circles, Ottoman as Eastern (native, oriental), and Austro-Hungarian as European (Western), not only in a simple binary relation old-new, but through the intertwining of cultural dialogue on the line of power and subordinate periphery.

As an analytical and methodological framework for the assessment and explanation of the described spatial and architectural occurrence, this study applies the theory of syncretism as a phenomenology that best defines the processes in the background and the architectural-urban resolution itself.

In the first part of the paper, theories of syncretic situations offered a reference for the basic structural definition of these contacts.

In the second part, syncretism is questioned on concrete samples placed in the space of the Sarajevo Čarši. The factor of social action is introduced as a corrective element of monosyllable combinations of confrontations. This social action distorts the canonical practices of the colonial paradigm, which places this part of the paper in the analytical framework of postcolonial studies.

The analysis of the sample clarifies syncretism in the levels of expression, and depending on the meaning of the background dialogue centre-periphery. The meaning ranges from the pragmatic (Mula Mustafa Bašeskija Street), to the one that tries to integrate modernization into the traditional spatial framework (Kundurdžiluk, Mali and Veliki Ćurčiluk), to its transition to the level of symbolic forms (Baščaršija Square).

Conclusions and consequently the results of this study should provide the primary theoretical pattern for defining syncretic spaces in architectural-urban theoretical canonization, which has so far mainly focused on identity, while the essence of syncretic theories is the identification as a result of conflict.

Assessing the meaning of problematic spaces is also necessary because syncretic situations, although coherent, are always only temporal, unstable. They will inevitably demand new resolutions, which, with proper valorisation, can be directed towards sustainable outcomes.

Keywords: syncretism, postcolonial, Sarajevo Čarši, architectural heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The first significant contact between East and West in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which occurred during the Austro-Hungarian colonial rule as a binary contact, often resulted with creation of ambience zones dominated by primarily Ottoman or primarily Austro-Hungarian, or *Europeanised* expression. The ambience parameters have become easier to read in these, conditionally speaking, “pure” spatial units, or spatial units of unambiguous interface of the two practices. Going deeper into the historical core of the Ottoman čarši, the borders become disperse⁶⁸, and the dominant layers (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian) became intertwined in the specific characteristics of the style – proportions, measures, form of urban matrix and setting, making the simple binary relation “old-new” more complex. Intertwining stylistic forms have resulted from profound changes of social norms and traditions, and as such are not just a simple contact, or random mixture, but a complex interface of differing logics, which are more or less dialogically reconciled.

Valuation, preservation and standards within the described complex resolutions imply reading of the meaning of both the process in the background of its development, and the formulation – i.e. architectural/urban forms.

The analytical framework and theoretical basis we are using to explain and conditionally canonise the mentioned developments will be the methodically and conceptually close theories of syncretic processes and post-colonial

⁶⁸ The borders of the Ottoman city can be drawn on the basis of the census records from 1604, and after that there had been no major changes until arrival of the Dual Monarchy.

studies⁶⁹, which will be described further in the text, as we believe they can fairly define the core nature of the described ambiguity of architectural/urban forms.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF SYNCRETIC PROCESS AND RESOLUTIONS IN URBAN / ARCHITECTURAL DOMAIN

Generally, the said studies start to define syncretism by explaining this phenomenon as a “coexistence of elements of diverse origin interacting ambiguously” (Pye, 1971:92). It is important to underline that such co-existence retains the visibility of origin of different practices or elements, i.e. constituent elements of syncretic resolution, which is in opposition to the forms that are result of complete amalgamation either through assimilation, synthesis/fusion, or, otherwise, the dissolution.⁷⁰

Syncretic may be both a process and a resolution/formulation, where the resolutions are, as a rule, temporal⁷¹ and require certain solution (Lambropoulos, 2001:231).

The theory of models of syncretism proposes that syncretism is “more or less messy processes that combine or perhaps secure the temporary coexistence of practices and doctrines from a variety of dissimilar [...] backgrounds” (Law et al, 2014:176).

In accordance with the above, and although Lambropoulos points out that syncretism itself is neither “good” nor “bad” (Lambropoulos, 2001:228), the final resolution turns the “difference into something that coheres after all” (Law et al, 2014:180). Therefore, syncretism, although somewhat coherent combination of different meanings, is neither complete, stable or conclusive, as is the case with synthesis or fusion, nor pure mixture, pluralism and hybrid.

The level of resulting coherence needs to be finally evaluated (“good” or “bad”), in order to identify the norms of continued activities in the space characterized by syncretism.

In line with the above, we can sketch the basic structure and characteristics of syncretic processes and resolutions, which are applicable also on the culture of shaping spaces:

1. Confrontation of incoherent practices, elements of different origin;
2. Ambiguity of syncretic situation;
3. Preserved visibility of the origin of the constituent elements;
4. Certain degree of coherence of resolution;
5. Temporality of resolution, existence of tensions that require resolution;
6. Syncretism in itself is neither good nor bad; i.e. it requires evaluation.

Analytical framework of post-colonial studies enters the discussion at the very point of describing of how the syncretic situation has come into being. Binary relation and practice of replacing one historic-stylistic ambience with another, i.e. the canonised architectural practices and cultural programmes dictated from a centre (Dual Monarchy) have been distorted in the described cases by the strength of traditional practices and impact of the local social forum. Consequently, the products or resolution are ambiguous. If the participating components are still visible, we may say that they have syncretic characteristics.

This premise is examined on selected samples – the street Mula Mustafe Bašeskije from Logavina street to the Old Orthodox Church, part of the Sarajevo Čarši (streets Mali and Veliki Čurčiluk), and the space of the Baščaršija square with the Sebilj water fountain.

Applicability of post-colonial theory specifically to the issue of colonial attitude of the Dual Monarchy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina has been intensified in recent studies⁷² that illustrate the perspectives of actors involved, mostly the positions of the centre, and since recently, also of the very cultural discourse of traditional community. Application of this approach is extremely illustrative in, for example, contextualisation of the Ottoman style in

⁶⁹ Lambropoulos (2001); Stewart (1999; 2015); J. Law, G. Afdal, K. Asdal, W. Lin, I. Moser and V. Singleton, (2014); Pye (1971; 1994); Kamstra (1970).

⁷⁰ According to Pye (1971:92), there are three possible resolutions of ambiguity: assimilation, fusion, and dissolution. “The first is the extension of one meaning to the point of the effective elimination of the other, in which case we may speak of assimilation. The second is the fusion of the diverse elements such that while a single coherent pattern of meaning has been attained that pattern is so different from any of the patterns hitherto available that a new religion may be deemed to have emerged. The third is the drifting apart of the two meanings, in which case we may speak of dissolution”.

⁷¹ “... every individual case of syncretism is necessarily temporary” (Ibid). On the temporality of mixture and also on the difference between syncretism and creolization, see Stewart (2015).

⁷² See: Hartmuth (2015; 2018); Ruthner (2006; 2015; 2018; 2019; 2021); Vervaeke (2013); Dervišević H. (2021).

Bosnia and Herzegovina, in relation to broader colonial practice and understanding of the origin and essence of the Islamic style of great colonial empires (France, England, Germany), and with respect to the tendencies to use modern autochthone Turkish style which came from the very centre of classic Ottoman architecture – Turkey (Hartmuth, 2015).

3. SYNCRETIC SITUATIONS IN URBAN HISTORIC CORE OF SARAJEVO ČARŠI

The first form of syncretic situation is presented on the sample of the street Mula Mustafe Bašeskija (Figure 1.). At the time of Ottoman rule, the street was the border between the commercial core, the Čarši, and the surrounding residential parts (mahalas) in Sarajevo, which in this part of the city started on the slope of the so-called Čurčić's Hill.

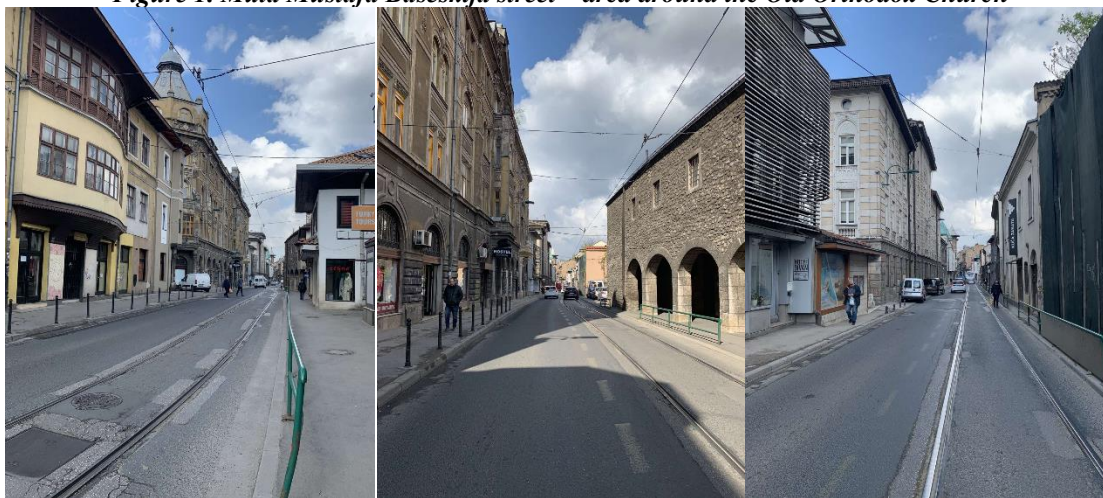
At the time of Ottoman rule, the street façade was formed by residential houses having only ground floor, or ground plus one floor. After the fatal fire of 1879, the Dual Monarchy started developing regulation plan for this part of the city, thus initiating for the first time the transformation of the traditional core. It reluctantly acted in the area of Čarši, as a result of unclear economic and political situation, but also social climate of expression of nationalist strivings of local communities, and ultimately, a very strong desire to preserve the visual expression of the Other, so present in the general colonial narrative.

The Plan had been to widen the section of the current street Mula Mustafe Bašeskije from Logavina to the Old Orthodox Church into a first class street (minimum 15 m wide). However, this intention was given up; the reason for this was the application made by certain Stjepan Srškić and other homeowners from this part of the Čarši, who argued that 9 m width was sufficient (Kruševac, 1960:43).

Accommodation of this request produced not a simple contact between two incoherent practices, but an ambiguous space that materialized the characteristics of both the Ottoman urbanism and European “corridor street”. Namely, since the street was given a whole new continuous row of multi-storey historicist facades on the south side, which correspond to the street profiles foreseen in the regulation plan, the interface of the characteristics of two different ambiances produced significant tension. They are perceived on sensory level, but also very practically perceptible (the issue of light in residential spaces, disruption of view towards the space of Čarši, inappropriately narrow pedestrian streets).

In spite of such tensions, the syncretic situation as such is not very prominent. Although there are elements of confrontation of opposites, visible origin of constituent elements, and the native community influencing the canonical practice, the tendency to retain, express and coherently present the traditional in a new resolution has in its background a pretext that is not a matter of convictions, but pragmatism.

Figure 1. Mula Mustafa Bašeskija street – area around the Old Orthodox Church



Another form of syncretic situation is illustrated on the example of spatial sequence of the very core of Sarajevo Čarši. As we said above, the manoeuvring space for major interventions in the Čarši was created by the devastating fire of 1879. It completely changed the appearance of streets of Mali and Veliki Čurčiluk, Kundurdžiluk and Aščiluk, which were the commercial core with trade and craftwork shops with shutters (ćepenci, kepenk). The buildings newly constructed on the Ottoman matrix, with their Europeanised, modernised aesthetic, constitute a confrontation in themselves (Figure 2.). The syncretism, in this case, was a product of the practice of partial

acceptance of modernisation in architecture by traditional forum as a desirable state of affairs. This is, for example, illustrated by reaction of shop owners in Baščarši on the occasion of issuance of the “Order by the Provincial Government for Bosnia and Herzegovina of 27 June 1892 no. 50.243/1 on Preservation of Historic Monuments, Treatment of Antique and Otherwise Historically and Culturally Significant Buildings”, which included a requirement to preserve the character of the Old City. Shop owners were of the opinion that such demands “were led by their fantasies”, not the actual situation and needs of the poor owners, who wanted to build modern buildings, without any association with the traditional shops with wooden shutters (*čepenci*) (Alić, 2010:69-70). The literary periodicals of the time also offer several examples of this ambivalent attitude of the native community towards modernisation⁷³, while the position of the centre is shifting closer to the preservation of appearance of the old commercial core as part of the paradigm of the phantasm of the Orient. „Around 1900, after much of Sarajevo had received a facelift *à la viennoise*, the Austro-Hungarian provincial government and its architects were confronted with similar concerns: that ‘civilization’ would effectively forfeit the appealingly exotic ‘oriental’ character of its unique Balkan possession at the expense of a townscape just about identical to most urban centres of the monarchy” (Hartmuth, 2015:160).

As presented in our recent study (Džumhur, 2022), the understanding of, on one hand, the extent of acceptance of modernisation among local merchants and craftsmen as a natural process of change that had started already at the time of Tanizimat, and on the other hand, the extent to which it was an imposed discourse, can influence the integration of this altered physical structure of commercial units into the description of the core values of Čarši. Furthermore, the said study showed that departure from traditional visual identity of the old Čarši and adoption of historicist forms of Central-European heritage was observed more intensively among the non-Muslim confessional community as a form of creating their own spatial framework, what was an important factor in the conclusive revision of Čarši integrity.

Figure 2. Kundurdžiluk street modified after the great fire in 1879.



The third form of syncretism was presented in the spatial unit of Baščaršija square with the orientalist form of the Sebilj fountain (Figure 3.)

Orientalism, as a stylistic form, had been consistently used on cultural, public and educational/sacral buildings, whose users were predominantly Bosnian Muslims. Such state of affairs suggests that this architectural discourse was a certain gesture towards Bosniaks (Hartmuth, 2018:9).

Series of other elements, however, put this style deep into normative framework of colonial paradigm – expression of cultural and scientific authority and supremacy,⁷⁴ mission to enlighten the backwards society as a part of standard policy of presenting the Other in the European metropolises, as well as the “othering of the Other” (Ruthner (2018:7). The very respect the Austro-Hungarian monarchy showed to cultural diversity of the ones they conquered is an instrument of a foreign power, too.

⁷³ See: Bosanska vila (1886, August 16); Bošnjak (1881, June 16); Bošnjak (1898, June 21).

⁷⁴ The Orientalism was perceived by the centre not as breaking up with the Ottoman tradition, but quite contrary, as „contributing to a continuity of ‘oriental architecture’ in Bosnia”, but in a better, “more original” and “purer” form. It is a sort of revival of Persian, Arabian, Moorish or Mamluk variations of the broad notion (as understood at the time) of Islamic architecture. (Ruthner, 2015:164).

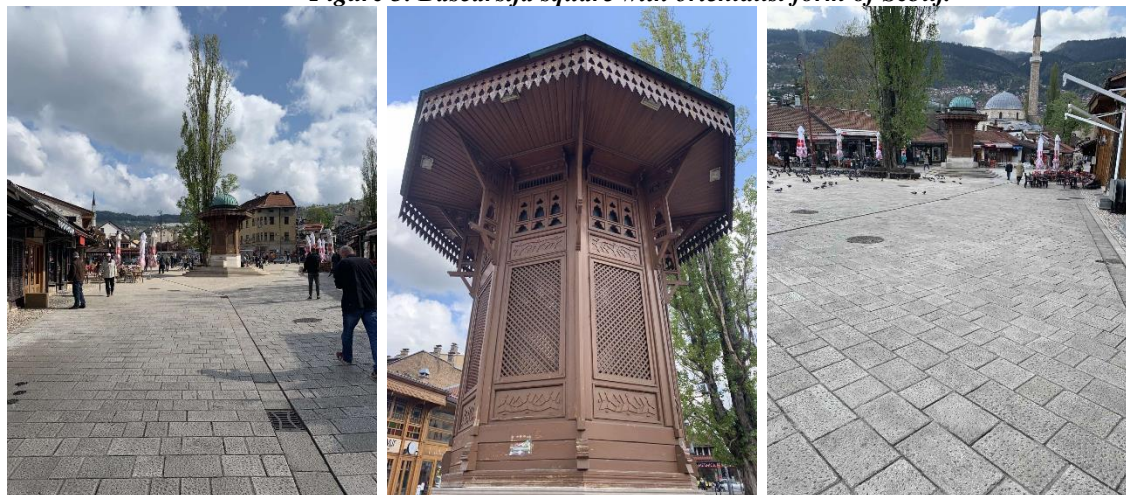
Strong effects of phantasm of the Oriental in perception of the coloniser is readable in the typology of buildings where the predominantly Oriental compositions were used; railway stations, hotels and exhibition pavilions were the heralds of the national visual identity and buildings first seen by any foreigner arriving to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In itself, orientalist architecture is not syncretic as its contextualisation does not suggest regulatory power of local social forum regarding any segment of its appearance, outside of already familiar schemes of colonial practice; however, redirecting the meaning of such individual monument into symbolic form made this shift to syncretism. This was a moment of self-orientalisation⁷⁵, reception of oriental forms as an expression of one's own autochthone heritage, also transposed to the present time.

Potential of the Sebilj fountain to become one of symbolic images is underlined with the ambiance where it exists as a visual landmark. Openness and size of the Baščaršija square underlines its monumentality and representativeness, which follows the suit of spatial formulation of European squares.

Expansive square was only made during the Austro-Hungarian period by demolition of extremely specific ambient unit,⁷⁶ a triangle of shops that had surrounded streets Kasapi Gornji and Havadžiluk, and the old fountain Mehmed-pasha Kukavica. A square is not a part of the Ottoman matrix, just as the Sebilj, in its stylistic expression, is not an Ottoman form; however, in the colonial dialogue with native forum they changed their meanings and became incorporated in the local identity. They are perceived as coherent unit in a traditional frame, where the image of the Baščaršija square lately becomes a synonym for the whole old Čarši space. Although it is a part of the saga on invented tradition⁷⁷, the coherence is possible since „there are variously coherent meanings for the various people involved“ (Pye, 1971:93).

Figure 3. Baščaršija square with orientalist form of Sebilj.



4. CONCLUSION

This paper argues that when opposing practices get in contact within an architectural/urban domain, whose canonical expression is changed in a dialogue between the interfacing cultural and social discourses, resolution of syncretic character may be created.

A corrective element of monosyllabic combinations of architectural/urban forms and practices (binary relations, mixture hybrids) is a factor of social impact. It distorts the established norms and produces spaces within which the cultural contacts intertwine, while the origin of different constituent elements still remaining visible.

Using theories of syncretism, we identify the structure and features of syncretic architectural/urban situation, as well as basic theoretical connections of the notion of syncretism (within social, religious and anthropological studies) and considered forms.

⁷⁵ At the moment when the Orient begins to voluntarily accept the role of the “assumed Orientals”, self-orientalisation occurs, consciously or unconsciously – which is noticeable in the case of Bosnia (Dervišević, 2021:43).

⁷⁶ The exact year and background of this demolition is not known, but the shops between the streets of Baščaršija and Halvadžiluk are not seen on the maps made between 1901 and 1905 (Fejzić, 27).

⁷⁷ Creating the “invented” tradition was illustrated by Reynolds-Cordileone in her presentation of the programme to create the Carpet Weaving factory Sarajevo (2015).

Since syncretism is "...a collection of events in the history of architecture (religion), which have a recognizably coherent structure" (Pye, 1971: 93), and inherently is neither good nor bad, we argue that the structure may have various strength of coherence and syncretic meaning, between the polarities of good and bad.

Such conclusions and premises are verified through three examples found within the narrowest historic zone of the Sarajevo Čarši, made in the place of contact of two cultural narratives – the Austro-Hungarian (colonial, European) one, and the Ottoman (autochthone, submissive). The social action and its meaning for the ultimate strength of syncretism are assessed.

The post-colonial approach provides the analytical framework to this part of sample analysis.

In case of the first sample, the observed dialogue is pragmatic (street Mula Mustafe Bašeskije). In the second case, it created forms that can be explained as ambivalent attitude of the native forum ready to accept modernisation, but still only within a preserved traditional framework. The third example speaks about the effects of self-regulation and creation of symbolic forms. They were caused by the colonial paradigm of explaining the origin and production of improved image of the legacy, whose "likeability", scientific grounds and systematicity of presentation helped integrate it into the identity of local forum.

As a final point, we can say that each individual syncretic situation is a case of its own, and even though we can follow the said general formulations, the main discourse of action is a separate evaluation of the meaning of syncretic process and form, because "The meaning, if there is a meaning, can only be found through the meaning" (Ibid:88), and it has to be "understood entirely in terms of dynamics of (culture)" (Ibid:93).

Understanding the essence of space as a syncretic, and evaluation of meaning should provide identification of the framework of future action. Because, as we said, syncretic space is the space of tensions, it necessarily evolves and will require new resolutions; this will have to be answered. Syncretic formation is not a finished process, legacy of an epoch, position, authority; instead, it is a force that keeps reproducing and demanding new solutions. "While they unfold, syncretic combinations are open-ended." (Lambropoulos, 2001:231).

Setting up the framework of syncretism is an attempt to avoid the contemporary disease – the need to necessarily identify all states of society and culture, what has often resulted with confrontation of positions, while the syncretism "focuses not on identity but on identification as a result of contentious contact" (Ibid:229).

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