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MUSIC, IDENTITY, GENDER: ÇENGİS, KÖÇEK, ÇÖÇEK

Studies on identity and gender in ethnomusicology, have drawn more attention not only on the culturally structured ideas of identity and gender discrimination in the society, which were influenced by the developments in the feminist movement and anthropology, but also on researching the relationships between musical behavior and this field. While evaluation of the world musics from a cultural and interdisciplinary perspective has made a progress together with the diffusion of “ethnomusicology”, the new titles “music and identity”, “music and gender” gained popularity in the world music cultures as a result of the interest in studies on different musical fields. Drawing on anthropology as well as studies on identity, gender, woman and culture, ethnomusicologists have found out that female and male identities are culturally structured in different ways. At this point, together with the opinion based on the apparently natural differences in music, new debates have developed in a way that has revealed the relationship of musical products and behavior with the continual gender discrimination within the social system.

As the methods used in studies on Ottoman-Turkish music have generally been developed on the basis of the historical methods of musicology, studies on topics such as music and identity, music and gender are rarely found. Although there is a considerable number of a study on Ottoman dance, it is therefore difficult to

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Ç.N.: The words *çengi*, *köçek* and *çöçek* are the original singular forms in Turkish.

encounter a study of identity and gender regarding *Çengi* and *Köçek*, who are the two most significant elements of Ottoman dance.

Walter Feldman, one of those rare researchers who have reached certain findings on identity, states as follows in one of his articles about being a *Köçek*;

Jewish çengi dancers were not exceptional in any period, but it is certain that the majority was Greeks and Armenians. Although Gypsies were frequently viewed, they were not involved in folk dances; instead, they were realized towards the end of the 19th century. As çengi dancers' performances in "drinking houses (meyhane)" were peculiar to the Greek, Muslim Turks were rarely encountered on these stages.²



Çengi

It is also possible to encounter another discourse as a reinforcement of this argument in Walter Feldman's articles about gender;

"Dance and music, together with mime, sexuality and illusion, with the public, influenced the itinerants visiting the Ottomans as well as the high officials in the court and fascinated them. Therefore, both woman and man are described in the travel books that have been studied or in the entertainment parts of the works on the Ottomans when there is a mention of music performers and dancers. Two different

² Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, 2000.

cultural relations are observed among Köçekçes, male dancers: Turks' traditional mime dance and Greeks' secret and immoral rites performed in the name of Bacchus. In order to understand this relationship better, we should know the meaning of dance to Turks; we should learn about Greeks' taverns and see the kind of role that they play in Persian Sufistic oral arts.³



Köçek

When we research into Ottoman dance, the two basic sources that we will utilise are the written texts and figurative documents reinforcing this type of texts. The written documents include travel books about Ottoman life by natives and foreigners, diaries, descriptive “miniatures”, “lithographies”, “engravings” as well as portraits of “Bazaar painters” dating from the first Ottoman period to the 19th century, and especially “paintings”, “photographs”, “postcards” of the final period, which also include the annalists' dates.

Following the findings from these basic sources, it is obvious to conclude that dance (*raks*) has a vital position in the Ottoman music tradition, and even that dance and music were occasionally complementary components for each other. As the following

³ Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, 2000

quotations point out, *çengi-s* and *köçek-s*, who did dances, assumed an important role in the plays and dances to be viewed. These performances had dramatic aspects as well as an artistic value. Those who did dances for spectators were called *Çengi*, *Köçek*, *Rakkas*, *Tavşan (Rabbit)*, *Kasebaz*. As the information in the historical sources suggest, the two basic dimensions regarding the urban music of Ottoman dance are *Çengi-s* and *Köçek-s*. Not until the 20th century had identity and gender discrimination of *Çengi-is* and *Köçek-s* clearly been defined. The Ottoman sources on different periods display terminological differences in terms of professional dances.



Köçek-s and Kasebaz-s

The oldest sources mention the Arabic term *rakkas* (male dancer) and *rakkase* (female dancer). However, the term *Çengi*, used in Turkish, had previously referred to the person playing the *zil*, but it was later used for the person playing the instrument *çeng*.



Çengi(Dancer) and Çengi (Turkish Harp Player)

Presently, this Turkish term also refers to professional female dancers. Additionally, it is possible to find out that *Çengi-s* are those *rakkase-s* who are non-Moslems or gypsies. Concubine *çengis* dancing in the east and Turkish Palaces date back to very early times. Delving into the etymological background of the word *köçek*, we learn that the word is derived from the Persian term *kuchak*, used to refer to child or young animal. The word *köçek* implied various meanings in the 17th century.

Also, following Popescu Judetz's explanation, this term, among the Ottomans, referred to some other various implications, including a young person elected to the military/political cadre or the janissary corps, or to a young male servant/deputy to a dervish.⁴

The Prince Dimitri Kantemir (1623–1723) explained the use of the term during his period as follows:

“Each dervish has a male child called köçek (kocek) aged 12 or over. He teaches literature, poetry, art and science to this child, with whom he shares wherever he sleeps or whatever he eats, and whom he takes wherever he goes. He loves the

⁴ Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, 2000

*child as if he were his son; perhaps he really is. He protects, feeds and defends the child. A great number of Abdals whose founder was Hadji Bektash (Hacı Bektaş) come from the Janissary House.”*⁵

Köçek is defined as professional male dancers in women costumes, men dancing with a set of instruments in the earlier periods, young men dancing in feminine clothes or male dancers resembling *çengis*, and some sources include an additional explanation that they are non-Moslem or recruited young males. Moreover, the words *köçek* and *çengi* are used in the same meaning in some records; *Çengi* also refers to professional male dancers in women costumes, men dancing with a set of instruments in the earlier periods, young men dancing in feminine clothes or male dancers resembling *çengi-s*. It is predicted that *köçek-s* were formed in time for men’s assemblies. According to the relevant records, they were generally selected among the minority groups or non-Moslems during the Ottomans’ period that *Köçeks* enjoyed their brightest time. They were chosen among handsome, presentable male children, aged 7–8, (a Greek from Chios, Gypsy, Greek, Arab, Armenian, and Turkish) and taken to private rehearsal rooms (*meşkhane*).



Köçek-s

⁵ Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, 2000

In these rooms they were trained in the major topics for their plays, such as music and rythm, neck and waist dancing, playing the cymbal (*zil*) and turning movement. Then they were included into groups. Those who had danced during the early period of the Ottomans were called *Çengi*, which also referred to female dancers, while male ones were named as *Köçek*. Although it is not clearly mentioned in the related sources, it is also stated that dancers who used to perform a different style, wearing special clothes, were called *Tavşan* (*Rabbit*). The reason for the occassional terminological confusion regarding *çengi* and *köçek* is that they (*çengis* and *köçeks*) performed their dances. In addition to this, Köçeks, instead of coming together with musician groups, formed a guild with comedians and mime artists taking roles in spectacle arts. In the 18th century men with their white baggy trousers (*shalvars*), embroidered bolero jackets on embroidered shirts and small fezs were also called *Tavşan* because of various figures peculiar to their dancing style. This title is not only observed as a kind of dance, but it is also regarded as a reflection of performances by the young male dancers, especially those who came from the Greek islands. Dances performed by *Tavşan* dancers were named as *Tavşanca* (*Rabbittish/Rabbitlike*).



Tavşan

Fetüvvetname, written in the 16th century, mentions that performances to be viewed included the organisations called *Kol* (Group) and these organisations depended on the Trade Guild. Nihal Türkmen explains the term *Kol* as follows:

“The term *Kol* was used as a native theatrical term referring to a group of performers, team or company. Group presentation is the sum of oral performances based on music, dancing, miming and a topic according to the schedule of a performance group.”⁶

A *Çengi Group* comprises a *Kolbaşı* (Group leader), his assistant and twelve performers. These *çengis* were accompanied with such instruments as *nakkare*, two *daires*, *çeng*, *kemençe* (fiddle), violin, *lavta* (lute), depending on their own periods. Young girls who were voluntary to be *Çengi* and experts in their professions took music and dance courses at *Kolbaşı*'s place. *Çengis* performed their art during weddings, henna nights, planned festival days for women, like “baby’s name” (“*kırk hamam*”) day held for women in childbed. Additionally, they danced in the tents erected by the prominent people of İstanbul in fields and squares for various festivities or at weddings in the open air. When invited to these festivals, *Kolbaşı* and her assistant would cover their faces with veils and get dressed in yellow boots. They would definitely hold fans in their hands. Young, beautiful and long-haired *Çengis* in low-cut costumes were preferable. They used to wear an ornamental piece on top, surrounded by gold and called *Tepelik*, and a kind of gold, told to be round and called *Kaşbastı*, on the very middle of the forehead. They had velvet *Camadan* on, embroidered with gilded silver threads, double-breasted, short-sleeved or sleeveless velvets. They also wore *Üçetek*, a three-panelled skirt, beneath *Camadan*, and a pair of silk shalwars under the skirt. Besides, they were dressed in low-neck blouses under *Camadan* and the top of *Üçetek*. They used to wrap their waists with shawls and wear a gold or silver belt on their shawls as well as low-heeled embroidered shoes. The *Zil* and *Calpara* would complement their costumes. They would not have their hair cut (neither would boys); they would let their curls down. During their performances, when the instrument group began to play, *Kolbaşı* followed by her assistant and

⁶ Türkmen, Nihal, *Orta Oyunu*, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, İstanbul, 1991, p.8.

twelve *Çengis* would slowly come on the scene and rotate four times with the company of slow songs. There was no dance in the first part. *Kolbaşı* and her assistant would not get involved with the dance in the following parts; they would only sit at an important point, watching *çengis* remotely and directing them. In the final part they would not dance, but sing (folk) songs or ghazal. These groups of nearly two hundred dancers would be made up of *illusionists*, *rope dancers*, *somersault acrobats*, *fire magicians* as well as *köçeks*. In the place where *çengis* performed their dances, women called *hammam master* and *soyguncu* (robber) would help them to get (un)dressed, to do their make-up and decide on their accessories. The rythm instruments *Çarpara* and *Çegâne* were crucial. Those who played the two instruments were named as *Çarparazen*. *Çegâne* was a kind of instrument with various *zils* and those who danced playing the mentioned instruments were called *Çegânebaz*. They generally had an instrument group of four people, namely *Sıracı*.



III. Selim Sarayında bir rakkase (XVIII. yüzyıl sonu)
A female dancer in the palace of Sultan Soliman III

Çengi

As Evliya Chelebi recorded, there were twelve Groups of Tradesmen in Istanbul. The performers (dancers) included in these groups were generally young Gypsies, Greeks, Jews and Armenians. Each group consisted of two or three hundred members. These dancers would display their performances to earn money. *Köçeks* were generally young boys aged 13–17. Women also had *Çengi* Groups, which also referred to a number of groups performing some other dances to be viewed. Afterwards, *Köçek* was used for men while *Çengi* was used for women (e.g., *Küpelî Ayvaz*, *Mazlum Şah*, *Saçlı Ramazan Şah*, *Küçük Şahin Şah*, *Memiş Şah*, *Bayram Şah*, *Çaker Şah*, *Şeker Şah*, *Sülün Şah*, *Sedef Zehra*, *Benli Hacer*, *Zilkıran Kamer*, *Fidan Ayşe*, *Kelebek Fırat*). Among the prominent *çengis* during the period of Selim III were *Saçlı Sümbül*, *Kemankeş Eda*, *Zülüflü Hatice*, *Yandı Emine*; in the 19th century Tosunpaşa, Hayriye, Hancı Kızı Zehra, Küçükpazarlı Naile, the member of Pasha's office Fatma and Aksaraylı Makbule were popular names.



Coffehouse

The above-mentioned dance performances were sometimes accompanied with humour. These dances involved figures such as bellydancing, heel-tapping, walking as if running on tiptoes, neck-dance, shoulder-shaking, waist-dance, rushing back, body-bouncing, body-shaking and body-bending. A dancer sometimes moved her body forward while lying backward and letting her hair down. There were also other performances such as “kaytan dance”, “tura dance” and “fez dance”. Some of them were non-verbal, but topic-based.

Considering what has been mentioned here as the performances or dances in Turkish society, we can add that all kinds of dances definitely have had influences on each other.

In *Meyhane*, one of Karagöz plays, *köçek* music is played, and while *köçeks* are dancing, the assistant of the pub plays the *zil* announcing that the group (*kol*) has passed. He tells Bekri Mustafa; “*It is late; we are punished then.*” *Köçeks* stand still until the group pass.

As *köçek* and *tavşan* dancers who are educated for festivities in the court begin training at early ages, they display their professional performances at the age of 12–13. A 7- or 8-year-old apprentice *köçek* starts training for dancing, singing and percussion playing. His role as a dancer ends when he grows beard and moves away from a feminine appearance. Afterwards, he plays instruments in music groups or sings songs. According to some sources, *tavşan* dancers are told to have a longer dancing career, but information regarding the reasons behind it are not possible to find out. Like *Çengis*, *Köçeks* are generally organized in groups. A *köçek* group, also named as “*kol*”, included dancers in Istanbul, ranging in number from three to one or two dozens, and at least one fiddle, two lutes, tambourine, tongs with *zil*; musicians as well as singers (*hanende*) with strong voice. However, the number of group members and instruments in Anatolia is more limited. They have two or three dancers; they

Ç.N. “kaytan” and “tura” meaning silk cord, braid, or knotted handkerchief.

play the instruments such as double drums in the open air depending on the features of a given district, horn, *bağlama* (instrument with three double strings played with a plectrum) in places where double drums are not played, *turnak kemane*, violin, *dümbek*, tambourine, tongs with *zil*, and musicians would also sing. In general, a group (*kol*) is identified with the group leader's name (e.g., Ahmet kolu, Cevanir Kolu, Edirneli kolu, Bahçevan oğlu kolu, Halil kolu, Yahudi kolu) In addition to their dances, *köçeks*, the essential members for court and mansion festivities as well as social gatherings with alcohol, are famous for playing the instrument *çalpara*. The most reputed dancers are known to be *Mazlum Şah*, *Küveli Ayvaz Şah*, *Saçlı Ramazan Şah*, *Coker Şah*, *Küçük Şahin Şah*, *Şeker Şah*, *Sülün Şah*, *Sakızlı Zalim Şah*, *Nazlı Yusuf*, *Çingene İsmail*, *Büyük Afet*, *Altıntop*, *Tazefidan*, *Kanarya*, *Yeni Dünya*, *Kıvırcık*, *Tilki* etc.



Enderunlu Fazıl stated that many dancer names were in fact stage names and while mentioning 45 dancers, he handed in these dancers' stage names:

*Altın Top, Taze Fidan, Kanarya, Yeni Dünya, Kıvırcık, Tilki, Afitab, Pamuk, Velvele and Ahu. The others used only Greek names: Küçük (Little) Panayot, Küçük Andon, Yanako, and Bulgar (Bulgarian) Todori. One of Fazıl's favourite dancers was Küçük Afet whose original name was Armenian.*⁷

⁷ Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, 2000

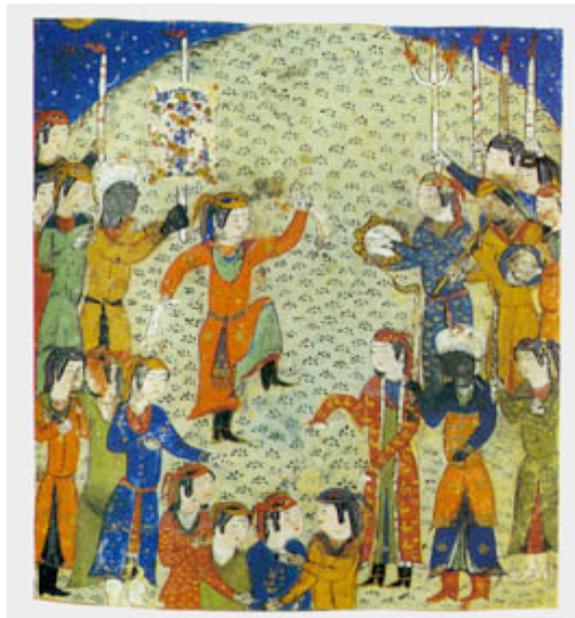
One of the arguments regarding *Köçeks* is that they were outlawed during the reign of Sultan Mahmud, and following this act of prohibition, most of them fled to Egypt, where Mehmet Ali Pasha was at the time. Another argument, though it is not for certain, suggests that these groups were banned with a law in 1857, or with *irabe-i seniye* in 1856. *Köçeks* that could not survive in Istanbul moved to Anatolia and were scattered to various regions. These were Anatolia and Egypt for *Köçeks*, and the Balkans for *Çengis*. Having had the opportunity to observe and research a very small part of Anatolia, including Zonguldak, Kastamonu, Bolu, Tokat, Kırşehir, Çankırı, I understand that nowadays the final performers of this traditional structure exist, trying to maintain their practices, which you can barely see. *Köçek* groups tell that only taking its commercial aspect into account, they are involved with this profession, and in terms of their clothing and life style, they do not relate themselves to Ottoman *köçeks*. Moreover, group dance (*kol oyunu*) and a kind of greeting dance (*karşılama*) performed by a single dancer/ two or more dancers are observed as a kind of Turkish Folk Dances. However, in terms of gender issues, *köçek* tradition could be viewed on stage during the 1950s, which was a period of night clubs (*gazino*). Later as *köçeks* disappeared with the prohibition of their dancing tradition, their figures got lost, and a new trend of homosexual dancers, who were sexually in line with this Ottoman *köçek* model, was initiated. In general, they reflected a female dancer (*rakkase*) of Arabic origin as their figures involved the oriental Arabic style.

The tradition of *Çengis* still exists in the Balkans under such names as *Cöcek*, *Çöçek*; especially in Kosova, Macedonia and Croatia this tradition is continued as a kind of Roman dances.

Our insights into the Ottoman-Turkish music and dance indicate that the artists were itinerants. Additionally, resulting from the cooperation of the Ottoman Empire with the neighbouring cultures until the 17th century, such a mobile character created very similar cultural understandings especially in Ottoman, Persian, Northern Indian and Turkestani palaces, woman's quarters (*harem*) and the recreational activities in urban

areas. Considering the interaction among these cultures, it is possible to observe this similarity both in the written documents dating back to the period before the 17th century and in the figurative records of such cultural centres as Bagdat, Herat, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tebriz, Semerkand, Buhara, Horasan, Delhi. This interaction is not only involved with music, but also with dance, which is of second importance in recreational art. Briefly, dancers, accompanying the musicians in various artistic centers of Azerbaijan, Transoxiana and different parts of Anatolia, arrived in Istanbul during this establishment process. We also infer that the music and dance brought by these artists was respected in Timurid and Safavid palaces, but it was also a part of the tradition that existed in a large area of the Middle East. These music and dance performers, who came from Iran, Egypt and Anatolia, had been active in various palaces over an extensive geographical area. This type of music and dance maintained its influence for a long time during the establishment process of the Ottoman tradition.

Considering the figurative sources, the first miniature involving music and dance themes depicts a female dancer accompanied by female musicians playing the *ney* and *def* during a wedding ceremony in the *hamam* of a Turkoman palace of the 14th century.



In an entertainment scene within Timur's palace from the 15th century a female dancer playing the *çarpara* is accompanied by female and male musicians, and these female musicians play the *kanun* and *def* during the event held in honour of *Timur*. In line with the concept of scenes frequently displayed in these miniatures, women generally sing; play the instruments such as *çeng*, *kanun*, *bendir*, *daire*, *def*, *kopuz*, *Khorasan drum (tanbur)*, *fiddle (kemençe)*, *reed flute (ney)*, and dance with *çarpara* in their hands. It is possible to predict from these scenes that women in the palace or other houses learned to play these instruments, to sing and dance by taking private courses, and put what they learned into practice during the festivities in the court or in their houses. Except for these women, itinerant musicians and dancing *çengis* who are not members of the palace or a house can also be observed.



Timur in Palace Entertainment

With the conquest of Istanbul by the Ottomans, these oriental capitals that pioneered the makam music transferred their roles to Istanbul, making the city a new cultural center where musicians from the East and West gathered. Istanbul, the cultural center of the Ottomans, assumes a crucial place in determining the Ottoman life of music and dance in the other major Ottoman city centres that generalized central culture. Festivities in these cities were organized in official visits, the Sultan's palaces or pavilions, events specially held for sultans's circumcision feasts, mansions,

promenade places, halva gatherings, coffee houses and drinking houses. The texts on the Ottomans put much emphasis on the significance of Istanbul.

As the written Ottoman sources suggest, Tursun Bey, who lived during the reign of Sultan Mehmet, the Conqueror, in the 15th century, mentions the concubine singers and their instruments in Fatih's sons' circumcision feast as follows;

*"Ud u şeştâr ve tanbur u barbut u nây, kanun-ı padişahî üzre taraf taraf efgane başladı ve bölük bölük muganniye cariyeler çenge çeng urdılar"*⁸

Moreover, a book on the life in Istanbul mentions the life of entertainment as in the following;

Istanbul festivals that continued in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and that became quite pervasive in the seventeenth century are so diverse. There were many people who were professionally involved in recreational arts and earned their livings. These hundreds of people with various jobs and skills came together to live, work and earn money as a society. Those in the major districts were invited to festival days such as weddings, births, circumcision feasts, fireworks; they would go in crowds and perform their plays; people of various races and religions were included among them. ⁹

⁸ AKSOY, Bülent, "Osmanlı Müsiki Geleneğinde Kadın ", *Osmanlı, Yeni Türkiye Yayınları*, C.10, Ankara, 1999, p.790

⁹ Ahmet Sevengil, *İstanbul Nasıl Eğleniyordu*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1993, p.43



Miniature from Fatih Period 15th.cc.

Guillaume Postel, asked to visit Istanbul as the vice-ambassador by the French king Francois I in 1537, mentions a çengi group in his work *Republique des Turcs*, published in 1560, and discusses female performers in the group as below;

“Another instrument for entertainment is the harp, which is quite common thanks to its nice sound. (Çeng) The instrument resembles a somewhat large herringbone with its horizontal bar over which denton is not attached so that it sounds better, and its strings are connected below. Girls called Çeng Singuin (Gypsy) play the instrument in exchange of money, just like it is the case with bards. While one of the girls plays the harp, the other plays a small def, only one side of which is leather stretched, with its brass zils. Two, three girls show their litheness that is larger-than-life; meanwhile, all of them sing. Later, the oldest and most beautiful one of all stands up slowly to change the atmosphere. Throwing her headscarf and cap embroidered with gilded silver thread, she puts on the turban that men wear like a hat, and plays a non-verbal role powerfully to enact the feeling of love. Her friend, on the one hand, plays the çengi that she puts upright between her legs; on the other

*hand, she plays a rhythm by patting her knees onto the floor and with similar movements.”*¹⁰

Du Loir, a French businessman who visited Istanbul with the French Ambassador Jean de la Haye in 1639 and stayed in Turkey for seven months, stated that Turks listened to music while having their meals. After a meal he was invited to, he saw the women behind the curtains, who were listening to the music, performed firstly by men and later only by women;

*“While the women called Çengi were playing the Çeng, the other group of women sang songs playing the ‘Rebab’, a round instrument with a long handle, and the percussive instrument daire. The female dancers playing the çalpara danced in the middle.”*¹¹

John Covel, a British man who visited Turkey during 1670–79, describes the *köçek* as follows;

*“They had clothes made of gold, silver and high quality silk. The petticoat (iç eteklik), a part of the costume, signifies the feminine aspect of the dance.”*¹²

D’ohsson who visited the Ottomans in the 18th century points out the following;

*“Participation of women in the organisations held in promenade places are the most frequently mentioned points in the records. These places are Kâğıthane and Küçükusu. Çengis sing and dance with such instruments as çeng, daire, zil.”*¹³

In his work *Defter-i Aşk* Enderunlu Fazıl, poet of the late 18th century, describes in detail the character Çengi İsmail, a Gypsy dancer and narrates his love adventures. He mentions İsmail’s admission into the court, his dismissal after his falling in love with some young men in Enderun, his misery and love affair with a young gypsy. This marriage leads to troubles for him, and makes him reluctant enough to quit dancing. A miserable and an unfortunate dancer figure is highlighted at the end of the poem.

¹⁰ Bülent AKSOY, *Avrupalı Gezginlerin Gözüyle Türk Müsikişi*, Pan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, p.23

¹¹ Bülent AKSOY, *“Osmanlı Müsiki Geleneginde Kadın”*, a.g.m, p.790

¹² Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet, Traditional Crossroads, NY.;, 2000

¹³ D’OHSSON, *18.yy Türkiyesi’nde Örf ve Adetler*, Tercüman Yayınları, İstanbul, y.t.y (197?), p. 243

In *Çenginame* (Book on Male Dancers) Fazıl deals with the most prominent male dancers in Istanbul at the time. During a group conversation about men and their male beloveds, the poet listens to a discussion on dancers called *çengi*. Each person praises a different *çengi*, exalting them to the skies, but cannot decide who is the most handsome and gifted of all. As a result, when asked to arbitrate and write a book on this topic, Fazıl draws up his *Çingename*, in which he mentions 42 Greek, Jewish, Armenian, Croatian and Gypsy male dancers through poems. Fazıl's descriptions about some dancers in *Çingename* are included below;

“BÜYÜK AFET (in the meaning of Dangerously Beautiful), lovely YORGAKI's pure body is like silver. His manner and heroic walk are unique in the world. His appearance and actions attract people to himself... Even if he gets into the lover's nose, it is worth it. ANDON was charming with his hands and mouth; he was like Iskender on the throne of coyness, he had two thousand lovers... Now flies have crowded on his face; ants have dropped on his sweet lips... Apparently, beauty is like a bird... The proportional body and stature of MISIRLI, the shah of Çengis, are unique. He is of Jewish origin. When he starts to dance with his whole body, he drives the public crazy... He has a myriad of lovers. Both his face and his walk are pleasant; he looks more pleasant when he unfastens his shalvar... KANARYA, erects his lovers' tools... A nightingale among the beautiful... Our role near him is to hold candles...”

In “*Çenginame*” Fazıl mentions that most *çengi* and *köçek* dancers, having lost their attractiveness, pursued their careers as mimes and singers, and he illustrates it with a Jewish *çengi* whose stage name is Latif;

*“Latif is not young, so what is the use of talking about this Jewish man? He is not either beautiful or skilled. However, his voice is excellent; he enchants people with his voice, but do not touch his fez; he is bald.”*¹⁴

Similarly, Julia Pardoe mentions Küçüksu, the leading excursion spot for women. During Lady Montagu's visit to the Chamberlain's wife Fatma Hanım, the Lady, who

¹⁴ Feldman, Walter, *Köçekçeler*, CD-Booklet Traditional Crossroads, NY., 2000

stayed in Istanbul and Edirne between 1717–1718, records that her daughters were singing, dancing, playing the *lavta* and *tanbur* in the event she attended.¹⁵



In 17th century “*Raksiye*”, the composer of which is unknown, is mentioned in Ali Ufki Bey’s work *Mecmua-i Saz ü Söz*, including the sample pieces performed in the court. “*Rakkas*”, composed by Ibrahim Chelebi, who was a member of the janissary band, is included in Kantemiroğlu’s work “*Kitabu İlmi’l- Musiki Ala Vechi’l Hurufat*” (Defining Music with Letters and Book on the Science of Interpretation).¹⁶

Itinerants in the 19th century remarked that most dancers were young boys born in the Greek archipelagos, and that most people from the Chios were involved with positions related to either dancing or drinking places (*meyhane*). *Meyhanes* in Istanbul Kumkapı, the Golden Horn, Galata/Pera were generally the meeting points of dancers. Female and male professional dancers were in good conditions until the beginning of reforms during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II, but jannisaries’ complaints about the unpleasant events caused by their audience in *meyhanes* and other performing places restricted *çengis*’ workspace. Therefore, a great majority of them emigrated to Egypt,

¹⁵ Burçak EVREN, CAN, Dilek Girgin, *Yabancı Gezinler ve Osmanlı Kadını*, Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 1997, p. 59

¹⁶ KANTEMİROĞLU [Yayına Hazırlayan: Prof. Yalçın TURA], *Kitab’ül İlmi’l Mûsikî ala Vechü’l Hurufat*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2000,

and when those who did not emigrate turned into “*persona non grata*” due to their dances, they gave rise to a scandal during the time of Sultan Abdülmecid (1839–1861). Finally, in 1857 the Sultan banned their performances. Another reason was that the Ottomans transferred from low comedy, which was a tradition of the 19th century, to vaudevilles of the European style, so *çengis* and *köçeks* in low comedy could not find a suitable place where they would perform their art.

As a musical form, *köçekçe* includes folk dance, tavern dance and *çengis*’ dance that has disappeared. In order to understand the formation of *köçekçe* music and dance, the starting point of research should be the Ottoman *meyhanes*. Although religious and political pressures resulted in attempts to close them down in the 16th and 17th centuries, the authorities could not achieve it in the 18th century.

Throughout the westernisation and modernisation period of the Ottomans, renewal movements in the musical field initiated with the reign of Mahmud II; following him, the Sultan Abdülmecid also gave support to the music and entertainment trends from the West. The first performance with piano in the court, the private piano courses for both the Sultan’s daughters and concubines, a fanfare orchestra of the concubines, events of a female dance group in the court started with *Abdülmecid* in the 19th century. In order that male musicians were not allowed into *harem*, performances to be displayed by the female dance group would also include female musicians, which meant that a fanfare involving women was formed.¹⁷ During some festivals the fanfare group would interpret opera songs, while also accompanying the female dance group that performed Scottish, Spanish and some other European dances, various plays as well as pantomimes. Leyla (Saz) Hanım, one of the most remarkable composers, performers and woman of letters, are among those who attended the first private piano courses. In her memoirs she mentions her music life in the *harem* as follows;

“*The fanfare group and orchestra of Western music would have courses twice a week whereas the Ottoman music group would attend their courses once a week.*”

¹⁷ Refik Ahmed SEVENGİL, *Opera Sanatı İle İlk Temaslarımız*, MEB Yayınları, İstanbul, 1970, p.62

*There was a separate room for ballet courses. In one of the concerts of Harem-i Hümayun women's orchestra all the members in jackets and trousers had short hair, and they were wearing fez. Turkish music courses would begin with any makam depending on the saz musician's preference; a prelude and composition of that makam are played. Afterwards, while the fiddle was beginning a solo performance (taksim), eight-ten young female dancers would come in and form a line in front of the vocalist group, waiting for the fiddle to move to makam of Karcıgar. With the end of the solo performance, köçeks' dance would begin with their first song, and they would take their steps.*¹⁸

According to some other information given by *Leyla Hanım*, the lower floor near *selamlık* (men's place) in Çırağan and Dolmabahçe palaces was reserved as a study room for the brass band. Tutors were male. The forewomen in the band would come with their daily clothes although they had headscarves hanging down to their shoulders. The female dancers would not wear headscarves. Black eunuchs in the sultan's palace (*haremağaları*) taking the tutors to the classroom and concubines accompanying the female dancers and musicians would attend the courses. Additionally, on the condition that they kept their silence, little girls in the court were given the opportunity to participate in these courses in order to gain some familiarity with music.¹⁹

In this article, drawing on the historical sources, I have made an attempt to discuss *Köçeks* and *Çengis*, the two major components of Ottoman dance, through a historical methodology. Since the first day of my research, I have believed that such a study should be evaluated in terms of musical identity and gender. In addition to this, I would really like to point out that it is essential to conduct detailed research on what kind of a historical understanding was considered in writing these documents, and to discover how this understanding was evaluated to form into the relevant documents. Regarding that nearly all these sources were recorded from a masculine perspective,

¹⁸ Leyla SAZ, *Haremin İcyüzü*, Milliyet Yayınları, 1974

¹⁹ Leyla SAZ, a.g.e., s.*****.

in a male-dominant society, we take notice of the necessity to explain how this discussion overlaps with Fatma Berktay's perspective "Woman History" and to come up with very explicit answers to the question "Which Human Being?".

When a "human being" as an individual is sent back to its position in the past, it is inevitable that its factual identity (race, nation, class, gender, religion) comes onto the agenda. Because the abstract and universal understanding of "human" in terms of the Enlightenment is criticised in that it follows the European identity of white, and bourgeois man, the perspective of "Woman History" resulted from the rise of an awareness of the fact that History claiming to be universal was only a partial phenomenon and excluded half of the humanity from history. At this point, I have referred to Walter Feldman, who presented crucial information on the topic, though not detailed, in line with "Feminist historiography" and included some of his definitions and quotations. As the quotations also suggest, I would like to shed light on the fact that, regarding gender issues, it is essential to research deeply into *çengis* with non-Moslem and Gypsy identities in urban life as well as those with different identities in the *harem* life of the Ottomans since extending the research from the urban life in Istanbul to the other cities in different regions under the Ottoman rule will provide more clarity to the topic. Considering *köçeks*, the masculine image in feminine costumes and identities of the recruited, castrated page boys in the Ottoman court should be studied and evaluated not only within the framework of gender issues, but also together with the non-Moslems' identities in the Ottoman culture. Presenting this article, I aim at providing some insight to researchers who are voluntary to carry out advanced research in the field upon the type of methods they should take into account as a manner of approaching this subject.

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