

## CHAIN DANCE *TESHKOTO* - CULTURAL IDENTITY MARKER OF MACEDONIANS

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### Abstract

Every nation through the process of building identity chooses symbols that shall identify and represent it. Unlike many examples of taking heraldic symbols, emblems associated with the geographic, political, religious characteristics; Macedonia is a rare case where a dance becomes an identification code. That is Macedonian dance *Teshkoto*, from the Reka region.

Regarding the construction of *Teshkoto* as an identity marker, we can notice two separate processes. The first one was the emergence and development of components that created and complemented the meaning of the dance. The second phase was the process of acceptance and establishment of this dance form as a national symbol. Its development as a cultural marker can be followed through two periods - the period of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia as a part of SFR Yugoslavia and the period of independence of the Republic of Macedonia. Namely, despite differences in the socio-political context, the trend of promoting and glorifying exact folk dance form - *Teshkoto* continues.

The example of *Teshkoto* shows the process of inauguration of a consciously chosen identity marker and its acceptance as a national symbol.

### Different Points of View

Before I start analyzing the main point of the dance *Teshkoto* which throughout the time has become an idiom of the Macedonian people, I would like to start this text in a less formal manner. I will try to present several different points of view on *Teshkoto*, with different perceptions of people who have noticed the effect of this folk dance, as a result of their personal explorations, experiences and inspirations.

The first 'difficult' part starts and is danced slowly, dilatorily. The slower, the firmer and better. You stand for a long time on one leg you cross the legs higher. Balance must be maintained, it is breathtaking for the audiences. The dance leader in particular, together with the other dancers, creates a *strong* bond between the beats on the drum and his en-tire being, soul and each nerve of his body. Every movement is psychologically justified and deeply experienced. It looks as if the Lazaropole inhabitant is experiencing with this dance the whole year when he was working and seeking fortune far away from his native place – a year filled with struggles and sufferings. The inner fire flares up until the hidden flame, blazing up entirely. Eventually, the audiences are feeling vertiginous by the force the dance leader's spins, by the burst of his *strong* dance, by the throbbing of the entire folk dance –(Janković Ljubica and Danica<sup>1</sup>, 1948:22)

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<sup>1</sup>Janković Ljubica and Danica are two sisters who have researched the folklore on the territory of almost entire ex-Yugoslavia, including the folk dances from Macedonia. From their field studies in the period between 1934 and 1964 they have published eight books and left one book not yet published, with records and descriptions. These records are the first ones related to Macedonian folk dances

At the numerous performances of *Teshkoto*, I observed between June and September 2011, the crowds consistently responded to it with greater enthusiasm than to any other piece, which I generally expected given the significance of *Teshkoto* and its position either as the opening piece for *Tanec* or the central piece of the *Galichnik Wedding*. However, as I began to interview individuals about their experiences, they consistently described deeply emotional responses, many involving chills or crying. One politically disinterested friend turned to me as soon as a performance of *Teshkoto* began, showing me the hairs raising on his arm. Some of the dancers in *Tanec* communicated a similar feeling of chills during the performance, indicating feelings of pride at contributing to such a symbolic moment. (Wilson<sup>2</sup>, 2014: 245)

In the faces of the folk dancers, each one of us recognizes one's great-grandfather, grandfather, father or son. In order to meet, to get to know ourselves, we need to look in that magical object, the mirror and see our reflection, to put aside the computer, the tech no music and to listen to the cry of Macedonian zurla and the sound of the drum, because *Teshkoto* is a reflection of Macedonian identity (Mironska-Hristovska<sup>3</sup>, 2002:146)

With the beginning of my professional work, I immediately started choreographing, too. I even represented myself with my own choreography at the audition for entering the Croatian National Theatre. And do you know what I made choreography for? For *Teshkoto*. It is truly an extraordinary music that fascinates me and that is why I chose it. Other choreographies followed, but I remember *Teshkoto* until today – Milko Shparenblek<sup>4</sup> (Zdravkova-Djeparoska, 1999: 50).

Not by accident are people of more nationalities (Macedonian, American, Serbian, Croatian) and with different professions chosen in the fractions, in order to “catch” the different aspects of experience, reception and interpretation. Following the fractions we can conclude that, generally speaking, *Teshkoto* is an exceptionally attractive folk dance which provokes deep emotional reactions of the audience, regarding both its performance and musical basis. But, is that enough for it to turn into an identity symbol of Macedonians, or have other elements supported the process?

### **Building of the Identity Marker**

Glorification of some of the aspects of the historical past is a method commonly used in the national identity building. As a rule, in order to achieve that, we choose distinguished individuals, historical events, emblems, heraldry or, as in this case, a dance that acquires another social function. In our example the process of creation of a new national symbol was supported by several separate events, each of which strongly influenced first the popularization and then the identity marking of *Teshkoto*.

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2-Dave Wilson is currently Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He lived in Macedonia from 2002-04, 2013-14 and partly 2011 and 2012 . He is researching the Macedonian dance and music.

3-Valentina Mironska-Hristovska is research fellow at the Department for Macedonian Literature, Skopje. Key qualifications and resorts on main interest: Macedonian literature, history of Macedonian literature, history of philosophy and culturological concepts. Author of six publications; the latest is *Literary Studies of Macedonian Identity* (2012).

4-Milko Shparenblek is one the most distinguished Croatian choreographers. Besides working in the most prominent theatres in Yugoslavia, he also choreographed and worked as an artistic manager in Portugal, Belgium, USA, France etc. In 1999 he staged his cult performance “Songs for love and death” for the Macedonian National Theatre (MNT).

The views on the notion “identity” in contemporary science have expanded so much that they often cause confusions. “‘Identity’ we argue tends to mean too much (when understood in *strong* sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:1). Robert Penn Warren has identical attitude. In his book about black identity *Who Speaks for the Negro* he wrote “I seize the word *identity*. It’s key word... On this word will focus, around this word coagulate, a dozen issues, shifting, shading into each other” (Gleason, 1983:913). One of the three concepts of identity defined by Stuart Hall reveals the relationship between the individual and the context, focusing on socio-cultural issues. “According to this view, which has become the classic sociological conception of the issue, identity is formed in the ‘interaction’ between self and society. The subject still has an inner core or essence that is ‘the real me’, but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds ‘outside’ and the identities which they offer.” (Hall, 2000:597). Identity is a kind of umbrella which gives space to the individual or group to find values, features which are recognized and shared. One of the major categories in the process of identity building is culture - language, folklore, literature etc. One of the first ones who addressed the issue of *Cultural Identity* in the 1960s while studying political culture, was Lucian Pye who defined it as a feeling of belonging somewhere, based on common particularities such as language, race, religion etc., that in a given situation become basis of identification. Beside the above-mentioned fundamental categories of identification, we can also detect a wide range of other elements that create the relief i.e. the mosaic of the picture called *cultural identity* (such as customs, national costumes, national and regional cuisines, language dialects, music, dance culture etc). In this analysis the *cultural Identity* is predominantly articulated through cultural policies. John Tosh in the interview with Jordan and Weedon wrote “The individual feeling for one’s own past arises spontaneously, but the historical meaning of that past must be created” (Jordan and Weedon, 1999: 73). It is a task of cultural policy, i.e. of its mechanisms that are in correlation with general public policy and social climate, to consider, shape and create meanings. Selection and promotion of a certain symbol in a cultural policy is not accidental at all; on the contrary, it is deliberate and purposeful<sup>5</sup>.

Dance *Teshkoto* according to its characteristics, manner of performance, long before the process of identity articulation beginning is distinguished from the other Macedonian dances. It is considered to be one of the most beautiful and most difficult Macedonian folk dances. The dance originates and is performed in the north-west part of Macedonia, belonging to the ethnographic conglomeration of *Reka* (River). People who gravitate towards this territory are called *Mijaci* (transliterated as Miyak). Reka region received its name from the river Radika and its tributary Little River. Geographically, Reka region is bordered by the southern branches of the Sharr Mountains, Bistra and south to northern parts of mountain Deshat. Given stated the extremely rugged terrain, with numerous mountain peaks higher than 2,500 meters above sea level, the villages (Galichnik, Gari, Lazaropole, Tresonche, Osoj) of this region were often cut off from the rest of the world, especially in winter.

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5-In the period after 2008 we witness a subtle transition i.e. substitution of the current identity markers in the Republic of Macedonia with new ones that offer different contents and concept. The blockage of the accession processes of Macedonia to the European Union and NATO by Greece has imposed, as a response to it, a tendency to highlight the ancient background of Macedonians. That is supported by a variety of activities (renaming infrastructure facilities, i.e. giving streets, roads and public structures names of ancient heroes, placing monuments of these historical figures etc.).

Limited existence facilities have forced these people, especially males to leave their homes and to go abroad to earn for a living, away from their homeland. The destinations differed varying from oversea countries to closer surroundings. In the new working places Miyaks danced, sang and promoted their cultural characteristics outside their native social environment. On the other hand, in the late 1930s festivals for folklore art started to get organized on the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and groups from Macedonia also participated in some of those performances. In her study dedicated to the national ensemble *Tanec*, the ethnochoreologist Ivancić-Dunin, relying on written sources, points out that folk dancers from Lazaropole have made a tour throughout Yugoslavia under the organization of *Serbian Sisterhood Circle* in 1939 (in the cities of Vrshac, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo). The Miyak dancers from Lazaropole took part on the Folk Dance Festival in Brussels, Belgium in 1939. *Teshkoto* was one of central performances in the repertoire of the Miyak groups. We will have to make a slight digression here in order to mention the other groups that had performed at these festivals and had popularized Macedonian traditional dances outside their birthplaces. The sisters Janković and later on also Maud Karpeles from the English Folk Song and Dance Society in London presented the attractiveness and beauty of the national dances from the village of Rashtak, Skopsko. The dances from this village were also presented at the *First Belgrade Folk Festival* in 1938, as well at *Germany International Worker's Festival* in Hamburg, Germany in 1939. At the *Friend's Folk Dance Festival* in London, *Rusalii* dancers from Petrovo village, Gevgelisko were presented. These three ethnographic groups distinguished themselves and were recognized by their attractiveness and authenticity and they became a "product of exported folklore". This was later reflected on the creation of the ensemble *Tanec*'s<sup>6</sup> repertoire. "So the model for performing or demonstrating village dances out of their social contexts had begun in Yugoslavia during the 1930s. It is significant to note that many dances of the dances that were being performed in those 1935-1939 festivals in and outside of Yugoslavia - *Teshkoto* from Lazaropole, dances from Rashtak village near *Skopje*, and *Rusalii* dances from Gevgelija area - became on early part of *Tanec* repertory, 1949-1953" (Ivančić-Dunin, Vishinski, 1995:6). Another event that strongly influenced the perception of *Teshkoto* was the performance of the already formed dance group of the ensemble *Tanec*, at the festival in Llangollen, Great Britain in 1950, where the Miyaks' folk dances *Teshkoto* and *Lesnoto* were presented. The group won the first prize. It was first official international valuation and valorization of Macedonian folklore in new state Yugoslavia, and because of that, this prize was very important and precious. On the Yugoslavian tour of *Tanec*, *Teshkoto* was on its repertoire. It was also part of the program of the Folk Dance Festival at Albert Hall at the end of 1950. In 1948 "Jadran film" made the film *Jugoslovenske narodne igre* (Yugoslav Folk Dances) with representatives from each of the six republics in Yugoslavia. The chosen dance from Macedonia was *Teshkoto* (this is one of the oldest videos of *Teshkoto*). In the video the dance was performed by dancers from Lazaropole.

Apart from the "magic" of performing it, some other factors have also contributed to making *Teshkoto* an outstanding dance. Its title translated in English means - hardship, heavy, difficult. In the dance it is related to the specific way of dancing - slowly with dignity. "The 'Teskoto' [heavy, slow, difficult] is dance genre as well as a name of particular dance. As a dance genre it tends to

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6-The National ensemble of dances and songs *Tanec* was established, by Decree of the Macedonian Government in 1949, with idea of preserving, cherishing of Macedonian folklore.

refer to a slowly performed, rubato step pattern; the dance is slow counterpart of Macedonia 'Les-noto' (an 'easy' faster dance)" (ibid, 265). The concrete group - *teshki ora* [heavy dances] includes hundreds others, but the most famous among them is *Teshkoto* from Galichnik and Lazaropole. The title can easily be given a symbolic meaning and become a moving picture of Macedonians and their own history in general. Macedonia after the Byzantine period was ruled by the Ottoman Empire for a period of five centuries. In the beginning of XX<sup>th</sup> century Macedonian territory was annexed to other Balkan countries - Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania with the Bucharest Treaty from 1913. Macedonian people were separated in different countries and process of their assimilation and national disfiguration started. Feeling of separation, injustice and bitterness followed the Macedonian people from then until today. The title *Teshkoto* (The Hardship) was excellent association for the historical past. An additional sense of concrete historical situation and meaning to the dance were achieved by publishing the eponymous poem of the Macedonian poet Blazhe Koneski. The poem was written in 1946, in the thick of establishing Macedonia as an integral part of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. Koneski is one of the most prominent figures of the entire Macedonian culture and identity. He codified the Macedonian standard language. One of the basic particularities of a nation is its language. "Ethnicity is the term we give to cultural features - language, religion, custom, traditions, feeling for 'place' - which are shared by a people" (Hall, 2000:617). The Balkan is especially sensitive to issues concerning language and ethnic groups. It is just enough mentioning the assimilation of the Macedonian population that lived in Greece, with the enforcement of Greek language in schools and official communication, ban on using Macedonian language in churches and renaming toponyms. Besides working on standardization of the language, Koneski continued contributing on the affirmation of Macedonian language in diverse spheres (literature, education, translations into Macedonian). Koneski established the Faculty of Philology in *Skopje* in 1947. He was one of the founders of Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts since 1967, and was elected as president from 1967-1975. Koneski was also a member of the Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian Academies of Sciences and Arts, and honorary doctor of the Universities of Chicago, United States, and Krakow, Poland. He had significant place in the social life of Macedonia, but beside that he was one of the most noteworthy names in contemporary Macedonian literature. One of his first poems *Teshkoto* was inspired by a performance of folk dancers he watched dancing in Prilep during the war. Because the poem itself is one of the key elements for the determination of the content of *Teshkoto*, I am going to cite a longer part of the poet's explanation for his inspiration. He says:

Here it is the history of *Teshkoto*: During the war and occupation, probably at Easter in 1942 in Prilep, as well as other years when some kind of villagers' reunion was held... [...] Walking down the old promenade, I noticed a folk dance in progress, but without wind instruments and a drum. Maybe there was only a kaval (kind of flute) playing, but I am not sure of it ... It is time of misfortunes and tragedies, wartime, and yet, a folk dance is being danced, there is something more important and timeless for those people, something that continues... The feeling remained the same, a general fascination with the remembered faces. But I could not say which folk dance exactly they were dancing - (Mironska-Hristovska, 2002:145).

The very location of the city of Prilep and the absence of music (which in the poem is depicted by additional description) makes us think that Koneski might not directly refer to the Miyak's *Teshkoto*. However, the fact that both the folk dance and the poem hold the same title is striking for the audiences. Starting from the poem of Blazhe Koneski, the *Teshkoto* dance was given narrative

explication, which covered all aspects of a historical moment and the struggle for national liberation. This is a rare case where the dance receives precise meaning and description. Ana Martinovska, studying the relationship between folklore and its influence on literature, in particular on Koneski works, wrote about *Teshkoto*: “The poet describing the dance has managed to show the hard past and the difficult life of the people” (Martinovska, 2012:166). In this analysis, parts from the song will be given. I will try to explain the process of connecting dance with epic dimension and impregnation of meaning through the same title. The poem begins with a description of the emotional disposition.

O *Teshkoto*! As the zurla wildly shrieks,  
As the tapan roars with deep echo –  
Deep sorrow, why do you crush my chest,  
Deep river, why do you well up in my eyes [...]

Then Koneski describes the dance, movements and the character of its the interpretation:

Oh, *Teshkoto*! Elderly men are coming out,  
on their foreheads, a thought, in their eyes, tears  
and the first step on the soft grass  
is quiet and slow, with retained grief [...]

In the second part of the poem, Koneski connected dance with the difficult history of the Macedonian people, with battle for freedom. The poem ends with the glorification of the victory over fascism, and freedom that finally after many centuries Macedonia obtained.

And the soul, you think, my people tortured  
in *Teshkoto* is woven –  
century after century gathering darkness  
of bloody pain, of slaves,  
century after century passed with thought  
of a joyful children, for free world,  
from song—for love that dies with the outcry! [...]

O *Teshkoto*! You were the chains of slavery,  
Until there remained a nation of the forested mountain;  
Even with the misery of the collected centuries  
a wild, rebellious folk dance took our lead! [...]

O *Teshkoto*! Now in our villages  
We will meet in freedom for the first time to dance  
Is it strange – for burning tears to flow  
Is it strange – for me to feel grief in my heart?! [...] (Koneski, 1965:9-12)<sup>7</sup>

Popularity of the poem grows up throughout the years. It is part of almost every anthology of Macedonian poetry. Koneski's *Teshkoto* is part of the curriculum for the subject Macedonian language in elementary schools. It has gradually become a verbal image of the dance bearing the same name.

7-I couldn't find English translation of the poem, so I used translation made by Dave Wilson from his text “*Teshkoto* and national sentiment in Macedonia: ascribing meaning, experiencing tradition”, and in part poem was translated by Marija Avshar and Marjan Djeperovski

In addition to these components and the process of turning *Teshkoto* into a myth, we can notice one more key factor - the activities of Emanuel Chuchkov. He is an exceptional person, from political aspect. Chuchkov was a first Minister from Macedonia in Yugoslavian Government in 1945. He was a founder of the State Ensemble *Tanec* and its head (1949-1955). His text *The idea behind our folk dance* was published in *Kulturen zivot* on April 23rd 1951. The same year this text in extended version entitled *Ideological Content and Rhythmic Processes in Macedonian Folk Dance* was published in the journal *Sovremenost* (Modernity). This text is the key to instrumentalization of national folk dances and their usage as a tool for setting some historical and ideological parallels. In this case, the tradition should have been interpreted in the spirit of the new socialistic order, where the folklore was very skillfully linked with some historical background. Macedonian ethnokoreologist Opetcheska-Tatarchevska writes about the change in the discourse of interpretation and meaning of the folklore given by Chuchkov. "With this text Chuchkov gives the political and ideological basis for instrumentalisation of the dances, to the extent of historical narration" (Zdravkova-Djeparoska, Opetcheska-Tatarchevska, 2012:101). In 1952 he published the above-mentioned text in French ("Contenu Idéologique et Procès Rythmique de la Danse Populaire Macédonienne) in the Journal of IFMC (International Folk Music Council), thus allowing these ideas to acquire their own international affirmation. In this text he wrote "*Teshkoto*" is a prototype of all Macedonian folk dance styles" (Chuchkov, 1951:65). While he was working as a Head of *Tanec*, he developed and practiced this thesis. *Teshkoto* transformed from a folk dance of the Miyaks into a folk dance of the Macedonians.

Chuchkov's strategy regarding contents and historical determination of the abstract dance structure, the popularity of Koneski's poem, as well as the appealing title of the Miyaks' folk dance, became a perfect amalgam for production of new contents within the already existing dancing pattern.

### **Process of Acceptance of the Identity Marker – *Teshkoto***

Gradually, in the course of the years to follow, *Teshkoto* became a universally accepted identity symbol related predominantly to the Macedonian ethnicity. It continued to live through a majority of replicas, quotations and artistic variations on this topic. A series of artworks followed on with this motive - paintings, sculptures, musical compositions, ballet, that processed, commented the original, through which its meaning multiplied. This process can be divided into two cycles, the first one being related to the socialist period between 1945 and 1991, and the second one the period after Macedonia's becoming independent, i.e. after 1991.

The period of socialism, in particular the first years, were generally associated with intensified establishment of institutions that supported and built the identity. Jordan and Weedon, writing about the cultural policy of a class, where they take for example East Germany, remark that the countries belonging to the socialist block tended to shift the emphasis from the individual to the collective. In the course of this process, various associations were established (youth's, workers' farmers' associations within the factories), whose idea was to embrace the social classes that were marginalized in the previous structure of the society. The cultural demands and needs of the associations were advocated in coordination with the centralized system which produced cultural models and ideologies. Professor Zlatko Kramarić, in his text paper *Cultural Identity vs. Democracy/Mondalisation* explains and clarifies one other aspect of the cultural policy in the socialist countries: "It is usually neglected as a fact, but Stalin's period played an important role in creating

the 'national' cultures of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, based on systematic valorization of the elements of folk culture" (Kramarić, 2011:300). The models chosen often considered folklore a matrix necessary for self-defining and self-understanding. In addition to the above mentioned tendencies which were present in Macedonia, too, our country witnessed a separate, parallel process of establishment of culture institutions which put emphasis on the national profile. In this group of culture institutions belong: the Macedonian National Theatre<sup>8</sup> in 1945, the National Museum of Socialist Republic of Macedonia in 1945, the Ensemble for Folk Dances and Songs *Tanec* in 1949, the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra in 1960 etc. These three aspects: 1) activation of the whole population in the social processes (and, accordingly, in culture) on all levels, 2) choosing national/folk exponents in the process of establishing *Cultural Identity*, and 3) construction of national institutions that will deal with development and promotion of national identity and will become its representative – were perfect grounds for quick, efficient and agile acceptance of what was offered as matrix of national identification.

This was the direction taken also by the artistic pieces, thus frequently considering the issues of the national struggle for liberation, the Ilinden Uprising, or other separate exponents of national identity. One of the most distinguish Macedonian painters Nikola Martinovski in his cycle named "Characters and scenes from the everyday life" (1951-1961) painted the oil painting *Teshkoto* (1952/54). In the painting prevailing nuances are earth-like hues and dark green colours. The painter has painted one moment of the folk dance, but the very mixture of colours reflects homesickness, mystery, solemnity. The naïve painter Boro Arsovski painted in oil the same motive in 1979. What is particularly interesting about this painting is that at its bottom the painter has painted extracts from country life, more exactly, men leaving their families for going abroad to work there. While the folk dancers in *Teshkoto* are raised in the upper, skyward sphere, they are a metaphor for the departure and grief felt by the fortune seeker leaving. Unlike painting and sculpturing, where, due to the nature and type of the artistic expression, it is relatively easy to identify the motive of *Teshkoto*, music, because of its wide, associative range, is a little bit more complex for detecting and connecting with the dance. However, we were following the criterion that the composer himself, with his tunes, accomplished a link with the folk dance, i.e. we found clear, rhythmic tune cross-sections. Concerning music and the thematic relations with *Teshkoto*, most committed to this theme was one of the most significant Macedonian composers, Vlastimir Nikolovski. He has quite often addressed this issue in his pieces of work, writing: *Teshkoto for clarinet and piano* 1948, *Teshkoto for cello and piano* 1973, *Teshkoto* 1977. Besides instrumental compositions Nikolovski composed several vocal pieces on this subject: *Teshkoto for mixed choir* 1950 and *Teshkoto2 for mixed choir and drum* 1977. In this selective choice of art works when Miyaks' *Teshkoto* was a major motive, we must not forget the music composed by Gligor Smokvarski for the first Macedonian ballet. The ballet, which was entitled *Macedonian story* and dated 1953, included parts from *Teshkoto*. The ballet part *Teshkoto* begins with the beats on the drum (an instrument which does not belong to a symphonic orchestra) which is rhythmic grounds for the tunes prevailing throughout that part of the ballet, the zurla (which with tapan - dram is music accompaniment of traditional *Teshkoto*) is substi-

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8-The Drama ensemble commenced its work in the new socialist context on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945, with the theatre performance entitled *Platon Krechet*. The Opera started performing on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1947 with the performance of the opera *Kavaleriya Rustikana*, and the Ballet had its first performance on January 27<sup>th</sup> 1949, with the ballet *Bahchisarayska Fontana*.

tuted with a clarinet which leads the melody, supplemented with the orchestra. This part represents the climax of the score and therefore has been quite frequently performed separately. Perhaps the best example of its popularity is the guest visit of the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra in Oman in January 2012, where Smokvarski's *Teshkoto* was selected and performed as a national representative. This piece of music has often been rearranged and is regularly played by Macedonian chamber orchestras.

Macedonian independence again turned to the need of identity marking of the Macedonian nation, which was most commonly related to the Macedonian ethnicity. Authors of article *Beyond Identity*, Brubaker and Cooper speak of different understandings for identity; they defined *strong* and *weak* identity. The *strong* considers identity as "sameness over time and across persons" (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:10). It is something defined, completed, and with clear boundaries. The second type which may be more consistent with the ideas of modern, democratic, and in some cases even post-modern interpretation, creates the identity image as being elastic, fluid, and multiple. Macedonia, i.e. its leaders, developed a concept belonging to the so called "hard" interpretation of identity. This approach was used because of the need to bring to light and stress our own features as historical constants. "Before the end of the 1980s, in these areas (the author writes about Yugoslavia) it was of crucial importance to be "authentic", and this "being authentic" meant being drastically different from the neighbouring cultures, which were regarded considerably different" (Kramarić, 2011:301). Besides, during the period of constitution, and nowadays, too, Macedonia was/is facing substantial difficulties in the relations with the neighbouring countries<sup>9</sup>, fact which contributed to make this trend stronger and more obvious. During this period, politics makes serious efforts to stick to and even strengthen the already determined identity projects. Unlike the other former Yugoslav republics, Macedonia only continued to cherish the identity symbols it established in the previous years.

The idea to make *Teshkoto* a national brand got even stronger in the coming, post-socialist period. Many sculptors and painters found inspiration in this Miyaks' folk dance. Maybe most striking example of this trend is putting a chain of sculptures of folk dancers dancing *Teshkoto* downtown the capital, along the most frequent walking street *Makedonija*. This sculpture was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and was made by the sculptor Zlatan Trajkov in 2009. In the field of music, we must mention the music piece *Teshkoto* from 2005, written by the young composer Bojana Petrovich. This piece was originally composed for a cello, but following the requests of some of its performers, a transcription for a violin was added. As I mentioned previously, there is a great interest for Smokvarski's *Macedonian story* which was staged on Macedonian National Theatre in 1993.<sup>10</sup> The choreographer Olga Milosavleva introduced a change in *Teshkoto*. Namely,

9-Macedonia twenty-six years after its independence have open and unresolved issues with neighbouring countries. Greece blocks entry into the European Union and NATO because of the irrational assumption that Macedonia exclusively as the name belongs to them. Bulgaria acknowledges our country under its constitutional name, but expresses its reserves regarding recognition of independence of Macedonian language and people, subtly introducing and imposing the idea of common origin, history and language. Serbia and Macedonia have misunderstandings regarding the independence of the Macedonian church. So these misunderstandings burden the neighbours relations.

10-It is interesting to mention that this piece was staged in 1953 and in 1993. Those were the beginnings of a new structure of the society – socialist and democratic. By the example of *Macedonian Story*, we can notice affirmation of identical methods and usage of identical program solutions.

she replaced the traditionally male folk dancers with female ballet dancers. This new presentation of *Teshkoto* on a ballet stage created an artificial product which was accepted as a valid projection of the original performance. The ballet *Teshkoto* became one of the central performances at all visiting performances with ballet ensembles. A lot of the popularization of the dance can be attributed to the worldwide famous *Galichka Svadba* (Galichnik Wedding) which takes place every year on July 12<sup>th</sup> and where *Teshkoto* is danced. *Galichka Svadba* as official cultural event happened first time in 1963. Nowadays this event is under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Macedonia, which is an indicator of the significance of this event. As a rule, the wedding is attended by the leaders of the country, the diplomatic corps and a huge number of tourists.<sup>11</sup> The event is also supported by the Ministry of Culture, which considers this event as one of the instruments to promote national features. One of the most impressive moments at the wedding is dancing *Teshkoto*. At the award presenting ceremony held on February 24, 2005 at UNESCO Headquarters, when our famous opera singer Boris Trajanov was presented with the award UNESCO Artist for Peace by the Director-General of UNESCO Koichiro Matsuura, Macedonian folk dancers from ensemble *Tanec* performed *Teshkoto*.

*Teshkoto* became a part of the emblems and symbols of a many organizations and institutions. The first Macedonian currency printed in 1992 contained the most significant cultural and historical features – the monument called Makedonium (built in honour the Ilinden Uprising and Krushevo Republic), the church “Saint Sophia” in Ohrid, some national costumes etc. The 10.000-denar banknote contained motives with the leading dancer dancing on the top of the drum accompanied with others dancers performing *Teshkoto*. Recently *Teshkoto* was put on the emblem of the national ensemble for folk dances *Tanec*. This indirectly indicates that the managerial staff of *Tanec* favours this folk dance. Gradually, this motive began to pull down its own regional features and started to be accepted as a universal symbol. As an example, we can mention the Coat of Arms of the ensemble *Skopje*, where we can see union of the main landmark of Macedonia’s capital – the Stone Bridge – and a folk dancer on top of a drum, a motive that cannot be associated with anything else but with *Teshkoto*.

Macedonia has nominated this dance for Third Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Even experts in the field of dance suggest choosing *Teshkoto* on the UNESCO list. “Director of Lado, the Croatian folk dance ensemble in Zagreb, recommended that *Teshkoto* be registered with UNESCO as a ‘national dance treasure’” (Ivančić-Dunin, Vishinski, 1995:263). The application was rejected. Therefore, the selection of *Teshkoto* as a first Macedonian applicationspeaks of the state’s relation to it, considering and treating it as masterpiece of Macedonian culture.

### **Significance of *Teshkoto* and its Interpretation**

The image of a folk dancer dressed in Miyaks’ national costume, dancing on top of a drum, became a synonym of Macedonia and the Macedonians. The collective visual image is already inside and imprinted into the national collective memory. The dance leader standing and dancing on top of the drum, moves typical for this dance only, is the climax of the dance. Therefore, this moment is chosen and presented in almost all the artistic symbols that we analyzed previously.

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11-In 1996 the event was attended by as many as 10.000 people.

Theorists and scholars recognize the significance of *Teshkoto* on a wider, national level. This was seen by the ethnochoreologist Ivancić-Dunin “‘Macedonian dance’ is often synonymous with an image of *Teshkoto*” (ibid, 263). A similar opinion is expressed by American ethnomusicologist Dave Wilson, “*Teshkoto* latent process of mining accrual, stretching back at least to its first performance outside of Lazaropole in the 1930s, has resulted in a specific combination of meanings (at once historical, politically, constructed, and personally imaged) that hold deep emotional significance for Macedonians” (Wilson, 2014:246). Macedonian prominent composer Toma Proshev describing this dance wrote “If the people has sublimated in his spiritual works its history expressed through a specific cultural form, then that form and that sublimate is *Teshkoto*” (Proshev, 1986:55).

Regarding the performance, analyses differ depending on the way of interpretation, but they frequently bear deep symbolical dimension. The art historian Nikos Chausidis, who has been studying the symbols in southern Slavs, identifies the action of climbing on top of the drum with some hidden, deep meanings and messages. “Many elements of this part of the folk dance *Teshkoto* suggest the dance leader’s upward movement, which indirectly reminds of the Shamans’ ‘upward journey’” (Chausidis, 2007:323). The famous opera singer Boris Trajanov also identifies certain mythical elements in this folk dance. This is how he described his feelings related to this folk dance: “This folk dance contains elements of an epic [...] our folk dance is centuries old, produced by the folk’s genius mind, which makes it still more exciting. The dance has something Titanic, but at the same time humane and familiar” (Atanasovska, 2006:20). This phenomenon of self-identification with the dance has been noticed both by domestic and foreign researchers who had studied it. “*Teshoto* is a story of past historical events ... a reflection of our identity; Macedonians commonly view the visual and aural elements of *Teshkoto* as an embodiment of what it means to be Macedonian, holding that the performance demonstrates both the struggles and the resilient spirit of the Macedonian people” (Mironska-Hristovska, 2002:145).

### Final Considerations

*Teshkoto* succeeded in becoming an identity symbol of the Macedonians. However, this process of attaching to it, this empathy between the dance and the people, was neither short-lasting nor autonomous. The directions for development of this dance symbol were very accurately defined, as they were in close correlation both with the culture policies and the need of national branding by means of a concrete dance. They were conditioned by a few independent processes. As previously mentioned, a few components were involved in this process – the opportunity to make appropriate semantic determination, offered by the very name, which with Koneski’s poem was historically connected, and with Chuchkov’s ideas it became a tool to build the identity profile. Macedonia’s independence, which brought some problems related to identity and independence of the language, culture and history, created perfect grounds for further popularization and promotion of *Teshkoto* as an identity symbol. “It is also used by political entrepreneurs to persuade people to understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) ‘identical’ with one another and at the same time different from others and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines.” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:4). I will finalize with my conclusion that the social context, political circumstances and culture climate managed to raise *Teshkoto* above other pieces of folk heritage, but the folk dance itself managed to become part of the collective memory and self-definition of every Macedonian. The depth of the

feelings that the performance arises is obvious and happens always when the dance is performed. Here I would like to round up my paper with the metaphor about the mirror. The Macedonian ethnicity, due to many specific features it has, found in *Teshkoto* its reflection in the identity mirror, and the Macedonians accepted it as their own, adequate and true. Regardless of the fierceness, strength and power of the political instruments and strategies of culture policies, if each and every one of us does not find herself/himself in that mirror, which means that that display, form, essence or content is not part of our identity complex, we will not accept it. To summarize, *Teshkoto* is our reflection in the mirror, we recognize ourselves in it, and it is our projection on a flat reflecting surface.

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