Identity Memory Constructs - Transition of Dance Body Idioms
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Abstract: Memory, in particular collective memory, is a process of recording historical events, social changes, as well as identity features of a nation. Memory gets its definition with dance, too. These memory composites are most commonly created with the purpose of highlighting a distinct feature, especially when talking about national memory. Although kinesthetic composition, unlike verbal, is more complex to formulate, standardize and interpret, it has yet created impressive representatives in the field of national culture. One of the most significant and most commonly used symbols of Macedonian identity in the years following establishment of Socialist Republic Macedonia, is the folk dance Teshkoto. It has been used as a repeated emblem in art (literature, painting, sculpturing, music), thus becoming famous countrywide and turning into an idiom of identity. Teshkoto is an example where the very title, as well as the manner of performance, establishes a matrix that is identified with presentation of various historical stages and processes, the Macedonians’ hardships and struggle throughout the centuries. Unlike this example, we have recently been witnessing a process of stressing the Macedonians’ historical antique background, a process that is characterized with taking new direction towards different national memory constructs. These new ways highlight a completely new aspect of the identity composite, and that is the extraordinary heroism of the heroes presented, i.e. the representatives of Macedonian national history. This trend of introduction of new traits of the nation started with a majority of sculptures, dances, which were erected at the most frequented parts of the capital of Macedonia. The new trend is presented with figures that feature warlike and victorious spirit. This new way of looking at these things was gradually transmitted to dance as well. There are already a few dance pieces inspired by the great Macedonian warrior, Alexander the Great. With them we witness the transition of the memory identity matrices, which, in this case, are framed by a totally different context.

Keywords: Identity, memory constructs, body, dance, Teshkoto.
DEFINITION OF STANDPOINTS

Writing about identity, Stuart Hall identifies three concepts – those of the 1. the enlightenment subject, 2. the sociological subject and 3. the post-modern subject. The second concept reveals the relationship between the individual and the context and studies the problem elaborately in a sophisticated manner, focusing on socio-cultural parameters. In our analysis, the cultural identity is predominantly articulated through cultural policies. These two elements are in a direct, solid, but subtly projected and well considered bond. Culture and identity are instruments used by politics or certain authorities for achieving their goals. 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. "The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social or cultural world" (Hall, 2000:597). The cultural policy of a state includes the emphasis and application of certain forms that will be accepted as national identifiers and holders of a national code. Selection and promotion of a certain symbol in a cultural policy is not accidental at all; on the contrary, it is deliberate and purposeful.

Regarding the topos which is part of the title of this issue - memory constructs - these memory constructs are part of, i.e. a product of cultural identity. Unlike Carl Gustav Jung's understanding of collective sub-consciousness, memory constructs are methods of collective conscious comprehension and are ways of imagining certain pre-accepted identification matrices, which, in this case, are associated with the category of ethnic identity. Memory constructs are a product of accumulated, available and channeled notions from which the identity composite is constructed. They turn into idioms which contain the most common (at least for the respective period of time) features, meanings, symbols, messages, which are identified with the cultural, historical, geographical, social trends in question. On the other hand, analysis of body idioms (which are a segment of memory constructs), with reference to determining identity features, is an area hardly studied at all, but which, in our case, offers an abundance of data. There are more and more scholars who study the phenomenon of so called “social body” in its variations, and they maintain that it is a micro-model of current religious, ethnic, aesthetic and political norms and projections. "Although Douglas begins from the proposition that there is 'natural body' the focus of inquiry is overwhelmingly directed towards understanding the social formations that are mirrored in the ways in which the body is symbolised and perceived “(Thomas, 2003:22). The objective of this paper is to show the trends and changes in the notion "nation", using the dancing body as an example. The selection of samples analyzed, in our case, dances, is strictly related to the issue of national identification, self-comprehension and the extent of acceptance of the models offered. The choice includes the folk dance Teshkoto and new dance forms. One of what is perhaps the most striking example of the Macedonian dance is Teshkoto, from the Mijak region. Alongside it are the chosen examples from the national historical background whose roles as ancient heroes are emphasized -Alexander the Great, Philip II of Macedon. These dancing forms - Teshkoto and new variants - use different symbols and contents which are predominantly associated with identity and self-perception.
**Teshkoto**

Even before becoming a myth for itself, *Teshkoto* showed capacity that defined its status as a “chosen” or “special” dance. Teshkoto is danced by men, the patterns are slow and virtuous in the first part, but become a furious tempo at the end. Sisters Jankovich who have explored the folklore on the territory of almost entire ex-Yugoslavia, including the folk dances from Macedonia have written of the *Teshkoto*: “The first “difficult” part starts and is danced slowly, dilatorily [...] 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 entire being, soul and each nerve of his body. Every movement is psychologically justified and deeply experienced [...] The inner fire flares up until the hidden flame blazes 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” (Јанковић, 1948:22)

The dance originates and is performed in the northwest part of Macedonia, more exactly in the vicinity of the villages of Galichnik, Gari, Lazaropole, Tresonche, Osoj and others belonging to the ethnographic conglomeration of Reka. People who gravitate towards this territory are called Miyaci. The very location and configuration of the terrain, high in the mountains with almost no infrastructure and limited existence facilities, have forced these people to become fortune seekers. Males used to leave their homes and go abroad to earn a living away from their native place. In this way they promoted their cultural code outside their native social environment. Folk dancers from Lazaropole made a tour throughout Yugoslavia in 1939. The dancers from Lazaropole also participated in the Folk Dance Festival in Brussels, Belgium in 1939. The Miyaci groups had *Teshkoto* as one of their central performances in the repertoire. Another event that strongly influenced the perception of *Teshkoto* was the performance of the already formed dance group of the National ensemble of dances and songs, *Tanec*, at the festival in Llangollen, Great Britain in 1950, where the Miyacis’ folk dances *Teshkoto* and *Lesnoto* were presented. The group won first place and the event was welcomed with numerous positive reactions from the audience. It was also part of the program of the Folk Dance Festival at the Royal Albert Hall at the end of 1950.

Apart from the magic of performing it, some other factors have also contributed to making the *Teshkoto* an outstanding dance. Its title, translated into English, means hard, difficult. In the dance it is related to the way of performing it, the slow paces and the very character of its interpretation (the ethnic-choreologist, Opetcheska-Tatarchevska has recorded over a hundred folk dances belonging to the group of “difficult dances”, but for the larger auditorium the *Teshkoto* is exclusively and explicitly associated with the performance of the Miyaci from Galichnik and Lazaropole). The title can easily take on a symbolic meaning and be connected with the image and self-perception of Macedonians and their own history. The five centuries of Ottoman occupation and oppression, followed by the annexation of Macedonian territories to other Balkan countries, and ultimately the dismemberment of the Macedonian territory between Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria and Albania with the Bucharest Treaty in 1913, have filled each and every
Macedonian with a feeling of bitterness, desperation and sadness. An additional sense of concrete situation and embedding of narrative elements in the dance were achieved by publishing the eponymous poem of the Macedonian poet Blaze Koneski. He wrote this poem in 1946, in the midst of creating a new nationally-accepted Macedonia as an integral part of Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. The poem was printed in the collection of poems with a quite indicative name, Land and Love, published in 1948. Koneski himself is of considerable significance for the whole of Macedonian culture and identity. One of the basic particularities of a nation is its language. Koneski is remembered for his work on codifying the Macedonian standard language. He was also founder of Faculty of Philology at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius and a member of the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Koneski had a significant place in the social life of Macedonia, but beside that, he was one of the most noteworthy names in contemporary Macedonian literature. However, the fact that both the folk dance and the poem hold the same title is striking for audiences, that’s why they started to equate one with the other. In the poem, the poet gives a poetic description of the steps danced, relating them to the hard history of the Macedonian people, the fight for freedom and independence. Thus, the semantic structure of the abstract dance obtains a concrete and irresistibly catchy content. Here is an extract from the poem:

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  
[...]  

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.  
[...]  

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! [...]  

(Koneski, 1965:9-12)

The popularity of Koneski’s poem, as well as the appealing title of the Miyacis’ folk dance, became a perfect amalgam for production of new contents within the already existing dancing pattern. Gradually, in the course of the years to follow, the Teshkoto became a universally accepted identity symbol related predominantly to Macedonian ethnicity. It continued to live through a plethora of replicas, citations and artistic variations on this topic. Many sculptors and painters found inspiration in this Miyacis’ folk dance. One of the most prominent Macedonian painters Nikola Martinovski painted Teshkoto (1952/54). Nowadays maybe the most striking example of this trend is putting a sculpture of folk dancers dancing Teshkoto downtown in the capital, along the most frequented pedestrian street Makedonija. This sculpture was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and was made by the sculptor Zlatan Trajkov in 2009. Concerning music and the thematic relations with the Teshkoto, most committed to this search was one of the most significant Macedonian composers, Vlastimir Nikolovski. He has five compositions titled Teshkoto. In this selective choice of examples where Miyacis’ Teshkoto was a major motif and inspiration, 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, includes parts from Teshkoto. The borrowed material represents the climax of the score and therefore has been quite frequently performed individually. Perhaps the newest best example of its popularity is the guest visit of the Macedonian Philharmonic Orchestra to Oman in January 2012, where Smokvarski’s Teshkoto was selected and performed as a national signature piece. A lot of the popularization of the dance can be attributed to the renowned Galichka Svadba (Galichka Wedding) which takes place every year on July 12th and where the Teshkoto is danced. As a rule, the wedding is attended by the leaders of the country, the diplomatic corps and a huge number of tourists. The event is supported by the Ministry of Culture, which considers this event as one of the instruments to promote national identity. One of the most impressive moments at the wedding is the dancing of the Teshkoto.

Teshkoto became a part of the symbols and emblems of a significant number of Macedonian organizations and institutions, as well as of the first Macedonian currency. The 10.000-denar banknote contained motifs from Teshkoto. Recently Teshkoto was put as the emblem of the National ensemble for folk dances Tanec. This phenomenon of self-identification with the dance has been noted both by domestic and foreign scholars who have studied it. “Teshkoto isn’t any more symbol of Galichnik, Lazaropole, Gari, Tresonche, Osoj villages, it has became symbol of Macedonian people, of all folk dance groups, of Macedonian folklore, folklore history, ethnos” (Миронска-Христовска, 2002:145). “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”. (Wilson, 2012:1)

NEW BODY IDIOMS

Macedonian independence again turned to the need for markers of identity for the Macedonian nation, which were most commonly related to Macedonian ethnicity. Brubaker and Cooper speak of strong and weak (soft) understandings for identity. The strong understanding 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 ideas of modern identity formation, and in some cases even post-modern interpretations, describes the identity image as being elastic, fluid, multiple. Macedonia, i.e. its leaders, developed a concept belonging to the so called “hard” interpretation of identity. Besides, during the period of constitutional development, and nowadays, too, Macedonia faced and is facing substantial difficulties in relations with neighboring countries, a fact which contributed to making this trend stronger and more pronounced. The Republic of Macedonia is experiencing serious misunderstandings with Greece regarding the name of the Republic of Macedonia. The result is blockage of the accession processes of Macedonia to the European Union and NATO by Greece. Bulgaria acknowledges our country under its constitutional name, but expresses its reserves regarding recognition of the existence and definition of the Macedonian language and people, introducing and imposing the idea of common origin, history and language between Macedonians and Bulgarians. The Serbian Orthodox Church does not recognize the
independence of the Macedonian Church. Although this issue is not within the competencies of the state, it is within the powers of church authorities, and this dispute does have an adverse effect on political relations.

In a certain moment in history, when strengthening of awareness of national identity and ideology is needed, a method commonly used is glorification of some of the aspects of the historical past. Paul Thompson in an interview with Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon emphasized “After all, the whole history depends on its social use” (Jordan and Weedon, 1999:73). In the period after 2008/09 we have witnessed a subtle transition i.e. dilatation of the current identity markers in the Republic of Macedonia with new ones that offer different contents and concepts.

We have to notice the construction of new body idioms aimed at creating a new perception of the Macedonians, not only in the world, but also as a factor in Macedonians’ self-identification. This trend is easily recognizable in the shape and appearance of the new sculptures from the project Skopje 2014, and some of newly created folk dances. In this respect, we witness the promotion of strong, dominant male figures, most commonly warriors from the past who have traits of superiority. If we consider only the sculptures placed in the centre of Macedonia’s capital, a few tendencies are obvious. The sculpture Alexander the Great, which, due to avoidance of political implications, was renamed as Warrior on a Horse, is located in the very middle of Skopje main square. It was placed there on September 8th 2011, on the 20th anniversary of Macedonia’s independence. The dimensions of the monument and the pedestal - 14,5 m. and 10 m. respectively - dominate the square space. The victorious posture of the horse rider carrying a sword pointed up into the sky and his athletic body build altogether speak of a triumphant figure. Even if we do not compare it to an ancient commander-in-chief, one cannot help associating the sculpture with power, strength and security. His father Philip II’s sculpture, which was also renamed into Warrior, is placed on the other side of the Vardar river, just in front of the entrance to the Bazaar. The statue of Philip II is almost identical in height as the one of Alexander the Great, measuring 13 m, and Philip is also carrying a sword in his hand. The monument called Heroes Who Had Died for Macedonia, composed of a chain of sculptures, also contains the sculpture of Prometheus cast into bronze, with magnificent body build, victorious posture and carrying a torch in his hand. We could also mention, as a quite similar example, the sculpture of the leader Karposh. He does not historically belong to the previous group. Yet, by its aesthetics and semantics, his sculpture contains the same features. His body posture (dynamic movements presented in the sculpture and decisive and unconquerable facial expression) seem to predetermine the outcome of the actions to come, most probably a battle with a victorious outcome. All these sculptures are accompanied by additional, auxiliary ones, and they all symbolize invincibility, superiority, domination and power - lions, warriors. This altogether contributes to the creation of a new image of the nation.

These new constructs are is already projected into dancing art, taking into account that these dances primarily deal with the figure of Alexander the Great. The fact is that as early as the 1990s the so called Alexander folk dance was choreographed. This chain dance has been performed by Macedonian Association Nikola Karev from Australia. Alexander’s dance contains dramatic elements presenting Macedonian
phalanges fighting their enemy (some parts of the dance present the death of Philip and his son Alexander taking over the leadership), after which the phalanges win the battle and celebrate the victory. In this dance we recognize combined patterns of several Macedonian traditional dances and dances related to the ancient times of Macedonia, where it is almost impossible to identify the type and contents of dances at that time. The performers are dressed as the phalanx warriors of Alexander the Great, with metal swords in their hands, which we do not find in traditional Macedonian chain dances. This connection does not mean assimilation, but interaction or the merging of two totally different times and creating, in this case, new identity matrices. Alexander the Great was also the subject of the latest ballet performance of Macedonian Opera and Ballet. This ballet performance was entitled Alexander III Macedonian and it was first performed on April 9th 2013, choreographed by the Croatian choreographer Ronald Savkovik, with music and libretto by a renowned Macedonian composer with Croatian origin, Ljubomir Brangjolica. The performance presents the life of Alexander the Great, the death of his father Philip II, the former’s battles and victories and his wedding party when marrying Roxana. Both of the examples mentioned, although having a totally different lexical approach - the first one applies traditional dance and the second one contains the “neoclassical ballet style” (Ципунова, 2013: online) - glorify the moments of heroism, victory and power. They are a continuation of the trend to create new identity constructs.

Rudolf Arnheim in his book Art and visual perception wrote “The outside world reflects itself on the mind, and this reflection is something that waits and needs to be studied, channeled, reorganized and preserved.”

Acceptance of certain visual performances which have been presented recently creates a new perception and idea of some national characteristics. The new matrices unambiguously and expressly promote the idea of a new, victorious, heroic and superior nation, unlike the concept presented by Teshkoto, which was discussed in part one of this paper.

**Transition vs. Petrification?**

During the contemporary, serious efforts have been made in the political sphere to stick to and even strengthen the already determined identity projects, but paradoxically it offers also new ones. “Identity and culture are neither traditions nor mentalities. Rather, they are notions created by not so long history and they activate themselves depending on the circumstances. Regarding present time, addressing certain identity or culture should be interpreted as an expression of identity strategies chosen by the ruling social groups” (Ruano-Borbalan, 2009:424). At the moment we are witnessing the existence of two opposing constructs - Teshkoto (whose genesis as an identity symbol begun in the 1930s) and the new construct, based predominantly on ancient history. Contrary to what we find and interpret as contents in Teshkoto, the new identity presentations offer a totally different concept of meaning. This simultaneous existence of two opposing constructs presents a kind of a dilemma. Is Teshkoto a represent of a transitional period, presenting the hardships and oppression from the past, and the new historic heroes are a kind of an attempt to envisage and visualize the future, or are these two constructs separate strata that will continue to coexist separately in future?
"National identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols - have internalised the symbols of the nation..." (Bloom 1990, 52). The extent to which a Macedonian will identify himself with some of the above mentioned approaches depends on a range of factors. The question that logically arises is whether we will witness consolidation and strengthening of the already accepted and approved body idioms, or whether we will decide to adopt and move towards the recently offered ones. Which of these two concepts will be the prevailing one in the time to come? Rather than offering a firm conclusion, I will end this paper with the above questions, for it is simply impossible, applying any scientific methodology or in-depth analysis, to give a true and accurate answer to this extremely complex question.

ENDNOTES

[1] Because I couldn’t find an English translation of the poem, I used part of the translation made by Dave Wilson in his text Teškoto and national sentiment in Macedonia: ascribing meaning, experiencing tradition, and in part translated by Marija Avshar

REFERENCES