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Revisiting *Teshkoto* Again. The Process of Signifying the Folk Dance *Teshkoto* with its Artistic Reflections

Abstract: The folk dance called *Teshkoto* has a special meaning for the Macedonians. It does not only belong to the traditional sequence of folk dances, but it is also a form which has accumulated a plethora of meanings. With the aim to research the associations related to this topic, I have included participants who helped me as a researcher to form a full picture about the perception of the dance. The survey results served as a basis to analyze *Teshkoto* not only through its original form but through its art replicas as well. The responses to the question on generated meanings are a result of many decades of “signifying” this folk dance. I have researched the transfer of those signified elements in current art works, but also the expansion of the same and the additional meanings they acquire. In this paper, the focus is on one ballet and one contemporary dance. The phenomenon of the general perception and interpretation of *Teshkoto* folk dance and its popularity not only of its traditional folk dance form, but also because of its specificity regarding esthetics and expression, tells us about its unique value.

Keywords: *Teshkoto*, Macedonia, signifying, acceptance, dance replicas, social reflections

Introduction

In order not to repeat myself because *Teshkoto* has been the focus of my research multiple times, I have decided, for the purposes of this analysis, to research the process of acquiring concrete meanings. In that context, the need has emerged to define and measure the general stance and the interpretations. That will provide us with the consequent observation of the meaning’s formation and their transposition in the various dance styles.

After providing a brief overview of the theoretical positions, I will link them to the process of interpretation, reception, establishing of communication schemes, as well as to the functions of the various performative styles. The question about the changing capacity of

the sign in different arts is one of the main basic parameters which needs to be defined. The greatest ballet reformer in the 18th century, Jean-Georges Noverre, in his book *Lettres sur la danse et les ballets* (Letters of dance and ballet) stated, "Painting and dance have the advantage before other arts to belong to all countries and nations; their language can be understood everywhere, they evoke same feelings everywhere... A beautiful picture is only a copy of nature, while a beautiful dance is the nature itself, decorated with art moves" (Noverre, 1965: 78). The universal value of such art is in the nature of expression. Music must be added to the part described by Noverre (painting is out of my research focus; therefore, it will not be mentioned further). Each of these expressions is associative. It is not linked to precise and clear content i.e. it is not arbitrary types of signs. In other words, it is not necessary to be familiar with the code, to have the key to understand the single meaning because such a meaning does not exist. This way of functioning is specific to non-verbal types of art where the signifying, i.e., the acquiring of meanings is left to the individual understanding of the recipient. Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of semiotics, did significant research on communication with all its constituent parts and functions. In his theory, the sign is the basic unit and consists of two parts: signifiant (signifier) and signifié (signified) (Saussure 2000). Umberto Eco is another author who interpreted communication relations and the process of assigning meanings, i.e. the process of signifying. He defines the process as: "The signified it should be that which connects the code in the semiologically relation with the signifier" (Eco 1973, 42). Other semioticians have applied this basic matrix in the performative form, trying to define the sign in the performance. That resulted in different definitions. Mukaržovski considered the whole stage text to be an equivalent to one sign (Mukaržovski 1986), while others decomposed it to the level of the performer (actor, dancer), as a carrier of the basic meaning (Aston and Sanova 1996, Zdravkova Djeparoska 2011). Veltruský treated every element/entity on the stage as a sign. He stated, "All that is on the stage is a sign" (Elam 1989, 5). Regarding the fact that performing arts cover multichannel, multi-systemic, multicode arsenal when communicating with the audience, it is extremely difficult to define the scope of the sign. In one of my previous works, the dancer was treated as a basic sign, which provided a possible interpretation of the capacity and the content of the various types of performances (ritual, social and artistic). In this case, the interpretation of the sign will mean that it is equivalent to the whole dance to acquire relevant information about its meaning.

Teshkoto = sign

To sharpen the focus of the folk dance and its meaning, I have provided sublimation or attempted to find a common denominator. This idea of including common opinions has started in a very innocent way. The question was raised which inspired a research strategy aimed at a larger target group. The participants were asked about the associations they get when they see the traditional dance *Teshkoto*. Since it was important for me to remain in the national discourse frames, only the responses of the Macedonian participants were taken into consideration (the majority were ethnic Macedonians, but other national minority groups were included). Seventy-six participants gave their responses. The group consisted of adults, aged 15 to 86. The younger participants took a more active part. The foreign researchers, dancers, ethnochoreologists, ethnomusicologists, choreographers who wrote articles, reviews, gave a statement or expressed their opinion about the folk dance *Teshkoto* were considered as a control/ comparative group.

What is the *Teshkoto*?

The *Teshkoto* is a male folk dance, a part of the non-material cultural heritage of the Reka region in Macedonia (Galichnik, Lazaropole, Gari, Tresonche villages). In terms of its choreography, it consists of two parts (slow-fast) or three parts (slow-fast-slow) depending on the leading dancer who also dictates the tempo. Rubato is performed. Migration for work, i.e., going abroad has initiated performing this dance outside of its domestic area. The connection between the folk dance and migrant workers is not accidental. Groups of males performed this dance before migrating for work and leaving the home country and their families. Blaže Smilevski, who wrote the book “*Teshkoto from Lazaropole*”, highlighted the moment of separation “The families went together with the migrant workers (from Lazaropole, author’s note) to Zhelichka Krasta with great sadness. And on Kras, Teskhkoto was performed. For final farewell. Kras was the place where people were crying, but also dancing” (Smilevski 2006, 51). That moment of separation while dancing the *Teshkoto* was carved in the collective memory.



Figure 1. *Teshkoto*, 1939. Courtesy of Blaže Smilevski personal collection

This dance is one of the first Macedonian dances which gains national (Yugoslavia) and international affirmation because of being performed in new environments where the migrants travelled for temporary work (many of them were located in Belgrade where the first performances occurred). There were many festivals and events registered in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia but also in Europe (Ivančić Dunin, Višinski 1995; Smilevski 2006). During the period of socialism, there were dynamic changes in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia where folklore was valued as one of the basic components of the national identity. Folklore was elevated at the same level as arts; it was a segment of the national recognition strategy and of multiethnic life. On March 29, 1949, a document was signed by Lazar Koliševski, the President of the People’s Republic of Macedonia and a National ensemble for folk dances and songs “Tanec” was founded. “Tanec was founded in a period when several professional groups were being established in Yugoslavia and other socialistic influenced European countries” (Ivančić Dunin and Višinski 1995: 8). On the one of the first performances on international stage “Tanec” won the first prize at the international festival in Llangollen, Wales in 1950 with the performance of *Teshkoto* and *Lesnoto*. The ensemble performed in the USA, in 1956, as the first folklore ensemble not only from Yugoslavia, but also the first one from all the

socialist countries and presented “the best from Macedonia and Yugoslavia”. The *Teshkoto* became part of the regular repertoire and gradually dominated other folk dances because of the nature of its performance but also because of the meanings it generated, i.e., the perception about it. Another important factor in regard to making *The Teshkoto* popular was the existence of culture-artistic groups in Macedonia. They used the repertoire and the style of *Tanec*, which contributed to its expansion and popularization.

Many authors have approached *Teshkoto* as a symbol of Macedonian dance culture. For example, academician Gjorgji Stardelov concluded that “this particular Macedonian dance is not performed on a mountain, or in a valley or a meadow, but on the real history stage” (Stardelov 2000, 23). Manoil Chuchkov, the first director of “Tanec”, called this folk dance “a prototype of the Macedonian traditional dancing style” (Chuchkov 1951, 65).

The most significant moment in the process of narrativization and the use of the term that is in the focus of this research and serves for assigning meaning to *Teshkoto*, was the same-titled poem by Blazhe Koneski, published in his book “Land and Love” (1948). That process of symbiosis of the two magnificent art works provided me with the opportunity to create concrete content which could be connected with the survey responses. Koneski starts his poem with a description of the folk dance and of the instruments used:

*„O Teshkoto! As the zurla wildly shrieks,
As the tapan roars with deep echo ... “ (Koneski 1965, 12).*

Further, Koneski continues with a description of the dance technique:

*“And the first step on the soft grass,
which is quiet and slow, with retained grief... “ (Koneski 1965, 12).*

Next, he thickens his expression creating a parable of the long slavery and fighting for freedom:

*“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...” (Koneski 1965, 12)*

The *Teshkoto* by Koneski has become an epic portraying the Macedonian history and its path to gaining independence. The verses of the poem are meaningful even today, in the 21st century, after all turbulent times. The process of acquiring meanings, signifying has become and continues with the multitude of art work addressing the theme. One of the recent works, created in October 2022 is the sculpture named *Teshkoto* by the young sculptor Ozbek Ajvaz. That work has awakened huge interest not only because

of the idea of the creation techniques and its size (eight figures in natural size), but also because of the material used (cast iron pieces). In an interview, the artist acknowledged the following:

“There are eight metal sculptures used, and that is not done without purpose. Eight is a symbol of infinity, eight because the Macedonian heart beats in a 7/8 rhythm... Locked at home (due to Covid-19) I was watching the dance all day long, then I made some sketches, and I started creating the sculpture...That folk dance is performed in Galichnik. When the locals would migrate for work, everyone would dance in a sorrowful way. And this is because coming back to the home country was really hard” (Ajvaz, online 2022)



Figure 2. Teshkoto, sculpture made by Ozbek Ajvaz. Courtesy of Ozbek Ajvaz personal collection

Meaning, stance, opinions, associations – an analysis

„Nomen est omen“, wrote the Roman playwright Plautus in his play “Persa.” Plautus emphasized the connection between the name and the main character in the story. Such a discourse became popular again in the 20th century. Many psychoanalysts have researched the connection between names, surnames with the character features, choice of profession, etc. (Abraham 1911; Jung 1972). The names or the titles are clear and easily noticeable sometimes; however, on the other hand, they can be indirect or hidden. In some languages such as Greek and Albanian, the personal names bear concrete readable meanings. Although the above-mentioned research has been directed towards personal names that does not mean that we cannot find an identical way of naming the character with folk dances such as the exact example of the folk dance tradition in Macedonia.

The process of naming *Teshkoto* has marked its semantic content, which resulted in a concrete perception, connected meanings and associations. But as mentioned previously, the folk dance is treated as a sign which has a complex mechanism and structure. The focus of this research is on defining the sign-meaning spectrum of *Teshkoto*. The aim is to record the perceptions of people about the dance itself, as well as the associations linked with it. This dance has a broad spectrum of interpretations that can oscillate between totally opposite terms and perceptions. The task I have assigned for myself is to discover the most frequent terms, perceptions which are initiated by the folk dance itself in those who observe it.

To a certain group of participants, the following question was posed: “What association comes to your mind when watching the folk dance *Teshkoto*?” As mentioned in the introduction, 76 participants were involved and although one association was required, some participants provided more, such as “Mijaks, tradition, pride, hope”. I did not exclude the multiple responses and in the analysis. All answers were categorized in groups of identical or similar words and meanings; therefore, the number of responses has increased to 118. Some of them presented a unique term but there were also whole sentences which described the concrete phenomenon. Therefore, the classification was done in a meticulous way. The terms/meanings which were used most frequently were selected. In other words, the following positioning, i.e. general visual representation, resulted from the associations and meanings the survey participants provided in relation to the traditional performance of *Teshkoto*.

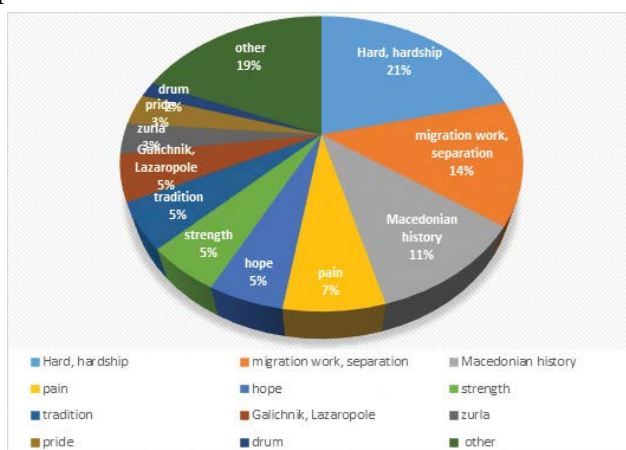


Figure 3. Results from the survey

The most frequent responses were **hard** and **hard(ship)**, terms which have identical meaning but belong to different parts of speech (adjective and noun). They were present in 21% of the responses. It is worth mentioning that the responses most often were related to history, while less often to the technique of performance. I am selecting few examples: “Hard life of Macedonians,” “Hardship and bitterness piled in Macedonian souls throughout centuries” etc. Ajvaz, Macedonian sculptor, independently from my survey, confirms these associations. In an interview about his sculpture he said, “The name *Teshkoto* itself reminds us of the folk dance, of a hard moment in our life; that is why I have chosen a hard material for the sculpture” (Ajvaz, online 2022). In the survey, just few responses were related to the hardship in connection to the dancing technique. For example, “hard performance,” “a hard and slow step”, etc. was present in only 4 responses out of 24 (16, 6 %).

This seems like a proper moment for a slight digression in order to refer to several research articles written by foreign scholars. Their notes cover different levels. When asked about their first contact with *Teshkoto*, the impressions of the participants were related to the technique of performance or the choreography and content. This is expected because rarely who explored the etymology of the name/title or the understanding of this folk dance as a national symbol. After the first performance of *Teshkoto* in New York, one of the most respected American critics and modern dance theoreticians John Martin in his review of the Tanec’s performance wrote “But nothing is no more thrilling

or more teeming with suspense than their first shepherds' dance, in which a solid line of eight men spends half the dance in a series of slow pliés on one leg, with the other leg off the ground, and with the most impeccable aplomb throughout" (Martin 1965, 11). Martin shared his impression on the concert performance of "Tanec" in Carnegie Hall. Unlike him, another American, Dave Wilson, who stayed in Macedonia longer and researched Macedonian music and dance culture pointed out a different aspect. In his paper, "Teškoto and the national sentiment in Macedonia: Ascribing meaning, experiencing tradition" he addressed the process of signifying, perception, as well as reception of *Teshkoto*. According to Wilson, "With its heavy, complex meanings and the strong sentiment it evokes, Teškoto exemplifies a unique and indisputable Macedonian identity, albeit in a different way than that imagined by nationalists" (Wilson 2014, 247). Apart from the primary focus on the choreography and the nature of performance, there are second level additional meanings which are connected, created, layered, and cannot be accessed instantly but through a process of observation. These new meanings, connotations are popular among the local people and define the significance of *Teshkoto* in a broader cultural and social context.

The second most frequent were the associations related to **migrant workers** including the responses such as **leaving, separation, and family dissolution**. For example, "the hard life of Macedonian migrant workers, farewells" "the suffering and sadness of migrant workers due to separation of migrant workers from the loved ones and the mother land". The scholars researching Macedonian traditional dance emphasize the associations of *Teshkoto* as a scream for the homeland, as a way to feel the warmth of the abandoned home and family. The Russian choreographer Anatol Joukowsky spent a substantial part of his life in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before emigrating in the USA. He is well-known for his research interest in the traditional dance as well as stylized folk dance. In the USA he held courses and training for traditional dances from various countries among which are the dances from former Yugoslavia and the Balkans. In his book devoted to the methods of teaching ethnic dances titled *The Teaching of Ethnic Dance*, in the description of Macedonian dances, he presented *Teshkoto* and the broken relations with the homeland. „To love Macedonian dance one must go deeply inside the Macedonian life... Their dances do not depict a realistic approach to life... For boys away from home in Paris, Istanbul, or New York, doing the 'Teshkoto' brings the far away Macedonian mountains close to home. The nostalgia engendered when three or four get together to dance with the beat of the tupans, Macedonian drums are overwhelming. These people become transported back to their beloved mountains through their dances" (Joukowsky 1965, 8). Ljubica and Danica Janković portrayed the moment of deep emotional survival while men performed *Teshkoto*. "Each movement is psychologically justified and deeply experienced: Men from Lazaropole through this dance experience the year of migration work emotionally again – a year full of struggles and hard rising again" (Janković 1948, 22). On the website page of the Lazaropole municipality apart from information about the area and well-known people from the region, a significant section is devoted to description of the folk dance *Teshkoto* accompanied with video recordings of its performances in the region. In this section you can read the syntagm "*Teshkoto* as a code for separation and existence through centuries" (lazaropolee.blogspot.com). Separation is closely connected to the dance performance, as a way of existence and it emphasizes the cultural idiom of the Mijaks additionally.

Another significant group of responses was related to the idea of the folk dance as a carrier of meanings related to the *struggles for freedom and against slavery*. This phenomenon presents a fusion of history with *Teshkoto* and integrating the narrative content is a result of the above-mentioned poem by Koneski. The responses from the first group relating to the hard life of Macedonians are closely connected to the responses from this group of respondents who perceive *Teshkoto* as a dancing synonym of the history of the people. The results from the two groups reach 32 %. The main distinguishing parameter was the use of nouns “hardship, heaviness” or the adjective “hard” presents in the responses from the first group but absent in the responses from this group. I would like to add some examples: “A symbol of the Macedonian struggle for freedom, independent country, recognition,” “Endurance of the suffering Macedonian people, the roots of our identity”. Such responses were present with 11 %.

The other responses contained the terms *pain* (7 %), followed by *hope, strength, and tradition* with similar frequency (six responses for each term – 5 %). The well-known villages in the region where *Teshkoto* was performed *Galichnik* and *Lazaropole* were also mentioned in the responses with the similar frequency. *Teshkoto* was used as an equivalent of the instruments which accompany it – *drums* (4 responses), and *zurla* (2 responses). There was one response “traditional folk dancer on drum” which is a visual representation of *Teshkoto*. Painters and sculptors frequently create visual disposition of a *Teshkoto* selected moving sequence most often the moment of the drum dance. This motif represented the logo of “Tanec” from 2014 until 2019.

Process of choreographic transposition – interpreting and broadening meanings

Contemporary culture has popularized the trend of addressing and artistic remake of folklore. Ballet is not deprived of these tendencies, chronologically speaking, as seen in the works created in the 19th century until today. Regarding Macedonian dance culture, of extreme importance are national ballet works which contain integration of elements from the Macedonian folklore at all levels – libretto, music, choreography. On the other hand, the traditional dance *Teshkoto* gained an important place in Macedonian culture and cultural identity. The process of acquiring meanings started and has continued through the sequence of reflections and artistic responses to this dance.

Referring to the starting theoretical position around the sign, meanings, process of signifying, it is very important to pay attention to the second level meanings which broaden the basic ones. Keir Elam in the book titled *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* explained that in performative arts broadening of one sign with new meanings is a crucial feature.

“Beyond this basic denotation, the theatrical sign (although Elam writes specifically about the theatre sign, in the theory we use the performative discourse which covers a broader theoretical area – author’s note) inevitably acquires secondary meanings for the audience, relating it to the social, moral and ideological values operative in the community of which performers and spectators are part... Connotation is a parasitic semantic function, therefore, whereby the sign-vehicle of one sign-relationship provides the basis for a second-order sign relationship (the sign-vehicle of the stage sign ‘crown’ acquires the secondary meanings ‘majesty’, ‘usurpation’, etc.)” (Elam 1980, 7).

As it becomes obvious from the survey results *Teshkoto* has acquired a multitude of meanings. The process of expanding this example is transparent and truly visible. The created meanings are repetitive, transferred and integrated into the shaping of new art works. The analyzed examples show creating and broadening of the basic meaningful composite. The dance replicas give new “readings” through which the connotative meanings are transferred to the scene. In this section, I am presenting two new dance constructs on the topic *Teshkoto*.

Macedonian history:

***Teshkoto* – From migrant work to Macedonian existence hardship**

The first national ballet work written by a Macedonian composer is *Macedonian history* by Gligor Smokvarski. The premiere was on June 21, 1953. The libretto was based on the play by Anton Panov, *Migrant Workers*. As a logical step in structuring the music text, Smokvarski has integrated a part titled *Teshkoto*. The composer in this part of the ballet uses drum (tapan) to put the authentic sound of traditional instruments in the music. The folk dance as a symbol of the moment of separation could be clearly read by the audience and was integrated organically into the scenario addressing migrant work as a phenomenon and faith of the migrant workers. The choreographer Dimitrie Parlić created a performance in which he tried to transfer the folklore of the ballet scene. The critic Makedonski acknowledged that there is domination of the “raw” material regarding the stylization principle (Makedonski 2008). The same observation was presented by one of first female ballet dancers and eminent ballet critic Emilija Dzipunova. She expressed the following:

”The first national Macedonian ballet *Macedonian History* is based on Macedonian male folk dance *Teshkoto* (premiered on 21.6.1953). The choreographer Dimitrie Parlić decided to incorporate the original dance movements” (personal correspondence, 2022).

Unfortunately, apart from Dzipunova’s statement, who is in the role of a performer, no other statement about *Teshkoto* can be found in the seldom reviews. There are no recordings or documented material (choreography notes) about that particular part but also about the ballet in general, because of which any attempt to reconstruct the ballet version of *Teshkoto* is impossible.

The second performance was created in the years after Macedonia gained independence. The premiere was on 17.7.1993 on Samuil’s Fortress in Ohrid, which had a symbolic meaning in the years of founding the independent Macedonian state. For this version, a new script was written by the director Ljubisha Georgievski. What logically followed was a creation of a completely new choreography by Olga Milosavleva which can be easily accessed for analysis. Georgievski wrote: “To write a libretto of a Macedonian history is very easy but also very hard, because from all world histories, ours is most tragic” (in Zdravkova Djeparoska, 2014: 75). The struggle of the two male protagonists was set in the center of the plot around which the conflict was built. *Teshkoto* occupied the central place in the choreography. It was the choreographic climax. Milosavleva switched the male performers with female ones. In her work, the music parts had an identical order as in the traditional performance: slow and fast. The most

important typical feature of male performers was taken in consideration and strengthened by dancing on point shoes and focus on specific poses as in the traditional version. Ethnomusicologists and ethnocoreologists in the ballet version note numerous inconsistencies with the stylized elements. They compared it with other traditional dances, especially the segment of the position of arms. Emilija Dzipunova pointed “It is a ballet performance in which Olga Milosavleva did not pay attention to the substantial point of this Macedonian male folk dance *Teshkoto*, but instead she creates an impressive spectacle including female dancers, with all female movements and female elements in its interpretation” (Dzipunova personal correspondence). Yet, apart from these comments, that ballet performance was singled out by its popularity and attractiveness. Ballet version of *Teshkoto* as an independent part, is preformed often on ballet concerts.

The two ballet versions are based on associations which present the main corpora in the survey – migrant work, broken family ties, hardship of separation, etc. Apart from that as a response to all barriers in the creation of the independent Macedonian state (which are still present after more than 30 years from proclaiming the independence), a new scenario was created. That scenario has addressed the history and “the curse” of Macedonian people. *Teshkoto* from an idiom of separation has suddenly become an idiom of history and national identity. Milosavleva, in her choreography, transferred the folklore elements in a new neoclassical lexis” (Dzipunova 2011, 104). *Teshkoto* by Milosavleva has grown into a respected symbol in which the consequently derived meanings related to the history, hardship of existence was transferred and articulated through the language of ballet movements.

Fairies and demons:

***Teshkoto* – Macedonian couch grass**

During the period after independence (after 1991), except Olga Milosavleva, the ballet choreographers did not have any particular interest in the national folklore work. An exception are young choreographers who turned their interest towards this sphere in the previous few years. I would like to point out the choreographic work of Jovana Zajkova and Boban Ruseski who collaborated with the young musician Evgenija Zdravevska (who performs under the pseudonym Zarina Prvosevda). She was responsible for the music, vocals, and percussions, which created “a single breath”. Zdravevska said in an interview: “In essence, without further consideration, this choreography, and the spontaneity of the process of its creation show that the genetics but also the roots which radiate in the creative process are something with which we are blessed existing in this country, Macedonia. That is something that signifies us, something that even unconsciously leaves mark and will be transferred as a decoration of the artist and its work until it exists and creates in any art field” (Zdravevska interview 2022). The work titled *Fairies and Demons* premiered on 1.07.2021 in Zagreb’s Dance Center. The Macedonian premiere was on 9.04.2022, while an extended version was performed on 16.06.2022, both in MKC (Youth Cultural Center). In regard to choreography, music and the concept, the authors referred to tradition and gave their “dancing” opinion on the topic. The new modernized approach created a new dimension to the work. Towards the short description accompanying the performance on YouTube, the following text is integrated:

In this piece the traditional beat and vocal performance intertwine with contemporary dance in order to tell an ancient story hidden by the time, but still pulsating in our pores.

Each step and each note tell the fairytales that traveled from father to son and remained alive until this very day. We invite you to allow them to give you chills, to wake you up... we invite you to find the childlike love and honesty in them, but also the deep wisdom that was left to us as a priceless heritage (YouTube).



Figure 4. *Fairies and Demons* Courtesy of Jovana Zajkova personal collection

A direct connection with the folk dance *Teshkoto* cannot be found neither in the naming process, nor in the description, nor in the choreography (regarding the referencing use of elements). Yet, many people who saw the performance have pointed out the exact connection. To the question how they perceive this phenomenon of connection and if they had the same vision of *Teshkoto*, Zdravevska emphasized:

“*Fairies and Demons* is a unique reflection of a part of everyday life of my people in the past, my roots. Conceptually, the choreography in regard to many elements reminds of *Teshkoto*; firstly, because of its rhythm with which we approach the choreography... and in relation to the movements which we use, the suffering can be sensed, but also the strength and endurance of Macedonian people seen as couch grass surviving through all the storms, managing to see the Sun and to grow profusely” (Zdravevska interview 2022).

This new approach towards the traditional folk dance is rich with various allegories, symbols, but also moving signs reminding the audience of *Teshkoto*. The focus is on hardship, heaviness of life, on the one hand, contrasted with beauty, liveliness, hope, on the other. These contrasted positions hard-light, calmness-euphoria, and male-female lie into the authors life view rooted in this region. The choreographer Zajkova pointed out:

”I often hear people’s opinion that *Teshkoto* represents the sadness, the pain, and the suffering of Macedonian people, but I believe that apart from that, *Teshkoto* is a wonderful symbol of the mutual support, of the rise and fall in life and portraying the same in their real form. The hardship and heaviness as a basic guideline and the dominant signifying are present, but equally present are also the meanings which additionally are layered and create a complex discourse of basic meanings” (Zajkova interview 2022).

And again, I will recall Dzipunova’s view, as the only active ballet critics who wrote the following for this creation of the young choreographers

“Two stylized versions (Dzipunova referred to the version by Milosavleva and the performance by Zajkova and Ruseski – author’s note) of one of the most famous Macedonian folk dances and a synonym of the Macedonian ethno folk dance culture – TESHKOTO. Three young creative people Zajkova, Zdravevska and Ruseski took the liberty and the inspiration to transform a dynamic, poetic vision of the dance in the piece titled *Angels and Demons*, without leaving the substantially recognized moving element of the folk dance, colored in the style and esthetics of the contemporary dance technique. In a spiritual sense, the real and the unreal, as well as the infinite give the work a metaphysical dimension” (Dzipunova personal correspondence).

The layering of meanings in this case opens new horizons for the young choreographers who started the creative process with the traditional folk dance, through the imprinted and established meanings that the folk dance had generated itself in previous periods and managed to give their own perception and creation of *Teshkoto*. The creation oscillates within the frame of what was pointed out in the analysis, and again it is connected with the historical aspects, with the identity of the Macedonian people. However, that discourse is upgraded subtly with a view towards the future that is victorious, optimistic, and probably a result of the view and attitude of these young people.

Conclusion

Constructing meanings, i.e., signifying which creates, carries, accumulates, and condenses content in relation to the traditional folk dance *Teshkoto* and is already integrated in the collective cultural memory. So, we can select a solid monolithic discourse of meanings. Those are the meanings that were confirmed through the analysis presented at the beginning of this paper. The way in which the signified is reflected and projected especially in the artistic versions and it is directly conditioned by the construct of the signified. The formed meanings are connected to the traditional dance as we could observe in the examples showing dance replicas with various performative styles which are transferred and complemented with each other. The artistic replicas in *Teshkoto* no longer address only the choreographic content and structure (partially present in the ballet version, but fully non-existent in the modern version of the dance). Based on assigned/signified meanings, the same re-signify them by their unique expressive style which can be graphically presented as:

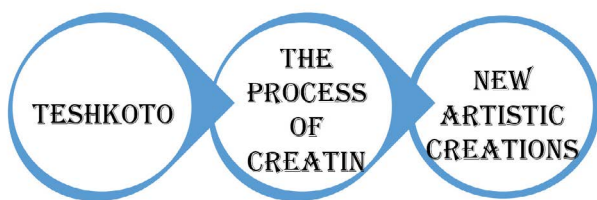


Figure 5. Proces of constructing new art works and its signifying

In this work, I have emphasized multiple times the quality and the “physiology” of the dance content, which forms a broad and complex narrative. That characteristic is used for analyses of *Teshkoto* folk dance. That brings it to the level of a national symbol, not only a regional one, in which new meanings have been constantly stored and the associative-discursive content has been broadened by permuting into various performative styles and discourses.

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Поновно иромишљање илеса Тешкоѿо: Процес означавања итрадиционалнои илеса Тешкоѿо својим уметничким рефлeксијама

Сажетак: Традиционални плес Тешкото има посебно значење за Македонце. Не само да припада традиционалном репертоару народних игара, већ је и облик који је акумулирао мноштво значења. У циљу истраживања асоцијација на ову тему, укључила сам учеснике који су ми као истраживачу помогли да створим потпуну слику о перцепцији овог плеса. Резултати анкете послужили су као основа да се Тешкото анализира не само кроз његову оригиналну форму, већ и кроз његове уметничке транспозиције. Одговори на питање о генерисаним значењима резултат су вишедеценијског „означавања” овог традиционалног плеса. Истраживала сам преношење тих означених елемената у актуелна уметничка дела, али и проширење истих и додатна значења која добијају. У овом раду фокус је на једном балету и једном савременом плесу. Феномен опште перцепције и интерпретације традиционалног плеса Тешкото и популарности не само традиционалне форме овог плеса, већ и због његове специфичности у погледу естетике и израза, говори о његовој јединственој вредности.

Кључне речи: Тешкото, Македонија, означавање, прихватање, плесне реплике, друштвене рефлeксије

