

# MODERNITY AND FOLK CHOREOGRAPHY

(on the example of Georgian folk choreography)

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Folk choreography is otherwise called ethnic dance. The terms *folk*, *ethnic*, and *folklore* are synonymous and indicate the antiquity of facts and events, their archaism and distant origin. These terms characterize all elements of identity of the people/nation/ethnos, both mundane, reflected in various forms of material culture, and worldview, the attitude towards the world and its artistic perception.

The term folklore, an Anglo-Saxon composite literally meaning *folk wisdom* (lore), was first used in a letter to The Athenaeum in 1846 by English scholar William Thomas, who proposed to replace the previous combination of words *folk antiquity* with said term. Since then, the term has firmly established itself in the ethnographic/ethnological space and, despite the slight variability of the definition (at times its meaning became more narrow and limited to denote oral literature, folk literature), has finally retained its authorial, semantic origins and represents a system of artistic expressions crystallized in human consciousness from the beginning of times. These artistic forms are revealed in a creative process by means of creating works with historical roots contemporary to the origins of the particular ethnos. Thus, we think of folklore as a means of revealing the creative skills of people, the origins of which we explore in the unknown depths of history.

The modern world is also multi-ethnic, and each ethnic unity, despite the active processes of globalization, retains or seeks to maintain its sense of identity, including in the form of folklore. Folklore is as much an integral part of the present, of modernity, as other signs of folklore: language, territory, sociocultural structure, and the like. Folklore in modern times is a reflection of proto-ethnic existence which, quoting Carl Gustav Jung, is revealed at the level of collective subconscious, the cultural archetype/genotype at any stage of the histori-

cal existence of the ethnos.

Folklore in old days and folklore now are as the intersection of two extremely distant points in history... and in this context a question arises: How solid is the structure of folklore and how unchanged is its form-creation process? To what extent does centuries-old folklore retain its static condition, canons, and archaism? **What is the folklore sustainability paradigm?** Answers to these questions shed light on the peculiarities of the historical-chronological development of folklore, which leads to the creation of new trends in folklore.

If we consider the combination of features of **folklore (oral form of dissemination, anonymity, collectivity, improvisation, variability, mundanity, syncretism, and others)** and judge each characteristic, we can easily conclude that folklore, despite its common orthodoxy, is a lively, dynamic event of changing nature. Folklore created by all these signs and “imported” from time to time from century to century cannot be bottled and distributed in a copied form. Created by a collective mind and passed on from generation to generation through improvisation, the pattern itself provides a wide arena for creating a different variety. So, what is the unchanging, pristine core that keeps folklore identifying with a particular people, ethnos, and what is it that can change?

This issue is highlighted by one of the most important issues in art, the relationship between **form and content**. In my opinion, constant (invariably) can be considered the permeable functional-content axis of the folklore pattern and the system of symbolic representations of artistic thinking. Less sustainable are the forms of reflection of these faces, the conditional frameworks in which the flow of creative thought takes place. The shape, or in other words, the structural arrangement of the pattern, is more flexible and more easily influenced by various external or internal factors. It should also be

noted that the above-mentioned view is not absolute, but is a view built on the principle of domination and reconciling the oppositions.

Returning to the main issue of the research, everything that said about folklore in general in the introductory part refers to all specific folklore directions: oral tradition, folk music, and folk dance. Due to the different nature of the means of expression (word, sound, movement) in these three directions, in the process of oral transmission, oral communication (word) and music (sound) show more solidity and better preserve the archaic model of form-content. The degree of their resilience is also explained by the largely chamber nature of oral and musical folklore when the verse-song is performed individually or by a small group.

With folk-dance, the situation is different. The main means of expression in dance are combinations of **body movement systems**: flexibility, facial expressions, posture, gesture, perspective, and others, hence it can be considered a more complex psycho-physiological phenomenon than a single word or sound, especially when the dance technique organically combines both sound and word, as it is in Pherkhuli. In this case, we are faced with a unity of word-sound-movement, which, you will agree, requires more effort in the process of oral transmission to next generations.

At the same time, the continuous existence of dance traditions is, in many cases, of collective nature. The oldest, most authentic form of dance patterns was performed by numerous dancers on folk days and holidays. If we also consider the synthesis of ritual dances and consider them an integral part of a theatrical spectacle or a series of complex actions, we logically conclude that the solidity of dance folklore is less stable, under the influence of historical-epochal tendencies for example, than oral tradition and music. Folklore, as a historian of a nation, reflect historical facts and events in a variety of forms and methods of expression. In this context, folk dance, taking into account the historical-religious situation, has emerged as a sociocultural event, which appears in a different functional-content and structural configuration at different stages of existence. Therefore, it is appropriate to talk about the different nature of modern folklore and its specific features.

A small excursion into the genesis of choreographic

art will help us visualize the chronological process of the development of folk dance from archaic forms to its modern interpretation. The presented schematic image highlights three main segments of folk dance: roots/ethnic factors, the first stage of the central axis and branches: authentic-folk and stage-folk dances (see the scheme of genesis of choreographic art). A clear differentiation of authentic and stage folk dances is especially important in relation to the concept of modernity. We have already talked above about the historical origins of authentic dance folklore. As for the origins/development of stage-folk choreography, it covers the last two centuries, and if we take into account that the history of choreography is thousands of years old, the two-century period is so small that we can consider stage-folk choreography as wholly modern.

Based on the presented theoretical considerations, which are also supported by the genesis of choreographic art and empirical observations on choreographic practice, it can be said that the modern manifestation of folk dance traditions has several directions. When:

1. **Dance folklore retains its original appearance** (authentic folk dances)
2. **Dance folklore is transformed into a field of art** (stage - folk dances)
3. **Elements of dance folklore are used in other types of dance or other performing arts.**

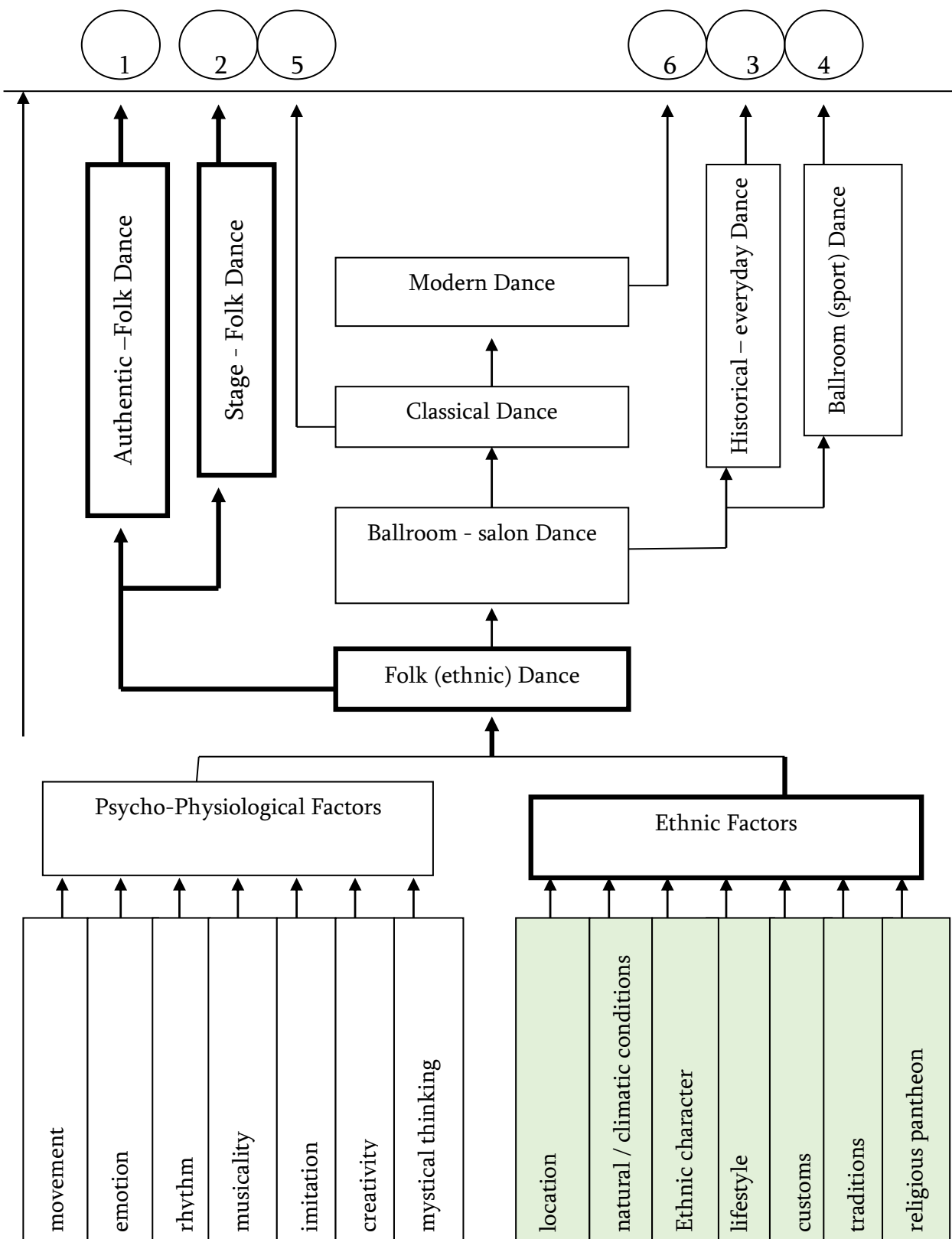
Let's consider the validity of all three cases using the examples of Georgian folk choreography, because Georgian folk choreography is the best practice in all three directions.

1) **Dance folklore retains its original appearance or folklore remains folklore.**

It is the present of authentic, primary folk dance, the choreographic elements preserved in national rituals and the continuous tradition of their performance. Here folklore retains its original function dominated by the aesthetics of self-gratification. It exists in the bosom of the ethnos that gave it birth, exists in the geographical area where it originated, in the celebrations-holidays/rituals where it retains its functional-content value, in a framework of original artistic-aesthetic forms, where the compositional elements of dance, drawing and vocabulary, are not processed, refined, cleaned.

Georgian dance culture, as one of the visible signs

### Genesis of Choreographic Arts



of Georgian ethnic identity, is an integral part of world cultural heritage. Its historical origins are confirmed by many archeological monuments, the images of which have survived in the form of swaying-praying figures and rituals. Rituals from pagan times carried a religious connotation, transformed by the influence of Christian culture. Through many historical storms, Georgian dance traditions still retain their original function and archaic forms. This is mostly the case in the mountainous regions of Georgia.

Svan, Rachan, Tushian, Pshavian celebrations-holidays *Lamproba*, *Atnigenoba*, *Lomisoba*, *Murkvamoba*, *Lazaroba*, *Shuamtoba* and many others are still part of Georgian highlanders' lives and are executed with the same faith and respect as centuries ago. At the same time, during secular holidays, people's laughter is accompanied by satirical, humorous, or competitive dances.

A separate stream is the theatrical performance *Berikaoba*, festive processions *Alilo*, *Chona*, and others. The abundance of authentic folk-dance examples proves that Georgia is among those few countries able to maintain their identity and a prominent place on the world ethnographic map.

## 2) Dance folklore is transformed into a field of art.

This direction includes the process of creation and development of stage-folk choreography from the beginning to the present. Here folklore loses its traces of identity and original, utilitarian function, as well as transcends the geographical area of the ethnos and its sociocultural boundaries. Stylized forms of folklore are created in different doses, designed for the audience and subject to the basic principles of performing arts. The choreographic trends of the latest period are created: the diversity of the ornamental solution of dance, the expansion of the boundaries of dance vocabulary, the plastic forms of techniques—so-called Creative freedom, reflection of modern traditions of musical-artistic decoration of dances in stage-folk choreography. In Georgian dance culture, this process has specific chronological frameworks, which we cannot say about authentic folklore. The transformation of dance folklore into a modern art space started in the early the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues today. This process includes several important stages, and all are related to the name of a particular artist, a specific creator: Alexi Aleksidze,

Davit Javrishvili, Nino Ramishvili and Iliko Sukhishvili, Avtandil Tataradze, Jano Bagrationi, Bukhuti Darakhvelidze, and many others who created choreography based on folklore. They staged many compositions (*Samaia*, *Khorumi*, *Parikaoba*, and others) that became symbols of folklore in Georgian choreography, and today it is often difficult to draw the line between people and the creative thought of the artist.

If we give the term *modernity* a narrower meaning and equate it with the term *latest*, we can talk about completely different trends, and this is a new generation of choreography: *Zekari*, *Juta*, *Tsdo*, *Otobaia*, *Tsekva-Tamashi*, and others, where the author (Iliko Sukhishvili Jr) sculpts new body shapes through bold experiments.

## 3) Use of folklore elements in other types of dance or other performing arts

This direction is one of the fashionable trends of modernity, going back to the beginning, trying to solve the philosophical model of the world with the help of *folk wisdom*; in the process of creating new artistic faces using rhythmic-plastic forms of folklore and individual elements. Here we are talking about the use of separate elements of dance folklore (and not finished patterns): stroke, turn, kick, brush, fractured movement, arm movements-states, forms of full-body movement-posture, and so on, used in classical choreography or in modern performances. The most visible examples of this direction are ballet performances on national themes: *Mzechabuki*, *Gorda*, *Medea*, *Chant*, and many others.

In conclusion, dance folklore, despite its antiquity, is an organic part of modern art. Choreographic practice shows that a return to folklore is a growing trend of the recent period, which is also declared by the politics of world culture.

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