C.4: Traditional Creation and Modern Experience in Folk Music Revival

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The Role of Identity, Continuation, and Participation in the Finnish and Breton Revived Oral Song Traditions

In this paper, I will discuss the relation of the continuation of the tradition, especially in the form of intergenerational cooperation and transmission of knowledge, and questions of identity and the possibility for audience participation, to the practice and popularity of revived forms of oral singing. I will take up two different cases: the Finnish runosong and rekilaulu traditions, and the Breton dance song tradition *kan ha diskan.* All are traditions which for contemporary singers mean learning oral methods and styles based on orally transmitted songs texts and melodies from archives. The three traditions are stylistically very different, and in certain societal sense even opposite: the latter is connected to reviving a minority language identity and leans on substantial intergenerational continuation, whereas the runosong singing in Finland represents an interrupted tradition intentionally connected to a distant mythic past by generations of scholars. The rekilaulu songs are short rhyming couplets, which are today known as fixed-form folk songs by many, yet barely recognised as the vital improvisatory culture it was during its peak time.

In Finland, the revival of traditional oral singing chiefly concerns the epic and lyric runosong. During the 19th century, the runosong traditions were vital in eastern Finland and Russian Karelia, as western parts of Finland had already changed to rhymed oral models. Large part of the archived material derives from Karelian and Ingrian regions, which, as related to the Finnish national symbol Kalevala, has recently caused debates over linguistic identities and cultural appropriation. Oral transmission of the runosong singing stopped in Finland several generations ago, but in the 1980s, a small group of educated folk singers began to learn the runosong singing and methods of oral composition with the help of archived material. In addition, a small number of folk singers practice this form. Performers sing alone or alternate between lead singer and choir, and audience listens as in any contemporary concert. Small scale jam sessions are also organised. Despite the skills and depth of knowledge acquired in the genre by a number of artists, the traditional runosong has not gained popularity among the public at large. The more recent Finnish tradition of rhyming couplets,

the *rekilaulu*, has remained entirely marginal in research but now enjoys a come back among a circle of folk singers, with jam sessions and workshops organized during the last couple of years.

Brittany in France is today one of foremost European scenes for performance of traditional music. In addition to musical instruments and songs that are performed alone or in groups, in the Breton speaking western and central Brittany this especially means dance music and a style of vocal accompaniment of dance called *kan ha diskan* ("call and response"). *Kan ha diskan* is typically performed by two singers, sometimes three, in the following manner: the leading singer sings a verse, which the other singer repeats, with overlap in the last two or more syllables by both. The songs are performed in conventionally organized sets of melodic and rhythmic styles, which allow the dancers and singers to alternate pace and energy. The texts vary from dramatic ballads to different kinds of old narratives and funny, anecdotal songs.

As a performance style, the *kan ha diskan* relates to songs in Breton language that are performed for local Breton dances. Reviving the dance and singing culture thus relates to reviving and maintaining the use of Breton. By the mid-20th century, the vertical transmission of the Breton from parents to children stopped. In France Breton was not only forbidden at school but stigmatized as the language of peasants, and parents preferred French to give their children a better future. Therefore only few singers had internalized the Breton language as a child and continued to speak it, and when bringing the song texts and melodies back from archives, many singers learned a new language along with the songs. The song technique with repetition and overlap demands good knowledge of the song texts and Breton pronunciation. However, as the first revival of the local evening events with dance begun already in the 1960s, singers who were native in Breton took up the tradition, and the later 1990s revival could lean on native performers' impact. First song courses were organized in early 1980s – at the same time the runosong begun to be learned and taught in Finland – but in Brittany the courses were taught by singers who were immersed in the practice as children and had already a long career as performers. Local dances as an activity that today engages a lot of people has secured a very large popularity for the song revival.

The goal of the analysis of the different consequences for these traditions that rely on the singer's knowledge of pre-modern oral song forms is to discuss what else, beyond skills and enthusiasm of the performer, shapes song revival movements and the possibilities they provide.