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DANCING FOR SURVIVAL

Belonging, Authenticity, Space and Place in a Chilean Immigrant Dance Group

> And dancing, like listening, doesn't come naturally: to dance to music is not just to move to it, but to say something about it – whatever else the performer may tell us from stage, what they really think about their music is shown by how they move to it. (Frith 1996: 224)

INTRODUCTION

In many immigrant communities in Europe, we find groups of people engaged in cultivating traditional music and dance. Immigrants have experienced significant disruptions in their relationships to space and place. Cultural practices are exercised in new and different circumstances altering their social function and significance. Music and dance can play a key role both in the building of local immigrant communities and maintaining ties to the home countries, while also playing an important part in building relationships with the majority culture. This article takes a close look at how experiences of place and social belonging are perceived, constructed, and limited within an immigrant community, and how dance practices are involved in these processes. I will approach these issues by focusing on *Ayekantún*, a Chilean dance group in Oslo, Norway. I will refer to how the role of traditional music and dance belonging to the Chilean *criollo* culture – referred to as *folclore* in the community – is conceived on different levels: First, in relation to the local immigrant environment in Norway; second, in relation to images of the homeland; and third, in a more abstract sense, in relation to the building of a worldwide community of Chilean expatriates.

The flow of immigrants to Europe during the past 20 to 30 years has forcefully raised new issues concerning cultural complexity and the role of immigrants within a multicultural society. In Scandinavia, several

authors from different fields have shown a particular interest in the cultural strategies of immigrant communities. Various studies explore how notions of belonging, space, and place are perceived, constructed, maintained, and transferred through music and dance (Schierup and Ålund 1986; Hammarlund 1990; Knudsen 2004; Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström 2003; Ronström 1992). This article, based on ethnomusicological field research among Chilean immigrants, can be placed within this Scandinavian body of research. A common feature in the aforementioned publications is the notion that music is an instrument of social construction. The focus is not primarily directed towards how music 'represents' or 'reflects' social structures, identities, or geographic location, but rather on how it is used as a tool in the social construction and configuration of these categories. Hence, music and dance practices are regarded as 'symbolic work', playing a part in the formation of collective ideas and efforts aimed at reaching a variety of social goals: community-building based on ethnic background (Schierup and Ålund 1986: 204), the 'external' promotion of immigrant culture (Hammarlund 1990: 92), or the construction and policing of social boundaries (Knudsen 2004: 89). An active relationship to music – as a performer, concert audience or music consumer – is seen as a practice used to organise and build individual and collective notions of space and place. It is argued that music is a human strategy that 'creates place' – by stimulating, organising and communicating memories, emotions and experiences. This is done "... with an intensity, simplicity and power that surpasses any other social activity" (Stokes 1994: 3).

The practice of dance in the immigrant community can be understood from two different but closely linked perspectives. On the one hand, we may regard dance as symbolic expression; the issues at stake concern what dancing is thought to represent and what place it ought to have – or not to have – in the life of a social group, a community or a nation. Dancing as a key social practice in a community is a primary social text of great importance. Dance styles play an essential part in the configuration of social distinctions, working as markers of individual identity, group belonging, and national identity.

On the other hand, dance can be regarded as a bodily practice. When dancing, we experience our bodies as they move to music, while at the same time we experience music through our moving bodies. Drawing upon the framework outlined by Patria Román-Velázquez (1999), dance practices can be seen as embodied discourses of individual and collective identities. Through corporal practices in social space the body becomes part of the construction of identity, acquiring, articulating, and communicating identity at the same time.

> Dancing is a process that allows for an understanding of the relationship between body and music as culturally constructed and culturally specific. […] Hence, the bodily expression of music is directly related to the way in which music has become connected to particular social meanings at any given moment in place. (Romàn-Velázquez 1999: 145)

AYEKANTÚN

Ayekantún was started in 1999 as a folk-dance workshop for children [taller infantil de danzas folclóricas] in the Chilean community of Oslo. The name '*Ayekantún*' is an indigenous Mapuche term meaning: "to amuse oneself merrily with stories, dance and music" [divertirse alegremente, con cuentos, bailes y música]. The group was originally established with the aim of …

> … preserving our choreographic and musical traditions in the children, some of them born in this country, and with very little contact with the country of origin of their parents.[1] (From programme folder presenting *Ayekantún*, May 2000)

> *… preservar nuestras tradiciones coreográfico-musicales en los niños, algunos de ellos nacidos en esta tierra y con muy poco contacto con el país de origen de sus padres. (From programme folder presenting* Ayekantún*, May 2000)*

Today, *Ayekantún* consists of both an adult dance group and a children's group, *Los Ayekantuncitos*. They have an active repertoire of about 20 different traditional dances. Like many contemporary folk dance instructors in Chile, Patricio Quintana, the leader and dance instructor of *Ayekantún*, emphasises the stylistic multiplicity of Chilean folk dance, including in the repertoire a variety of dances from virtually all of Chile. The dancers may be seen in rustic ponchos performing an indigenous Mapuche dance, in the sparkling costumes pertaining to the energetic *diablada* dances of the Tirana festival, and the children may even dance in straw skirts and flower wreaths, swaying to the Polynesian rhythms of *Rapa Nui* [Easter Island]. The core of the repertoire is, however, made up of criollo dance styles, including the *polka*, *trote*, *cachimbo*, *chincolito*, *trastrasera*, *el costillar* and not least, a number of different varieties of the *cueca*: Chile's national dance

1 Translated by the author.

and official symbol of the nation (Knudsen 2001). The group performs at events both within and outside the community: Independence Day celebrations, the inauguration of the Chilean cultural centre, an annual kite festival, various multicultural events, and events arranged by the Catholic Church.

The majority of the twelve adult dancers active in *Ayekantún* today came to Norway as part of a relatively large wave of immigrants that arrived at the very end of the Pinochet dictatorship. Their professional occupations are typically working class. Most of them come from predominantly urban backgrounds with limited folclore interest within their families. More than half of them had never danced traditional dances before arriving in Norway, and admit to having had little or no interest in this kind of cultural practice before leaving Chile. Whether they had dancing experience in Chile or not, they all report that the immigrant situation spurred a new interest in specifically Chilean cultural expressions. At the beginning of my first research period from 1999 to 2003, it was quite a surprise to realise that the activity of these folclore dancers, at the very core of the Chilean community, by and large, was not a continuation of any cultural activity brought along from Chile, but rather a revival or reconstruction in Norway (Knudsen 2001).

A COMMUNITY UNDER THREAT

Many minorities live a precarious existence although they may maintain their dissimilarity and cultural boundaries over many decades, even in complex urban societies. Just like other cultural practitioners in various immigrant communities, Chilean folclore performers experience their community as being culturally threatened. Some general observations regarding this perceived threat may be worth considering as they have a strong and direct influence on the development and configuration of cultural strategies. The observations are based on my own fieldwork among immigrants from recent waves of migration to Norway.

First of all, minority communities are surrounded by majority culture, which may be experienced as dominating, difficult to understand, or both. Cultural visibility in concert arenas and in the media is controlled by powerful commercial organisations which generally show little interest in stimulating minority musics. When a majority becomes a minority, as is the case for Chilean immigrants, the need to reflect upon, reconsider, and in many cases, defend notions of cultural belonging arises. The majority society challenges these notions by offering options that are not available in the homeland, where there is no great threat to the common feeling of

ethnic or national belonging. In Chile, the cultivation of collective identity is taken care of by the school system, the media and public institutions. It is not an issue that needs to be questioned by the individual or pointed out to the surrounding society.

A second, related aspect is the threat of assimilation. Especially for groups with little new recruitment and limited contact with cultural 'roots', the possibilities offered by the majority society or internationalised popular culture may seem more attractive, particularly for the second generation. As a result of intermarriage and cultural interaction, many minority communities have a sense of losing their foothold in the traditions and customs with which they identify. Although current European policies regarding minorities often encourage so-called multiculturalism, there is minimal support directed towards those internal practices that enable the cultural survival of the community.

A third circumstance is the lack of cultural expertise. Today the Chilean population in Norway numbers around 7 000. Within a population this size, one cannot expect to find more than a handful of high quality cultural performers. There are few other performers to exchange musical ideas with and measure performance quality against. There is limited organised training and no major cultural institutions promoting Chilean music and dance. For example, there is only one performer of the traditional folclore harp in all of Norway. Despite modern communication technology providing possibilities for seeking inspiration from sources back in Chile and maintaining a certain contact with performers and musicians in other Norwegian cities and in Sweden, *Ayekantún* still has to cope with a certain cultural isolation.

A fourth observation and a characteristic feature of the Chilean community, is an unbalanced demography. Migrants come in waves. The onset or discontinuation of a wave of migration is due to economic and political events around the world. Young adults dominate most of these waves, either seeking better economic opportunities than they had in their country of origin or fleeing from persecution. The wave of Chileans arriving in the late 1980s was mainly made up of couples and young families. When this wave of migration subsided after the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1989, immigration to Norway dropped abruptly. There is today hardly any 'fresh' immigration to the community. Most of the cultural leaders are in their 50s and 60s and large parts of the second generation are choosing alternative cultural networks. Consequently, the community is faced with cultural decline. A declining interest in cultural practices and symbols of ethnic belonging is undoubtedly a very real threat to the future of the community understood as a coherent cultural entity, distinct from the surrounding society.

DISCOURSES AND NARRATIVES

In earlier field research in the Chilean community of Oslo, I have often been struck by the variety and complexity of discourses surrounding the configuration and justification of cultural practices. I have experienced that within the same music or dance group there may exist various, and sometimes contradictory, narratives surrounding their activity. However, all the performers with whom I have been in contact during my research share an overarching ambition: To work for the cultural survival of the Chilean community as a distinct social group. The remainder of this chapter will bring forth a number of coexisting perspectives and discourses by letting the voices of the *Ayekantún* dancers be heard through excerpts from interviews I carried out with ten adult members in May 2008. These are obviously primarily individual statements representing each member's attitudes and interpretations of dance practices as experienced within the immigrant setting. Still, together, they form a relatively coherent image of what it means to be engaged in the cultural struggles of this immigrant group. The interview excerpts are used as a point of departure for elaborating on five key discourses: authenticity, community, relations to majority society, cultural survival, and national belonging. Finally, these discourses are drawn together and related to the role of immigrant culture in view of integration policies. Additional material from my longstanding contact with the Chilean community will be used to complete the picture.

AUTHENTICITY – GETTING YOUR SHOES DIRTY

As any performers engaged in traditional music and dance, the dancers of *Ayekantún* have a deep desire to present their work as genuine and authentic. Negotiations concerning costumes, choice of music or dance movements play an important part in the social construction of folclore, both in Chile and in the immigrant communities. Parallel to the historical discourses surrounding 'folk' culture in much of the western world (Storey 2003), authenticity in criollo music is based on images of peasant life in rural Chile, often connected to the culture of the *huaso*, the equivalent of the Argentinian *gaucho*.

When issues concerning authenticity arise, the dancers of *Ayekantún* often refer to *tierra* as a *summarising metaphor* (Ortner 1975). Tierra is a complex term that can have a variety of meanings: Earth, soil, land, ground, place, region, home, country, nation, motherland or even world. In discourses surrounding Chilean traditional music *de tierra* [of the earth] is used synonymously with 'traditional' or 'folkloristic' in terms like *bailes de*

tierra (traditional folk dances) and *cancionero de tierra* (book of traditional songs) (Loyola 1980, 1985). Both in conversations about music and in folclore song lyrics, tierra is often used ambiguously or carries multiple meanings, touching upon two or more understandings at the same time. However, the aspects of connection and belonging are always present. It is no coincidence that when referring to either Chile or to their own birthplace tierra is the preferred term, undoubtedly being more poetically loaded than alternative, more 'objective', terms such as *país, nación, pueblo,* or *ciudad*. Tierra emerges as a key concept in the prevailing understanding of folclore culture within *Ayekantún*. Taking tradition seriously means relating to tierra by moving your body in certain ways understood as authentic traditional dance. In the words of the instructor Patricio Quintana, this involves an aspect of 'grounding', a metaphorical attachment to the earth:

> We are trying to work towards authenticity in the way that ... What I am trying to do is to teach people what is most attached [literally 'glued'] to the earth [tierra].[2] (Patricio Q.)[3]
>
> *La autenticidad, la hemos tratado nosotros de trabajar, en el sentido de … lo que yo utilizo es ... enseñar a la gente lo que es mas pegado a la tierra. (Patricio Q.)*

Tierra is socially constructed as connected to the culture of rural areas of Chile, the preferred source of the performance material of *Ayekantún*. Underlying this understanding there is a recognition that authenticity has to do with connections to *cultores*, 'bearers of tradition' in rural areas, living on and off the land. As understood by Verónica, one of the female dancers, tierra is linked to the simplicity and humility characteristic of rural, 'peasant' life in Chile, thus constituting a contrast to modernity and complexity:

> JSK[4]: So what does tierra mean to you?
>
> For example, I had the opportunity to travel to southern Chile, and this [impression] filled me. To see the spontaneity of a peasant who started dancing a guaracha, I was charmed. He was so attached to the earth [tierra], because he knew how to dance. And [seeing

2 Translated by the author.

3 Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees except for the instructor and leader of the group Patricio Quintana.

4 The author, Jan Sverre Knudsen.

them dance] the cueca of the south too, the way of dancing. What impressed me was their feeling, their affection.

They are humble people, right? Living on what they live on, kneading their own bread, living off their own harvest.

I think that's what is happening everywhere, in Norway, everywhere. Cities are filled with buildings, are filled with other things, and the authentic, the original remains in the periphery, where modernity doesn't come. If you go to downtown Oslo or downtown Santiago or any capital, you will not find the authentic.[5] (Verónica)

JSK: ¿Entonces, que significa tierra para ti?

Por ejemplo, yo tuve la oportunidad de viajar al sur de Chile, y eso me lleno… ver la espontaneidad del campesino, que salió a bailar una guaracha, me encanto como, bien pegado a la tierra, porque la sabía bailar. La cueca sureña también, la forma de bailar, la impresión se veía afecto, se veía cariño.

¿Es gente humilde, no? Vive con lo que vive, amasa su pan, vive de su cosecha.

Creo que es lo que pasa en todas partes, en Noruega, en todas partes, las ciudades se llenan de edificios, se llenan de otras cosas, y lo autentico, lo original queda en la periferia, donde la modernidad no llega. Si tú vas al centro de Oslo o al centro de Santiago o cualquier capital, no puedes encontrar lo autentico. (Verónica)

Many of the *Ayekantún* dancers refer to changes in their understandings of authenticity, basically involving a stronger focus on cultural 'roots' in rural Chile. This development can be linked to an increased contact and cooperation with certain folclore performers in Chile – notably with the group *Paillal* – and not least, the influence of the leader of this group, Osvaldo Jaque who has visited Norway to teach and give workshops with the group. In 2005, after fund-raising in the community for more than two years, *Ayekantún* made a study trip to Chile that included a dance workshop with *Paillal*, a meeting with the wife of president Lagos and a tour of some important folclore areas. Following this visit, the group underwent major changes. *Ayekantún* was divided into an adult group and a children's group – possibly because some of the older children left the group shortly after the trip. They also started working more with the *campesino* [peasant] dance styles and began performing to their own live music instead of only

5 Translated by the author.

using recordings. The cultural ideology and understandings of authenticity promoted by Jaque – and supported by Patricio Quintana – made a strong impression, and have to a great extent been adopted by the *Ayekantún* members.

> Osvaldo Jaque, it is he who is the authority. We have to know where we come from. We have to know where folclore comes from, where this culture comes from and where tradition comes from.[6] (Patricio Q.)
>
> *Osvaldo Jaque, el es la autoridad. Tenemos que saber de donde venimos, tenemos que saber de donde viene el folclore. De donde viene la cultura, de donde viene la tradición. (Patricio Q.)*

Changes in understandings and new configurations of dance practices also meant dissociating oneself from cultural narratives previously dominating folclore discourses in the community.

> Many things that were done before were copied in wrong ways. When [Chilean] people had just arrived, what was meant by folclore? What people thought of was *Bafochi*, *Bafona*[7], and *Los Huasos Quincheros*, *Los Perlas*, *Los Hermanos Campos*, and *Los Chacareros de Paine*[8]. People were copying what they were doing then. They were copying great groups such as the Chilean folkloric ballet, which rehearses many hours every day. And they copied it incorrectly, the costumes, everything. And they stuck to those stereotypes.[9] (Patricio Q.)
>
> *Muchas cosas que se hacían antes se copiaban mal. La gente aquí cuando recién llego, ¿Qué era lo que se entendía con folclore? Lo que conocían era* Bafochi, Bafona, *y* Los Huasos Quincheros, *y* Los perlas, Los Hermanos Campos, Los Chacareros de Paine. *Copiaron el toque que ellos tenían en ese entonces. Copiaron cosa que eran muy grandes. El ballet folclórico chileno que ensayan horas al día. Y lo copiaron mal. Copiaron mal los trajes, copiaron mal todo. Se quedaron con esos estereotipos. (Patricio Q.)*

6 Translated by the author.

7 *Bafochi* (Ballet Folclórico Chileno) and *Bafona* (Ballet Folclórico Nacionál): The two major Chilean national folk dance ensembles.

8 These are major professional *folclore* music and dance groups.

9 Translated by the author.

Verónica clearly distances herself from the view of authenticity she held previously, when she performed with Chile Andino, a dance group active in the Chilean community of Oslo during the later years of the Pinochet era. Today she is proud of dancing more 'authentically' in *Ayekantún*, even engaging with 'tierra' by getting it on her shoes.

> I became acquainted with folclore in Chile Andino. And I was practically a dancing Barbie doll. I thought that was the most beautiful thing, a dancing doll.
>
> For me, that was the authentic thing. But then, when our teacher Osvaldo Jaque came, I learned that it was not. And this was what my mother had told me. So now I have another image of authenticity. What we are doing now is much better. I get my shoes dirty, dancing outdoors at the 4H farm.[10] (Verónica)

> *Yo conocí el folclore con Chile Andino. Y era prácticamente una Barbie para bailar. Una muñeca Barbie. Pensé que eso era lo más lindo, una muñeca para bailar.*
>
> *Para mi, yo pensaba que eso era lo autentico. Pero ahora cuando vino el profesor Osvaldo Jaque, aprendí que no. Y eso era lo que me contó mi mamá. Entonces ahora tengo otro imagen de lo autentico. Lo que estamos haciendo ahora es mucho mejor. Ensuciarme los zapatos, bailando afuera en el 4H gård[11]. (Verónica)*

Such changes of attitude and alterations in the repertoire and performance mode of *Ayekantún* cannot be viewed only as the result of the establishment of contacts with Jaque and Paillal, but should also be understood in relation to social changes affecting affecting the Chilean community. As the community has matured and a new generation, born and raised in Norway, is beginning to make itself noticed, there is a certain downplaying of the most explicit nationally emblematic aspects which were so important for many of the original immigrants during their first years in a foreign country. Today, there is a wish to go deeper than the purely symbolic level. Simply taking part in the cultivation of a major national symbol is no longer enough. Over time, the attraction of folclore dance activities in this immigrant community has come to depend on greater challenges: New images of authenticity, a more varied repertoire, and higher artistic quality, understood here as an approximation to a particular set of performance modes and ideals.

10 Translated by the author.

11 Name of the 4H farm pronounced in Norwegian.

Fig. 1 – Ayekantún practice session. May 2008.

Photo by Jan Sverre Knudsen

COMMUNITY

Ayekantún could fittingly be called an extended family. Many of the dancers are related, some are close friends, and they all know each other well through the activities of the Chilean Cultural Centre, *Casa Cultural Chilena*. The weekly practice sessions are held in a relaxed, informal atmosphere in a 'semi-private' arena: a locale belonging to the housing community where the instructor lives (see fig. 1). Before the session starts members engage in small talk while the children are playing in the kitchen area or outdoors. During the practice session constellations change: some of the dancing is done in a large group, while sometimes one or two couples may dance while the others watch or play guitars and sing. Alicia, from a family that has had five members dancing in *Ayekantún*, emphasises the family aspect:

> It's something beautiful, something that I shared with my parents. We have been three generations in the folclore activities. Five members of my family dance. It is something that unites us. We know that once a week we participate together in an activity. It is a family thing.[12] (Alicia)
>
> *Es algo bonito. Algo que yo compartía con mis padres. Siempre había tres generaciones en las actividades del folclore. Cinco en mi*

12 Translated by the author.

familia bailan. Es algo que nos une. Ya sabemos que una vez por la semana estamos juntas en una actividad. Es algo familiar. (Alicia)

For Chileans, living far from what they regard as their home country, or tierra, maintaining links to their relatives in Chile is important. Most families make visits 'back home' more or less regularly depending on what they can afford. The members of *Ayekantún* see their activity as a way of preparing their children for such visits. This includes teaching them folclore, cultural values and practices as well as learning Spanish:

> This [participating in *Ayekantún*] makes it easier when they visit Chile. It is tragic when children have no [Spanish] language. They visit Chile and find that they cannot communicate with their relatives. And they say: "I want to go back to Norway." In Chile it may be hard for them because they have lost their language.[13] (Felipe)

> *Eso les facilita cuando van de visita a Chile. Porque es trágico cuando los niños no tienen idioma. Van para Chile y se encuentran con que no pueden comunicarse con los familiares. Y luego dicen: "quiero irme para Noruega". En Chile se les hace duro porque han perdido el idioma. (Felipe)*

Several members of the group emphasise the positive social role of their cultural activity in the upbringing of children and their inclusion in the community. Participating in the dance group is seen as a way to give the children positive values and habits and even as a way to prevent them from running into problems with crime and drugs. Felipe puts it this way:

> So I say to all the people I know who have children: "Get them to join *Ayekantún*." It is better to spend 1 000, 2 000 or 3 000 kroner on your son for a folclore activity instead of having to spend thousands and thousands of kroner on him because he became a drug addict. Children have many possibilities in their free time. So we must pass on the positive activities, and one of them is the folclore activity.[14] (Felipe)

> *Entonces, a toda la gente que conozco y que tengan hijos digo: Metan los niños [en el* Ayekantún*]. Mas vale gastar 1 000, 2 000 ó*

13 Translated by the author.

14 Translated by the author.

> *3 000 en su hijo en una actividad Folclórica antes de que tengan que gastar miles y miles de coronas porque su hijo le cayo a la narcótica. Porque en el tiempo libre, los niños aquí tienen muchas posibilidades. Entonces hay que trasladarles las actividades positivas, y una de ellas es la actividad folclórica. (Felipe)*

This way of justifying cultural activities seems to echo arguments often furthered in Norwegian cultural and educational policies. According to what we might call a 'socio-political strategy', the promotion of music and dance is seen as a tool to build young people's self esteem and to develop positive social bonds (Knudsen and Berkaak 1998: 13). Adolescents 'at risk' are given an alternative to getting involved in criminal activities. Basically, they are kept away from the streets. While the Chilean community as a whole has not been troubled by many of the social problems various other immigrant communities are burdened with, this argument is quite common in discussions referring to the need to include children and adolescents in cultural practices.

Besides the primary activities of dancing and performing music there are other important areas that have to be taken care of: Transport to performance venues, providing food and drinks for the performers, and last but not least, ensuring that the dancers have the appropriate costumes for all the different dances. Much of this work is carried out by women. Since it may be difficult and expensive to depend on getting costumes from Chile, the women of *Ayekantún* have established their own sewing group. In the following quotation, Isabel relates how this started.

> Me and my sister-in-law, we were bored one Sunday. And I found an old duvet cover [*cubredyna*[15]] and started to cut it open: "Let's see, let's try!". I had an old, worn dress. We unstitched it and used it as a model. And so we made a huaso *china*[16] dress using an old duvet cover. And since it turned out pretty well, we went out to buy fabric. We improvised, measuring by eye, as we say in Chile. And we made a really beautiful dress, which I'm going to use for the first time tomorrow. I had never sewn a dress before. I bought a curtain which was the most similar, and made it from that. The sleeves were

15 *Cubredyna* is a hybrid verbal construction particular to the Chilean-Norwegian community. It is made up of the Spanish term *cubre* (cover) and the *Norwegian dyne*, a bedding duvet traditionally filled with eiderdown or feathers.

16 *Huaso china* is the female figure of the huaso culture, the Chilean equivalent to the gaucho culture of Argentina.

too short because there was not enough fabric, but my *china* dress turned out well.[17] (Isabel)

Yo y mi cuñada, estábamos aburridas un día domingo. Y encontré una cubredyna bien viejita, y la abrimos. "¡A ver, vamos a probar!" Tenía un traje viejo. Lo partí, y lo cupe como modelo. Y hicimos un traje de china de huaso, con una cubredyna vieja. Y como nos resultó, fuimos a comprar telas. Improvisamos, cortamos así, al ojo, como se dice en Chile. Y nos salió un vestido bien bonito, que mañana lo voy a estrenar. Nunca había cosido un vestido. Compré una cortina, lo que más acercaba, y de allí la hice. La manga quedó corta porque no había género, pero salió el vestido de china. (Isabel)

In this way, the women of *Ayekantún* have formed their own social setting in addition to the dance sessions and performances. They use old duvet covers and curtain material to make more or less authentic-looking replicas of traditional Chilean folk costumes which they proudly display at the practice sessions. Their activity highlights one of the characteristics of this and many other immigrant communities: An altered and often pragmatic approach to cultural practices. Obviously, the dancers of *Ayekantún* are at a much greater distance from the 'authentic sources' than similar groups in Chile. There is little competition from rival groups and the activity is rarely subject to any competent external evaluations. The social boundaries surrounding the activity are not patrolled as they would be in Chile.

It may seem that this relatively pragmatic approach gives the group a sense of freedom which is beneficial for the social atmosphere, allowing it to construct a space marked by a lot of fun, spontaneity and improvisation. In Chile, there is a great deal of competition surrounding folclore dancing, particularly around the nationally emblematic cueca dance, which has even been a compulsory activity in schools. Competitions are held at local, national and even international level with participation from immigrant communities worldwide. Patricio Quintana points out that this focus on competition does not match his own image of the authentic folclore of rural Chile, and would definitely not be welcomed by young members of the immigrant community; it would most likely prevent many children and teenagers from participating.

The children who went to Chile saw how the instructors treated the children there. And they realised the difference between Chile

17 Translated by the author.

and Norway when it comes to the relationship between adults and children. Our children do not compete with other children. We do not participate in cueca competitions. Even if many of them dance very well, we do not participate in competitions because we have no intention of beating anyone. We only want to show something. And that is the role of *Ayekantún*: To show our tradition.

But it depends on us adults to bring them to the practice session in a positive way so that they have fun. Because children have fun dancing. They are allowed to make mistakes. They are children. They play. They play dancing. And that's the idea: We encourage the children to play dancing. Then they will get to know it bit by bit. It is not about teaching them in a military way. Children lose interest when they feel compelled, don't you think? "They force me in school, they force me at home." And what happens if they come to dance and say, "Look, they force me there too."[18] (Patricio Q.)

Los niños que estuvieron en Chile vieron como los instructores de conjuntos trataron a los niños allá. Y se dieron cuenta de la diferencia que hay entre Chile y Noruega en torno a esta relación entre adultos y jóvenes. Los niños nuestros no compiten con otros niños. Nosotros no participamos en competencias de cueca. Por muchos que bailan bonito, baila una pareja, no participamos en competencias. Porque no tenemos ninguna intención de ganar a nadie. Queremos solamente mostrar algo. Y esa es la función de Ayekantún. *Mostrar nuestra tradición.*

Pero depende de nosotros los adultos, que los inculquemos a ellos que los traigamos a los ensayos que los motivemos, de manera positiva, que se diviertan. Porque los niños se divierten bailando. Ellos no tienen de esa prestación que tenemos nosotros. Tienen permiso para equivocarse. Ellos son niños. Ellos juegan. Juegan bailando. Y eso es la idea. Que nosotros hacemos que los niños juegan bailando. Para que ellos conozcan el folclore de apoco. Los vamos llevándole a poquito. No que lleguen allí y que tengan que aprender un baile, pero así. Así militarmente hablando. Los niños pierden el interés cuando se sienten obligados, ¿o no? Se sienten obligados "me obligan en la escuela, me obligan en la casa." Y mas, si llegan a bailar y van a decir, "mira, me obligan allí también." (Patricio Q.)

This 'learning by playing' may on the one hand be understood as a necessary pragmatic approach in a threatened community that struggles to recruit

18 Translated by the author.

young people for folclore activities; on the other hand, it might also be seen as an adaptation of a Scandinavian approach to teaching which doubtlessly is much less focused on discipline and compulsion than what we generally find in Chile. In any event, this approach to dance tuition is facilitated by the relaxed 'semi-private' character of the practice sessions and the physical characteristics of the locale. The children might sit on sofas and watch the adults or listen to the music, play for a while outdoors or in the kitchen area before joining the dance with their peers.

Field observations at practice sessions with *Paillal* in Chile, in September 2000, provide an interesting comparison. Here, specific details concerning costumes, such as the height of the heels on the men's boots, the colour of a sowing-apron used in a peasant dance, or the use of sandals or shoes were the subject of lively, and sometimes heated, discussions among group members. For *Paillal*, direct links to rural sources are considered an important mark of quality. They call their presentations *proyecciones folclóricos* reserving the term folclore or sometimes *folclore auténtico* for music and dance situated in what they see as the 'original' setting in rural areas. Obtaining material through personal contacts with *cultores*, 'bearers of tradition', is highly valued. The performance of a specific song or dance is often introduced as a generous gift from the cultor. In immigrant groups, such authenticity debates receive less attention. Issues of authenticity become disconnected from rural Chilean sources and, instead, become linked to the instructor, who comes to be seen as the one who has the expertise and represents the group's closest connections to folclore 'roots' and their cultural models in Paillal.

RELATING TO MAJORITY SOCIETY

The social position of Chilean folclore dancing in Norwegian cultural life is marginal. In the struggle for visibility in the various multicultural arenas of Oslo folclore maintains a low profile, especially if we compare it to the more commercially-oriented salsa scene, where a number of Chileans can be seen performing in Latino bands. While the Chilean community in general shows limited interest in presenting their cultural activities to outside audiences, the interest shown by Norwegian cultural institutions has not been exactly overwhelming either. Folclore dancing does not coincide with popular Latin American music trends and has not become integrated into the commercial 'world music' market. In essence, it remains 'Chilean culture for the Chileans'.

Still, there has been a certain change in the efforts of *Ayekantún* regarding the way they relate to the surrounding society. While the first years of the

group were primarily focused on performing for the immigrant community, today more attention is paid to the way in which performances are received by Norwegians and the image of Chilean culture the group promotes. Before their trip to Chile in 2005, members signed up for courses in traditional Norwegian folk dancing so that they would be able to include some of these in their performances during their tour of Chile. Patricio Quintana points out that the aim of this effort on the one hand was based on a wish to approach Norwegians engaged in the preservation of dance traditions, and on the other hand was aimed at showing people in Chile that living in a foreign country should ideally imply getting to know some of the culture of this country.

Roughly speaking *Ayekantún* has two kinds of performances: 'internal' performances at celebrations, and parties within the community and performances meant for Norwegians and mixed audiences, mainly at multicultural events. Consequently, they have developed two different repertoires. When performing for Norwegians, most of the repertoire is based on the more flashy style related to the huaso culture of central Chile, notably featuring the nationally emblematic cueca dance. The more varied 'internal' repertoire highlights the rural campesino [peasant] dances as well as dances representing the different geographical districts of Chile.

In a study of the music culture of Assyrian immigrants in Sweden, Anders Hammarlund (1990: 95) addresses aspects of community building by suggesting that we discern between the *catalytic* and the *emblematic* functions of a musical practice. Catalytic functions are described as stimulants of processes in the internal social chemistry of the immigrant group. They concern experiences of togetherness and community. Emblematic functions, on the other hand, deal with a group's outward self-representation, especially in relation to the majority culture. They concern the creation of difference: The self-definition of the community as distinct from the surrounding world, and the outward communication of this difference. As shown in Hammarlund's research, these two distinct functions can be filled by different music styles. Similarly, for *Ayekantún*, we could say that the emblematic functions are taken care of by the huaso style which dominates in performances for Norwegians, while the catalytic functions relate to the wider range of campesino music featured at the more 'internal' venues. In explaining these differences, Patricio Quintana refers to the educational role of *Ayekantún* in the community. A repertoire with a wide range of traditional dances is seen as an educational representation of the complete geographic and demographic expanse of Chile.

CULTURAL SURVIVAL – BEING SWALLOWED BY THE SYSTEM

Pervading all the discourses surrounding the dance practices of *Ayekantún* is one common understanding shared by all the dancers: What they are involved in is of utmost importance to the cultural survival of their community. There is a sense of an uphill struggle. The demographic development of the Chilean community seems to be working against it. Since new recruitment in the form of 'fresh' immigration from Chile is insignificant, the increasing distance in time to a past life in Chile becomes a growing obstacle to a cultural community understood as a coherent social entity, eventually threatening its very existence. Also, as Patricio Quintana sees it, the increasing integration of young 'second-generation' Chileans into alternative cultural arenas is a threat to the cultural survival of the community.

> It is very important to preserve the children's feeling of being Chilean. This is an issue that is becoming more important all the time. Children also have other interests. I think that with every year that passes it becomes more difficult to work with folclore here, because people are becoming integrated. Chileans integrate very easily. They easily copy what goes on around them. They work and work, they have no time; they are not interested in this activity. We adults carry the responsibility of keeping this tradition alive, but how long can we go on? Until our knees give way? Until our bodies tell us it's enough? Our intention is that the [Chilean] children join the group. We now have six, with the possibility that more will join us. We are always asking for more children.
>
> It's getting harder every day. Every day it's becoming more difficult to maintain our identity in this country. The system is eating us up – swallowing us, little by little. And the fact is that for these people here, it's a tremendous job, and a costly one.[19] (Patricio Q.)

> *Es bien importante mantener el sentido de ser chileno a los niños. Es un asunto que va cuesta arriba. Los niños también tienen otros intereses. Yo creo que cada año que pase es más difícil hacer folclore acá, porque la gente se integra. El chileno tiene muy fácil de integrarse. Copia muy fácilmente los ejemplos de lo que esta pasando, y trabaja y trabaja, no tiene tiempo, no se interesa por ese tipo de actividad. Nosotros los adultos, somos encargados de mantener viva esa tradición; ¿pero hasta donde?*

19 Translated by the author.

¿Hasta que las rodillas nos den? ¿Hasta cuando el cuerpo nos diga: está bueno? Entonces, la intención de que los niños se integren al grupo, como ahora tenemos seis, con la posibilidad de que sean mas. Siempre estamos pidiendo más niños.

Es más difícil cada día. Cada día es mas difícil mantener nuestra identidad en este país, porque la gente, el sistema se la va comiendo, se la va tragando a poco. Y el hecho de que esta gente acá, es un tremendo trabajo, y cuesta. (Patricio Q.)

The second-generation Chileans of Norway, who have only recently begun to influence cultural life, generally tend to establish their own social networks, transgressing the boundaries of the cultural community their parents are involved in. While never denying their background and heritage, their involvement in exclusively Chilean expressions is obviously not as closely linked to a personal past as it is for their parents and thus attains a different and sometimes purely symbolic character. Young Chilean-Norwegians have their own understandings of the symbolically loaded expressions so much valued by their parents, and their own ways of dealing with them. As most adolescents in multicultural urban societies the children and teenagers performing with *Ayekantún* are engaged in internationalised popular culture. They can be seen performing hip-hop or other popular music, though they often prefer music and dance of Latin American origin, particularly the salsa, which has experienced a surge in popularity. The 'Latin wave', including salsa, merengue and cumbia as well as newer styles such as 'rock Latino' and 'Latin house', has in recent years had a strong impact on the music culture of young people. This offers Chilean teenagers a social field where they can enjoy what we might call an 'ethnic advantage'. By virtue of their Latino background, their appearance, and their mastery of the Spanish language, young Chileans easily obtain a certain status in ethnically mixed groups of young Latin music lovers.

NATIONAL BELONGING, INCORPORATING IDENTITY

The single fundamental notion holding both *Ayekantún* and the Chilean immigrant community together is obviously some kind of feeling of being Chilean. The survival of the community depends entirely on the successful transmission of this feeling to the next generation. The adult dancers of *Ayekantún* attempt to transmit this feeling to their children by organising various cultural activities in a Spanish-speaking environment where the children can feel at home and over time strengthen their sense of being

Chileans. As Alicia and Silvia maintain, a sense of connection to 'their' Chile can be attained through body movement:

> With a dance style, they [the children] can present their culture, their traditions, and their roots. When the children ask about Chile, it is not so necessary to know that Santiago is the capital. Connecting to the motherland is not only about knowing, it is something that can be done by dancing.[20] (Alicia)
>
> It is a way of incorporating identity. ... We help the children in their identification, with music, with conversation, with celebrations, with everything. But it is difficult.[21] (Silvia)

> *Con una forma de baile [los niños] pueden presentar su cultura, su tradición, sus raíces. Cuando los niños preguntan de Chile, lo más necesario no es saber que Santiago es la capital. La conexión con la Patria no se trata solamente de sabiduría, es algo que se puede hacer en forma de baile. (Alicia)*
>
> *Es una forma de incorporar a la identidad. …A los niños les ayudamos con la identificación, con la música, con la conversación, y con las fiestas, y con todo. Pero es difícil. (Silvia)*

Similarly, in a *brindis* – a traditional folclore toast – written by a member of the community with close relations to *Ayekantún*, creating bonds to Chile is understood as an action more than as a feeling or an idea. Connections to Chile are constructed through body movement by dancing the cueca – literally 'creating the motherland' [*haciendo Patria*] 'outside' in the immigrant community.

> I am a foreigner, that is true, and I come from far away / but I have my roots and tradition / and the cueca dance reflects the joy of my nation / of my nation, that is true / whoever may say so / we are creating motherland here, outside.[22] (Written by Sergio Campos)

> *Soy extranjero, es cierto, y vengo de lejos / pero tengo raíces y tradición / y en la cueca se refleja la alegría de mi nación / de mi nación es cierto/ quien lo dijera / estamos haciendo Patria aquí afuera. (Sergio Campos)*

20 Translated by the author.

21 Translated by the author.

22 Translated by the author.

As these quotations indicate, the *Ayekantún* dancers have an awareness of their dance as a practice embodying the nation, while at the same time virtually constructing it. Regarding dance in this way highlights the ways in which the dancing body expresses, articulates and builds a sense of national identification. Related to the cultural influence of Chilean immigrant communities around the world, a new particular notion of the Chilean nation has emerged. The map of Chile shows 13 regions, but during the past decade a 14th region, called the region of *el exterior*, or the region of *el reencuentro* [reunion] has virtually been added; a region made up of the approximately one million Chileans living outside Chile today. Allegedly coined by former President Lagos, this expanded image of the nation – an imagined community – is gaining increasing recognition both from the Chilean authorities and from expatriate communities around the world. At least on a symbolic level it responds to the deeply felt wish that many Chilean expatriates carry: To be accepted fully as Chilean nationals while still having permanent residence in a foreign country.

CONCLUSION – IMMIGRANT CULTURE AND INTEGRATION

As discussed in this article, the folclore dance practices of *Ayekantún* should be understood as an important cultural strategy in a community of Chilean immigrants. It is a strategy aimed at creating a meeting place where several generations of Chileans feel at home and can cultivate their common interests. It is aimed at preserving and passing on traditional practices as well as maintaining links to Chile. Finally, it can be understood as a part of the group's own integration strategy aimed at negotiating a place for these practices within the wider multicultural society of Norway.

Although the configuration and social role of the dance activity discussed here has undergone certain changes – including recent efforts aimed at reaching out to Norwegian folk dance practitioners – folclore dancing still must be regarded as a rather 'internal' cultural practice. We may, of course, regard such exclusive practices of an immigrant community as the expression of an isolationist tendency and consequently, as contradictory to integration efforts. Cultural activities surrounded by more or less obvious national or ethnic boundaries undoubtedly contribute to giving immigrants the opportunity to live a more or less complete social life without engaging themselves in the majority culture more than absolutely necessary.

There is, nevertheless, a different way to understand this issue. For many immigrants, there are major obstacles to participation in cultural activities outside the limits of their community. For some of the older members, the Chilean community is practically their only social world – their only

'family'. Attempting to understand and participate in settings dominated by the majority culture is simply not a very tempting alternative to their own familiar and controllable cultural world. The maintenance of culture and tradition which is so highly esteemed by the dancers of *Ayekantún* can be regarded as necessary symbolic work needed for the preservation of the community. The 'internal integration' of an ethnic community – the ethnic cohesion cultivated through catalytic cultural practices – gives immigrants a necessary foothold and may very well be a precondition for functioning outwardly as a noticeable cultural force and, consequently, for their 'external integration' into surrounding society. Even for the young second generation Chileans, who explore and cross cultural boundaries on a daily basis, a sense of grounding in a culture that relates to their background and heritage, whether they participate actively or not, may give them a better chance of succeeding in social and cultural life outside the limits of the Chilean community.

At any rate, one must be careful not to draw the conclusion that these more or less exclusive, internal practices of immigrant communities pose any social problem or that they counteract integration efforts. Based on my encounters with the committed practitioners of folclore dancing, I would argue that cultural activities among immigrants, including those taking place exclusively within the limits of their communities, can have positive social effects transcending the communities themselves.

As several studies point out (Ronström 1992; Schierup and Ålund 1986; Knudsen 2004), the survival of an immigrant community as a distinct cultural entity depends not only on the opportunity its members have to engage in their 'own' particular cultural practices but also on their willingness and capability to do so. It is not difficult to predict that in the course of a few decades the passionate cultural survival strategies spearheaded by *Ayekantún* and other enthusiasts of Chilean-ness will become diffused, or at least altered, with the approaching 'new' generation. In the coming years we will most probably see young Chileans exploring new ways of being 'ethnics', increasingly relating to their Chilean-ness on a more symbolic level, while at the same time involving themselves deeply in the pan-ethnic Latino culture, where they benefit from an 'ethnic advantage'. Still, as studies on immigrant communities indicate, feelings of ethnic and national belonging can persist, and practices of music and dance in immigrant communities may survive for several generations, thus contributing to the cultural wealth and complexity of societies around the world.

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