

Learning to Become Dancing Musicians: Flamenco Dancers Going Global

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A Thesis
In
The Department
of
Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Social and Cultural Anthropology) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

June 2007

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ISBN: 978-0-494-34439-2

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ISBN: 978-0-494-34439-2

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Acknowledgements

First of all, thank you to all the dancers who have shared their experiences with me. You all have and continue to inspire me everyday. I am so grateful to carry flamenco in my heart which enriches my life in so many ways.

I would like to thank Pr. Amit for all her dedicated time and precious advices. Also thanks to Pr. Leblanc for her time and thoughtful questions. A special thanks to Pr. Neves-Graça for accepting to be a guiding voice in such a short notice and for the great insights she gave me about these aesthetic corporeal modalities and embodied cognition.

To my parents and family for believing in me and for all their support. And last but not least, thank you to Claudio for convincing me that this endeavor was worth it every time doubt would arise, as well as all the friends for their enthusiasm and support about this research project.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This thesis stems from a very personal interest: flamenco dance, through a cross-cultural perspective. Originally from Andalusia, a southwestern region of Spain, flamenco has been dispersed especially since the 1960s, and is now practiced in almost every part of the world. Asia, and particularly Japan, is becoming an important flamenco locale outside of Spain along with New York City and other Latin American cities. Not only do flamenco aficionados travel to Spain in order to learn and improve their practice, but Spanish artists also travel to other countries in order to teach and perform in shows. In the case of Japan, for instance, it is becoming common for flamenco artists to go there for long periods - several months or years - in order to teach and perform in local *tablaos*¹. Furthermore, flamenco is being commodified and made more accessible through the internet and material goods such as CDs and DVDs. Even though flamenco is certainly being transformed along the way, Spain - and especially Andalusia - still remains the flamenco reference for many practitioners around the world. Indeed, Spain still represents the point of reference in terms of flamenco's production and learning setting. Thus, it is a common phenomenon that dancers around the world go to Spain in order to learn and develop further their understanding and practice of flamenco.

Being a flamenco dancer for the last eight years, I have been concerned with embodiment and identity issues of flamenco that a "non-native" learner encounters along the way. These issues specifically concern the way foreign dancers come to learn flamenco skills and how they perceive their dancing. I believe that context plays an important role in the learning and performing process. Indeed, the practice of dance is much influenced by time and place and an analysis at the *level of the body* is necessary in order to study the appropriation, transmission, and migration, as well as the shifting, of movement styles (Desmond 1994, 39). Moreover, while I wished to examine the transformative trajectory of

¹ Typical flamenco venue, usually located in a bar and/or restaurant.

certain individuals into becoming flamenco dancers worldwide, I realized that learning flamenco involves a complex cultural embodiment which is both rich, and that its different facets are also worth examining.

From my own practice, I have gained awareness of many issues that complicate the dance embodiment for an individual who learns outside of the “lived dance context” (Pietrobruno 2006). These issues concern the often scarce opportunities to learn and practice specific dance skills in a cultural context different to the actual lived one. Therefore, this thesis is about the embodiment process of flamenco dance by some non-Spanish individuals. In other words, this thesis analyzes the *modus operandi* by which individuals learn to incorporate a dance form that was not present in their everyday culture beforehand. It is about their experiences and the challenges they have to deal with according to their own learning and career-making contexts.

This thesis also contributes to the anthropology of dance and overall human knowledge in demystifying the still very present association between the dancing abilities with biological issues. As Marcel Mauss (1936) argues, nothing is natural, but learned through social transmission. Nevertheless, learning to become “fluent” in a dance form requires even more work for someone coming outside of the “lived dance context” (Pietrobruno 2006). Indeed, while the apparent naturalness in the dancing mostly results from an extensive informal training, the challenge for these non-Spanish dancers lies in the rather formal training context that they move within at a later stage in their lives. In choosing to study and practice flamenco dance, many are confronted with several challenges both along the learning and eventual career-making trajectories.

In order to find out about other non-Spanish dancers’ experiences, going to Spain to meet with some of them became a necessity, as well as an obvious point of departure, together with my fieldwork in Montreal. Since I was particularly interested in the embodiment process of flamenco, I concentrated most of my research on the incorporation and learning process with dancers in Montreal and in classrooms in Spain. In fact, the main

reason for their presence in Spain was about wanting to learn and deepen their knowledge of flamenco.

Therefore, I first examine the learning process of flamenco dance in the classroom venues which constitute the main (formal) instruction setting that non-Spanish dancers move in. Then, in chapter 2, I explore the main training issues specific to flamenco dance, as well as the collective aspect of flamenco performance. In chapter 3, I address the different flamenco locales where I conducted fieldwork in Spain, together with the dancing styles and discourses conveyed around issues of gender and ethnicity. I also address specific distinctions between the ways flamenco dance is taught in Spain versus other locales. Chapter 4 aims to present further considerations about the complex cultural embodiment of becoming a flamenco dancer. Thus, chapter 4 is a complementary epistemological approach to the embodiment of flamenco dance by these non-Spanish dancers.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to the non-Spanish professional dancers' experiences throughout their career-making either in Spain or in their own respective countries. Thus, the thesis focuses on the dancers themselves, as regards their learning experiences, together with their performance and/or career experiences. First of all, however, since the dancing body is what constitutes the focus of this thesis, I begin with theoretical and epistemological considerations, followed by the methodology used for this research.

Writing about the dancing body

Dance is, for some powerful reasons, the most shallowly interpreted art form in the contemporary United States. It is a stigmatized art form, whose practitioners are given only a marginal economic, intellectual, and political place in U.S. society. From the standpoint of political economy, choreographing human movement can be considered a radically "unproductive" activity – having no material result – and can be difficult to commodify and mass produce as a participatory experience. This makes the enterprise of choreography itself distinctly unsuitable for playing an integral role in a consumer-oriented society. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in contemporary U.S. society there is no widespread popular understanding of why the art of performing or designing choreographed movement might become the central focus of a normal person's life. There is no widespread appreciation of what the process of mastering a choreographic experience can mean to an ordinary culture bearer. Sally Ann Ness 1992, 2-3.

Along with the precarious status of dance in contemporary Western societies, there are philosophical and methodological reasons for the marginal academic attention that the dancing body has received so far. According to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1992), it is due in great part to the conception of the body created by Cartesian Dualism. Sheets-Johnstone argues that “the more recent Western twentieth-century emphasis upon vision effectively reduced the richness of the affective and tactile-kinesthetic body – the body of felt experience – to a simple sum of sensations” (Sheets-Johnstone 1992, 2). Consequently, the “living sense of the body, and its propensity for sense-making, have been blotted out by top-heavy concerns with brains, minds, consciousness, and language, these latter being construed by many people as virtually self-sufficient “mental” systems, all the rest being just so much in the way of mechanical peripheral support” (*ibid*). Thus, what is non-verbal and ephemeral becomes less serious and less valuable for academic attention. And since dance is based on body-use and pertains to the non-verbal, the dancing body does not leave any tangible trace and may become arduous to investigate for the researcher used to “classical” data collection methods (see the “Methodology” chapter). Likewise, the sub-discipline called the anthropology of dance is fairly recent – from the 1960s onward - and is still a marginal area of study (Desmond 1994; Reed 1998). According to Desmond (1994), other reasons that might explain the status of dance within Euro-American societies is that dance is often regarded as a pastime and, when it is ranked to the status of art, it is practiced mainly by women and “non-whites” (Desmond 1994, 34). Actually, I believe that it is no coincidence that the majority of dance anthropologists are women.

With this in mind, why would people choose to dedicate their time and energy to serious dance training, a field which is more often than not underpaid and undermined? Furthermore, what brings people to choose a dance form which is foreign to their own culture, complicating the learning process even more? I believe that it is more important than ever to study such phenomena in a globalizing world, since it says something universal about humans: the need and desire to find an outlet from everyday life; or to use Victor Turner’s terms, a *liminal* space where “personal and communal creativity may arise” (Turner 1982, 11-

12). Dance, and here flamenco, offers the possibility to experience new feelings and emotions, especially for non-Spanish initiates. Hence, the incorporation of new body-uses and sensations that are completely foreign to one's everyday corporeal vernacular entails a cultural transformation from within. Indeed, Sally Ann Ness claims that the serious study of a dance form involves "culturally challenging experiences, which test the limits of the normal constructions of the social self" (Ness 1992, 6). As time passes, self-revelations and potential moments of catharsis may induce many to keep up with the long and arduous dance learning path.

However, most people struggle in trying to verbalize those powerful feelings and emotions triggered by dance. Actually, language is quite limited and not necessarily adequate for translating highly corporeal sensations and emotions into words. This is why, I believe, that everybody interviewed about why they love to dance flamenco had such trouble in explaining it literally, myself included. Although motivation may stem from a strong connection and love - even passion - for the dance form, it is never an irrational choice of activity on the part of dancers. In other words, because dedication to the dance activity may be so intrinsically linked with the power of emotions and sensations that some may experience, but who would have a hard time communicating these into words, does not mean that what they do is irrelevant or irrational. In this case, I believe that our commitment and deep love for flamenco binds us and tells something deeper about dance practice which transcends nationalities; learning and practicing a dance offers the opportunity to escape from the ordinary, mundane life and the roles we have to inhabit. This is not to say that dance is free from cultural constraints, on the contrary. Nonetheless, dance offers a space for spiritual experience, for a heightened self-consciousness through highly reflexive practice, which dance is about.

But then why choose flamenco among all other dance forms? Neither myself nor the dancers present in this thesis are able to respond definitively. I assume that part of the answer lies in the strong connection between the music and dance in the tradition. In other words, flamenco music and its rhythms must move you somehow in order to choose to devote

yourself into becoming a flamenco dancer. Because the dancer not only has to follow the rhythm, but also produces it with his or her own body, then being sensitive to flamenco music becomes essential.

Since dance cognition is a process where the body matters so critically, I would like to present here a brief overview of what has been produced on the body so far, before getting into the literature on the anthropology of dance per se. Then, I shall elaborate on the “embodiment of a dance”, which is understood here as the learning process, and constitutes the conceptual base for the core of this thesis.

On habits and stylized bodily practices

In anthropology, Marcel Mauss was one of the first scholars to acknowledge the body as a social as well as a psychological and biological site. In his 1935 essay, Mauss introduced the notion of the techniques of the body² in identifying the distinct ways in which people use their bodies from society to society. Concerned with the training and passing down of body techniques such as swimming, walking or dancing within each society, Mauss concluded that there is possibly no “natural” way for an adult to walk, but only one that is socially mediated and transmitted; such would be the same for any other “physical” activity. Mauss identified imitation and education as the primary social modes through which body techniques are transmitted and reproduced within a society (1936, 8). However, body techniques are not necessarily consciously taught and acquired; rather, according to Mauss, they are “shaped by and express the “habitus”, a notion that Mauss borrows from Latin to refer to the *habits* that vary among individuals within a society, but especially between societies (1973, 73). In doing so, Mauss was one of the first to acknowledge the importance of the body in constituting and maintaining culture.

This notion of *habitus* was further developed by Pierre Bourdieu and is at the core of his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*³, first published in French in 1972. Habitus, according to

² *Les techniques du corps* (1936)

³ The original French version of *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972).

Bourdieu, are “systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules [...]” (1977, 72). In other words, the dispositions are “ ‘cultivated’ through interaction with ‘a whole symbolically structured environment, and these ‘cultivated dispositions’ become ‘inscribed in the body schema and in schemes of thought’” (Bourdieu 1977, 15). The acquisition of practical knowledge such as skill - and dance, obviously – takes place through routinely carrying out specific tasks involving characteristic postures and gestures, or what Bourdieu calls a particular body *hexis*. Therefore, such mundane practices as “standing, sitting, looking, speaking, walking” are all skills to be mastered by the individual through a dialectical process that Bourdieu calls “the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world” (Bourdieu 1977, 89). The body is the site of a complex dialectic between the individual and the social interconnected with time and space. The habitual ways of knowing and moving are inscribed on and by the body through social routines. In other words, the body’s imprinting of the world and its effect on it is triggered through a dialectical process between the body and its surrounding environment. Habits, skills and other more complex bodily practices such as dance are embodied through a dialectical process involving social interactions and repetitive corporeal stylizations.

It is important to mention that Bourdieu also recognizes that the incorporation of the world is as much a gendered process as a process of gendering (Bourdieu 1990, 72; in Cowan 1990, 23). In the case of practical knowledge, to become competent or skilled is mostly based on the extent to which the individual has the chance to practice a specific skill. For example, many young women “are immature throwers and many young men can’t skip or leap very well due to gender limited opportunities to practice these skills” (Kimmerle, 2000, 271). Since habitus is a mostly unconscious learning that begins since early childhood and becomes automatic or like “second nature”, we tend to associate specific skills with gender. However,

the “gendered abilities” are mostly the result of the repetition of a motor skill that fashions one’s muscle memory - or the constitution of what Bourdieu calls a body *hexis*.

Thus, habitus is both a medium and an outcome of social practice (Wainwright et al. 2006, 537). On one level, because biographies are always different, then everyone has a unique habitus; on another level, “each individual habitus also bears the stamp of a group’s collective history” (*ibid*). In this way, habits and movement styles are profoundly embedded into the body and these tend to be very resistant to change through a mere desire to act in different ways. I have experienced that myself through dance; it is not enough to understand and realize how you stand and how your posture looks and should look like, to be able to modify it to the desired way. As Jackson (1989) points out, referring to John Dewey (1983), the mind is not separate from the body, and “it is pure superstition to think that one can ‘straighten oneself out’ by some kind of ‘psychical manipulation without reference to the distortions of sensation and perception which are due to bad bodily sets” (Dewey 1983, 27; in Jackson, 1989, 119). Thus, habits cannot be changed at will because we are the habits. Likewise, Bourdieu (1977) argues that humans cannot become totally aware of the social construction of their bodies. Nonetheless, despite the powerful grip of habitual body sets, Jackson argues that it is possible to change a body of habits, physical or cultural, though it “can never be a matter of wishful thinking and trying; it depends on learning and practicing new techniques” (Jackson 1998, 119). In discussing reflexivity in dance, Cowan (1990) argues that individuals may become more reflexively conscious than usual of their bodies (Cowan 1990, 24). She claims that “[probably] more than in everyday life, the celebrant in the dance-event is acutely aware of the dual aspects of embodiment: that she or he “has” a body, and that she or he “is” a body” (*ibid*). The dancing experience thus allows for a heightened awareness of the body in motion, something that habitus does not render fully, since it is mostly unconscious.

While I wished to use Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as a conceptual base in illustrating what is taking place in the mastering of flamenco dance, I realized that it could not fully explain what is at work through the learning process, especially for the practitioner who is

experiencing new ways of moving and feeling through the body. Because the dance learner is involved in such effort-making, that is conscious intentions of incorporating and reproducing specific movements and gestures, Bourdieu's notion of habitus is not accurate for such cognition phenomena. This is why I prefer to use "dance embodiment" in order to render fully what is happening in the incorporation of flamenco dance skills, vocabulary and aesthetic values. Nonetheless, I refer to Bourdieu's notion of habitus when the dance learner has to somehow break away from his or her usual posturing and body-uses, as well as when a dancer has to modify his or her past dancing habitus in order to embody a new dance form (here flamenco). I also refer to the notion of habitus in some instances of dancing moments when the dancer does not have to think about what he or she is doing anymore, thus having reached a level that allows her or him for freer interpretation, and even improvisation⁴.

Anthropological accounts of dances

In acknowledging the body, embodiment, and embodied knowledge as important ways of being and knowing, the anthropology of dance has been able to go further in understanding the dancing experience in relation to its specific social and cultural context (Royce 2004). Some anthropological works⁵ on dance have provided very important and interesting insights about the wider dance cultural context. The anthropology of dances⁶ has contributed by demonstrating that dance is not just a static representation of history and culture, nor just a repository of meaning, but a producer of meaning each time it is produced. Dance is not just a living mirror of a culture, but a shaping part of culture, a power within the culture as John Blacking has pointed out: "The power of dance rests in acts of performance by

⁴ At a certain level, the dancer does not have to think about what is going on, since he or she has internalized the dance techniques and structure in such a way – often referred to as organic by some – that the dancer can focus and play with other elements of the interpretation, such as the emotions and things that he or she wishes to express.

⁵ To fully appreciate how the field of the anthropology of dance came into being, see the works of scholars such as Judith Lynne Hanna (1979), Adrienne Kaeppler (1978), Joann Kealhinohomoku (1983), and Drid Williams (1991).

⁶ Williams (1991) has argued that we should use the term *anthropology of dances* in order to acknowledge all dance forms and their own contextual specificities in order to get rid of any illusory universal dance model.

dancers and spectators alike, in the process of making sense of dance [...] and in linking dance experience to other sets of ideas and social experiences” (Blacking 1984).

Nevertheless, the dancer’s body is constantly exposed to constraints that are tied to social norms and to the power of regulative discourses. Foucault (1977) has demonstrated how powerfully discourses and institutions discipline how the body is lived, more often than not unconsciously. Because bodies are the source of discourses as well as their product, discourses are reproduced only through bodies and their activities. Thus, discursive practices are very powerful in the way dancers learn to use their bodies, and learn how to understand their bodies (Khudaverdian 1998, 1). Moreover, the dancing body is a crucial site for both the reiteration and contestation of these social norms or discursive practices (Reed 1998).

Politics of dances: on the construction of national, regional, local and ethnic identities

Many anthropological studies on dance forms have contributed to illustrate the various politics of dance. These include how discourses and norms around dance practice can be a powerful tool in shaping national, regional, local and ethnic ideals (Daniel 1991, 1995; Archetti 2003), in promoting the recognition of a dance form as acceptable - even as an art form - often characterized by a class-upward movement (Daniel 1991, 1995; Savigliano 1995).

Indeed, Daniel’s work in Cuba (1991, 1995) shows how the Cuban state ideologically chose the rumba, among many other popular dances, because it was viewed as most closely supporting the ideals of a socialist state. Hence, the rumba was related to a particular community: the lower-class, dark-skinned workers of Cuba. Because of the government’s control of this dance practice, the rumba shifted from being associated with drinking and public revelry to a more contained version through the control of the culture house and the stage (Daniel 1995, 61). Similarly, in Spain flamenco was long associated with taverns and public revelry and became more regulated with its passage to the theatre (*cafes cantantes*). However, the state’s intervention during Franco’s regime controlled what was presented to the public, especially towards tourist audiences. In both cases, the government’s intervention

has made these dances more acceptable among other society's strata. Their intervention also modified these dance forms in a certain way. In the case of flamenco, the state was concerned to transform it into a national symbol. Hence, the constraining cultural politics were part of Franco's agenda of realizing a unified Spain. Nevertheless, flamenco never became a national symbol on the inside, as flamenco still remains a regional art form which most of the Spanish outside of Andalusia do not identify themselves with; rather, it is an Andalusian symbol. On the other hand, flamenco has acquired an unprecedented popularity worldwide, and flamenco has become a national symbol in the eyes of the international audience. We may even argue that flamenco has become a "Spanish commercial label"⁷.

Savigliano's work (1995) on tango shows the domestication and transformation that tango underwent throughout its multiple processes of exoticization in the cultural capitals of London, Paris, and Tokyo. In becoming 'acceptable' within the global context of the appropriation and modification of tango, the reintroduction of tango in Argentina had an empowering effect, granting recognition to certain social groups and their practices (Reed 1998, 515). Although tango originated in the low-working class sector of Rio de la Plata in the 1880s, it is only in the 20th century that it acquired popularity throughout Argentina, thus becoming a national symbol. As in the case of tango, flamenco originated among the lower-class sectors in Andalusia. However, it did not undergo such appropriation and domestication by the West, though it became more 'acceptable' through the romantic movement from the 19th century onwards, and through its shift to theatres. As with tango, the romantic movement which created the myth of the exotic Spain "represents the cumulative efforts of many generations of European tourists and intellectuals in collusion with key elements of Spanish society" (Chuse, 257). On the other hand, flamenco never became an integral part of the national identity in the way that tango has for Argentineans. Nevertheless, being Spanish seems to be an essential identity feature when it comes to understanding and performing flamenco "best" (Leclerc 2006).

⁷ Term borrowed from Pietrobruno 2006, 82.

I have cited these particular studies on the political facets of dance since they echo much of flamenco's identity construction and constant refashioning (Chuse 2003, 272). In analyzing why scholars, flamencologists, aficionados and performers have, and continue to defend so vigorously the various interpretations of flamenco's origins, Loren Chuse (2003) looks at the diverse steps that flamenco went through historically in order to show what the discourse around flamenco's ownership reveals about issues of identity construction. Hence, Chuse looks at how flamenco emerged as a product of the Andalusian lower-class along with the romantic movement; its evolution from 'low-class entertainment' to the status of art, helped by the move to theatres and the intervention of the famous poet Federico Garcia Lorca and composer Manuel de Falla; then, its establishment as a national symbol under Franco's regime; and its reclaiming as an exclusive gypsy art form in the 1960s onward with the *gitanismo* of Antonio Mairena (gypsy singer) and Ricardo Molina (poet) (2003, 274). As we will see in this thesis, the new *gitanismo* discourse still has "a great deal of clout and cultural capital, among Andalusians and foreigners alike" (*ibid*).⁸

Since the 1960s, the discourse around the idealization of a "pure" flamenco is often linked with the gypsy identity - Gypsy or Roma people of Andalusia, who are called and refer to themselves as *gitanos* - and many scholars and aficionados end up equalizing flamenco as a culture in the blood (Mitchell 1994, 197). It looks, then, as if flamenco, whether it be singing, guitar playing or dancing, was an innate talent for gypsies - although not all gypsies practice flamenco, at least professionally. According to Timothy Mitchell, a historian and sociologist who has written extensively on flamenco and the Spanish society, these discourses create some kind of "innate *gitano* superiority" (Mitchell 1994, 198).

It is common for ethnic minorities to use performance as an arena for resistance, negotiation and affirmation of their identity (Hughes-Freeland and Crain 1998, 2). Dance, and here flamenco, becomes an arena for the empowerment of a particular group of people such as the gypsies, historically caught in socio-economical inequalities in Andalusia. Thus, in

⁸ For a rigorous analysis of the historical factors and the various political stances that flamenco performance embody, see also Mitchell (1994) and Washabaugh (1995).

examining the agency of the performers – their perspectives, their intentions, and their experiences while performing – it is important to make the link with the wider socio-cultural field from which these performances emerge and which they actively shape (Mendoza 2000, 239; Desmond 1994). Discourses around the “appropriate” or “authentic” way of doing flamenco may have an impact on the dancers’ embodiment and careers, especially the discursive practices linked with national and ethnic identities, as we shall see in both “Ethnic styles” and “Marketable flamenco and its stakes on non-Spanish dancers’ careers” sections in chapters 3 and 5 respectively.

Music and especially dance as a *discourse of the body*, may in fact be especially vulnerable to interpretations in terms of essentialized identities associated with biological difference such as “race” and gender (Desmond 1994, 42). According to Radano and Bohlman (2000), race is also fundamental to the ontologies of music, in other words, to shaping basic concepts of what music is (Radano and Bohlman 2000, 7). Music and dance participate in the construction of ‘race’ or ethnicity: the Other cannot or should not own or occupy the music and dance that the Self purports to own (Radano and Bohlman, 6). Thus, the discourse around the stereotype of “having the rhythm in the blood” in music as well as in dance, is recurrent throughout the world (Desmond 1994; Radano and Bohlman 2000; Pietrobruno 2006; Wieschialek 2003; Willson 2001). In the actual ‘globalized’ world, ‘race’ or ethnicity is one of the most enduring factors contributing to the formation of musical and dance difference (Radano and Bohlman, 10). According to Pietrobruno (2006), this popular misconception of dancing as a skill “in the blood” “conceals how dance ability is an acquired knowledge that develops from growing up in a specific movement culture” (2006, 15).

Dance and Gender

As previously mentioned, dance practice serves as a marker for the production and refashioning of racial, ethnic, class, regional and national identities, but also gender (Desmond 1994, 36). Hence, because gender is highly performative (Butler 1993), dance is a rich and critical terrain for ideals of gendered difference in action as well as gender-crossing,

mixing and reversal (Reed 1998). In her work on dance in Northern Greece, Cowan (1990) shows how women are encouraged to show their beauty, sensuality, virtuosity and seductiveness while maintaining self-control and not drawing too much attention at the same time. Thus, the line between what is acceptable and not, as well as what is perceived as sensual and sexual, becomes blurred and ambiguous. In drawing the links between football and tango as integral parts of the national Argentinean identity, Archetti (2003) argues that these sport and dance forms are also instances where ideals of male attributes are expected and celebrated. As in Cowan's case, women here assume their role of seduction and sensuality although they remain under the male gaze and control. Born out of a patriarchal society, flamenco dance has gone through a similar gendering process⁹. For a long time, female dancers who performed in *tablaos* and *cafés cantantes* were both romanticized and associated with prostitution (Chuse 2003). However, flamenco dance has been one of the few arenas where women have been able to legitimately perform in public¹⁰. As we will see for flamenco, male and female attributes and gendered dancing styles are continuously reiterated, contested and refashioned, especially within the current global context.

Transnational movement of dances

In her anthropologically informed article (1994) on the movement of dance in a global context, Desmond talks about a process of hybridization that takes place across race, class, nation and gender. She argues that hybridization is a dialectical process that may involve commodification of movement styles, modification, adoption, and/or rejection of these or some of these, and that we haven't theorized this phenomenon rigorously enough so far (Desmond 1994, 35). Desmond points out that "every dance exists in a complex network of relationships to other dances and other non-dance ways of using the body" and that "[its]

⁹ For a thorough study of women singers' space and identity construction in flamenco, see Loren Chuse (2003)

¹⁰ Other flamenco features such as music and singing have been historically rather male domains of activities.

meaning is situated both in the context of other socially prescribed and socially meaningful ways of moving and in the context of history of dance forms in specific societies” (36).

One of the anthropological studies that follows the movement of a dance form in a global context is Helena Wulff’s work (1998) on the transnational *off-stage* ballet world. She follows three classical ballet companies based respectively in Sweden, the UK, and the United States. She observes that although there is a consensus on the discipline’s standards, there are distinct regional ballet styles that are revealed and somehow reinforced in this transnational context. She also looks at the national ballet schools and their specificities as well as their transnationality, i.e. the consensus on teaching ways and relationships between teacher-students, as well as the dance styles taught in each school (Russian, English, Balanchine, etc.).

Wulff also looks at the diverse experiences of making a ballet dance career as well as the space for agency. From my own study on the “flamenco world”, to borrow Wulff’s term, I also came to identify a consensus on flamenco standards for some places, although many people who I spoke to claimed that the flamenco they learned back home was very different from the one they were learning in Spain. Flamenco styles differ within Spain itself, where I identified two main regional dance styles: the “Andalusian style” and the “Madrid” style”. Furthermore, I observed, and it was confirmed by a Spanish teacher, that the “Andalusian style” is dominant in Montreal. However, flamenco dance is not institutionalized as ballet is. Thus, the dancers’ trajectories are much different in that sense.

Wulff speaks of ballet as an “international language” where she believes that being somehow familiar with ballet and contemporary dance presupposes a certain cultural knowledge: thus, “professional artists tend to share the conventions of their art internationally, and are thus able to cooperate” (1998, 37). The same goes for flamenco, where flamenco artists and connoisseurs are able to make the difference between an outstanding and a terrible performance, according to the technique and artistry level of the performers. Likewise, in studying the flamenco practice in Montreal, Leclerc (2006) has identified two main elements through which aficionados will judge a performance: the

rhythmic aspect of the music and the mastery of flamenco technique. Indeed, being familiar with the dance vocabulary and codes, or with what Bourdieu calls the artistic capital, is what makes collaboration between international artists possible.

Another interesting study on dance in movement is Martha Savigliano's work (1995) on tango where she analyzes the different aspects of the exoticization and transformation process that tango went through historically. In doing so, she examines not only the European appropriation and transformation of tango and its journey back to form an integral part of the Argentinean identity, but also the relationship between two Exotics - from a Western perspective - through tango: the Japanese and the Argentinean. Savigliano makes an interesting commentary about these two countries "trapped" in the logic of Western exoticism where "Japanese people are [supposedly] cold, detached, and controlled" whereas "latinos, including argentinos, [... would be] expressive, passionate, and sensual" (1995, 191). Then, she asks the question: "How can such a famously passionate dance as the tango argentino be practiced and enjoyed by such famously repressed people as the Japanese?" (*ibid*) There is a very similar phenomenon between flamenco and Japan, as there is a growing interest for flamenco on the part of the Japanese. Actually, to see a majority of Japanese students in a flamenco classroom in Spain has become a common phenomenon.

Savigliano claims that passion "plays a major role in the production of exoticism". Since exoticism is a practice of representation that is still dominated by Eurocentric colonialist discourses and Western stereotyping, tango – and I would add flamenco since they are both so recurrently associated as passionate art forms - do not escape the exoticizer's desire. Interestingly enough, even though flamenco is supposedly a Western art form geographically, flamenco's association with passion and a romanticized Andalusia has always caught the curiosity and attraction of many Europeans (Chuse 2003, 257).

Throughout her observations, Savigliano argues that even "[when] Japanese perform the tango argentino, incorporating all the techniques of passion they have learned from Argentinean artists, they still look 'Japanese'" (1995, 192). Savigliano attributes this phenomenon not to any lack of 'feeling' or skill on the part of the Japanese dancers but to the

power of exoticism (*ibid*). I would argue that it might also be due to these dancers' prior habitus "resistance"; in other words, each of these dancer's habitus may be quite "deeply-rooted", and thus hard to modify. Although it might often be the case for Japanese flamenco dancers to continue looking "Japanese" despite skillfulness and emotional endeavor, I don't believe that it is a fatality. I remember seeing a Japanese woman dancing a *bulería*¹¹ at the end of a show in Seville, and she could certainly have passed for a "gypsy" due to the way she moved and expressed herself. I have seen another Japanese girl improvise some *pasos de bulería* in a bar in Seville in front of her friends, and I could not tell the difference. I think that what was one of the deciding factors for this seemingly "authentic" way of dancing¹² was a profound cultural embodiment, mostly due to their long-term stay in Seville. Consequently, the Japanese dancers that Savigliano speaks about learned tango along with Argentinean teachers in Japan. In other words, it seems that the cultural context in which the dancers move is crucial.

Another very interesting and thoughtful work is Halifu Osumare's study (2002) on hip hop culture in Hawaii where she identifies what she calls the *intercultural body*. In order to illustrate this intercultural body that was revealed through her fieldwork, Osumare is concerned with "how the individual creates with inherited (yet often unconscious) body languages to negotiate his/her identity in conjunction with inculcated dance styles of the marketplace through the improvising, dancing body" (2002, 43). To make this illustration, Osumare refers to Butler's¹³ use of Bourdieu's "habitus and field" as a basis to look at the processes through which global hip hop youths construct their performed identities. Osumare argues that this complex intercultural body results from "Hawaii's local style of bodily posturing and practices, developing out of almost two hundred years of Polynesians' and Asian's social and biological mixing [...] meeting headlong with the bodily practices that are generic to today's MTV and BET generation" (2002, 39). Osumare claims that this dancing

¹¹ The *bulería* is a famous flamenco *palo* [musical style] from Jerez de la Frontera.

¹² My observations are based on my own embodied cultural knowledge of an "authentic" flamenco performance, and also on other dancers' presence who shared a similar view.

¹³ Judith Butler (1999): "Performativity's Social Magic"

intercultural body is negotiated and produced both consciously and unconsciously: the merging of performance (conscious willing of the body to represent personal and cultural identity) and performativity (unconscious larger breakdance repertory) occurs in the improvised dance event in which moment-by-moment choices are made (2002, 36).

Although my own subsequent fieldworks in Montreal and in Spain have not allowed me to yet notice an “intercultural body” that would illustrate itself so obviously¹⁴ as Osumare observes with Hawaii’s hip hop youths, I have been able to observe the influence of past dancing experiences (such as ballet and Spanish classical) in some of the dancers. In order to be more personal and ‘authentic’, some dancers actually attempt to create their own dancing style in experimenting and mixing with other dance forms such as modern dance, while others will claim to be authentic through following the more “orthodox” or “traditional” flamenco style¹⁵.

On dance embodiment

I use the term “dance embodiment” in this thesis as synonymous with the incorporation of dance skills, vocabulary and aesthetic values into the body. Thus, dance embodiment means learning to dance; it is the long and arduous path leading to kinaesthetic cognition.

As such, learning flamenco dance, as with any other dance form, constitutes a kinaesthetic learning where an individual comes to incorporate new patterns of body-use - especially for an individual learning a dance form ‘foreign’ to her or his cultural background or “prior-habitus”. The learner is brought to identify and embody aesthetic patterns of body-use mostly through mimeticism, which is based upon a bodily awareness of the other in oneself. Thus, mimeticism involves observation, identification, and reproduction. Since dance is a social phenomenon, an individual learns dance on the bases of innate capabilities plus

¹⁴ I did not notice such an intercultural body, mostly because I concentrated my observations on the learning and embodiment process of flamenco dance, since that was the main reason these dancers had come to Spain.

¹⁵ This will be explored in more depth in chapter 5 under “Finding your own style or way of applying flamenco to your context”.

social interaction (Hanna 1979, 28), be that either in a formal or informal training setting. The learning process involves mimeticism, but also and foremost *doing* and *experiencing* (Dyck 2003, 9), since dance cognition is an indwelling process. Accordingly, movement styles develop through psychomotor socialization patterns which depend largely on observing dance, general motor activity, and dance practice (Hanna 1979, 31).

This process of *mimeticism* and *learning by doing* triggers the body's reflexivity, enabling the self-consciousness to be enhanced and experienced differently. The body's reflexivity also offers possibilities for choosing different ways to move; in other words, the body-in-action learns by negotiation with the environment, including dealing with socially and culturally desired skills and aesthetics (Bourdieu 1986). According to Jaana Parviainen, "[dancers] learn to move with the result that their movements do not take place coincidentally; they acquire knowledge as indwelling awareness to produce in their bodies movements of a desired form and meaning" (Parviainen 2002, 20).

In this way, dancers learn by doing, but also by reflecting upon doing. Ingold (1990) identifies reflection as a capacity to disengage consciousness from the current of lived experience; such reflection is the work of imagination (1990, 111). Imagination occurs when the attention is turned inwards on the self (1990, 418). Therefore, imagination is a reflexive activity, and in the case of dance or any practical activity, "one may, in imagination, 'go over' the same movement as a preparation or pre-run for its practical enactment" (*ibid*). Imagination or visualization is what allows dancers to aim at executing movements of a desired form and meaning, or to achieve certain movements' aesthetics. Moreover, the imaginative activity also allows for creativity, although within a pre-established dance vocabulary.

Learning to move is also about choosing some movements and excluding others (Parviainen 2002, 24). Hence, the choice of certain movements and movement styles can be done voluntarily although choice is much influenced by culture where particular schemes of preference, valuation and meaning are at work (Dyck 2003, 9). In other words, the individual comes to internalize those cultural codes associated with the discipline. Overall, the dancer's

embodiment is formed through the development of technical abilities (physical capital) combined with an embodied cultural knowledge (artistic capital) (Bourdieu 1986; in Wainwright et al. 2006, 539).

In general, the transmission of physical knowledge can hardly be articulated or translated into literal form. However, according to Dyck (2003), embodied processes of dance “occur within thoroughly social settings and are subject to being noticed and discussed both in gestures and words” (Dyck 2003, 9). Thus, the disciplining of the dancing body occurs within both language practices (Faure 2000) and larger social processes, such as history, economics, politics and intercultural dynamics, or what Bourdieu refers to as “social fields” (Bourdieu 1993b).

In the case of formal instruction such as the flamenco venues I have observed and participated in so far, such language practices include the use of metaphors and onomatopoeias in addition to gestures and physical demonstrations in order to illustrate the *modus operandi* of a particular movement or series of movements. Moreover, the cultural context in which the dance is learned and practiced is very important, since the language practices might be adapted accordingly. In the case of the flamenco venues in Spain which often feature a majority of foreign students, teachers will emphasize the non-verbal language to pass down their knowledge¹⁶.

As Bourdieu has demonstrated, social fields are very influential in the shaping of an individual’s habitus. In fact, “Bourdieu links agency (practice) with structure (via capital and field) through the process of habitus” (Wainwright et al. 2006, 536). Thus, the fields in which the individual learns to dance are determinant, especially the cultural field and the market. It can be seen, therefore, that the apprenticeship and career trajectories of dancers “depend on the views and actions of those with the power to determine what counts as capital within a particular field” (Bourdieu 1986; in Wainwright et al. 2006, 549). Therefore, the discursive practices around authenticity are very powerful in determining what counts as the artistic

¹⁶ See *On the use of metaphors and other language practices* in chapter 4.

capital within the world of flamenco. It is very likely that learners may come to incorporate and reproduce such normative “power play” surrounding the dance.

In analyzing the extent to which one is able to embody a dance form¹⁷, Sylvia Faure (2000) identifies different factors influencing the process of the dance incorporation, such as the implication and motivation of the practitioner. There is also the recognition of the dance practice on the part of relatives and friends, the level of mastery (the class level for instance), the teaching settings, the way the dance practice fits in the history of both the student and teacher, their own social, *cultural* and economical background, as well as the relation established between the teacher and the student. I would add to these elements the frequency of classes and rehearsals, the experience acquired on stage, the age, the individual sensitivity and attention capabilities (cognitive capacities of moving the body and listening), and the degree of familiarity with codes and cultural elements of the discipline (such as language and cultural proximity). There are also the learner’s capabilities and limitations based on his/her body structure and past learning experiences, including other dances, to take into consideration.

Thus, in analyzing the dancers’ embodiment and their views about their flamenco practice, it is crucial to take account of considerations key elements, such as the contextual lessons settings, as well as the discursive practices around the dance. Hence, the following chapters are dedicated to examining the embodiment process of flamenco dance, such as the main training issues of flamenco, the distinct flamenco locales and styles related to time and place, as well as the regulative discourses around the “appropriate” way of doing flamenco. It will be seen that the social fields in which these non-Spanish dancers move about, especially the cultural and the market fields, are influential in their embodiment process, and principally in their career trajectories. Before presenting the ethnographic chapters, I would like to first describe the methodology I used in order to render this thesis possible.

¹⁷ Even though Faure’s sociological studies were conducted on classical ballet and contemporary dance classes in France, I believe that her observations are very relevant to any dance embodiment within a formal educational context.

Methodology: a multi-sited fieldwork among dancers of different origins in Montreal and Spain

The purpose of my research was not only to find out how and why flamenco dance had become important and meaningful for many “international aficionados”, but foremost how it affected their everyday lives and their experience of mastering flamenco dance. In doing so, I also wanted to examine the various discourses around the flamenco practice; in other words, the discursive practices about authenticity that might eventually affect not only the way the international practitioners perceive their dancing, but also the embodiment and the practice of the dance.

Prior to commencing fieldwork in Spain, I had already started to conduct a number of interviews with flamenco dancers in Montreal about different aspects of this dance such as elements of embodiment, the learning process as well as career prospects. These interviews and subsequent conversations helped me to widen my perspectives about the flamenco embodiment process as well as its contextual practice (the specificity of Montreal as a small but important site for flamenco outside of Spain). It also helped me to construct and adjust my questions in order to find out if specific issues such as technical and style aspects were also experienced by other dancers elsewhere.

To investigate these questions, it was necessary to adopt a multi-sited research approach that would enable me to meet with international aficionados and find out more about their own experiences. Thus, after conducting fieldwork in Montreal I continued with fieldwork in Spain where I spent five weeks in flamenco classrooms and performance venues (mostly) in Seville, Jerez de la Frontera and Madrid in order to meet with dance students coming to these locales from different parts of the world. I had spent time in Spain two years earlier with the expectation that I would eventually be back in order to conduct my fieldwork there, especially in Seville. This “pre-fieldwork experience” helped me in preparing and figuring out how I would conduct my research in Spain. Because of time and financial constraints, my pre-fieldwork experience helped prepare and organize my fieldwork in Spain to be as efficient as possible in terms of time. I must admit that the choice of spending most of

my fieldwork in Seville was a direct consequence of my previous trip, since I already knew the city and different school venues I could attend to in order to observe and/or participate and meet with other dancers. Being Andalusia's capital and main flamenco site in terms of schools and activities in the region, Seville is also a city that attracts a lot of foreigners to come to study flamenco. And because it is not very large, it is easy to meet before and after class for a "*copa y tapas*" with other students. All these considerations weighed in the decision to spend more time in Seville rather than Madrid, a much bigger city where it can be more complicated to meet with people simply because of greater distances to travel.

Again, since I did not have a lot of time and money to conduct this research project, focusing on Spain where many international aficionados gather represented a kind of starting point without having to travel to different countries. Indeed, Spain is regarded as the pilgrimage centre by many *aficionados* who wish to get to know or deepen their knowledge of flamenco. Thus Spain was the obvious option to be able to meet with as many foreigners as possible and explore their aspirations and experiences within the context of learning to dance flamenco.

In doing so, I was looking for individuals for whom flamenco occupied an important place in their lives since I believe that motivation plays an important role in the embodiment process. Moreover, I believe that acquiring and incorporating a dance form transforms and expands one's body awareness and thus, this process also entails a cultural transformation; or to use Sally Ann Ness' terms, "a new cultural construct within the body of its subject, or bearer" (Ness 1992, 5). Thus, I chose to observe and participate in more advanced level classes - intermediate, advanced and professional which corresponded to my level as well - since I assumed that advanced students would probably be more reliably committed to flamenco than in beginners' classes. Even though I too hoped to learn and improve my dancing, my principal motivation for participating in classes as a student was that it would enable me to interact and meet with other students and in turn to arrange formal interviews with some of them. As Sarah Strauss (2000) points out, participant observation not only helps the researcher to gain credibility in the eyes of the community under study, it also enables a

grasp of “the personal bodily understanding of the transformations which these practices make possible” (Strauss 2000, 172). However, participating in the dance class made it somehow harder to observe the other students since often times I had to concentrate on my own body to be able to achieve a series of footwork and movements. And when I tried to simply observe the others, the teachers would often come to me and ask what was wrong, or what was it that I did not understand¹⁸. On the other hand, there were always moments where a teacher showed something and then would let us work on it by ourselves; these moments were often rich in interaction and in helping out each other. Then, I was able to get a better overview of what was going on; for example, who could grasp the feet right away and who had more trouble to do so or who was more at ease with the upper body or turns and who was not, etc.

For the first two weeks in Seville, I used to practice before class in a studio with other students where I was also able to get a deeper sense of their thoughts about this experience (about the teacher, comparison between the teachers, difficulties and things that they enjoyed to do, etc.), as well as their ways of understanding and learning in class. For example, Marie¹⁹, a French dancer who had been living and dancing flamenco for three years in Seville, told me that she had a very good memory for footwork series, especially the “complicated ones” such as in Lola’s class. Actually, it was Marie who was helping and leading the others during the practices. Sometimes I would argue with Marie on which count the dance started or how the footwork should sound like. It was interesting to observe how many students such as Marie and myself learn and remember better the footwork when we sing it rather than if we count the feet. Such hints of valuable information for my research often came out during rehearsals and casual conversations in the changing room after each class. And on other occasions such as walking back home after a class or having a drink after seeing a show with others, I was able to get important and very interesting information that I would not necessarily get during formal interviews.

¹⁸ Although the teachers knew of my research conducting, they probably saw me foremost as a student among the others who was struggling to achieve the dance skills being taught.

¹⁹ Note that I use pseudonyms throughout the thesis to protect confidentiality.

However, talking about dance is not obvious because of dance's non-verbal character.

Indeed, movement tends to resist any translation into verbal language:

[t]he discourse of dance, like any non-verbal communication, involves the expression of the unspeakable, because verbal language has another quality, another grammar and logic than dance – dance and verbal language are two different 'modes of discourse' (Blacking 1985, 67; in Wieschiolek 2003, 119).

Thus, participants often find it difficult to translate their dancing experience into words, because dancing and talking are two different ways of expressing oneself. I as a dancer often encounter similar problems when I try to write about my dancing experience. Then, I believe that certain things must simply be experienced; as Michael Jackson points out, "participation thus becomes an end in itself" in order to break the habit of using a linear communicational model for understanding bodily praxis (Jackson 1989, 135). By being a dancer and participating in the dancing embodiment process, I was using reflexivity in order to use a common ground with the experience of others and thus, reflexivity has allowed me to get further insight into each individual's experience. Thus, my interpretation remains grounded in the field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those with whom I have shared dancing moments and thoughts (Jackson 1989, 135).

However, the dancers' verbal account of their perceptions and interpretations is still very relevant. Heike Wieschiolek (2003) claims that it is important to pay particular attention not only to what dancers have to say, but to the way they talk about their dancing experience. So I focused my attention (and recorded it later on in my notebook) on their discourses about their dancing experiences, plus on the way and on which occasions these discourses occurred. In other words, I paid special attention to their perceptions and interpretations throughout the classes, training sessions, show performances and attendance.

My field research primarily focused on flamenco students as well as professionals on why and how dancing affected their lives. My fieldwork in Montreal was a bit easier since I already knew the flamenco milieu simply because I had been dancing for four years when I started the interviews with students and professional dancers. Being a flamenco dancer helped

me greatly in constructing and adjusting a questionnaire based on long-term observations, conversations and experiences I had had throughout time (much before I even started the master's). And as I said previously, the feedback I got from those interviews helped me to refine the questions for the second phase of fieldwork in Spain. While I was familiar with the flamenco milieu in Montreal, classroom venues in Spain became the main site for meeting foreign flamenco dancers. Dance classes and schools, be in Seville, Jerez de la Frontera or Madrid, are often advertised either on posters in the streets or (now more than ever) on the internet. Flamenco dance teachers may teach all year long (except during summer time) or from time to time through special workshops. However, I have observed that in the latter years more and more courses are offered in the summer time because of (I assume) the growing demand from the international students. Then, before I left for Spain in September 2005, I had made a list of potential schools (based on the ones I already knew and been told about) through surveying the internet. Of course, I did not (and could not) participate in all the classes being offered, though I selected a number of them according to my budget, my personal tastes, and the different types of classes offered (informal and more formal, all year long, workshops, etc.) in order to get some broad idea of the dance lessons context, especially in Seville.

During the four weeks that I spent in Seville, I was taking three classes daily plus one hour of practice for the first two weeks. I was also able to observe a few other dance classes elsewhere according to my schedule and workshops that I had not been able to take, because of my limited budget. I started to conduct interviews very soon after my arrival, first with my two roommates from Switzerland, and then with friends that I met in my classes. However, I soon realized that more informal conversations were often times very rich and useful sources of information. After a hectic month of running between classes, meeting up with people either for an interview or a chat and attend flamenco performances, I went to Jerez de la Frontera – which stands at one hour south-west of Seville - for three days. Even if I was only able to attend a few classes in Jerez, one that stood out from them was María Isabel's class from which I drew much information and interesting insights about improvisation in

flamenco. I spent the rest of my trip in Madrid - about three days - where I concentrated my observations in the famous dancing academy “Amor de Dios”. I chose to go there because I was curious to know this school, but also because, contrary to other schools, the teachers there are always alternating. Thus, you never know who is teaching and you have to go to the school itself to see the schedule each week to find out which is teaching at any one time. There are about fifteen dance studios in that school, and I spent most of my first day observing and deciding which class I could participate in. Although it was a short stay, I found that Madrid was very different from Seville and Jerez de la Frontera in terms of teaching ways. Thus, I explore the specificities of these different flamenco locales in chapter 3.

Although my main source of information was to be found among flamenco students, I was able to attend a performance featuring foreign dancers and to conduct an interview with Zoé, a Montrealer who has been living and pursuing a flamenco career in Seville. Meeting with foreign flamenco dancers who were making a local career in Spain was not easy since, as I had anticipated, there are not many in this position. However, the interview with Zoé (who I already knew) and subsequent conversations with Marianne (from Québec) who has lived and danced in *tablaos* and in vanguard flamenco companies in Seville have provided me with very interesting and sometimes contrasting views which I explore in chapter 5.

A second level of my field research concerned the teachers as regards to the explanations and directions that they tended to give during classes, as well as the type of discourses they articulated about how a specific movement or *palo* should be danced, since I believe that it eventually influences the learning process as well as the dancing experience for many participants. And as we will be able to notice later in the next chapters, the influence exerted by those discourses extends beyond the classroom. Accordingly, I paid special attention to what the teachers said (often using metaphors and exaggerating the movement so that we could understand better) and tape-recorded some class lessons. I was also able to conduct an interview with Toni, a teacher from Seville, when he was in Montreal to give a workshop before I left for Spain. Although I did not have the sufficient time to conduct

interviews with other teachers, the kind of information that Toni shared with me has been very interesting and useful since he is used to traveling extensively to teach in several countries apart from running his own school in Seville.

While conducting fieldwork in Spain, I had considered the possibility of using the video-tape in order to record partial transcriptions of movements, facial expressions and sounds in the class venues but this aim became complicated by time and technical constraints and also because teachers won't usually allow it (though tape-recording is no problem). I was aware that the use of a video camera implies a selective point of view and might only offer a visual counterpart to the verbal account of dancing (Hughes-Freeland 1999, 114 and Wieschialek 2003, 118). And since dance has no universal meaning but rather a meaning or meanings according to the context where it is produced, the "most important information about the meaning of a dance is contained in the statement of actors, spectators and other participants in a dance event" (Wieschialek 2003, 118). In other words, the dancers' perceptions, interpretations and their accounts on how dancing affects their lives becomes a crucial source of information. However, the video cannot illustrate those perceptions and feelings triggered in the dance. Thus, considering all these issues, I decided not to use the video this time.

It was not surprising to me that many of those who I've asked to share their perceptions and experiences about dancing, either here in Montreal or in Spain, were immediately willing and happy to do so. What actually was a bit surprising for me was that I did not encounter big revelations or things that I did not envisage at all. I believe that being an insider to my community of research, both in Montreal and in Spain, has greatly helped me both in recruiting people and in sharing many perceptions and similar experiences. On the other hand, their contributions have helped me widen my understanding of the embodiment process and career making of flamenco learning in different contexts.

Why Flamenco and How

The large majority of people I interviewed on the subject of what it was that made them “fall in love” with flamenco found it hard to articulate a clear, concise response. As I mentioned previously, dancing and talking about dance are two different things. Nonetheless, the majority of flamenco students I spoke with told me that the moment that they saw a flamenco show, either on television or in a venue - either at home or in Spain - they were completely thrilled with it and started then to look for dance lessons. Others told me that it was the music that first caught their attention. However, many are not clear about which was the precise event responsible for beginning to learn and feel passionate about flamenco; they only remember their first teachers and the desire to keep on learning more. Likewise, for many, going to Spain in order to learn and “embody” flamenco dance became somehow a necessity, either because of the scarcity of flamenco teachers at home, or due to the belief that it was important to go to the site of flamenco’s origins. I will return to this issue in the section called “In the classroom: other distinctions between Spain and elsewhere” of chapter 3.

Others, while on holiday in Spain or taking Spanish language classes, decided to start taking flamenco lessons. For some who could afford it, their holiday extended to various months, even years, in order to keep up with flamenco learning. Moreover, it was not uncommon to meet with individuals who had decided to spend a year or more in order to dedicate their energy and time to flamenco dancing. This entailed some sacrifices for them, emotional as well as financial. Such was the case of a Korean dancer that I met in Seville. Kyon had been learning flamenco for eight months in Spain when I met her in a class. She had had some previous flamenco lessons in Korea, though very minimal according to her. In Korea, she had been trained as a ballet and folklore dancer. Her previous dance training was apparent from the style and speed in which she was embodying flamenco dance compared to others in the class²⁰. Her prime motivation in coming to Spain was to learn flamenco. However, she was torn between having to go back to Korea because of financial and

²⁰ Within eight months, she had reached a level that many will actually take years to achieve.

emotional issues (she had left her boyfriend behind), or remain in Spain and concentrate on her flamenco training. Although she would have liked to, she could not work in Spain since she did not have a working visa. At the time of the interview, she was thinking about concentrating on her apprenticeship for a few more months, as long as the money would allow her to do so. Although she did not know exactly what she would do with her flamenco training afterwards, she wished to keep on dancing back in Korea, although dance is not what 'will allow her to eat', as she said. Interestingly, Kyon told me that recently she had been able to discern a clear link between flamenco and Korean folklore, and that perhaps she would do something with the two dance forms²¹. Her objective was to eventually do something related to flamenco; but first she believed that she had to learn it "well".

Another dancer I met who was going through similar emotional and financial issues was Lote, a Belgian young woman whom I discovered that I had taken classes with on my previous trip to Seville. When we met, she told me that she was there specifically to take two workshops with two famous female dancers. However, Lote had made a lot of sacrifices to come to Seville - she had had to ask for money from her parents - and felt guilty about leaving her two children behind in Brussels. She was also a bit angry since the workshop dates were changed at last minute, after she already had bought her flight ticket. Now both workshops were given during the same week, so Lote had to spend an extra week (she was in Seville for two weeks) looking for other dance lessons. Hence, she could have remained in Belgium and saved money. However, she was glad to be in Seville and re-connect with some friends, since she had visited Spain quite often. Indeed, she had previously lived with her daughter in Jerez de la Frontera for two years just to be able to learn and 'indulge' herself with flamenco culture²². She used to say that from the first moment that she discovered flamenco in Belgium, she decided she had to come to Spain in order to live there for some time. Hence, Lote believed that it was the only way to really understand and learn flamenco. She used to

²¹ I address this issue specifically in "Finding your own style or way of applying flamenco to your context" in chapter 5.

²² In order to do so, she sold everything she had. At first, she thought that she would only stay for 6 months but ended up staying for two years.

say that Jerez - where she had spent most time in Spain - was a place where the *compás* (flamenco rhythm structure) and the singing were omnipresent. She claimed that dancing flamenco had allowed her to grow, to change her posture and become less shy.

I also met an Italian dancer who visited Spain as often as possible in order to learn and improve his flamenco dancing. In a conversation we had, Aldo complained about the fact that many teachers in Rome “do not really know about flamenco”, and that the majority of them have never studied in Spain. He considered that in order to learn flamenco, not only did it take much time and hard work, but it was necessary to go to Spain. I also used to come across an Italian young woman who would go to all the flamenco shows in Seville. Caterina was not the only one to go to as many flamenco shows as possible; many people concentrate their stay on both dance lessons and performance attendance. Caterina told me that back in Rome, she would love to be able to live from flamenco exclusively through teaching and performing.

Of course, not everybody perceives their flamenco practice as important or worth making such sacrifices. Some will prefer to take flamenco lessons in their home town or study on a self-teaching basis²³. Actually, there are more and more self-teaching tools, such as the use of CD and video recordings often available on the internet. As well, some dancers have other priorities over flamenco, such as school or work. Such was the case of two Swiss girls with whom I was living in Seville. They had come to Spain in order to take a two-week flamenco workshop during their annual vacation. However, one of them preferred to prioritize her holidays over flamenco lessons, and she would often skip classes. Both told me during the interview that they loved doing flamenco, although it would never become a career for them. It is actually quite common that many dancers will have another career and share their time between the two. The marketplace - which is the prominent field in which dancers operate (Bourdieu 1986) - has a strong impact on this decision-making, since dance seems to have a precarious status in a globalizing consumer society. Nonetheless, some would prefer to spend

²³ Financial issues, along with the importance of flamenco practice in one's life, play a big role in the decision to go to Spain or not.

more time on their flamenco practice than they actually do, as is the case for May, a flamenco dancer in Montreal.

In Montreal, many dancers perceive the travel to Spain as an essential step in the learning process, especially if the individual wishes to make a career from dancing. Indeed, having been to Spain and taken flamenco lessons there enhances credibility (Leclerc 2006). Although some dancers will ask for financial aid through the government's cultural scholarship programs, most of the dancers go to Spain by their own means²⁴.

Hence, for the majority of non-Spanish dancers that I met, going to Spain – either as often or for as long as possible - in order to learn flamenco was part of a desire to keep on gathering new material (choreography, technique, dynamics with musical components, etc.), as well as getting a better understanding of flamenco in order to either teach and/or perform as a professional dancer back home. There is also a desire to keep up with flamenco's evolution and innovations, since Spain is regarded as the point of reference. Again, the majority of the dancers I met did not envisage making careers as professional dancers in Spain, although eventually at home this was the aim. Indeed, the possibility of becoming professional dancers had been contemplated over time through the learning process; in other words, that possibility became more tangible as they progressed into the flamenco embodiment. However, as we shall see, evolving in a different cultural field to the Spanish one, demands that some dancers have to be “inventive” and find strategies to deal with issues related to their local context.

Thus, their attempts to put into words the driving force that pushed them to learn flamenco dance and to make such sacrifices were never really conclusive; most of them would answer that they just loved doing flamenco. However, such an answer reveals more than it may appear. Indeed, I believe that flamenco dance represents for many an activity that allows them to express something that they cannot otherwise do in their ordinary everyday life. Such a highly emotional and physical outlet that flamenco represents can be a driving force which goes beyond the long and painful path towards the mastery of the dance.

²⁴ This goes for Montrealers as well as for the majority of other dancers I met.

Since the learning process of flamenco dance is what constitutes the main goal of the dancers I met, the embodiment of flamenco forms the core of this thesis. Whether individuals go to Spain or not, the choice to learn flamenco entails a complex kinaesthetic and cultural embodiment in which motivation plays a big role. However, many other elements are also determinant, such as the training issues specific to flamenco dance and the teaching settings (including styles taught, technical levels and discourses around the flamenco practice) that I shall explore in chapter 2 and 3 respectively. Moreover, the choice to pursue a career as a flamenco dancer is necessarily a not obvious one²⁵, either in Spain or elsewhere, as we shall see in chapter 5.

²⁵ Given the often precarious status of dance in many places, choosing to live and promote oneself as a professional flamenco dancer opens one up to financial vulnerability.

Chapter II

Learning to Dance Flamenco: Main Training Issues

It is not surprising that for many people who had already some training in other dance forms such as ballet, modern dance, jazz or folklore, such as Korean traditional dances for instance, the learning process was made easier or embodied faster than for those who lacked any dance background, such as myself. As Zoé, a professional ballet dancer from Montreal who is now making a career as a flamenco dancer in Spain, claims:

I had to live seven years of flamenco experience to discover that: dances are all the same in the end, they all originate from a feeling, from a sensation. It is about feeling el peso [weight], you can't just decide to go backward or forward, you need to feel the weight within and around your body beforehand. Zoé, Seville²⁶.

Since dances are related to each other, this explains why so many who have a dance background learn flamenco faster. However, in the end, it takes a lot of practice and long hours of work in order to embody and “master” a particular dance form. As we shall see in chapter 4, learning a dance form entails a complex cultural embodiment process, one that both requires a bodily indwelling through social interaction, as well as the incorporation of aesthetic and structural codes of the discipline. And as Zoé told me later on, although she had that previous ballet dance training, she had to break with that ‘past habitus’ in order to be able to embody flamenco dance, especially as regards relocating her centeredness in the pelvis instead of the upper-body²⁷. Zoé has had to spend much time rehearsing in the studio as well as listening to flamenco CDs in order to understand and internalize the rhythm, as well as getting used to the singing patterns that dance has to follow.

Thus, to understand and embody the technical styles and footwork specific to flamenco dance is not an easy task for anyone, especially as regards understanding and internalizing the rhythm or *compás* which requires a lot of ‘intellectual’ concentration. Actually, many dancers stressed the rhythm [*compás*] as the most difficult aspect. Even

²⁶ Note that almost all interviews excerpts are my own translation.

²⁷ Flamenco is said to be a dance from the earth. Hence, most of the dance forms locate the centeredness in the pelvis area. See Royce (2004, 74).

though a few already had some musical background, to understand and master the different *palos* (musical styles) in flamenco was one challenge, and then to dance and make the music through footwork [*zapateado*] and *palmas* (clapping hands) was another that took time to integrate. Another difficult though highly important aspect of flamenco is to achieve the ability to improvise. A third important aspect is the structure of the dance and the interaction with the musicians and singer, all of which will be explored in the following sections.

Becoming a dancer and a musician at once: of aesthetics and musicality

One aspect that is peculiar to flamenco dance compared to other dances (at least in the West) is that the dancer does not only “mark” and accentuate the rhythm, but she or he actually makes the rhythm by means of the footwork [*zapateado*]. There are even sections within flamenco dance which are called “*a palo seco*” where the dancer is by her or his self creating the rhythm through footwork alone, and is only accompanied by *palmas* (clapping hands rhythmically). One of the main difficulties stressed by almost everybody interviewed was the need to be able to embody the *compás*, which is the accented metrical structure according to the musical style (or the different flamenco *palos*). Thus, the flamenco dancer is also a musician: a percussionist, who uses his or her body as an instrument to make different sounds and rhythms by means of the feet beating the ground, hands clapping together or on the body and the *pitos* (snapping the fingers). As a musician, the flamenco dancer has to be very sensitive to the music, to the tone of voice of the singing and to the rhythm. However, understanding and embodying the *compás* does not necessarily mean that it will be easier to dance. Indeed, I have met and taken dance classes with two local singers, one in Seville and the other in Jerez de la Frontera, who both really mastered the *compás*, but they nevertheless had much trouble dancing along with the rhythm. I specifically remember the guitar player who accompanied María Isabel’s class in Jerez who could not understand why Ana, a local singer, had such difficulty dancing a *bulería*²⁸ “*a compás*” and would keep on starting over

²⁸ The *bulería* is a famous flamenco *palo* [musical style] from Jerez de la Frontera that is in the twelve metrical measure and usually occurs at high speed.

and over again since she felt so unsure. Ana used to complain about how hard it was to coordinate her movements along with the music.

Take the case of a musician for instance: developing “good hearing” does not automatically mean that she or he will be able to dance according to the rhythm. Hence, to be able to play good *palmas* and to dance in the rhythm, and able to keep up with it, are two different things that both require practice. Often, dancers will prioritize the dancing over the *palmas* such as is the case in Montreal for many, including myself²⁹. As we shall see in the next section on the collective aspect of flamenco, playing *palmas* is an integral part of ‘traditional’ flamenco performance that takes time and practice to achieve.

Because dance is a kinaesthetic form of expression, the dancer needs to embody certain modalities of movements specific to flamenco. Nevertheless, the *compás* remains a very important, if not essential, aspect of flamenco, whether you are a dancer, musician or singer. As for the dance, the *compás* is as important as the movements’ aesthetics in flamenco. Many people actually told me that studying the *compás* had been one of the main reasons why they had come to Spain (I shall come back to this issue in the section “In the classroom: other distinctions between Spain and elsewhere” of chapter 3). May, who has not been to Spain yet, mentioned to me that both style and footwork, hence merging aesthetics and rhythm peculiar to flamenco, are the hardest elements to achieve for her. Since she did not know about music prior to studying flamenco - like most of the students I met - May had a hard time in understanding why she was unable to fall correctly within the *compás*: “*When you don’t understand the rhythm, you don’t understand why you don’t get it*”, May, Montreal.

Sometimes, it can even be the dancer who leads the other musicians, especially in the *escobilla*³⁰ section. In that specific section, the dancer gives the *compás* [rhythmical measure] and the speed to follow. The dancer also has to be able to nuance the sounds that she or he

²⁹ However, being able to play “good” *palmas* to accompany the dancing and music is a requirement on stage since, as we will see later, the performance is a collective event. *Palmas* serve as the rhythmic accompaniment to flamenco. There are two kinds of *palmas*, the *sordas*, muted handclaps, and the *claras*, sharp handclaps.

³⁰ The *escobilla* is a section in the structure of any *palo* where the dancer leads with the use of footwork. The dancer is accompanied by the musicians and/or *palmas*. There is no singing in that section.

produces: as a percussionist, the sounds or “notes” that will come out depend on the way and the strength with which the dancer beats the ground (wooden floor). For instance, there are three different ways to beat the ground: with the *planta* (upper part of the foot), the *golpe* (the whole foot), and the *tacón* (the heel). The sounds that the dancer makes also depend on the intensity with which she or he hits the ground. I remember specific metaphors that many teachers in Spain were using to teach us how a series of footwork should sound. Metaphors such as “*el dibujo es éste*” [the drawing is like this], or “*escucháis el soniquete*³¹” [listen to the musicality/groove] or “*hay que matizar*” [you have to nuance the sounds, i.e. lower, louder]. As we will see in the “Learning to dance flamenco” section in chapter 4, because the teaching of a dance is indirect (Parviainen 2002), teachers often use metaphors in giving explanations in the classroom.

Eventually, the flamenco dancer is also supposed to develop his or her ability to play with the rhythm in order to get out of the leading rhythm and be able to improvise, in the same way a jazz musician does. So the dancer really has to work hard on “dismounting” the rhythm [*compás*] to be able to do that, and, of course, it takes time. As two Montreal professional dancers mentioned to me during interviews, embodying the *compás* and playing with it is a never-ending working process, but it is a gratifying and enjoyable activity to do simultaneously.

On improvisation: displaying both mastery and getting loose in performance

Being able to improvise is the ultimate “test” for an accomplished flamenco dancer. Improvisation occurs mostly - or I should say is highly expected to occur - in a specific *palo* called the *bulería*, which is a rapid and festive style in the twelve metrical structure (*compás* of twelve). Many dancers I spoke to told me that knowing how to dance a *bulería* was one

³¹ *Soniquete* would be the equivalent of the term “groove” or “swing” in English.

thing, but the hardest or most problematic thing was to know when to “enter” in the *bulería* and when to *rematar*³² according to the singing.

Of all the classes in Spain that I attended, one stood out from the others because of its emphasis on improvisation. It was in Jerez de la Frontera, a small city in Andalusia where the famous *bulería* form was born. A Belgian friend, Lote, who had lived for two years in Jerez, recommended to me a specific and untypical class with María Isabel, a locally famous lady in her fifties who has taught the *bulería* form to many locals and foreigners. I wish I could have spent more than just two days in Jerez, especially in her class, since I learned a lot - things that I had never been told or been able to figure out before. Unlike the typical lessons I was used to where the teacher stands in front of the class and shows us the movements and footwork to reproduce by ourselves, María Isabel would come to class around 11:00 am (often later) and sit down with her first beer of the day, light up her cigarette, clear her throat and start singing. She would have previously greeted us and asked who shall go first, that is, who would dance in the middle of the class while the rest remain seated but in an active role of beating the rhythm with the hands and doing *jaleos*³³ to support and encourage the dancer. María Isabel seemed to have her “favorite” students, two Japanese girls who had been there for 11 months already, and who would drink beer along with María Isabel. They would usually go first and then help out the ones who needed to practice in the adjacent room.

On my first day of class, after some of the students had jumped in, I decided that it was my turn. However, it did not go well the first time, although I had “sensed” the right time to enter in the *bulería*. The second time went much better, and María Isabel congratulated me. The three hours of class passed so rapidly, and I felt that I had learned a lot just by watching and encouraging the others and in trying to understand when was the right moment to *rematar* according to what María Isabel sang. María Isabel believed that the best way to teach someone to dance the *bulería* was by having each one of us dance alone and figure out by ourselves what to do and when to do it. As she used to tell us:

³² *Rematar* literally means “to finish off” or “kill off”. In flamenco dance, *rematar* or to do a *remate* is when the dancer concludes on the singing phrase, often with the use of footwork.

³³ *Jaleos* are the spoken or shouted encouragement to the performer.

I have you seated because I want you to look, I want you to listen to what is going on. That is how you learn as well. When someone stands up and starts dancing a bulería, that is how she will learn how to dance, not to imitate, but to feel, to understand what is going on.

When improvisation takes place, the dancer is not completely “free” to do whatever pleases him or her; the dancer’s decisions fall within the codified possibilities for improvisation in flamenco (Hayes 2003, 111). Of course, the dancer already has access to different possibilities – series of movements and footwork - that she or he can use at the right moment. In other words, it does not all come out as something completely new. Likewise, María Isabel would also teach us a basic “*pata de bulería*” for us to use or play with during our solos if we wanted to. María Isabel would tell us how to recognize when to enter in the dance: “*when the singing is high and goes down: there!*” María Isabel did not really teach technique and postures: rather, she would stress the importance of listening to what she was singing when we danced, and to make decisions accordingly. She used to tell us that she preferred us to remain immobile – though in an active role - if we felt unsure about where the singing was going.

As Michelle Heffner Hayes (2003), a flamenco dancer and scholar, points out, even in the “most spontaneous gathering of dancers who play *palmas* for one another as they trade solos, the codes for improvisation are strictly prescribed. Yet dancers find innumerable ways to play in and around, to interrupt and recombine elements of traditional flamenco vocabulary” (*ibid*). Improvisation then means a complex and intricate decision-making process within the parameters of “traditional flamenco” which happens within a group of people³⁴. As will be elaborated in the next section, performing “traditional flamenco”, and this is the case for the *bulería* form, is a community event: the group provides a rhythmic foundation for the dancer’s performance in which the participants shout out words of encouragement (*jaleos*) and might tease and dare the dancer to take risks in his or her performance. Then, the dancer may signal to speed up, slow down, even dance in silence; but all of these decisions depend on clear communication within the members of the group

³⁴ Such collective events are similar to Turner’s notion of ‘communitas’, which is characteristic of people induced to experience liminality together, or a transient personal experience of togetherness.

through coded steps, gestures, or phrase length (*ibid*). And in the traditional '*bulería de Jerez*' form that was taught in María Isabel's class, the singing constitutes the mainstay. Thus, the dancer has to follow the singing patterns. However, as happened in class, the dancer may tease and induce the singer to keep up with the dancing patterns. In that particular case, the dancer, Aiko, was pushing the singing to continue going loud and 'intense' until the end.

But above all, what determines a successful improvisation is when there are moments of completeness and loss, of both mastery and abandon, or what is often referred to as the arrival of the *duende*³⁵. And as Nathalie and Kate, two professional dancers in Montreal, mentioned to me, improvisation is the goal that any flamenco dancer is pursuing, i.e. to be able to achieve and live fully such a "letting loose" experience. This makes sense, since flamenco dance was originally very spontaneous, and should also be very personal at the same time. It is supposed to be personal according to the notion that each individual has his or her own feelings and emotions at a given moment³⁶.

At the same event where the dancer, Aiko, was pushing María Isabel to keep up on singing loud, something liminal happened, since we could clearly notice that she was improvising. As María Isabel said later on to congratulate Aiko:

She does it as if it was very easy and I don't know where she takes out so many things?! I think that she does not think about it too much, María Isabel

No, I don't think about it too much [laughs], Aiko

According to the same two Montreal professional dancers, even if you don't believe in the magic that the *duende* represents, you aim nonetheless for a complete "letting loose" on stage³⁷. Of course, it happens only rarely since a lot of elements need to be present at the same time in order to prepare the dancer for such experience. Along with the dancer's focus on what is going on inside as well as around him or her, the dancer and the musicians (including the singers) need to be in complete harmony, to be "connected". These moments of complete

³⁵ *El duende* in flamenco is referred to as the spirit of inspiration and getting loose that overcomes the dancer and endows his or her movements with a sense of "authenticity" often lacking in fully choreographed productions (Hayes 2003, 113).

³⁶ See section called "Different Dancing Styles: but in the end, you need to develop your own" in chapter 3.

³⁷ It can happen in *palos* [musical styles] other than the *bulería*.

harmony, as brief as they may be sometimes, provoke the kind of emotion and ‘shivers’ that recall the *duende*. Hence, the *duende* - this collective liminal experience - would require both mastery and abandon on the dancer’s behalf, as well as the strong connection with the musicality and singing elements. Hence, the other performers need to be actively present, not passive³⁸.

In Montreal, it can be hard to learn about the dance-song relationship specific to the *bulería* form since there are few occasions - and very few singers - where this is possible. Dance lessons such as María Isabel’s class are very hard to find outside Spain. As we shall see later on, the singing is much more present in classes in Spain, making it harder for students elsewhere to understand the dance-song dynamics. As with May and many others, I am still struggling with questions about when to use a *remate* and a *llamada* (cues) in the *bulería*. Thus, since the decisions depend on the singing patterns, being able to improvise during a *bulería* is something that many do not feel comfortable with because of limited opportunities to gain the necessary information, making it harder to reach the liminal experience of the *duende*.

Nonetheless, improvisation in flamenco extends to musical styles (*palos*) other than the *bulería*. Indeed, although the dancer may be very well prepared with his/her choreography, anything can happen on stage. Improvisation in flamenco performance is not only a common thing, but it is highly anticipated from an audience of aficionados who link authenticity with spontaneity. Improvisation therefore usually happens within a specific *palo*³⁹ such as the *bulería*, or during the final of another *palo* which often ends on the *bulería* rhythm. But it may also happen during other parts of the performance, especially during the *letra*⁴⁰ or the *escobilla*⁴¹. Actually, the dancer must always remain aware in the *letra* part, since often the singer will choose to sing a *letra* on the spot, or will take more measure loops

³⁸ Note that all performers may experience the *duende*. To have *duende* refers to the developed ability to achieve such liminal state, which has nothing to do with a spirit possession. However, the performer remains in control but experiences letting loose at the same time; the performer experiences feelings of pleasure, revelation and might even verge on a trance state.

³⁹ *Palo*: any of the musical styles of flamenco, such as the *bulería*, the *soleá*, the *taranto*, the *tango*, etc.

⁴⁰ The *Letra* is the section of any *palo* where there is singing.

⁴¹ The dancer is leading the *escobilla* part. There is no singing in that section.

than “usual” to sing a phrase. In the latter instance, the dancer must wait before doing the *remate*, thereby need to improvise during the laps of extra time. I remember two specific moments when I had to improvise in the *letra* part while performing on stage. The first one happened when I was performing an *alegría* along with two other dancers during the end of the year students’ *peña* in Montreal. We first performed the *entrada* (entry) along with the *llamada* (cue) for the singing to start. However, the singing did not start right away, and another dancer - there were three of us - continued to dance as if the singing had started, while myself and the other dancer remained immobile waiting for the *letra* to begin. This dancer did realize her “mistake” and came back to her initial position and waited with us for the singing to begin. All this happened within a single *compás* (of twelve counts, as is the *alegría* rhythmical measure), thus within a very short space of time. After our performance, that dancer told me that she did realize her mistake during the performance. She felt a little bad because we had been told by our teacher that we might have to wait for the singing to start since we had never practiced the choreography with the singer beforehand, as is often the case whether in Spain or elsewhere⁴².

The other example happened about two years ago when I performed a *seguiriyia* at the Montreal’s monthly *peña*. It was the first time that I was dancing on my own, as well as the first “professional” show that I was participating in. I had choreographed the singing part according to the standard number of measure loops that I expected it to last, since I had not been able to rehearse it with the singer. However, by the time I was supposed to start the *escobilla* as I had planned in the choreography, the singing was still going on. But instead of panicking or being frozen not knowing what to do, I kept on “marking” the *letra* “naturally”, and did so until it ended before starting the footwork. This moment was very brief; I believe it lasted only two or three *compás* (measure loops). I never reflected “consciously” during that time, I just let it flow and remained in control. After my performance, I remembered that specific moment and realized that I did so because I knew that I had to keep on dancing and

⁴² Many non-Spanish dancers have complained that most of the time, it is impossible to practice with a singer, because they are so few, especially outside Spain.

wait before starting the footwork, since it would have been totally “incorrect” to do as I had planned beforehand. I had come to embody the form of the *letra* part in such a way that I did not have to think or become destabilized by this event. My body knew what was the “right” thing to do, and I just let myself guided.

Faure uses the concept of “*mètis*” to refer to the kind of knowledge that allows the dancer or any performer to improvise on stage during moments of unforeseen events. She uses the term “*mètis*” which comes from Ancient Greece where it was used to define the technical culture, before being undermined (discredited) by science and philosophy (Faure 2000, 12). She prefers the concept of “*mètis*” to distinguish it from Bourdieu’s notion of “practical logic”⁴³ which requires a certain stability in the conditions of practice based on habits and corporeal automatisms (such as repetitive movements and figures in dance). Faure argues that the “dancers’ *mètis*” is revealed when the knowing-how is destabilized by the context such as in the previous examples, triggering other elements such as reflection in action, thoughts, tactics, attention, fakes, adjustments, etc (*ibid*, my translation). Of course, being able to deal with such unforeseen events comes with long-term experience and familiarity with the dance genre. Hence, the more you perform on stage, the more you become secure and in control of what you are doing and thus, letting loose comes easier. And since improvisation is strongly expected in flamenco performance, it is important not only to master the technique and the codified vocabulary of flamenco, but also to develop this tactical logic (*mètis*).

Communication with the other musicians: the collective aspect of flamenco

Listening to the *cante*

While it is usually the dancer who leads throughout the dance performance, it is different when the singer enters into play; it is then the singer who leads the dancer, as well as the other musicians. As Nathalie and Kate both said during interviews, the singing becomes the mainstay of the dancing, and it influences the way you dance, i.e. what and how you

⁴³ *Sens pratique*

express your dance. Moreover, you can't dance "loudly" while the singer is performing or else the audience will not be able to hear the singer. The flamenco dancer also has to guess the singing [*cante*], i.e. the structure of it (one, two or three phrases and the pattern in which they will be repeated) and the amount of *compás* - measure loops - that it will last. It constitutes an "organic" ability that the dancer generally develops over time, by repeatedly listening to different singing parts from different flamenco *palos*. In other words, the dancer has to train in order to guess the *cante*'s patterns: where it will stop, and thus where the dancer must mark it (with a *remate* for example) or accentuate it (within the phrases). So even if the dancer prepares very well his or her choreography, she or he must always listen carefully to the singing and be ready to improvise on the variations or complete changes that may occur during the performance. These unforeseen, though most probable, events trigger the dancer's *mètis* in action.

Lote, who had previously taken classes with María Isabel in Jerez de la Frontera, had an interesting experience in a class in Seville regarding the *cante*. Lote told me that she believed that she has not really learned about the dynamics between the singing and the dance in María Isabel's class. However, an event proved her wrong as she was the only one to be congratulated by the teacher in one of her classes in Triana, Seville. Hence, Lote had been the only one to pay careful attention to the singing while the other students just executed the steps without listening to the *cante*. Lote already knew that specific *letra* sung in that class, so she remained attentive to it and executed the dance's steps accordingly.

The lyrics also play an important role in what the dancer will come to feel, as well as what the dancer will have to express. Usually, the lyrics go along with the music's tone, that is to say, if it is a *soleá*, the lyrics will normally speak about sad and dramatic things whereas if it is an *alegría*, the lyrics will be mostly joyful. But sometimes, as in the *bulería* style for instance, the lyrics may vary considerably. On one occasion, they may be joyful and even comical, whereas on other occasions they may express anger and rebellion. As Domingo Ortega, a famous dancer from Jerez de la Frontera, said during a class that he taught in Montreal: *how can you dance if you don't understand the lyrics?!*

I have discussed this issue with some dancers, who present divergent views about the importance of understanding the lyrics with regard to the dancer's interpretation. During a conversation with Sofia from Zurich, she told me that she could not imagine how it would be possible for someone to dance if she or he did not understand the lyrics. Sofia believed that understanding the lyrics was a crucial element in the interpretation of flamenco. I agreed right away, though I remembered another conversation I had had with a dancer in Montreal, who does not understand much Spanish. During interview, May told me that she also believed that it was important to understand the lyrics you are dancing to, although it is not absolutely crucial since the musicality and the voice's tone gives you a pretty good idea of the mood and emotions that the lyrics express. And even if flamenco music is complex and often hard to understand, "universal" feelings such as loss, mourning, happiness and joy, are expressed in flamenco (May). However, as you cannot always count on the mood of the melody to guess what the lyrics are about, I believe that the more the dancer understands them, the better the dancer's interpretation will be.

As noted above, being able to work with a flamenco singer - *cantaor* or *cantaora* - is not a typical opportunity outside Spain, as there is often a lack of musicians elsewhere, especially when it comes to finding someone as 'qualified' as a flamenco singer⁴⁴. Therefore, it becomes a much more complicated process for a dancer – that is, living and learning flamenco outside Spain – to embody such familiarity and anticipator ability around the *cante*. Hence, other than listening to flamenco CDs and watching videos (many excerpts are available online for free), going to Spain constitutes an essential path for many in order to learn how to deal effectively with the *cante* as a dancer.

⁴⁴ On interview, Toni, a flamenco dance teacher from Seville, told me that in order to become a flamenco singer, you need to have a specific type of voice in the first instance. On the other hand, Toni believes that it is not necessary to be Spanish to be able to become a *cantaor* or *cantaora*: *outside of Spain, it is the Japanese who are the best in the cante* (Toni).

Structure of the dance: different palos (musical styles) and distinct parts

Flamenco music is very complex, since there are many styles [*palos*] which have their own structure, measure [*compás*] and emphases. For instance, some of the most recurrent styles are called *soleá*, *alegría*, *siguiriya*, *tango*, *tiento*, *bulería*, *taranto*, and variations of these. There would exist two categories of musical styles: Firstly, the “*jondo*” (deep) styles like the *soleá*, the *siguiriya*, the *taranto*, the *tiento*, the *soleá por bulería*, the *martinete*, etc.; and secondly the “*fiesta*” styles, like the *alegría* (its name means joy), the *tango*, the *bulería*, the *rumba*, the *sevillanas*, etc. There is also a hierarchy between the styles according to the singing: the “*cante jondo*” (deep song) which encompasses many styles such as the *soleá*, the *alegría*, the *siguiriya*, and the *bulería*; and the “*cante chico*” (small song), such as the *fandangos*, the *sevillanas* and the *rumbas*⁴⁵.

Often, teachers will insist on distinct ways of interpretation according to the *palo* being taught:

You cannot dance a siguiriya the same way you dance a soleá, Kate, Montreal professional dancer

You have to dance in the alegría style, this is not a soleá, Alba, flamenco teacher in Seville.

Some styles are “easier” to dance than others” in other words, it is be easier to improvise on a *bulería* than on a *siguiriya* or an *alegría*, for example. As Pasqualino (1998) notices: “dances like the *siguiriya*, the *soleá* or the *alegrías* are usually performed on stage in front of a *payo* [non-gypsy] audience and require a knowing-how that not all gypsies possess. On the other hand, the *bulería* is, in Jerez, known by all” (Pasqualino 1998, 109, my translation). Actually, most of the *palos* in flamenco – the ones that are danced – comprise a certain structure which requires previous choreographic knowledge. For example, a danced *siguiriya* may last up to twenty minutes or so, whereas in the case of the *bulería de Jerez*, the dance is very short (around one to two minutes), lasting about 6 to 8 *compás* (measure loops).

⁴⁵ Along with musical and historical reasons, there are ideological motives behind the categorization of styles in flamenco, especially as regards the hierarchy based on the *cante*. For a critical analysis of the socio-historical development and categorization of these styles, see Chuse (2003), Leblon (1995), Mitchell (1994) and Washabaugh (1995). Likewise, dance students may come to embody such hierarchy among the different *palos* and prefer to dance on the “deep” [*jondos*] ones.

That is why María Isabel's class in Jerez de la Frontera was so focussed on improvisation, since she was teaching the "*bulería* de Jerez" style, and nothing else.

Some dancers may make the choice to work with a specific *palo*, according to personal taste. This was the case of Kyon, a Korean dancer who preferred to dance on an *alegría* and *tango* since she liked the joyful styles and had trouble expressing the *soleá*. On the other hand, May, a Montreal dancer, does not feel very comfortable dancing on a *tango*⁴⁶ or an *alegría* and prefers the "sadder" styles such as the *taranto* and the *soleá* which suit her personality better. Actually, it is common for dancers in Spain to specialize in and be associated with performing a specific *palo*. Accordingly, some students may choose to take a specific class because of the choreography taught in that class over other options. However, the more you know about the distinct *palos*, the freer you are to interpret a whole range of musical styles and emotional states. This is also a common tendency, i.e. that dancers choose to become versatile with as many *palos* as possible, and especially those who decide to perform a whole show as the sole dancer.

In every flamenco dance, no matter the *palo*, there is always a structure with which the dancer can play. For example, there is the part when the singer performs the *letra*. Another part is the *escobilla*, which is when the dancer is only accompanied by the guitar and makes most of the rhythm with the feet. There is also the *falseta* where it is the guitarist (or another instrument player) who leads and the dancer only accompanies what the guitarist is doing: there is no singing in that part. The "*llamadas*" [callings] serve as cues in order to change from one part to the other. For example, the dancer will normally do a *llamada* at the end of the *escobilla* in order to indicate to the other musicians the moment to switch to the singing, either for a new *letra* or for the final of the dance.

May, among others, told me that she found it difficult to understand the structure and that it has never been explained in any of her classes in Montreal. May's view is that either it is hard to explain, or teachers just do not fully understand. I must admit that I discovered how

⁴⁶ May claims that the *tango* is hard because it is particularly sensual, and that she feels "fake" or even "kitsch" when dancing an *alegría*.

the structure works much more on my own during time spent in the studio with musicians. However, as Sofia claims, a full explanation on the structure dynamics is generally available if the same question is asked in a class in Spain.

On the other hand, I have been told in many classes that you can combine the different parts as you please, according to what you wish to communicate. But as mentioned previously, the communication between the performers is crucial for the “magic” - what is often referred as *el duende* - to eventually happen.

The guitarist mostly follows the singer and the dancer throughout a performance. The dancer leads mostly the whole dance, but at the same time she or he has to be very attentive to what is going on. Both musicians and dancer have to remain aware of each other in order to perform as a group, or else it would just sound chaotic.

Working with the guitarist is something very special, a process that one does not really learn in class - both in Spain and in Montreal, as I have noticed - but rather in the studio on a one to one basis⁴⁷. In order to be able to perform “traditional” flamenco within the *cuadro*⁴⁸, that is, along with live singing and music within the standard structural frame (parts mentioned above), a dancer is almost helpless without musicians. But that is often the case in many places around the globe where it is very hard to find flamenco artists. That was an issue raised by many dancers I spoke with such as Kyon, a Korean dancer, and Arabelle, a woman from a small town in the south of Germany. And even in a city like Montreal, there are only about three singers and a small number of guitarists, so it is not always easy to work with them since they are in high demand from the other dancers⁴⁹. Actually, most of the flamenco artists - who both teach and perform - in Montreal are not Spanish or of Spanish descent, except for the singers.

⁴⁷ As we shall see in the section “In the Classroom: other distinctions between Spain and elsewhere” in chapter 3, however, it is common in Spain to have the presence of a guitar player in the classroom, sometimes even a singer.

⁴⁸ The *cuadro* is the typical group structure composed of musicians, generally guitar player(s), singer(s), and dancer(s) along with *palmas*. The cajón [wooden box] is also commonly used as a rhythmical base.

⁴⁹ In Montreal, the majority of flamenco artists are dancers or *bailaoras*, since the great majority of dancers are female.

In order to understand and learn about flamenco structure and the interaction dynamics among the performers, many dancers such as May claim that seeing shows is a very good way to get lessons about these elements. Likewise, the monthly *peña* in Montreal is a good place for aficionados to gather, learn and share their passion as well as their knowledge. However, I assume that these kinds of events may be harder to find in places with few or no flamenco artists, a situation which forces the flamenco aficionado to look for alternatives, such as video and internet tools and, ultimately, travel to Spain or other closer flamenco centers.

Flamenco dance is primarily individual, i.e. you dance alone but you are supported and encouraged by the others around you. Since the dancer is normally supported by the other musicians and *jaleos* - spoken or shouted encouragements to the performer - at least in the so-called “traditional” *cuadro*, flamenco is a collective art form. This might be one of the reasons why flamenco is appealing to many people living in more “individualistic” societies such as in North America. However, I prefer not to speculate on this since it was not at the core of my research and it was not mentioned specifically by any of the people I spoke with. Moreover, Francis Leclerc (2006), who has produced a master’s thesis in ethnomusicology on flamenco in Montreal, has come to the conclusion that the desire to belong to a group is not one of the primary reasons why people practice flamenco.

Audience

It is important to note that to perform in front of an audience familiar with the flamenco genre is usually a very different experience to performing for a “non-literate” audience (which is often the case outside of Spain). A “knowing audience” will usually participate in the *jaleos* since they are active participants and interpreters of the performance. A “knowing audience” of aficionados is mostly able to recognize ‘good’ artistry and technical levels displayed by the performers. Although performing in front of a ‘knowing audience’ can be very motivating and rewarding, at the same time it can be a source of great pressure and

anxiety. Hence, performing in front of an aficionado audience is like participating in a community event where the performers are the protagonists, and are more likely to be subjected to criticism and even possible rejection from their peers. Therefore, performing at the monthly *peña* (flamenco event) in Montreal has been and is still for me and many artists a very important event since it is an occasion to establish or confirm your status as a professional dancer.

On the other hand, to perform in front of an audience not familiar with flamenco can, of course, be also a source of stress. I have experienced such anxiety while performing in front of “non-literate” audiences, especially in moments when I was expecting encouragements in the form of *jaleos* and all I could hear was silence. I automatically tended to think that people were just bored and did not really appreciate the performance. However, I was surprised each time they applauded at the end of different sections of my performance. Hence, I realized that I had come to internalize cultural codes that I had seen so often during flamenco shows in the form of *jaleos*, and therefore, “unconsciously” expected to hear such encouragements as signs of approval from the audience.

Chapter III

Different flamenco locales and dancing styles: Seville, Jerez de la Frontera and Madrid

As I mentioned previously, for many of the dancers I met, going to Spain was a ‘necessary’ path in order to learn and develop their flamenco practice. Even though the importance of flamenco practice differed for each dancer, their stay in Spain, especially in Andalusia⁵⁰, had an impact on how they perceived their dancing level, and on the flamenco style(s) that they were used to back home compared to the one(s) they encountered in Spain. Therefore, many of the dancers I spoke to decided that the flamenco they encountered in the class venues in Spain, especially in Andalusia, had become – if they were not already – the reference in terms of ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ flamenco. Hence, some would not consider continuing to learning the flamenco they were taught at home, whereas others would remain with both learning options, considering the different styles taught as enriching and complementary experiences. Of course, the dance lessons options that the individual has back home, along with financial issues, have implications for such decision making.

But before examining further the distinctions between the flamenco taught in Spain versus the one(s) taught elsewhere, I shall look first at the Spanish flamenco locales and dancing styles encountered in the places I carried out my fieldwork and met with these students: Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, and Madrid. The notion of place plays a big role in the type of flamenco being taught in Spain as we shall see. Andalusia is the birth region of flamenco and thus, flamenco has a longer tradition over there, especially in cities such as Seville, Jerez de la Frontera and Grenada.

I also came to realize that the teaching dynamics, including discourses around the flamenco practice, have a significant impact on the students’ views and dancing embodiment. More than technical issues that the dance requires, discourses around the styles according to

⁵⁰ Andalusia is the birth region of flamenco. Thus, it is often considered as the reference point in terms of ‘traditional flamenco’.

place and ethnicity, as well as ‘appropriate’ gendered ways of moving, have a particular influence on how students view and embody flamenco dance.

Andalusian style and Madrid style

Nowadays, the flamenco in Madrid is not the same as the flamenco in Andalusia. In Seville it is the flavour [el sabor], the “pinch” [el pellizco], the “finish off” [el rematar], the way to pick up oneself [el cogerte]. In Madrid it is the technique, and the innovation. In Madrid everything is choreographed, in Seville it is more improvisation [...] Seville, Jerez, Granada, Córdoba, all are similar [...] In Madrid there is a lot of technique, it stands a little out [sobresalido] from what is flamenco, Toni, dance teacher from Seville.

In the quotation above, Toni alludes to the fact that Andalusia is flamenco’s birthplace, Andalusia is thus the site of a longer flamenco tradition, and is consistently recognized as the flamenco reference. Being the capital and hence the biggest city in Andalusia, Seville has been able to draw in numerous flamenco artists and develop different style traditions. However, smaller cities such as Jerez de la Frontera and Grenada⁵¹ have their own peculiar flamenco tradition and, thus, are recognized as important flamenco locales worldwide. Madrid, on the other hand, is also an important site for flamenco, although it is more due to the fact that Madrid is Spain’s capital rather than because it is the site of a long flamenco tradition. Hence, there is a major difference between the flamenco dance style taught in Madrid versus those taught in Andalusian cities. Therefore, Toni and other teachers and dancers alike, make a distinction between ‘the flamenco taught in Madrid’ and ‘the one taught in Andalusia’.

In order to draw the main distinctions between these different flamenco locales and styles in Spain, I shall first examine the Andalusian context and then make a comparison with the specific case of Madrid. Although I have found that there is no significant distinction in terms of prices for flamenco lessons according to these different cities, I believe that the existing distinctions in terms of style, music, technique and tradition/innovation have a direct

⁵¹ There are other Andalusian flamenco locales such as Córdoba, Almería, Algeciras, Málaga, Cádiz, etc. Since I concentrated my fieldwork particularly in Seville, but also in Jerez and Madrid, I shall therefore pay more attention to these locales.

impact on the learning process of the individual. I also think that these differences, among other determinants⁵², influence the student when choosing a city to study flamenco.

Starting with the Andalusian context, I shall first examine Seville as a very important and meaningful site for flamenco dance lessons, principally because of its long tradition among other things. I must mention that it is there that I spent most of my fieldwork and pre-fieldwork time. Consequently, I am more familiar with Seville than other flamenco locales in Spain, although I also spent some time in Jerez de la Frontera and Madrid. The distinctions that I will be elaborating upon are drawn mostly from my fieldwork data, but also from what I have come to 'know' from current information sources and discourses from flamenco students, teachers and from my literature review which encompasses newspaper and magazine articles available on the internet. I should specify, though, that Madrid has attracted a lot of Andalusian flamenco artists over time, and many of them are now based in Madrid and teach there. Consequently, you can easily find the so-called "Andalusian dancing style" as much in Madrid as in Andalusia.

Being the Andalusian capital, Seville offers the highest number of dancing schools and teachers in the region and thus, the most numerous dancing styles⁵³. What also makes Seville special compared to the other Andalusian locales is the level of technique which is usually higher. However, what is common to all Andalusian flamenco locales is the encouragement and support in finding your own style, since it is supposed to be particular to each dancer. There is also a common way of interpretation, which is playful and coquettish or what is often referred as "*flamenquillo*". The interpretation is based on free play, to distinguish from the more "classical style" related to Madrid. Although Seville is the capital of Andalusia, it is not a big city such as the metropolis of Madrid, thus making it easy to go by foot from one school class to another. It is also easier for international flamenco students to meet with each other before or after class either for a rehearsal or to "*ir de copas*" [have a

⁵² Determinants such as a higher cost of life in Madrid, either preferring to live in a smaller place than the capital, or wanting to live in a metropolis, or being closer to the sea, etc.

⁵³ Considering that each dancer is supposed to have developed her or his own style.

drink]. The same applies to Jerez de la Frontera and Grenada since these are even smaller towns.

Among the choice of teachers and schools available, there is one school in Seville that stands out from the others for also offering theory about the *baile*⁵⁴: courses include history and cultural criticism. Because the Cristina Heeren Flamenco Foundation has an “official” status, it means international students have more success when asking for a student visa (for longer stay) and also sometimes gaining finance from their respective countries⁵⁵. I actually met a French girl who was a grant holder for one year’s study at the Foundation. Being Korean, Kyon had to ask for a visa to be able to stay for a year; she started her training in Seville in that specific school. However, Europeans do not need visas to study or even to find work in Spain⁵⁶. Otherwise, most of the people I met were studying by their own means (More in section “Financial Issues” of this chapter).

Seville is also the site of several *tablaos*⁵⁷ and theatre venues for flamenco performances. There is also the “Bienal de Sevilla” in September as well as a growing number of summer workshops intended specifically for international students. Seville is also known for its historically famous district “Triana” which used to be a gypsy flamenco district. However, Triana has become gentrified through the affluence of tourists; thus, today the majority of gypsies live on the periphery of Seville. Some *peñas* and flamenco schools still exist in Triana, such as the Manolo Marin Academy, now run by Jorge, where many international students go. However, the majority of school venues are concentrated more in the center of Seville, and as stated previously, it is common for flamenco students to go by foot from one class to another.

Jerez de la Frontera is a smaller city standing about one hour south-west of Seville. Jerez de la Frontera is often said to offer less technical flamenco than Seville or Madrid, with

⁵⁴ *Baile* means dance.

⁵⁵ Students usually require an official letter confirming their admission. However, I know people who have been able to get a bursary to study with one specific teacher, i.e. on a one-to-one relationship.

⁵⁶ Actually, I often heard Spanish people complaining about the lack of job opportunities, especially in Andalusia. Hence, finding work for a foreigner seems difficult, as many stated.

⁵⁷ Many of the *tablaos* are oriented towards a tourist audience, while the *peñas* are usually directed towards a “local” audience.

the emphasis more on the interpretation being characterized as playful, and on the “*pellizco*” and improvisation, especially in the *bulería* form for which Jerez is the original site. The *compás* is very present, and the focus in class is on the importance of listening to the singing. Such was the case in María Isabel López’ class in which improvisation and attentive dancing, along with the singing, was the focus. But there are more and more classes and schools opening now in Jerez, and teachers with a high technical level are more present in the town thanks to the Festival de Jerez in February of each year, which draws a growing number of international students who almost ‘invade’ the city during the festival. The Festival de Jerez seems to have become even more popular than the Bienal in Seville. Jerez is also the site of two famous neighbouring gypsy districts: San Miguel and Santiago. Hence, there is a concentration of school venues⁵⁸ (still a small number compared to Seville) and *peñas* in these districts. However, other important schools – which largely depend on international students’ affluence - are located in other parts of the city.

Madrid, the country’s capital, is distinct in one sense simply because of a shorter flamenco tradition, but also because of a longer classical⁵⁹ dance presence. As many have pointed out, Madrid’s flamenco schools are highly focused on technique, and especially on footwork. Madrid numbers many flamenco schools as Seville: in fact, their number is pretty similar. However, Madrid is a much bigger city and it is more complicated for the student to attend different schools because of distance issues.

In Madrid, I carried out my fieldwork in the most famous school called “Amor de Dios” where teachers constantly change each week or month. Available classes are advertised on the board at the main entrance, and it is up to the student to make up her or his mind on the class to choose according to the teacher and level desired. However, it is often possible for the student to attend the class as an observer⁶⁰ in order to help make her or his decision. My observations confirmed what I had already been told by other dancers, which was that in

⁵⁸ However, the teachers are not necessarily gypsy.

⁵⁹ Especially Spanish classical and bolero school styles.

⁶⁰ This is the case for the majority of classes taught in Seville and Jerez de la Frontera as well, although not in the case of special courses such as workshops.

Madrid, flamenco classes are focused on technique and a lot of footwork, rather than on the interpretation and encouragement to find your own style.

In Madrid, there are also important *tablaos* and theatres where many flamenco productions are presented. For instance, many Andalusian artists move to Madrid since it offers more career opportunities. As well, Madrid is a site of experimentation for many flamenco artists who wish to push flamenco's parameters further. As Toni pointed out, Madrid is recognized as a site more open to innovation and fusion with modern or contemporary dance, for instance. Indeed, I took classes with two teachers who demonstrated a dancing style heavily influenced with classical and contemporary dances. However, I also encountered similar dancing styles in Seville and Jerez de la Frontera. Since Madrid is somehow a place where artists come and go, Andalusia has influence over Madrid but is also profoundly influenced by Madrid. I remember a comment made by María Isabel in Jerez about a Japanese girl who had studied for three years in Madrid: *she has another style than us*. What is interesting is that this Japanese dancer had spent most of her time studying with a teacher who was actually from Jerez de la Frontera.

In terms of the types of foreign students, each place – Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, and Madrid – seem to attract them equally, i.e. either those students who took flamenco as a serious activity, or otherwise. However, overall I met more Latin Americans in Madrid than in Andalusia. Moreover, I found that it was more common to see children in Madrid and Jerez de la Frontera than in Seville's classrooms, although this might have purely been a coincidence. In general, there was almost always a majority of foreigners in all the classes I observed or participated in, regardless of location. In some classes, it was common to see a majority of Asians (of whom many Japanese and Taiwanese) as well as Italians. There were many German students too, as well as some French and Swiss. I was always the only Canadian in the classes, although many teachers as well as long-time students – especially in Seville - knew of many dancers from Montreal. It seems that Montreal dancers' relationship with Spain is strong, as regards frequent travel to Spain, and especially to Andalusia (Leclerc

2006). Therefore, it would seem likely that the dancing styles in Montreal are heavily influenced by Andalusian ways of approaching flamenco.

While the Andalusian dancing styles are typically focused on the interpretation and improvisation, Madrid's emphasis is more on footwork and 'classical' technique⁶¹. Of course, there are many exceptions, but the trend seems to follow these main distinctions, as my own observations and discussions have confirmed. Another main difference between Madrid and Andalusia regards the importance of developing one's own dancing style: this is most relevant for the individual learning flamenco in the "Andalusian way".

Different dancing styles: but in the end, you need to develop your own

There are many styles within flamenco since it is a very personal thing [...] when you study with several teachers you grab what you prefer from each, and then you adapt it to your own body. I, for example, don't like it when the students imitate. I don't like imitation. I do a footstep, a movement and I leave the people do as they please. They have to do what feels best for them. You have to feel good when you dance. Of course, they must do it within the compás, they have to do it correctly, but everybody his or her own way, Toni, flamenco teacher from Seville.

This quote from Toni is very representative of the way flamenco is taught and ought to be like, according to many flamenco artists and aficionados, especially in and from Andalusia. Finding your own style, your own interpretation is common practice in classes in Spain, particularly in Seville and Jerez de la Frontera as I have noticed. I was often told, either in flamenco classes in Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, or in workshops in Montreal given by Spanish teachers from Andalusian cities, that I had to find my own way of interpreting the choreography that was being shown; i.e. that I should not reproduce exactly the same movements, but rather, that I had to feel and do what suited me best. Not all teachers necessarily insist on that matter, but it is quite common in the flamenco milieu, as opposed to the classical ballet or jazz dance for instance, where everybody has to be synchronized and "look the same", particularly in group choreographies. This pursuit of personal style might be due in part to the fact that flamenco is primarily a soloist dance, urging each dancer to develop her or his own way of expression.

⁶¹ Including postures, pirouettes and turns, arm positioning, etc.

I met a Slovenian girl in Madrid who had been doing ballet and jazz dance for a long time. Hence, she was used to being corrected and being told exactly what to do, so every dancer would tend to move and look the same. However, she really liked the freedom of dancing flamenco in Slovenia and not having to be corrected 'all the time'. But she also often felt that she had too much liberty in her flamenco class, and that she could not really learn since she did not receive feedback from her flamenco teacher.

While flamenco teaching relies closely on imitation, students are often urged to push their learning further by exploring what suits them best. In a class that I observed in Seville for instance, the teacher told everybody that he did not mind at all if the students did not follow exactly the same movements that he was demonstrating. On the contrary, he much preferred that each of the students explored on their own what felt best for them. If they preferred to raise the right arm instead of the left, or keep it in front or remain still, then there was no problem. Indeed, teachers in Seville and Jerez do not systematically correct the students in their practice. Instead, they ask if the students have any questions. It is also common for teachers to present a choreography 'on the spot' and keep changing the movements as they please. Some of the students find this hard to follow, especially those who are used to being told exactly what to do which is more the case in Madrid. I believe that this phenomenon is part of the philosophy of enabling students to find their own style.

Therefore, finding your own way, your own style in dancing flamenco, is believed to be very personal since it becomes more 'authentic' that way. There are different discourses around authenticity within flamenco, and one of these, which is also common to many other art forms, is that it has to be sincere in order to be 'real', to be authentic. It has to be sincere according to your own feelings, to what you wish to express and transmit to the audience. In other words, authenticity, according to the dance style, is linked to the concept of honesty and the individual:

You can pick up details, technique, but when you are copying someone, it doesn't come out well [...] The most difficult part is expressing yourself, you can learn the technique, but you need to manage to really feel it, Georgia (Israel), taken from "Flamencos without Borders"

Thus, developing your own style in dancing flamenco is something that depends on your personality, your mood and emotions at a given moment and what you wish to express.

As Ruiz mentions, this is not counter to the steps, rhythms and norms of each flamenco *palos*:

In dealing with the rigid rules of the dance, the artist shall always leave a personal signature in his or her work. This does not contradict the fact that there exist steps, rhythms and norms that vary from one dance to another. Hence even if the interpretation shall be original, the dancer shall always respect those established rules (Ruiz 1994, 105, my translation).

In order to develop his or her own style, the dancer may also do so according to his or her body structure. As Janet Goodridge observes: “[the] degree of mobility we have in our joints, the length of our limbs – together with the pull of gravity – affect our movement. In order to develop their performance, dancers may need to compensate for a particular body type” (Goodridge 1999, 141). I remember myself in a class trying to imitate the teacher’s style which looked so great on her! She was a tall and corpulent woman. However, I looked ridiculous dancing her way with my thin and delicate body frame. May mentioned that she noticed that there were some movements that would never look good on her, no matter how hard she tried. She was referring specifically to one of her first teachers who was much shorter than herself.

According to another dancer from Montreal, however, it can help to learn from other dancers’ styles - men and women alike - because it can incite you to develop and enhance new ways of moving. It can even make you discover a part of yourself that was unknown to you. Along with the influence of specific styles that teachers show, and the individual’s body frame and personality, the dancer’s development of her or his own style is also influenced by gendered ways of moving and dressing codes. This issue is now discussed below.

Gendered ways of dancing

Despite the different styles in flamenco dancing which are also expected to be personal according to each individual, there are some peculiarities in terms of gender. Since

flamenco originated in Andalusia which is the site of a historically strong catholic influence and patriarchal society, flamenco dance is thus regulated by particular ways of moving according to gender. Gendering etiquette is often associated with the appropriate 'traditional' dressing, as well as the distinction made between "*el baile de mujer*" (women's dance) and the "*baile de hombre*" (men's dance). As Desmond points out, "[movement] serves as a marker for the production of gender" (Desmond 1994, 36).

In general, male flamenco dancers in Spain are not expected to dance in a 'feminine' way; rather, they are supposed to dance according to certain masculine standards. Luis Lopez Ruiz in his book *Guide du flamenco* (1994) has tried to describe how men dance - and should dance - differently to women. Some of the recurrent features that he claims characterize the male and female dance are as follows: the [man's] chest expands, the feet hit the ground while the arms and hands remain almost immobile, whereas the female dancer will move the arms, hands and fingers more freely while her body bends and waggles (Ruiz, 103, my translation). However, Ruiz specifies that nowadays, men and women tend to dance more similarly; and that this leads, according to him, to a kind of asexual gesture (Ruiz, 103, my translation). Thus, it would apparently become more common for men to integrate "feminine" ways of moving, and for women to dress up and dance as men do, such as wearing pants and doing a lot of footwork.

One the most famous flamenco female dancer of this era, who revolutionized the *baile de mujer*, is Carmen Amaya (1913-1963). Interestingly, Amaya introduced several 'masculine' characteristics to her dance, such as wearing pants and performing a lot of footwork and tremendous pirouettes in each of her performances, thus showing an uncommon 'masculine' strength for her time. Curiously enough, she achieved this outside Spain, while being in exile with her family in Latin America.

In his book *The Passion of Music and Dance: Body, Gender and Sexuality*, Washabaugh (1998) does not speak about an asexual dancing in flamenco, but he argues that certain recurrent gestures that various male dancers use recall a 'feminine' way of dancing.

These recurrent 'feminine' gestures that Washabaugh identifies are specifically the way men grab their shirt as if they were wearing a woman's skirt. Washabaugh refers to this phenomenon as "bending"; in other words, bending is the crossing over between the gender boundaries.

As Desmond (1994) and Reed (1998) remind us through their literature review on dance studies, gender is constantly manifested and negotiated in dance; gender standards can be reaffirmed in dance, but they can also be contested or reversed. Gender standards are renegotiated each time dance is enacted and discussed. Let us not forget that other dance forms have an influence on the flamenco practice, such as ballet and modern dance which have their own gender standards. As Desmond argues, "[every] dance exists in a complex network of relationships to other dances and other non-dance ways of using the body and can be analyzed along these two concurrent axes" (1994, 36).

In the same book, Washabaugh (1998) describes the male dancer as "aggressive and almost ferocious in his posture and movement" while remaining "composed if not serene" at the same time (1998, 40). He also argues that "these qualities of ferocity and serenity [...] inhabit the bodies of dancing men in precisely the same way they appear in a matador – literally, a killer – as he confronts a bull in the ring" (1998, 40). In fact, flamenco dance has been highly influenced by the practice of bullfighting. As Desmond argues, dance forms are influenced similarly by other dances as by other non-dance practices, in this case, bullfighting (Desmond 1994, 36). Many movements involving the arms and the "haughty" posture based in the pelvis are features of bullfighting, which is mainly a male practice. But these qualities are very much present in women dance as well, and I often find myself doing these kinds of movements which remained strange and confusing to me for a long time. Even if I was and continue to be completely against the practice of bullfighting, I have always been very attracted by these "exotic" movements and postures in flamenco dance that recall this activity. I have explored this issue with other dancers (both Spanish and non-Spanish) who also deal with this contradiction, namely this attraction and repulsion of the bullfighting presence in flamenco dance. Nonetheless, although dancers recognize this influence,

flamenco dance is not based on bullfighting and therefore, is usually not explicitly taught and performed as such. Interestingly though, while bullfighting is traditionally a male activity, male and female dancing ways equally use movements and postures that recall this activity.

The evolving wider context in which the flamenco practice is embedded also has an impact on gender issues. For instance, although until recently as female dancers used to be associated with prostitution⁶², it seems that nowadays this is no longer the case. Actually, not only is it common and valued for a woman to claim herself as a flamenco dancer, but many women are even leading two careers at a time. It is also possible that the flux of international aficionados has an impact on the flamenco practice and the local society, including gender issues.

I would like to examine some examples of actual discourses and opinions around the theme of gender and dance. These examples are taken from interviews with renowned flamenco dancers who also travel and teach flamenco around the world:

Today women and men dance the same way, but this is because everybody is preoccupied with the feet. No one gives a 'fuss' about the arms, the head, the aesthetics, and everything is based on strength and counter-rhythms. Moreover, you can see everybody looks the same in a way, whereas in my time everyone had his/her own personality. El Guito, interviewed by Fernando González-Caballos Martínez, my translation.

This first interview excerpt with El Guito reveals a lot about an 'idealized' flamenco past where every dancer was "unique" and where the gender border was maintained. From this excerpt, it also seems that today, women tend to dance in the style of the male dancer (using much more footwork), leaving aside the upper body aesthetics which are so often associated with *el baile de mujer*. Here, gender crossing might be viewed as a loss in "personal style", or as a homogenizing process.

However, even if these 'standard' differences between male and female ways of dancing are becoming blurred and are meant to keep on changing over time, differences or distinctions between male and female dancing, whatever they are, tend to remain. Here are other contrasting examples around the issue of gender in dance taken from interviews with

⁶² According to an interview with the dance teacher Toni.

famous dancers of the new generation on flamenco-world.com (all my translation). Let us start with the “female dance”:

March 2006: [...] *We must distinguish the fact that I am a woman and that I have the female dance [el baile de mujer], which is very distinct from the male dance. It is not possible to compare us both,* Pastora Galván, dancer from Seville

[...] *What do you think about the actual female dance situation?* Carlos Sanchez

That there is a lot of abuse in terms of footwork technique. I don't like that. The woman must make use of her arms, shoulders, hips a lot more... She has to compensate the feet with everything else she has because if not, there comes a time when you get bored. Nowadays people tend to do remates [se remata mucho] using the feet rather than the arms [...] The woman has to search for herself [buscarse] and not disguise deficiencies with the feet. It is easier to use the feet than try to say something with the upper body. Anybody can learn to use the feet. Pastora Galván.

Here is another example from an excerpt which is more ambivalent about the way a woman should dance:

June 2006: *In a recent interview with Pastora Galván in this area she was saying that the woman “has to compensate the feet with everything else that she has because if not, there comes a time when you get bored”. Do you agree with her?* Silvia Calado

I share the same point of view. Nor do I like it when it's only arms and aesthetics. The dance [el baile] has its moments of breaking oneself [romperse], of standing up, of breathing, of walking around, of control, of scratching oneself... And its moments of giving it all [meter caña] with the feet and showing off what you know to do with your body. I think that even an eyelash is important in the dance [el baile]. The hair, the head, how you move the hips, you are a woman and you have to be feminine. And when you have to show your guts [redaños], do it as well. Fuensanta la Moneta, dancer from Grenada.

Again, it seems from the above that one of the main masculine characteristics in flamenco dance is the use of footwork. The use of footwork is actually the main musical aspect of flamenco dance, along with *pitos* and *palmas* or clapping on one's body. Historically, music and song components have for a long time been the domain of men, while women “[found] a place in that other dimension of flamenco performance, namely dance” (Washabaugh 1998, 15). Thus, the use of [a lot of] footwork might be considered as a masculine feature because of its strength requirement but also according to its musical quality which has traditionally been the men's domain. As I mentioned earlier, even though women used to do a little footwork when they danced, Carmen Amaya is really the one who

revolutionized the *baile de mujer* and who put these gendered qualities to the test. However, as we can see from the excerpts, the debate on feminine and masculine dancing features still goes on.

Now let us examine two other contrasting examples about the male's dance with two internationally famous *bailaores*, starting with Joaquin Grilo from Jerez de la Frontera:

April 2000: *You are the male dance prototype [el prototipo del baile de hombre] for your remates, the movement of the hands. How do you see yourself when they speak of you as the bailaor [male dancer] macho prototype?* Luis Clemente

Because it is really as it is. I agree with this view very naturally, every man who dances should be the macho prototype, strong, the word says it all: man [hombre]. Afterwards in your private life you can do whatever you want, but on stage you have to give what is expected of you, you are a man and you have to dance accordingly. There are no hiding-outs. Joaquin Grilo, bailaor.

Still according to the interview excerpts above, it seems to me that what Ruiz identified as the main 'ideal' characteristics of the *baile de hombre* and the *baile de mujer* are still very current. On the other hand, the following excerpt with Joaquin Cortes demonstrates a strong influence of ballet training in his dance, thus challenging flamenco's gendered nature:

May 2001: *When did you begin dancing with a bare torso?* Lucila Castro de Trelles

Oh... a long time ago, but I believe that in their talk about nude torsos some people are mistaken. I am referring to the purists, when they criticize it. I think that in primitive dance the creators, who were pretty much also the ones dancing, danced with naked torsos. In classical ballet they still dance with a nude torso. Why not in flamenco? When I did it, it created a polemic. I obviously view it as a bit absurd and so there is conflict. Joaquin Cortes, bailaor originally from Córdoba, who moved to Madrid at the age of twelve.

The case of Joaquin Cortes is very special since he does not hesitate to shift the 'traditional' dressing in flamenco, such as using the *bata de cola*, a typical long-tail skirt that women use, and to incorporate sensual and "feminine" movements in his dance. In doing so, he has become a polemical figure in the flamenco milieu, fueling the debate around the appropriate dressing etiquette and gendered dancing standards.

As regards the dressing standards in flamenco performance, views and opinions vary a lot, especially among non-Spanish dancers. Many consider the use of ‘traditional’ dressing according to gender as important, and for some it is actually one of the things that attracted them to flamenco in the first place, especially for female dancers. However, many do not feel comfortable in using such dressing etiquette, such as the long dotted dresses for women commonly found in Andalusia. While the majority of female dancers I met like very much to dance using a skirt, a few prefer dancing in pants. The audience plays a powerful role in this choice too, as many dancers feel the pressure to perform using the expected dressing codes, especially long dresses or skirts in the case of female dancers.

Gender issues in the classroom

In Spain, there are generally more options for men to learn from male teachers than there are elsewhere. According to Filipe, a flamenco dancer from Germany, he is the only man in his classes in Berlin, while it is not the case in Spain, whereas women tend to be the majority of students in classrooms everywhere, including Spain. It is therefore not uncommon to see more male students in a class taught by a male teacher than a female teacher, though men will also take classes with female teachers, and this applies both in Spain and elsewhere.

In Montreal, for instance, most teachers as well as dancers are female. Hence, there are only a few men that dance either professionally and/or who take flamenco lessons. It might be that it follows Spain’s pattern of a predominant number of women dancers (although their majority is not that significant) whereas men are dominant in the musical and singing realm. My aim here is not to attempt to explain this gender issue in Montreal, since it is very speculative of me to do so. However, part of the explanation might lie in the fact that dances, in North America at least, and especially soloist dances, are not only considered as “unproductive” (Ness 1992) but also as a rather ‘feminine’ thing to do (Desmond 1997).

In a ‘mixed’ class, some teachers will ‘bend’ in showing a movement or a choreographed section identifying the male way versus the female dancing way. Such was the case in a class in Seville taught by a female teacher. She showed different ways to *rematar*,

clearly identifying one way for men and another one for women. Interestingly, the men's way was more challenging in terms of footwork and technique, and most of the students, including many women, chose to practice the male's way. Later on, when practicing and reviewing the choreography, it was the male's *remate* that everybody was using, almost as if the female's *remate* had been completely left aside and forgot. On the other hand, some teachers such as Toni do not hesitate to use a skirt when teaching female students. Furthermore, some male teachers pay careful attention to 'female' gestures including hip movements, as was the case in Jorge's class in Triana, Seville. Nevertheless, many teachers insist on the fact that the student is either a man or a woman and should dance accordingly:

More sexy, show that you are a woman! María Isabel speaking to a German student in the class in Jerez de la Fronera.

Some dancers have shared their concern about dancing within the gendered parameters in flamenco. For instance, May finds it difficult to dance in a "feminine" way and prefers to dance using pants, although she wished to explore her "femininity" more, especially the 'looser' movements in the hips. However, while students specifically choose to study with a same-sex teacher in order to develop either these "feminine or masculine" ways of dancing, others choose to study with "opposite-sex" teachers in order to find and develop alternative dancing styles. Such was the case of Nathalie, a Montreal professional dancer, who specifically chose to study with a male teacher in Spain in order to develop more "stamina" in her dance, as she said. It should be noted, however, that the ability to explore alternative ways to the gendered standards in flamenco may be challenging when there are not many options in terms of the variety of teachers, such as is the case in Montreal where there is a great majority of female teachers (in the case of a male student for example).

Overall, a negotiation is always involved in the gendering of dance, i.e. how much to take from a gender construction, from the discourses around the masculinity and femininity of the dance, and how much to leave aside; or in other words, how much is materialized (Butler 1993). It is even truer, I believe, for the 'non-native' dancer who already has his or her own 'gendered habitus' prior to learning and embodying flamenco notions of gender. You can

choose with whom you wish to learn, choose to perform either in a 'male' style or 'female' style, the type of dressing to use, etc. However, as I have been able to observe, and from my own experience as a dancer, it seems that even if there is room for choice, the normative discourses around gender performativity in flamenco are quite powerful (Butler 1993), and go beyond the boundaries of Spain.

'Ethnic' styles

Another discourse within flamenco, which is also present in other art forms, is to look for a supposedly 'essentialized' way of dancing in order to judge what is authentic, what is supposed to be "pure". I am referring here to the 'gypsiness invocation' in flamenco, which is present especially in Andalusia, although it has repercussions beyond Spain as well:

This is how gypsy people do when they dance, this is how it has to be done, Molly referring to what her flamenco teacher used to say in a class in Montreal.

In fact, it has become 'marketable' for any flamenco artist to invoke their gypsy identity in order to create public interest in their performance. Nancy Thede (1998) mentions that nowadays many artists tend to invoke elements drawn from a profound and mysterious gypsy tradition in order to legitimize their talent, or that they talk about their talent as being "transmitted by blood" (Thede 1998, 161). Thus, being gypsy is a highly marketable value in flamenco, and may influence both the choice of classroom lessons and show attendance.

Leblon, a history scholar who has written extensively on flamenco, makes a distinction between a so-called Andalusian style of *baile flamenco* and a gypsy one; according to him, these two dancing styles coexist (Leblon 1995a, 82). Leblon argues that particular *palos* are more 'gypsy' than others: the *rumba* and the *bulerías*, while others are more 'Andalusian', like the *alegrías* and the *cantiñas*, the *garrotín* and *tanguillos* (*ibid*). Each of these categories or ways of dancing can be executed quite differently: the more "gypsy" dances are executed through *desplantes*⁶³ and 'violent' movements, passion, vital energy, exuberant and wild rhythms, whereas the more 'Andalusian' dances are characterized by slow

⁶³ *Desplantes*: which are characterized by the use of "heavy" footwork.

and harmonious movements, displacements, figures, elegance and grace (Leblon 1995a, 82-83). The synthesis of both ways of dancing are found in the dance styles considered as “more flamenco”, like the *siguiriyas* and the *soleares* (Leblon 1995a, 83). Moreover, Leblon claims that it is easy to distinguish between the two dancing styles, depending on the proportioning of the features cited above. Thus, a ‘gypsy’ dance gives the impression of being more ‘expressive’, more spontaneous, more ‘wild’, more ‘natural’, *vis à vis* a more studied, aesthetic and elaborated Andalusian one (*ibid*). Leblon goes even further in his association of *baile flamenco* with gypsies when he speaks about the learning process: “Who ever has seen these little gypsy girls drawing dance movements following the rhythm of *palmas* [hand clapping] executed by their siblings before even having learned to walk, will understand what the expression “to possess dance in the blood” signifies” (Leblon 1995a, 83, my translation).

The distinctions based on “essential affiliations” that Leblon makes is quite representative of the kind of discourses that purists share. Nevertheless, if this “gypsy” dancing style does exist as Leblon describes it, Leblon does not seem to be aware of “the lore surrounding gypsy performance of flamenco [which] supports the contention that gypsies do not “learn” flamenco; they are born dancing and singing” (Hayes, 108). In other words, Leblon seems to take for granted the discourse around flamenco as it being a naturally ethnic expression. On the other hand, it is clear that “the complex cultural contexts in which gypsy children are introduced to flamenco are different from the professional training of flamenco dancers in other areas of Spain or the rest of the world” (*ibid*). Thus, what Leblon identifies as the Andalusian style is probably what many come to learn in a more formal training setting than would be the case for the gypsy style. As Pietrobruno (2006) argues about learning in a lived dance context, “most people who grow up with the dance acquire it in childhood, its movements often being taught indirectly through the corporeal language of the body; thus they may not have a sense that they have learned it” (2006, 113). In a rather informal instruction context, the dance is often performed in families and by communities; thus, the

dance practice “is intergenerational and therefore performed equally by children and adults” (2006, 2).

Nonetheless, I would argue that these two styles that Leblon identifies “so clearly” are not that easy to distinguish in real life. Reality is much more complex than that, considering that an ‘expert’ eye will often observe a blend of the features that Leblon has described, plus other influences from other musical and dance genres, since flamenco exists within an ever growing network of other performing art forms. Indeed, “dance is produced through actual performances that can change and evolve as a dance heritage is acquired and maintained and possibly expanded to incorporate outside forms” (Pietrobruno 2006, 14).

Moreover, it can be quite interesting and disconcerting as well that some gypsy dancers do not follow at all the ‘gypsy’ style of dancing, understood as “natural”. Dancers such as Joaquín Cortés and Israel Galván are continuously re-inventing flamenco dancing through their performances, while attracting waves of criticisms at the same time. As Loren Chuse points out about the dancer Joaquín Cortés, “the consummate and extraordinary gitano dancer whose skill and artistry cannot be denied, is under constant fire from the flamenco purists” (2003, 298). This applies equally to Israel Galván, about whom I continue to read contrasting reviews of his artistic endeavours. Once I saw him dance in Seville, and while I was leaving the theatre, I remember hearing an elderly woman complain: “this is not flamenco! Whatever it is, this is not flamenco!” It made me laugh inside, since I perfectly understood what she meant, although even if Galván had danced to Spanish classical music, blending his footwork with a lot of ‘contemporary’ movements, I was still able to recognize the strong presence of flamenco in his dance.

Nevertheless, these discourses around a “purer” dance style – often associated with the so-called gypsy one – may have an impact on the choice of teachers that international students make. Hence, non-Spanish aficionados are quite susceptible to embodying such discourses around flamenco and ethnicity, especially if they go to Andalusia. Actually, it is common in Spain – especially in Seville, Jerez de la Frontera, and Grenada – for teachers to advertise their courses by emphasizing and linking ‘gypsy’ and ‘purity’ as marketable labels.

I must admit that I fell under the influence of such ‘idealized’ *gitanismo* in hoping to find a more ‘authentic’ type of *baile* on my first trip to Seville. Indeed, one of the most (if not the most) famous gypsy family, ‘los Farrucos’, and especially the dancer Farruquito and his brother Farru, offer the most expensive classes nowadays.

An anecdote with a gypsy teacher

My own class experience with a very famous gypsy dancer was quite disappointing, however. It does not have to do with her dancing skills, since she proved to be quite “à la hauteur” of her reputation on the few occasions that she danced in front of us. And I knew her style beforehand, which is quite similar to the ‘gypsy style’ that Leblon describes, though she was very graceful, charismatic and elegant as well. Actually, I could not believe it when I saw the advertisement on the wall of a school that I was attending in Triana (a historically famous gypsy and flamenco district in Seville): one of the greatest female dancer of our time was giving a workshop while I was there! I had seen her dance in Carlos Saura’s famous movie “Flamenco” and she became my idol instantly. Thus, I had great expectations and hoped (naively) to be able to dance as she did one day. According to a friend of mine who was organizing the workshop for her, she was quite nervous about teaching “in a formal setting” and did not really know how to do it. I remember the speech that she gave on the first day of class; she said that “some people possess Art, like herself, and others don’t, no matter how hard they will work”. This had the unfortunate consequence of establishing immediately a kind of hierarchy among the students in the class. The hierarchy became increasingly obvious as the days passed, since she taught particularly to a small group of people, about three students who always stood in front of the others. Among them, there was her daughter, another gypsy woman and a “becoming one”, a Mexican-American who was dancing with “los Farrucos” family. Because of an injury to her knee, the teacher could not dance a lot and she used those three dancers as examples for the other students. However, these three dancers often made mistakes, and the teacher often made us repeat particular parts all over again throughout the hour and a half class. I am not saying that I did not learn at all, but 300 Euros

for 15 hours of class is quite a sum for such a small amount of choreography, just a *pata de bulería*! Although I felt quite ridiculous trying to embody her style which did not suit my body frame (I have a frail and skinny body-type compared to her imposing and tall figure), I tried to focus my attention and embodiment on the energy and strength that she wanted to teach us.

This experience in particular made me rethink about what it is to be a “good” teacher from a regular or even “bad” one. Actually, no matter the dance genre, it does not have to do with dancing skills and artistry since many great dancers are “bad” teachers. I assume that it has to do, in great part, with how dancers have acquired their knowledge: perhaps the more formal kind of education they have received, the more helpful this is in learning how to teach. Hence, being able to teach does not depend merely on good intentions, since I believe that a teacher has to develop other capacities than purely executing a dance. Being able to demonstrate a movement step by step and explain the structure of the dance is a complex process which I become more aware of each time I teach. Therefore, I did not doubt the teacher’s intentions of really wanting to transmit her knowledge to us. However, it became clear that she did not know how to proceed and was improvising, probably depending on how she had learned through observation and a lot of practice in a rather informal setting. See the section “Learning to dance flamenco” of chapter 4 for further discussion about the teacher-student relationship.

Hierarchy among students

I should also mention that this kind of hierarchy created among students was common to many of my other classes, be it in Spain, in Montreal or even in Mexico. I observed that many teachers choose certain pupils and put them in front of the class in order to help others follow the choreographies. However, some teachers concentrate their attention and interventions on those pupils, creating an imbalance among the students, and thus, reducing their chances of embodying the dance “adequately”.

I shared my observations on this kind of hierarchy or “competition” in the classrooms with other flamenco students. I wondered if they had had similar experiences in Spain, and also at home. Hence, Aileen, an English flamenco dancer, told me that there was a big difference between what she had encountered in London, compared to her classes in Seville. She said that in London, people in class tended to look at her with a ‘superior’ or snobbish attitude, and dressed up “*a la flamenca*”, focusing very much on their looks. On the other hand, in Seville, the teachers and students spoke with Aileen, made jokes and dressed up as “normal”.

Filipe, a German dancer, told me about a class in Seville where there were several German students who did not speak with him – even though they knew that he was German too - and tended to look down on him. He also told me that he found that this kind of attitude among dancers was quite common in any dance milieu, a sort of widespread ‘competitive’ attitude. Mélanie, a French dancer, agreed right away and mentioned that she had had many similar experiences to Aileen’s and Filipe’s. Other dancers told me that they had experienced a competitive attitude from Spanish students, such as a distanced and snobbish attitude. However, as in the case of Aileen, I mostly observed a friendly attitude from Spanish dancers, especially as time passed on.

In the classroom: other distinctions between Spain and elsewhere

Along with the school venues and dance styles (including those based on gender and ethnicity) that students have come to encounter in different cities in Spain, I am aware that the teaching dynamics are often quite different to other parts of the world. Such dynamics include the ways and ‘tools’ that teachers tend to use in classrooms in Spain versus elsewhere. I am referring here to the musical support and ways that teachers transmit their knowledge. As well, financial issues, age, school options and technique levels are crucial factors in the extent and way in which an individual embodies flamenco dance.

Styles taught elsewhere

The dancing styles taught elsewhere may be similar to the ones found in Spain, such as the Andalusian style(s) or the Madrid style identified previously. As explored in the previous section about the different flamenco locales in Spain, style is often linked to place. However, style also depends on time and context, i.e., not only the influences and changes that a dance form is subjected to over time, but also how the dance form is expected to be and look like in a given moment and place. Many dancers compare and contrast the style they were taught back home to the one(s) they encountered in Spain:

It is ballet-flamenco, the bolero school, there is an enormous difference between here [Seville] and over there [...] in Switzerland it is more placed, classic, for the stage. Here [Seville] the arms go in front, it is more sensual. The styles are very different. We are used to stretch after class in Switzerland, but here they don't do that, Sofia comparing her school in Zurich and the flamenco taught in Seville.

It is the old style [estilo antiguo], the teachers are old, they cannot show you, Kyon, Korea.

Above, Sofia and Kyon were comparing the flamenco style that they were being taught at home to what they had encountered in their classes in Seville. I believe though, that the styles that they were taught in their respective home countries had much to do with time and place; i.e. when and where their teachers learned flamenco. Sofia and Elisa's teachers were actually Spanish brothers from Madrid. Thus, I suppose that they had learned a certain style there, be it Spanish classical dance and/or bolero school, and then advertised their classes as flamenco in Zurich. It might have been how they were taught flamenco in Madrid at the time they were living there. And since Sofia and Elisa had come to Seville (Andalusia) for a flamenco workshop, they found that the two styles were very different indeed. Time plays an important role in the dancing styles, since flamenco evolves quite rapidly in Spain. Thus, what Kyon identified as the "old style" of doing flamenco is probably what her teachers had learned at the time. Indeed, a "*flamenco antiguo*" style does exist, and is still used by many dancers in Spain.

In Montreal, most of the teachers and dancers are influenced by the "Andalusian style" according to Toni, a flamenco teacher from Seville:

It is not so modern. Here [Montreal], the people I see here, they look more pure when they dance, it is not so modern, it is more flamenco, more Andalusian, Toni talking about flamenco in Montreal

What does it mean “more flamenco”?

That it is not so modern, not so contemporary. Nowadays in Spain, it is common to do much contemporary. For example, the flamenco in Madrid is not the same as in Andalusia. It is totally different, Toni

Just as in Andalusia, it seems that in Montreal most teachers allow students to look for their own style (May). Moreover, in Montreal as in Spain generally speaking, I observed, and discussed with others their comments that some teachers’ styles are more about footwork and rhythm whereas other teachers’ styles focus on the upper-body. As May stated about flamenco styles in Montreal, it is hard to find a teacher who uses a ‘good’ balance between the footwork and the upper-body. However, probably because the number of teachers and styles is much higher in Spain, I found that it was easier to find a balance between both feet and upper-body uses.

Many came to consider the “correct” or authentic way of doing flamenco as the one they encountered in Spain, especially in Andalusia; hence, when it comes to tradition, the tendency is to look at the “roots”. As Pietrobruno observed, the “authenticity of a popular dance is ultimately linked to its place of origin” (2006, 111). It is no surprise, then, that many dancers describe what they learned at home as not being “real” flamenco per se:

It was not flamenco, it was something else, Mélanie, France

It is much more classical Spanish than flamenco, Elisa and Sofia, Switzerland

The people that teach in Rome don’t know about flamenco, many have not even studied here! [Seville], Aldo, Italy

In Korea the people don’t know [flamenco] well, the zapateo [footwork] is very simple, Kyon, Korea.

Of course, most of the people who visit Seville or other places in Spain to learn flamenco already hold a certain view or motivation about encountering this “real” way of doing flamenco, simply because Spain - specifically Andalusia - is the original site for flamenco and continues to be the main vehicle for its production and evolution.

I wanted to live it, I had to go to Spain for the flamenco [...] For me, it is the only way to learn, to live with the people, we always hear the compás, Lote talking about her experience in Jerez de la Frontera.

They [teachers in Zurich] don't give me the flamenco passion, that is why I come to Seville, Sofia, Switzerland.

Even for some who have never traveled to Spain, they tend to share the same view about Spain as “the reference” for flamenco:

I do want to go for the footwork technique, how it sounds, it is more subtle [...], for the attitude, there are more teachers, more styles, May, Montreal.

I myself wanted to go the first time mainly because I knew, from the workshops occasionally given by Spanish teachers in Montreal, that the level was higher in Spain, and also because I was convinced that if I was to learn and perform flamenco seriously, I had to deepen my knowledge and training in “going back to the roots”. It was also, in a way, my anthropological curiousness and conviction that meant I had to know more about flamenco and its socio-cultural context in order to give it the respect it deserves.

However, it is important to note that other styles and “outside” influences are not always seen as “negative”. On the contrary, other dance forms and influences can be seen as very important and enriching, even recommended by some teachers. Paula, a flamenco teacher in Seville, told us in a class that it was very important to learn the correct posture and how to do turns (pirouettes). According to her, these types of classes may be very boring, but they are essential. However, flamenco teachers tend to assume that students take those kinds of classes (such as ballet and modern dance) as well as their flamenco lessons. Consequently, many flamenco dancers who do not learn such basic technique are at a higher risk for injuries. Furthermore, some dancers complain how hard it is to change the way they dance to a more “correct” or “safe” one. Hence, to learn how to relearn to dance is not obvious, since dancers have to “break” somehow with their dance habitus and work towards a new one.

Furthermore, I frequently observed that students with previous dance training tended to “embody” flamenco dance faster. For example, such individuals will use the arms right away when learning a footwork pattern. May, who has previous ballet and contemporary dance experience, told me during interview that she was used to learning dance by using her

whole body: in fact it does make it easier to remember. As well, many interviewees told me that they enjoyed dancing other styles, that it helped them to explore new ways of moving and of finding another kind of muscular training: these are helping tools discussed in embodying flamenco dance later on.

Compás and musicality

Of all the technical and musical aspects involved in the learning and embodiment process of flamenco dancing, the main element that was stressed both as essential and difficult by almost everybody interviewed was the *compás* (or rhythm):

My problem is the rhythm, the compás, it takes a lot of mental energy [...] When you don't understand the rhythm, you don't understand why you don't get it, May, Montreal

I am not sure about the contratiempo [upbeat] yet, the main difficulty for me was the compás, Lote, Belgium

Many specifically stressed the issue that when they were learning flamenco at home, the *compás* was not necessarily the focus in class; indeed, it was perhaps completely non-existent:

She did not know the compás, Lote talking about her first flamenco teacher in Belgium

They don't do palmas, or compás, they just put a CD on, Elisa, Switzerland

She looked very "flamenco", but had little compás, Mélanie, speaking about her first teacher in France.

Overall, my own experience with the flamenco teaching venues that I have attended so far confirms what many have shared with me about how flamenco is/should be learned and performed (according to the flamenco taught and performed within the *cuadro* of musicians). However, having started studying flamenco seriously when I was living in Mexico City and having continued afterwards in Montreal, I did not share this issue about the *compás* that many others had while in Spain. Of course, embodying and mastering the *compás* is and remains one of the main difficulties for me. However, contrary to many whom I have discussed with, I was already familiar with the *compás*. The difference or particularity of the

class venues in Spain compared to Montreal and Mexico City was more related to the order of the musicality (the subtlety and groove in the footwork), and in the way the *compás* was taught in general (the steps usually being sung to you rather than counted).

Thus, apart from the fact that many did not have the knowledge about the *compás* as I did to some extent, the main differences between Spain versus elsewhere that I have encountered in my own experience and in others' comments do concern the *compás*, although it is rather in the way it is taught and practiced, as I mentioned earlier. In Spain, it is quite uncommon for teachers to count the steps (say aloud the numbers from one to twelve in a *compás* of twelve such as in the *soleá* or the *alegría*). I am not suggesting that they do not count them at all, and many actually do so, but they tend rather to “sing the steps” and use onomatopoeias to indicate where to “*marcar*” (put the foot on the floor or do a specific movement in order to “mark” the *compás*). The teachers with whom I have taken classes, or observed, in Spain usually do that: either when teaching a choreography mainly involving body movements, or in showing a series of footwork; they sing the pattern rather than tell on which count it has to fall. It is probably for this reason that some teachers have a hard time saying on which count a series of footwork (such as a *remate*) starts and ends when asked by the students. Therefore, flamenco dance is taught and practiced in Spain in a less “mechanical way”, that is, you are encouraged to learn how to feel the music, to feel and embody the *compás*.

When it is counted, there is no feeling, May

I feel good here [Seville], I can feel the music inside, Sofia.

On the other hand, many teachers outside of Spain do not even count the steps and teach very simple footwork, as some have pointed out:

There is no guitar, they don't count the steps, Sofia

They don't do palmas, no compás, they just put a CD on, Elisa, Switzerland

In Korea [...] the zapateo [footwork] is very simple, Kyon, Korea.

Nevertheless, I have noticed that teachers, be it in Spain, in Mexico or even in Montreal, accompany the class using *palmas* to indicate the *compás* to follow. Some of the

teachers I observed in Madrid, as well as one in Jerez de la Frontera, used to mark the *compás* with a *bastón* (walking stick) hitting the floor. I noticed that this was used particularly in classes where there were a lot of students. However, it gave me a strange feeling – I found it annoying - probably because I was not used to it in the way it was used to hearing the *compás* with *palmas*.

However, it seems that not all teachers use *palmas* in the classroom. Thus, the kind of flamenco that students encounter at home can sometimes be very different to the flamenco traditions found in Spain. Particularly where the focus is not on the rhythm (or *compás*), dance students may find it difficult to adapt to the class dynamics in Spain, such as Sofia and Elisa who mentioned that the *compás* and the footwork that was shown in the class was too fast. They were not used to learning at such speed, or practicing “so much” footwork.

Teachers, especially in Spain, insist on the importance of listening to the rhythm (*compás*), to the music since students in a group always tend to accelerate and thus, get out of the rhythm. I often heard the teachers yell: *Don't run!* [*no correís!*], *Out!* [*fuera!*], cleaner! [*más limpio*], or *you ate it* [*te has comido*] when skipping a count.

Another aspect that also concerns the musicality that I have noticed, and that has been stressed by some dancers such as May, is the *soniquete* (groove) and the subtlety of the sounds (musicality) in doing the footwork which is more “developed” and insisted upon in Spain:

I do want to go for the footwork technique, how it sounds, it is more subtle, May, Montreal
The soniquete is not the same, it is another style in Switzerland, Sofia.

I frequently observed that in Spain, whether in Andalusia or Madrid, teachers insist on nuancing the sounds in the *zapateado* (footwork). And this is how many dancers learn to remember the footwork patterns, such as Marie from France. The case of Marie is particular since she showed to have a great memory. Not only did Marie remember choreographies that had been shown to her four years previously (she had been living in Seville for three years), but she remembered the “awkward” and very nuanced footwork patterns more easily than the

more “regular” ones. And Marie remembered them better through singing them, which is what most Spanish teachers do when they show the *zapateado* sections.

Song and guitar accompaniment

Another specific aspect about the way most of the teachers in Spain (or in workshops given by Spanish teachers elsewhere) use to teach was to sing the *letra*⁶⁴ part when the class is not accompanied by a singer. Everybody I spoke with (in Montreal and Spain specifically) about the *letra* agreed that this part is much easier to dance when it is being sung to you rather than when you just dance it to music (guitar playing) or on *palmas*:⁶⁵

It goes better because they sing the step, I learn much better here [Seville], Sofia

I get it much faster when they sing it to me, Elisa

In Japan, I teach flamenco, but here I feel it more strongly. I practice with a cantaor, a guitarist, with palmas [...] The sensations are different, and this is what I want to pick up, Akemi, from article “Flamencos without Borders”

I sing, although I sing poorly, but it is very important for the students. It is not the same to dance only with the guitar playing than when you also have the cante [singing], so that they [the students] can relate to both, Toni, teacher from Seville.

I remember one particular day when I was in the changing room with Aileen, an English girl who was also studying philology at Seville University. Aileen had problems remembering the *letra* of the *alegría* that we had been shown in the class. So I began singing the lyrics (with my horrible voice!) and automatically Aileen remembered the steps and started to dance the whole section. Of course, that was how we had been taught the choreography, not so much on counts but rather according to the singing.

On the other hand, it seems that flamenco lessons elsewhere do not provide such a connection between the dance and song. Indeed, this is mostly due to the lack of flamenco singers outside Spain. In Spain, and especially in Andalusia as I observed, teachers sing in the class when there are no singers present. However, it does not seem to be the case for teachers

⁶⁴ Letra: part of the traditional structure of any *palo* (flamenco style) which is sung. The singer is the leader in the *letra* part, the dancer and musicians support and accompany the singing.

⁶⁵ See the section called “Listening to the cante” in chapter 1 for a more thorough overview on the dynamics involved in the *letra* part.

elsewhere, complicating the students' understanding of the dynamics between song and dance.

Another aspect about the *letra* as well as the other sections (*escobilla*, *remates*, *llamadas*, etc.) within the structure of the traditional flamenco, is that in Spain it is usually much easier to get the information about how it works (what to do, when and how) than elsewhere:

The teachers don't explain the music, the structure, but here [Seville] they do when you ask, Sofia, Zurich

It is hard to understand the music, the letra, when to do a remate, a llamada. I have never been told [...] maybe because the teachers don't fully understand, May talking about her teachers in Montreal

Here [in Seville] they explain the structure to you, when to enter [according to the singing], over there they don't, Elisa, Zurich.

Another main difference between Spain compared to elsewhere is that usually classes in Spain are accompanied by guitar playing - especially in the choreography classes - which is often missing or rather seldom used elsewhere; teachers just count, do the *palmas*, or put a CD on. This might be due in part to the lack of musicians who know how to play flamenco and accompany the dance outside Spain. In Spain, many guitar players are willing to accompany dance classes for free in order to learn how to accompany the *baile* (dance). Nevertheless, I attended a few number of classes where guitar players accompanied the class for free, mostly in Montreal. These guitar players were practicing and learning how to interact with the dance. However, classes are usually more expensive when they are accompanied by a "professional guitarist". This was the case in some of my classes in Montreal and Mexico, though it seems to be a widespread phenomenon according to Toni:

There is always a guitar player in the classes in Spain, in the choreography classes of any level [...] In Russia they don't have a guitar player, they use a CD [...] Sometimes I have to bring a CD with me to other countries [to teach] because there are no guitar players, or because we have to pay for it and it is expensive [...] It is very important for the ear, it is not the same to dance on the guitar, you must do it, because it is not the same to dance on a CD as it is with a guitar player, Toni, flamenco teacher from Seville.

Consequently, the collective aspect of flamenco may be "less embodied" in places where there are few or no possibilities to learn along with a singer and a guitar player. This

issue is further explored in chapter 3 through the strategies that dancers develop to cope with the lack of musicians in “Applying flamenco to your own context” of chapter 5.

Technical levels and interpretation

There is a distinction to make regarding the interpretation and the technique level according to location, particularly between Spain and elsewhere. In general, the technique level in Spain is much higher than in other countries. For instance, Toni, a flamenco teacher from Seville who has traveled a lot to give workshops worldwide, claims that the advanced level in Montreal is not the same as the advanced level in Spain. I personally share this view since I experienced the difference both times I went to Spain to study flamenco. On my first trip to Seville, I could only follow the intermediate levels whereas in Montreal I was in advanced level classes. On my second trip two years later, although I was able to follow advanced classes, the level was still much more demanding for me than in Montreal. Some professional dancers from Montreal have told me that when they were in classes in Spain, they felt that they could “no longer” dance flamenco, meaning by this that the level was high. This issue is also due to the fact that, I believe, professional dancers in general are not anymore used to taking classes (except for random workshops); rather, they are used to rehearsing and teaching others. Hence, the perception of the degree of difficulty also depends on the habit of actually being taught in a formal setting.

Furthermore, the perception of the degree of difficulty depends also on the habit of learning and practicing with the song and musical components; thus, it depends on the capacity to listen and gain familiarity with the musical genre. I remember my second day in María Isabel’s class in Jerez where I had to improvise a bulería according to the *cante* (singing). Although the technical level was not so high (since it is much more a playful style where, rather, you have to be very aware of the singing), I could not “feel” where the singing was going, thus I kept on missing when I had to “*rematar*”. Each time María Isabel told me to start over again, she sang a different *letra*, which added up to my confusion. I know that María Isabel intended to help me figure out by myself when to *rematar* by listening carefully

to her singing. But because I was not used to listening and understanding where the singing was leading to (since it was not part of my *habitus*), the only thing I could manage to do properly was to enter in the *bulería* in the right place. Many Montrealers complain about this issue related to the *cante*, such as Nathalie who claims that it is necessary to get used to its patterns by listening to as many CDs as possible, since there are very few possibilities to practice with singers in Montreal.

In Spain, some students had a hard time following the technical level of the class they had chosen:

The class goes very fast. I don't feel comfortable asking questions, there is not enough time for each student. There is more time in Switzerland, Elisa.

This might be due, as I mentioned previously, to the level of an intermediate class in Spain, which is usually much higher than an intermediate level elsewhere. However, many school venues and teachers allow students to come and observe the class to figure out if that is what they are looking for and if it “fits” their technical level.

On the other hand, according to Elisa and Sofia, they receive good training at their school in Zurich in terms of posture, arms, turns, etc. Elisa believes that dancers in Spain have had to learn these technical “essentials” too. However, it seems not to be the focus in classes, at least in Seville and Jerez, whereas they concentrate on pushing you to look for your own style. I suppose that it has to do with the fact that teachers, such as Paula, assume that dancers receive a basic posture and technical instruction in classes other than flamenco.

According to Kyon, the Cristina Heeren Foundation in Seville is a good place to start flamenco lessons since the dancing level is pretty basic. Kyon believes that other schools and teachers are good for later on, once you have acquired a basis. When we met for the interview, Kyon told me that she had started to take *bata de cola* (long-tail dress) lessons, but realized that it was too soon and that she needed to “make muscle first”.

As I mentioned previously, I frequently observed a certain hierarchy among students where the most advanced often stood at the front of the class. Nevertheless, I also noticed that some kind of solidarity tends to develop among students who have a hard time keeping up

with the class level and speed. Their bonding is developed mostly through exchanges of laughs, whispers, sighs and looks in the classroom. Furthermore, it is common for those students to gather together before or after class in order to rehearse and review the choreographies in a rented studio. And even if the teachers tend to teach and focus on the most advanced students, it is also common for teachers to adapt to the level of the majority of the students in the class, in order to avoid going too fast. I came to realize that this is a common phenomenon everywhere, not only in Spain.

As regards the level of interpretation, Toni made an interesting comment when interviewed. Toni said that while in countries such as Costa Rica and Russia the dancers show a strong technical level, the dancers in Montreal focus more on their interpretation and work less on technical abilities. Toni's observations are concordant with the Andalusian style that is dominant in Montreal, which emphasizes on the interpretation and improvisation. Therefore, I believe that the technical and interpretation levels in a specific place have much to do with the prominent flamenco dancing style(s). Furthermore, I also believe that, along with the history of flamenco in a specific place, the history of other dance forms as part of the collective habitus may indeed influence the mastery of certain aspects of flamenco over others. For instance, the importance of classical ballet dance in Russia, which is worldwide known for its particular technical mastery, might explain in part why Russian flamenco dancers would demonstrate such a high technical level.

Age and “cultural proximity”

I strongly believe that age is an important factor in the embodiment of a dance form. Every learner brings capabilities and limitations based on his or her body structure and past learning experiences (Kimmerle 2000, 271). Thus, a child or adolescent might have less difficulty than an adult in learning new body-use patterns because her or his habitus is not (yet) as ‘deeply-rooted’ as an adult’s one. According to Bourdieu, the habitus is mostly framed in childhood through a practical mimesis (Bourdieu 1990, 73). Therefore, the sooner an individual learns dance skills, the stronger are the chances that she or he will embody them

faster. However, as Kimmerle points out, the child learner has additional developmental limitations which depend on maturation of the nervous system (Kimmerle 2000, 271). Moreover, Kimmerle claims that “[whether] a child actually reaches the mature stage and becomes competent however is based on the extent to which the child has a chance to practice these skills” (*ibid*). Significantly, many non-Spanish learners do not have much opportunity to learn and practice flamenco in their home countries, even less so at an early age. However, possibilities are increasing in main Latin American cities, and also in Tokyo and New York apparently.

Most of the non-Spanish dancers I met were either in their twenties or thirties. A few others were in their forties and fifties. Thus, they had started to learn flamenco dance at a relatively ‘advanced’ age compared to most of the Spanish dancers who usually start much earlier. However, I met Spanish dancers who had started to study later on in their lives and were in the same class levels as many other non-Spanish students. Although many of these Spanish dancers had an excellent technical level and often stood in front of the classes, a few did not however.

In order to explain the phenomenon that I observed, namely that many Spanish dancers who had started to study recently usually learned flamenco “faster” than non-Spanish ones, I turn to Pietrobruno’s (2006) interesting comment about salsa dance:

Adults who first learn salsa in the formal setting of a classroom do not acquire the dance in actual circumstances. Nonetheless, they have grown up in a dance or movement culture whose vernacular they may or may not have consciously learned. As they produce their movement heritage in the ways that they move their bodies, they transpose their bodily culture to the salsa dance class. Their corporeal vernacular, acquired in actual circumstances, exerts an influence on how they apprehend this new dance (2006, 114).

Therefore, whether adults learn in a formal or informal instruction setting, a deciding factor in the embodiment process of a dance is the cultural context in which individuals have grown up. This phenomenon is further explored in chapter 5 on the complex cultural embodiment of flamenco dance section.

Coming back to the notion of age, I found myself studying with a majority of children and teenagers in only three specific classes out of all the others I took and observed in Spain. Two of them were in Jerez de la Frontera, the other in Madrid. Those children and teenagers were all Spanish (locals); none of them were foreigners. However, these experiences gave me a sort of flashback, as I used to learn flamenco with children when I lived in Mexico. As well, it seems to be more common for children to learn flamenco in certain places outside Spain than others. I am referring especially to Latin America, since flamenco seems to have had a longer presence there than other parts of the world. Indeed, Latin America's long relationship with Spain might be an important factor to consider for parents wanting their child to learn flamenco. Hence, 'cultural proximity' plays an important role in the embodiment process, in terms of motives and possibilities in practicing a particular dance form.

Coming back to the notion that age may have an impact on the embodiment of dance skills, aging also increases the risk of injuries and body limitations. For instance, because of a problem with one ankle, there is a speed limit that Lote reaches in doing footwork that she will never be able to surpass. On interview, May stressed the issue about her body that changed over time; thus, there are certain things that she can no longer do as easily as she used to; she also has to deal with a sore knee problem. It is common, as well, for dancers to give up their apprenticeship or career because of injuries. Such was the case of a Slovenian young woman I met: she gave up dancing because of a bad knee injury. However, even though flamenco dance is as technically demanding as any other dance form, an individual can expect to learn and dance flamenco professionally over a longer timeframe than might be the case for classical ballet, for example.

Financial issues

Although there tends to be more options available in terms of schools and teachers in bigger cities such as Rome, London and Berlin, classes are expensive compared to the class

venues in Spain – I am referring to the regular year-round classes, excluding workshops and special classes.

I barely have the time and money to take one class per week in Belgium, Lote

I can take only one class a week in Berlin because it is very expensive, Filipe.

Therefore, there is a direct impact on the frequency of class attendance and thus, on the learning process speed. For instance, many students such as myself, can only take one class per week (of one hour or so), while for the same price I can attend three classes per week in Seville; the average price of a regular class in Seville is thus half the average price for a class in Montreal. I suppose that this price difference has to do with the local cost of living as well as the overall class attendance numbers, which may be smaller in other parts of the world.

I also found that there was no significant difference in prices for lessons in Seville, Jerez de la frontera or Madrid. However, the cost of living is higher in Madrid. One reason which might explain the similar cost for dance lessons between Madrid and Andalusia may be due to the greater affluence of tourists in big cities of Spain, following the growing international interest in flamenco. As Washabaugh indicates, “flamenco’s current popularity is important economically to the nation’s booming tourist industry, as Spain was reported second only to France last year [1997] in the total number of visitors to a nation” (Washabaugh 1998, 51).

I also observed that it is more common for Europeans to come as often as they can to Spain in order to study flamenco (for a few weeks or months), whereas many Asians come for longer periods (usually one, two or three years). In doing so, most of the aficionados I met were studying by their own means, sometimes having to deal with financial insecurity. For instance, La Tati, a flamenco teacher in Madrid, has memories of several pupils who almost turned ‘Bohemian’ in order to make a living out of flamenco:

They have left their country, their house, their steady job, and when they arrive here, they give language lessons or anything they can to pay for their flamenco lessons. And the ones who want to be successful, they manage to; they go to all the festivals they can, and they pick up information about everything. They are lovers of flamenco, much more so than many Spanish people (Excerpt from article “Flamencos Without Borders”).

In making such financial sacrifices, some also have to cope with their family's and friends' judgment. In the same article in “Flamenco Without Borders”, Akemi, a Japanese dancer, complains about the fact that her friends do not understand why she spends so much money coming and going to Spain: *They see it as a different world, and sometimes it's difficult to make them understand it, but it's my life, isn't it?*

Lote, a Belgian dancer and mother of two, also has to deal with her family's judgment, and she felt especially guilty at having left her children in Brussels, even though it was just for two weeks. Prior to this trip, Lote had also sold everything she possessed in order to live in Jerez de la Frontera for two years with her daughter. As La Tati mentioned for “Flamencos Without Borders”, Lote is one of those individuals who will do everything they can in order to study flamenco in Spain as much, and for as long as possible. Accordingly, I have met many individuals who regarded their flamenco practice as important enough to make sacrifices for.

However, I also met several individuals who were pursuing flamenco dance rather as a hobby. Thus, their stay in Spain was concerned more with having a “dance holiday”, hence looking for pleasure rather than pain and hard work. Interestingly, a few of those extended their stay, as their flamenco practice gained more importance. In doing so, financial issues became a major concern for them.

Flamenco lessons options

Of course, a crucial factor in the learning process of flamenco dance is the instruction options available to the individual. As I said previously, many begin learning flamenco in Spain and keep returning there as often as they are able to. However, others start at home and

visit Spain with the objective of speeding up their apprenticeship. This was the case with the majority of the dance students I met in Spain. Many of them complained that at home, they did not have a lot of options in terms of flamenco lessons settings (including styles taught), or that the lessons were often more expensive than in Spain:

There are about five flamenco schools in Berlin, though they are very expensive, Filipe, Germany.

In Montreal, there are many options in terms of flamenco dance lessons. However, as I mentioned above, the price per class is higher than in Spain and the majority of teachers are women. Thus, these circumstances have implications for the frequency of class attendance as well as for the embodiment of gendered dancing ways of flamenco.

Helena, the Slovenian young woman I met in Madrid, told me that she gave up her flamenco dance lessons because she did not feel that she was learning with her teacher. Unfortunately, she was the only flamenco teacher in the city where Helena lives. Thus, Helena had to put an end to her flamenco learning altogether because of a lack of lesson options⁶⁶. Indeed, I met with several individuals who had come to Spain because of a lack of flamenco options in their home town. Such was the case of Kyon, who only knew of two schools in Korea that did not meet her needs anymore. Similarly, Arabelle, a woman living in the south of Germany, told me that she had to travel for one hour in order to take flamenco dance lessons. Thus, Arabelle could only take one class per week. On the other hand, even though there is only one flamenco school in Zurich, Sofia and Elisa decided to pursue their learning for at least the next two years.

Conclusion

Learning flamenco dance style(s) and technique is a complex cultural process involving personal motivation and choices influenced by: the teachers' styles and school styles available; the body's capabilities and limitations, including age; discursive practices

⁶⁶ Helena had not come to Spain in order to learn flamenco, but was there on visit. We met in the hostel where we were both staying and it was during a conversation that she commented on her past flamenco learning experience in Slovenia.

around the ‘appropriate’ ways of dancing (gender, ethnicity, tradition); other prior dance learning and bodily practices; the ‘cultural proximity’; as well as the relationship established between the teacher and student, which is highly influenced by the other students’ levels. Moreover, other factors are at stake in the embodiment process, such as the opportunity to learn along with the musical components of flamenco, the technical levels offered, financial issues and dance lesson opportunities. Overall, the location and context of dance lessons are decisive elements in the way dancers embody and view their flamenco practice.

Chapter 4 The Complex cultural embodiment of becoming a flamenco dancer

Learning to dance flamenco: of mimeticism, practice and imagination

Learning a dance form is like learning a kind of body language. However, dance is not reducible to language in the sense of a system of words and symbols, discourse, or rhetoric⁶⁷, since, such as music, dance relates much more to the abstract domain. Dance is a complex structured system of aesthetic and symbolic codes which are more often than not non-verbal⁶⁸. Hence, through the learning and embodiment of a dance, practitioners go through a complex corporeal and identity transformation. It is therefore now worth examining its different facets.

Because of dance's non-verbal - or rather very corporeal and abstract - character, dance teachers do not usually "try to translate their knowledge into literal form" (Parviainen 2002, 21) because the dance must be experienced, it must be felt, since dance is a kinaesthetic kind of knowledge. This is not to say that the apprenticeship and incorporation of dancing happens outside of language practices, on the contrary. What I mean here, is that language practices used in the case of formal education⁶⁹ are more or less explicit in that they take the shape of metaphors, images, onomatopoeias, singing and/or counting the steps, value judgments, exclamations⁷⁰, and non-verbal communication such as touching, gaze and facial expressions, etc. I shall come back to illustrate better these specific language uses, especially on the use of metaphors.

The embodiment (which is both conscious and unconscious⁷¹) of a dance form such as flamenco entails a complex process of corporeal appropriation of gestures, behaviors,

⁶⁷ Faure 2000, 4.

⁶⁸ I do not wish here to define what dance is, or even to find a universal model for dances, since it has been attempted in other works and various problematic issues arise in doing so (Hanna 1979, Royce 1977, Williams 1991).

⁶⁹ According to the flamenco lesson venues that I have observed.

⁷⁰ Faure 2000, 5.

⁷¹ I do not intend to put an end to the long-philosophical debate around how much of the embodiment is conscious and unconscious. However, I believe that the novice in dance is much more conscious than the 'expert' since he or she has to learn new patterns of body-use which may be very foreign to what the body has been used to, thus requiring a lot of efforts in adapting and transforming his or her body hexis. If the 'expert' becomes conscious of the different steps undertaken while performing certain

cognitive postures and rhythm through attentive observation and application in practice in using time and space. I will illustrate below the different dimensions of this embodiment based on examples specific to the flamenco venues in which I have participated either as a witness or active agent.

Mimeticism: embodiment through inter-relational learning

Mimeticism is the relationship between observation, identification and imitation that is at the core of any practical learning⁷², and particularly in the case of learning a dance form. Mimeticism involves a motor-based communication between the observer and the performer (or the teacher); likewise, it is an inter-relational learning. This is obviously what happens in a typical flamenco dance class, be in Spain or elsewhere⁷³, according to my observations and experience. Since dance appropriation engages a process of reflexivity *in action*, that is, of attention, investment and emotional identification or *indwelling* as Parviainen (2002, 18) argues, the movement or behavior enacted is never the exact reproduction of the past. Moreover, the incorporation is continuously adapted to the context in which it takes place (Ingold 2000).

So, rather than imitating the teacher's movements, the flamenco student has to understand, practice and embody the movements, and also internalize the rhythm. Hence, the student has to incorporate the *knowing-how* of the dance through practice. Turning to Marcel Mauss' notion of *les techniques du corps* in her socio-anthropological dissertation on ballet

movements, he or she then becomes unable to perform them as easily and gracefully as usual. Nevertheless, both are very *aware* of being in the action when they are dancing.

⁷² Bourdieu (1990, 73-74) speaks of a practical *mimesis* or mimeticism in addressing the child's imitation of gestures and acts rather than models, and Dani Cavallaro (2001, 99) stresses the importance of the body and imitation in the learning process: "Both philosophy and science have been increasingly stressing the crucial part played by the body in the acquisition of knowledge. Babies develop an understanding of their surroundings through their bodies well before they learn how to communicate verbally. They imitate facial expressions practically from birth and come to associate different expressions with different tones of voice".

⁷³ I am aware that there are teachers who are not able to dance anymore. I believe that the learner must have some previous knowledge of the dance form to be able to understand what the teacher wants her or him to do. However, I have never experienced that myself, nor did those who participated in this study experienced learning with a physically 'disabled' teacher. Parviainen (2002, 20-21) analyzes this phenomenon in her article "Bodily Knowledge: Epistemological Reflections on Dance" in which she speaks of a 'kinaesthetic empathy' that enables aging or injured dancers to transmit a knowledge of the moving body to the students.

and contemporary dances, Sylvia Faure (2000) describes the concept of “knowing-how” as the gestures, movement types and ways of executing them, structured through aesthetic principles according to the specific history of the dance form, which incessantly take shape and body - hence they become individualized and particular - in being appropriated by each dancer.

The extent to which the embodiment of the dance is possible largely depends on contextual elements such as the implication and motivation of the practitioner (most of the dancers I spoke to approached flamenco practice as something serious and important in their lives). There is also the recognition of the dance practice on the part of relatives and friends as well as career prospects; the level of mastery (the class level for instance); the teaching settings; the way the dance practice fits in the history of both the student and teacher; their own social, cultural and economical background, as well as the relation established between the teacher and the student (Faure 2000). I would add to these elements the frequency of classes and rehearsals, the experience acquired on stage, the age, the individual sensitivity and ability to focus (cognitive capacities of moving the body and listening), and the degree of familiarity with codes and cultural elements of the discipline, such as language and cultural proximity. There are also the learner’s capabilities and limitations based on his or her body structure and past learning experiences - including other dances - to take into consideration.

The incorporation of *knowing-how* in flamenco implies much more than mimeticism. Along with the elements mentioned above as important factors, embodying the *knowing-how* also entails the internalizing of the dance’s vocabulary and cultural codes. I remember one class in particular where this became obvious in Seville where a friend of mine, a long-time classical ballet dancer from Montreal, accompanied me. She had thought that she could take the class along with me and follow the steps by imitating the teacher and the other students. I agreed with her since the level of the class was more or less intermediate⁷⁴, i.e. not too advanced. I thought that she would be capable of following since I had observed that students with previous dancing experience were able to learn more quickly. However, my friend had to

⁷⁴ According to how it was advertised, although the dancers in that class were all of different levels.

step back very quickly, resolving to watch the class as a spectator. She told me afterwards that the class was too advanced for her, that she did not know the steps like we [the students] did and that she had to be shown them before she could do them. I replied that this sounded strange to me, since we did not know the choreography beforehand: the teacher improvised and we just followed her steps.

Of course, we were already familiar with the coded structure of the *palo* - the dance style which was an *alegría* - a pattern of *compás* (rhythm measure) in twelve. Thus, we already knew on which count to accentuate or put the foot. What I came to realize is that we had all come to internalize to a certain extent - as individuals - the dance vocabulary and its 'grammatical' structure: we had come to embody the dance as part of our *habitus*, though my friend had not. In other words, we knew enough of the coded structure of the dance form - the *alegría* in this case - to be able to follow the teachers' steps.

Considerations on the use of the mirror

The same friend also asked me why I never looked at myself in the mirror and kept on looking at Alba, the teacher. I replied that I did not like to see my own reflection and become "too conscious" of it, but also that I was afraid of becoming dependent on the mirror since on stage you can become helpless if you are too accustomed to it. This is a theme that was stressed by other dancers, such as May, who finds it hard to accept her own image in the mirror. But above all, I wanted to "feel how it looked like". The mirror is commonly used as a tool in the classroom or during rehearsals in order to have a better idea of how the enactment of the dance looks. The mirror is often associated with an imaginary audience since this is what they will come to see. Sometimes, however, teachers encourage us to dance without the mirror in order to forget about our image and concentrate on the musicality and on our own emotional interpretation of the choreography. In general, it gives very good results: Wulff argues that ballet dancers' steps become more expressive when they are 'liberated from the mirror' (1998, 8).

The main reason why I did not pay attention to my own reflection in the mirror - in that particular class - was that I wanted to understand and capture as much of the teacher's dancing style as possible. However, you cannot simply try to imitate another's movement; it was not possible for me to become a perfect replica of Alba⁷⁵. There are several reasons that explain this complex matter about the concept of mimeticism in learning a skill or bodily language such as a dance form. One of these is that my own bodily experiences are distinct from that of Alba's, just as my body composition is distinct, and also, my body sensitivity and knowledge. As Ingold (2002) and Faure (2000) argue in their respective works, the past - the way of doing things - does not reproduce itself identically, since it is re-actualized within new contexts and specified through each individual embodiment. This explains in part why dancers, although from the same discipline, all come to develop their own dancing styles. They may look similar, but they remain distinct, unique in a way. And as previously mentioned, to develop your own style is something highly valued and expected in flamenco, especially among teachers from Andalusia.

On the use of metaphors and other language practices

My friend also observed that there was a lot of verbal exchange between us and the teacher, and I agreed. I often ask many questions, we all tended to ask questions in that class⁷⁶, especially about the *compás* such as on which count the footwork had to start and finish. We also asked about specific gestures that we tried to reproduce and found difficult to achieve.

However, questions about the *modus operandi* are not easy for teachers to respond to, and a lot of them tend to answer using their whole body through repeated demonstrations. I

⁷⁵ I even used to think that in order to dance up to the teacher's style, I had to alter my body constitution so that it was more like the teacher's. Other students have shared a similar view, such as May, who understood her inability to reproduce her teacher's movements as being due to height and body type difference. Hence, as we have seen, the body constitution is an important factor in developing one's own style (Goodridge 1999, 141).

⁷⁶ I noticed that it was especially the Italians and Spanish who interacted most with that teacher. I observed a similar phenomenon in the other classes I took and/or observed in Seville, Jerez and Madrid.

have had a lot of those teachers who “instinctively” do the movements but who do not know how to explain or deconstruct the movements, probably because they learned themselves this way, by imitation, but also by trial and error. This was the case in Lola’s class in Seville where we would spend the whole class trying to figure out a *remate* (short combination of footwork) since she only knew how to do it at “normal speed” which was very fast.

But a “good” teacher will usually use metaphors and tell you where to put and feel your weight. He or she will be able to show you the movements and footwork at slow speed. This makes a big difference for students who can then understand more quickly. Alba, the teacher in the class whom my friend was referring to, used metaphors, such as “*it is as if you were dancing on a crystal*” when talking about the *alegría*, so that we would not do heavy footwork.

She also used to explain how to get the right posture through metaphors such as “*sacar el pecho*” [take the chest out] and *arriba!* [upward!] or *imagine a string that starts at the bottom of the spine and stretches straight up on top of the head* to correct the posture. Other metaphors are commonly used in other classes such as “as if you wanted to pick up something” about a movement involving the arm and hand, or “it’s a dance from the earth, feel it” in order to make us realize the connection with the ground much more than with the air - such as in ballet - and achieve centeredness which differs among dance forms (Pietrobruno 2006, 124; Royce 2004, 74). A common metaphor used in Montreal is “to be grounded” referring to this centeredness in flamenco which is based in the pelvis rather than in the chest or upper-back. Likewise, many dancers with previous ballet dance training have had to relocate their centeredness to allow the hips to move and *to be grounded* (May).

Alba, the teacher, also showed us how we needed to turn the head before the feet when changing direction, how to move the arms using the chest but mostly, what we should not do according to what she observed in us. Often, teachers exaggerate the wrong posture or way to do something in order to help us realize our “incorrect” approach. They might also tend to exaggerate the “right” movements in order to show the different steps to be

undertaken in the realization of a particular movement, sometimes using metaphors to help make their point clearer.

However, the use of metaphors can lead to confusion and misunderstandings. Sylvia Faure (2000) points out how metaphors can lead the student to do the opposite of what is expected. Moreover, in the case of non-natives learning flamenco dance in Spain, language may often be a barrier, complicating the apprenticeship. Then, the use of metaphors which demands a good knowledge of the language on the part of the student may become useless, unless there are interpreters willing to help out (such as is often the case for workshops given outside Spain). Non-verbal language such as demonstrations, touching, looks and facial expressions thus becomes even more crucial in these cases as the majority of flamenco students in Spain are foreigners. During workshops given by Spanish teachers in Montreal, May realized that body language can be powerful even in explaining the “feeling of the dance”.

However, I have observed that when certain things are verbalized, may greatly enable the dancer to learn faster. I am thinking here especially about the structure of the dance; in other words, how to proceed in order to build a choreography. Hence, in most of the classes I attended the students were taught a choreography based on any *palo* such as a *soleá*, a *tango* or an *alegría* for instance. However, many dancers complained that they are ‘trapped’ with reproducing the choreography⁷⁷ they’ve been shown in class. This resulted in them being unable to choreograph something of their own since they did not really know how to proceed. Elisa and Sofia believe that it is necessary to be told the ‘way to operate’ and to not hesitate to ask such questions in class (when they are in Spain). However, I have tried to ask those kinds of questions in Montreal and have been left often confused and disappointed with the answers I received. I finally learned to understand and play with the structure a lot on my own, through observing shows and working in the studio with musicians. Nevertheless, I believe that when explanation of the dance structure is given, students are enabled to be less

⁷⁷ In this perspective, the choreography becomes a commodity that dancers “buy” in order to eventually use it either on stage or show it in another classroom.

dependent on dance classes, and freer to develop their own choreographies and dancing styles. As May stated in her interview, since it is hard to understand the structure, it is probably also hard to explain it.

Practice and ‘enskilment’: learning by doing

As Ingold claims when talking about skill in general, “it is not through the transmission of formulae that skills are passed from generation to generation, but through practical, ‘hands-on’ experience” (Ingold 2000, 291). Hence, *knowing how* to do a specific movement or skill is acquired through your own practice and experience. As Sheets-Johnstone points out in discussing our tactile-kinaesthetic sense as a central organizing role for perceptions as a whole, “we learn by moving and by listening to our own movement” (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, cited in Parviainen, 2002, 16). This is pretty much the case in flamenco: developing a constant awareness of movement and musical aesthetics.

Knowing-how, meaning here to perform a dance form, “involves knowing how to express the aesthetic intent of the movement and how to create aesthetic movement imagery. All of these forms of *knowing how* are forms of bodily lived (experiential) knowledge. As such, they are avenues for self-knowledge” (Fraleigh 1987, 26). As with Parviainen’s notion of *indwelling* (2002), learning dance techniques involves a process of embodiment of sensor-motor and cognitive behaviors, more or less complex and specialized that we perceive in others; hence, it is an inter-relational process. These behaviors are always relatively structured since they are globally reproducible; they happen within a structural frame (Ingold 2000). The embodiment then involves the individual’s sensations, his or her practical and tangible experience, his or her perceptions which are already socially constituted and structured (Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*). Indeed, dance skills or *knowing how* involve more than just knowing how to replicate specific movements. Skills, such as dancing techniques, are not handed on through a system of rules and representations to be received by the “passively receptive mind of the novice” (Ingold 2000). Rather, what goes on is a process of *enskilment*,

which is an education of attention⁷⁸ that can only take place in the dancer's engagement with the learning environment. Thus, this *indwelling* process or *enskilment* "cannot be assimilated to the conceptually articulated or empirical mode" (Parviainen 2002, 17).

I remember another teacher in Madrid who said that the execution of some specific movements might seem strange at that moment for our bodies, but the more you practice them, the more they become automatic until the point is reached where you don't have to think about how to do them anymore: *it is training. If you think, the head sends orders and it is too slow*, Monica, teacher in Madrid.

Actually, this is the case for any *enskilment* (Jean Lave in Tim Ingold 2000, 416) or physical task that we undertake in our lives, such as learning to walk, which demands a tremendous effort to achieve; but through trial and practice, we eventually learn to walk without having to think about it anymore. Walking, as well as dancing, is a bodily knowledge that is inseparable from doing. If you try to do the reverse, to think about everything that is going on while you are walking and continue to try to walk at the same time, you will start having trouble walking. The same process takes place when I start thinking or being too conscious of what I am doing while I dance; it becomes much harder to execute the movements and footwork that are usually fluid. In a specific class with Alba, I started to think and count the *contra-tiempo* (counter-rhythm footwork) section; it became much harder to fall correctly on the *contra-tiempo* although it was a section that I had been able to execute quite well until I started thinking "too much" about what I was doing. Alba asked me: *What is going on? You were doing that section well before. Stop thinking, just do it!* I followed her advice, and almost magically, I was able to execute that section once again.

Learning to dance involves a continuous trial-and-error process which is nonlinear and fraught with difficulties (Parviainen 2002, 21). As Bourdieu (1986) argues, "we tend to forget all the details of a messy, nonlinear learning process, interpolating and generalizing about our own skills development"(1986, 22). As a dancer becomes more agile and reaches a

⁷⁸ Ingold (2000, 37).

certain level of expertise, the muscle memory that shapes the dancer's body hexis⁷⁹ allows him or her to perform without having to 'think' about what is going on. The dancer is aware of dancing, of the proprioceptive⁸⁰ process involved. However, if the dancer thinks 'too much' about the different steps that the body goes through in performing a movement, he or she will begin to have much more difficulty in dancing as she/he usually does. The same applies when we perform any everyday task such as walking or holding a glass; even when we speak we do not think about the different physical efforts involved such as the positions and pressure of the tongue on the palate, unless we are in the process of learning a new language.

This kind of bodily knowledge that we acquire along with time and effort – though eventually we forget about this – is referred to as *tacit* knowledge by Michael Polanyi (cited in Parvianen 2002). In Polanyi's view (1966), all skills exhibit the structure of tacit knowing, since it is a dynamic kind of knowledge displayed only through action. Polanyi (1966) speaks of two dimensions of the same knowledge, focal and tacit, where *focal knowledge* concerns the object or phenomenon in focus, and *tacit knowledge* functions as a background to what is in focus. For example, "when we read a text, words and linguistic rules function as tacit subsidiary knowledge, while our attention is focused on the meaning of the text" (Parvianen 2002, 17). We constantly switch from one to the other in any activity we do, such as walking, cycling, speaking, or reading. Hence, learning to dance triggers this basic cognitive human ability to blend the old with the new where tacit knowing achieves comprehension through indwelling. As a dancer practices a new choreography, she or he moves from being "all body parts" towards a fluency that permits him or her to forget about all the technical efforts involved and concentrate on the interpretation of the choreography.

⁷⁹ Bourdieu defines the notion of body hexis as an embodied "permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking [...] Body hexis speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, being bound up with a whole system of objects, and charged with a host of special meanings and values" (1990, 69-74).

⁸⁰ Proprioception refers to the individual's internal perception of movement, his or her own position, posture, equilibrium, as well as where the various parts of the body are located in relation to each other.

Imagination or visualisation and latent knowledge

Kyon, the long-time Korean folklore and classical ballet dancer who had started to learn flamenco eight months before I met her, once told me that often she would understand the steps, but could not execute them immediately. This sounded very familiar to me, since I experience this quite often, as do other dancers I have spoken with. Sometimes it can take me months, even years to achieve a specific movement or a series of footwork that I have in mind but cannot reproduce physically.

Another important aspect of *knowing how* can be referred to as imagination or visualisation; it is the idea or the image of the desired action to be executed. The process of imagination is when attention is turned inwards on the self: in other words, it becomes reflexive (Ingold 2000, 418). As Ingold claims, one may, “in imagination, ‘go over’ the same movement as a preparation or pre-run for its practical enactment” (*ibid*). To visualise the distinct steps that one wishes to perform is often an efficient technique to use in dance and other practical activities.

However, this process is not always automatic; in other words, you can have a specific idea of how the movement should look or sound (footwork) for a long time before it starts to translate within your body. I refer to this phenomenon as *latent knowledge*; in other words, you may have a clear idea about the how the movement should look and about the distinct steps to undertake. Nevertheless, the body might remain resistant to enacting the movement. Resistance may be caused by past habitus, but also when the dancer has not acquired a sufficient technical level: a body hexis that would allow him or her to perform the movement right away.

Another manifestation of this latent knowledge slowly making its way into the body’s *modus operandi* is when you feel that you do not know how to dance anymore. I have shared this sensation with other dancers from Montreal who also experienced the phenomenon while they were in Spain or back at home. I observed that this phenomenon usually occurs when the body is trying to assimilate and process a tremendous amount of information. But it can also happen on other occasions, such as in the studio when you are trying completely new ways of

dancing which often lie in the form of abstract ideas. In both cases, the body is undergoing a transformation from the 'habitual' way of dancing towards a new one. This process may take a lot of time, since dance education is a long-term apprenticeship.

The faculty of imagination also allows for creativity. However, the body may remain resistant partly according to past habitus, but principally because of body limitations (including age and injuries). Along with these factors, however, frequent training is always the means whereby creativity can take shape, sometimes even in a way that was unforeseen by the 'mind's imagination'. Hence, creativity can arise from the body in movement, just by exploring new ways of moving in negotiation with the surrounding environment. Thus, revelations and self-discoveries are also part of one's creative frame.

Cultural embodiment: more than the technique, the flamenco attitude “*mucha cara*” and “*el pellizco*”

To learn to dance constitutes a complex dialectical process between the individual and the social within specific times and spaces. As we have seen in the previous section, postural incorporation is done through social interaction and the practice of repetitive corporeal stylizations. The novice dancer is slowly brought to embody modalities of movements, as well as aesthetic and structural codes of the dance form.

Thus, learning how to dance is a process of *cultural embodiment* or acculturation. In other words, you learn a new language, experience new sensations and ways of expression. Likewise, Sally Ann Ness (1992) points out - when she explains the process that went on while she was trying to integrate a new movement involving the arm - that there was actually a cultural transformation taking place:

The posture of everyday life disintegrated as the new patterning took over. On one particular good day, as this disintegration happened, a mental and verbal – that is to say, a symbolic and cultural – transformation simultaneously occurred within me as well, as “I” performed this dance. As “my arm” became a knowing source of action, something happened to “me”. “Me” was “re-membered” by “my arm.” The distinct sensations of memory, personality, and a socially constructed linguistic “voice” bodily relocated themselves [...] with

striking force and clarity, a redefinition for itself, a new cultural construct within the body of its subject, or bearer, Ness 1992, 5.

Through learning modalities of movements, there is this body assimilation and transformation through acquiring new movements and hence, providing the individual with a wider and distinctive self-conscience. Thus, through integrating new ways of feeling in the body and moving the body, there is a cultural embodiment that takes place. I should point out that this is even more the case when you embody a dance form that is “foreign” to your cultural background, or foreign to the individual’s habitus. This process of acculturation entails a lot of work when an individual is in the process of acquiring new ways of dancing that have their bases within a culture other than his or her own. In this instance, as Marianne, a professional dancer from Québec, pointed out, you need to work twice as hard in order to achieve a certain level of “proficiency”:

A funny thing is that in Andalusia, you will go rehearse at the studio and people look at you and ask “what are you going to do? You should rather come have a drink with us!” They are so relaxed and easy going, their time is so elastic. Of course, during 20 years while I was in Québec, they were dancing all the time. It’s obvious that I had to work twice as hard [...] I was not born into it, I started to learn at 19-20 years of age, they have 20 years ahead over me. You see the little girls coming out of school with their flamenco shoes and their castanets going to learn how to dance the sevillanas. You see babies that already clap their hands, it’s really cultural! And even if you live there, I think that any serious flamenco dancer has to go live there for some time since in their way of talking and their everyday gestures you can see flamenco movements.⁸¹

Above, Marianne refers to the need that she felt to work very hard and spend long hours in the studio in order to embody flamenco dance in a shorter period of time compared to her local friends in Seville. She also describes to what degree flamenco gestures are embedded in the local culture, something that she was not familiar with before having lived there - which was also the case, of course, for all my informants, and for myself. I remember my first trip to Seville two years ago when I noticed how much flamenco dance and the local everyday life were intrinsically intertwined. I could see in people’s everyday gestures and

⁸¹ Interview excerpt from Gagnon, Élodie (*Macadam Tribus*, Radio-Canada).

“intense” or seemingly “defiant” gaze - when they speak or look at you - the relationship with a recurrent “flamenco attitude” that flamenco performers tend to display.

Many international dancers have shared with me this concern about developing the “flamenco attitude” such as May, a Vancouver-born, who lives in Montreal. Because she says that she is a shy or rather introverted person, developing an attitude that will draw the audience’s attention to her is a difficult thing to do. It is also what people expect from a flamenco dancer since more than the “traditional costumes” and technical proficiency, a flamenco dancer is expected to show confidence and pride.

The gaze is also an important feature of this ‘flamenco attitude’. In the gypsy culture, to look at one person directly in the eyes is a sign of respect (Pasqualino 1998, 110). According to Pasqualino, the dancer’s gaze must be real; it is the expression of his or her real feelings (*ibid*). As May mentioned to me, she needs to find the right attitude that will suit her dancing style. Hence, to display a ‘profound’ and ‘honest’ gaze seems to form an integral part of the ‘*actitud flamenca*’.

Regarding this so-called “flamenco attitude”, I remember a conversation I had with Lote, the Belgian dancer who spent two years with her children in Jerez de la Frontera (and who made several other trips to Spain) in order to learn flamenco. It took place in a *peña*⁸² in Seville, right after a show featuring two “foreign” female dancers - a Polish and an American - as well as a French guitar player. Referring to the show as an example, Lote made a general comment about international flamenco artists who are often shy and reserved while performing. She was including herself in her comment, and I agreed right away since, as I mentioned previously, others had already shared this concern with me. This is not to say that Spanish flamenco dancers are never shy or introverted when they perform, it is something that all artists, and especially dancers, have to work on. However, reaching a certain level of self-confidence and focus while performing might be something that non-Spanish dancers have to

⁸² Small venue (usually a bar or café) for flamenco performances.

work on even more, especially in terms of enacting this gaze which is so specific to flamenco culture.

Furthermore, facial expressions are also an integral part of this ‘flamenco attitude’. Many dancers tend to use a lot of those distinctive facial expressions, and even exaggerate them compared to other dancers. Mélanie, a French dancer who had been living in Jerez de la Frontera for a year, told me that she decided to stop studying with a specific teacher since she was starting to use facial expressions that her teacher made constantly while dancing. She did not like being aware of using such facial expressions, partly due to her personal taste but also because she did not “feel real”. In the same interview for Radio-Canada, Marianne mentions that the first time that she became aware of flamenco was in a movie called *La Belle Histoire* by Claude Lelouch (1992) where she saw little girls making faces while dancing. Actually, those images of the little girls grimacing did not appeal to Marianne, who found it strange and unattractive. On the other hand, I have seen many non-Spanish dancers adopt such facial expressions while dancing either in the classroom or on stage. I must admit that I have come to embody certain facial expressions particular to flamenco when I perform, although most of the time I am not necessarily conscious of making them. I have also realized that, rather than forming part of the interpretation, the gaze and “flamenco facial expressions” (hence, the “flamenco attitude”) help the dancer remain focused in his or her performance⁸³. Indeed, I remember that María Isabel kept on telling a German student to dance with “more attitude” than she was: *angrier, more aggressive!*

As Marianne mentioned, flamenco gestures are present in the everyday local life. Likewise, there is a certain recurring *way of behaving* which might be hard to incorporate for someone not familiar with the cultural context. This is also why many students, including May who has not been there yet, to believe that it is helpful, for some even necessary to go to Spain in order to immerse themselves in the flamenco culture, particularly to get “closer” to that *attitude*.

⁸³ Nathalie, a dancer from Montreal, told me on interview that the gaze helped her to concentrate on her performance while she was dancing.

Regardless of whether dancers adopt this flamenco attitude or not, and whether or not they use facial flamenco expressions on different levels, what is crucial in the interpretation, according to many such as Toni (a teacher from Seville), is the “*pellizco*”. *El pellizco* is hard to define. Although it cannot be translated literally, “pellizco” means “pinch” and I believe it refers to the image of dancers being pinched by the rhythm: how the music produces the sensation of pinches on their bodies. *El pellizco* could also be seen as “body groove”. More than flamenco gestures and technical virtuosity, the *pellizco* is the key to an outstanding performance. To show *pellizco* is to “have good *compás*” (good rhythm) plus a “little something” that shows a complete symbiosis with the music and the dancer’s body, moving with grace and delight. In interview, Toni mentioned that in general, Japanese and Costa Ricans dancers are very good technically, although they would often lack this *pellizco* in their interpretation.

I have found that this “body groove” is very important in other dances or bodily practices - including playing music and doing sports - such as in salsa where it is often referred as “*el sabor*”, or as “*ginga*” in Brazilian football and capoeira⁸⁴. I would also argue that what is often stereotypically referred as “to have rhythm in the blood” or “to possess dance in the genes” are metaphors to indicate such “body groove” phenomena.

The *pellizco* or “body groove” is rooted in movement which flows or ‘swing’ with the rhythm, often simultaneously producing pleasurable sensations. However, it is not necessary to go to Spain in order to embody this notion of *pellizco*, although it might greatly help, of course. I believe that learning flamenco dance in Spain was a decisive factor in the embodiment of these two Japanese young women whom I saw perform with tremendous energy and *pellizco*. Nonetheless, today more than ever, the variety of music CDs and show videos (featuring flamenco performances) are great tools to work with in order to internalize

⁸⁴ Although each of these concepts (*pellizco*, *ginga* or *el sabor*) have their own particular meanings since they are culturally constructed and thus, are distinct, they are often linked with the notion of “blood”. For a deeper analysis of the *ginga*, see Margaret Willson’s article “Designs of Deception: Concepts of Consciousness, Spirituality and Survival in Capoeira Angola in Salvador, Brazil” (2001). Unfortunately, I was unable to find any significant work either on the *pellizco* or on *el sabor* that would analyze these specific concepts.

the rhythm. Thus, to come to feel and enact *el pellizco* is a cultural transformation from within, one that requires even more work than for someone who would have been immersed in the flamenco culture since early childhood.

Therefore, to learn to dance is an indwelling process that involves at the same time a cultural transformation from within. This cultural transformation is present in the dancer's everyday life; thus, it is not exclusively present in the dancing moments. I have observed and been told on many occasions that my cultural transformation (or flamenco embodiment) is apparent in my everyday posture and gestures. It is in the way I stand and express myself, it is even in the way I clap my hands. It is strange that no matter how hard I try to clap my hands in the way I used to, I am unable to clap them without having this 'flamenco touch'. As well, I am much more aware of what I do, of my everyday gestures, even the way I walk. I developed an awareness of my body-use patterns that come with a constant dance learning and exploring. Hence, my cultural transformation as a flamenco dancer is not only present when I perform, but also in my everyday life activities. My embodiment as a flamenco dancer is inseparable from 'I'. Through the same bodily awareness or reflexivity, I am expanding my body hexis by integrating new ways of moving, expressing and feeling in the body.

Conclusion

Pietrobruno claims that for someone who learns to dance in a lived dance context, the movements and expressions are often being taught indirectly through the corporeal language of the body of everyday life (2006, 113). Likewise, a child 'may be formally taught specific footwork and turn patterns', but "body isolations, [including facial expressions and gaze], are picked up by experiencing the family dance culture, similar to how we acquire everyday gestures" (2006, 114). Therefore, this apparent "naturalness" in performing a dance is due to an 'extensive "informal" training' (2006, 130-131). But when flamenco dance is 'brought' to a new setting, often just a few elements are selected. And as a first impression, these elements may be perceived as exotic by many initiates. Pietrobruno explains that the posturing and body isolations of a dance "cannot be easily reproduced, as these corporealities are a product

of the years of acquired knowledge and informal practice that an individual garners from being part of a culture. Consequently, those elements that render the dance “authentic”, [including the attitude and *pellizco* in the case of flamenco], can often never be fully seized” (Pietrobruno 2006, 117). Therefore, the cultural context in which a dance is embodied is crucial; i.e. in the way and extent to which the dance is embodied. However, the transplanting of a dance into new contextual settings may transform the dance, even produce what Osumare (2002) has called “intercultural bodies”. It seems that local dancing styles and other bodily practices influence how flamenco is performed in locations outside of Spain.

Chapter 5

Marketable flamenco and its stakes on non-Spanish dancers' careers

Most of the individuals I met who wished to make a dancer's career viewed this in terms of their own home country; very few thought of trying a flamenco dance career in the Spanish context. Many reasons are weighing in this situation, such as the already high competitive level among dancers in Spain, and the precarious state of flamenco dance overall. Furthermore, notions of authenticity are often linked with national, regional and ethnic identities, thus playing a significant role in the marketing of flamenco performance. Hence, being Spanish, Andalusian and/or gypsy have become the most marketable identities, which place international dancers at a disadvantage. These marketable identities are linked to flamenco's history and traditions, of course, but they are also based on essentialist notions: on ideological notions of "being born dancing". Such is the case of the *gitanismo* discourse, which attributes authenticity to gypsy performers because of their supposedly "natural abilities" (Hayes 2003, 108).

Consequently, there would also exist a hierarchy among international dancers based on national identity as we shall see. Actually, these discursive practices on authenticity, especially the gypsiness invocation in flamenco, have an impact on professional dancers outside of Spain as well. The aura of authenticity takes many forms based on different criteria, among them the notions of identity and the outward appearance comes into play, since dance is a domain where the *body matters* significantly.

Of Authenticity or "flamenco puro" and the gypsiness invocation

In flamenco, as well as in any dance and musical genre, there are a lot of different and often combined criteria in order to judge a performance as 'authentic'⁸⁵: thus, their degree of presence will ultimately establish a performance with either great value or less value. Of course, as we have seen, many of these criteria are based on the level of mastery, both

⁸⁵ Note that tradition and authenticity are often combined and interchanged.

technical (including musical) and artistic, that performers display. But more than that, who decides what kind of flamenco is appropriate and a “*valeur sûre*” inevitably has a big role in the ‘authentic’ flamenco’s construction and refashioning. There is a plethora of voices which participate in identifying and judging flamenco performances, among them not only the artists themselves, but flamencologists and cultural critics, as well as aficionados and scholars - often historians and musicologists (Chuse 2003, Hayes 2003).

The value of a flamenco performance can be alternately viewed and judged through distinct criteria along with the artistic and technical mastery, such as: the spontaneity and improvisational content; if it is performed according to “real” feelings; according to the interpretation that the performer gives it in his or her own life (personal style and way of applying flamenco in life); if it is the ‘recognizable’ traditional way of performing flamenco (within the *cuadro* and using appropriate dressing etiquette), thus, respecting the roots spectrum. Often, there is also a strong distinction made between private flamenco among *aficionados* (thus authentic) and commercial flamenco (for a tourist audience, thus less valuable)⁸⁶.

Another kind of discourse which is often present in many performing arts surrounds the need to have suffered to be able to ‘do it real’. In the case of flamenco, this discourse around suffering and authenticity is tied to class and ethnicity, referring particularly to gypsies. Likewise, a common essentialist discourse attributes the “flamenco puro” to the gypsies. According to Nancy Thede, being gypsy in the flamenco world is a guarantee of quality, even of genius (Thede 1998, 94).

Hence, there has been an ongoing debate concerning the attribution of flamenco’s origins between two main groups: the Gypsies and the *Payos* (Spanish non-gypsies). The debate around the extent to how much of flamenco is gypsy and how much is *payo* (sometimes referred as Andalusian) is linked to wider historical and identity processes⁸⁷. Consequently, a hierarchy exists among flamenco performers and aficionados based on

⁸⁶ Washabaugh (1995 and 1998). This last aspect applies especially to the Spanish context.

⁸⁷ See Chuse (2003) and Mitchell (1994).

essentialist and national distinctions: 1) Gypsies and Andalusians; 2) Other Spaniards; 3) Latin Americans; 4) All others.⁸⁸ In examining the perception towards non-Spanish flamenco artists during the 1960s, Donn Pohren (1988) wrote the following:

The non-Spanish aficionado should be warned of one thing – regardless of his proficiency in performing flamenco, or his accumulation of knowledge about flamenco, he will always be thought of, and referred to, as that fellow who performs well, or knows a lot, considering he is a foreigner. Rarely, will he be accepted on the level of the andaluz. This is due to a rooted belief that only the andaluces can perform, or even understand, flamenco properly. This belief is so strongly embedded in the nature of the andaluz that, even if disproven through discussion or performance, it remains intact (Pohren 1988, 82).

Although there has been a growing number of aficionados from around the world who go to Spain in order to learn and improve their practice, they still have to negotiate these identity issues in which the Spanish identify themselves as the ones who perform and understand flamenco the best (Leclerc 2006). And this is even more the case when non-Spanish aficionados try to make a career in Spain. As Chuse (2003) points out, “this [*gitano*] discourse continues to have a great deal of clout and cultural capital, among Andalusians and foreigners alike” (Chuse 2003, 274).

According to Hayes, there is a danger in attributing the dancing ability to a group of people as natural. She argues that “to suggest, however, that gypsies perform flamenco as a spontaneous expression of their blood runs dangerously close to the myth that African Americans are born with the ability to dance” (Hayes 2003, 108). Moreover, this ‘racist’ assumption, according to Hayes, “is further developed and reproduced by those flamenco artists, Spanish and non-Spanish, who insist that “true” flamenco (always the desired goal of any performance) can only be accomplished by people with a specific racial heritage” (*ibid*). Thus, the *gitano* discourse has an impact beyond Spain’s boundaries and may affect the non-Spanish dancers’ careers to some extent.

These discursive practices claiming authenticity which are inextricably bound to notions of nationality and ethnicity have an impact on the social fields in which dancers

⁸⁸ Pohren (1988, 82).

move, especially the cultural and market fields. Publicity selling flamenco shows everywhere will use romanticized and exotic ideas about flamenco through words such as *passion*, *fire*, *pure*, *traditional* and sometimes *flamenco de raza* (racial flamenco) and *gypsy*. Because the main field in which professional dancers make their career is the marketplace⁸⁹, such discursive practices have a strong impact on their career trajectories, especially on non-Spanish dancers. I would therefore like to examine the impact of such discursive practices on what is recognized and claimed as 'authentic' or 'pure' flamenco, especially those based on ethnic and national constructs.

Making a career as a flamenco dancer: Spain and elsewhere

It's not because we are not Spanish that it cannot be good! Marianne, dancer, Montreal.

Marianne made this comment to me some time before she went to perform in New York at the 2006 International Flamenco Festival, probably anticipating her reception as a non-Spanish artist among some of the most famous flamenco artists of this time. Despite her apprehension, it went very well and Marianne was happy with both her performance and reception.

While flamenco depends a lot on its international audience to be able to survive and evolve as an 'art form'⁹⁰, the international aficionados that visit Spain (especially Andalusia) to learn flamenco and try to make a local career as flamenco artists may be disappointed if they experience exclusion from the flamenco milieu. Although things are starting to change slowly and some foreigners are incorporated into flamenco dance companies and *tablaos*⁹¹, they are still considered exceptions. The potential "threat" that those international flamenco artists might represent in terms of economical and political considerations may be a sufficient motive for many Gypsies and *Payos* (Spanish but non-gypsies) to want to "protect" their

⁸⁹ Bourdieu's notion of social fields influencing practice (and habitus) where the ultimate determining field is the "market".

⁹⁰ Who might identify flamenco as art is another problematic issue. Historically, flamenco was ranked as art through its transition from the taverns to the theatres and foremost by the "Concurso del cante jondo" organized in 1922 by the poet Federico Garcia Lorca and composer Manuel de Falla (Chuse 2003).

⁹¹ Typical flamenco venues such as bars and small theatres.

“own art” by keeping it amongst themselves. In doing so, they are supported by many aficionados - often qualified as ‘purists’ - who help legitimize the discourse around the “pure, authentic flamenco”. As Radano and Bohlman point out, even musicologists have contributed to legitimizing and fueling the discourse (bound by stereotypes and prejudices) around the “naturally rhythmic” Gypsies (Radano and Bohlman 2000, 6).

Marianne’s story is particular since she has lived and worked as a flamenco dancer in Spain (Seville) during six years. Here is what she had to say about her experience during an interview with Radio-Canada⁹²:

Nowadays it is starting to change, there is much more openness towards foreigners, and even pride coming from the fact that we [foreigners] like it [flamenco], although they protect themselves too. They will tell you: “anyway, you are not Spanish” or even after a show, they will come to congratulate you and realize that you have an accent. Suddenly, you don’t dance as good just because you are not Spanish, which in part is true. I was not born in it [flamenco], I started to learn flamenco at 19-20 years of age. They have 20 years ahead over me.

Marianne’s ambivalent attitude (both respectful and challenging) is quite representative of other dancers’ views that I have encountered. While many have a strong respect for flamenco’s origins (whether they acknowledge it as fully or only partially true), many non-Spanish dancers have a hard time relating to the “ethnic” discourse, even outside of Spain:

It is hard looking like flamenca. The outward appearance: gypsy, Spanish, the dress, it makes it easier to get gigs. That’s what people expect. May, Montreal.

On the other hand, Zoé, who is also from Québec (Montréal), has a somewhat different and more ‘positive’ experience as a flamenco dancer living in Seville for the last five years (and in Madrid for two years prior to that). Zoé told me that she had been able to live exclusively from her flamenco practice for two years. After a short dance career with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, she has had the great opportunity to live and work with flamenco musicians in Spain. This has allowed her to work continuously on embodying the compás and

⁹² Gagnon, Élodie (*Macadam Tribus*, Radio-Canada)

musical subtleties of the different *palos*. Along with watching videos and listening to CDs, Zoé has learned much by attending flamenco shows. Nevertheless, she admits that she never had personal expectations in terms of career objectives; rather, she always had artistic goals. She believes that what is important is to keep on exploring and working on artistic research: *the rest comes on its own and we must not provoke it*. Zoé also believes that her prior ballet training has served and continues to serve her flamenco dancing a lot. However, it is only recently that she has become aware of how present and useful it is in her practice.

Both Marianne and Zoé have been dancing in local *tablaos* as well as within companies with renowned artists. However, Marianne told me that often she would not be picked at an audition mainly because of her height; she was often much taller than the typical Andalusian female dancer, thus contrasting with the others on stage.

Zoé had to work for some time in a bar in order to “survive”. It is only recently that she has been able to teach in Seville and live from it. She actually enjoys teaching very much. At the time we met for the interview (October, 2005), she had just presented her new duo project on the previous night and this has been a great success. She was very pleased with her experience, and filled with renewed energy and motivation to continue with that show and other possible new ones.

The professional experience of these two dancers in Spain is quite remarkable, and is due in great part to the high level of mastery that they both display. It is even more remarkable due to the fact that in Spain the competition level between artists is highest, thus making it more arduous for non-Spanish artists to “make their own space”. In dealing with the high technical level and increasing number of artists, non-Spanish dancers also have to cope with discourses and prejudices that tend to devalue their level of proficiency.

However, it is not only in Spain that these preconceived ideas have an influence on the trajectory of non-Spanish flamenco artists. Since Spanish names and symbolic references are likely to sell more, many artists adopt new names as well as exotic references in their titles to advertise their productions. In fact, Marianne once told me that when she was living in France, a producer advised her to change her name to a Spanish one in order to be more

‘marketable’. In Montreal, things are a little different since artists tend to keep their real names and do not announce shows as authentic, although they tend to use ‘traditional’ costumes, which is also something that audiences expect.

The link between national or ethnic constructs and the dance form is quite powerful and goes beyond national boundaries. In one of the first flamenco classes I took in Mexico City, the teacher told us that we could all become good flamenco dancers since “we all had Spanish blood to some extent in our veins”. Of course, as the only foreigner in the class, I felt a little unnerved by this comment, and started to think about my own cultural and biological background in relation to my aim of becoming a flamenco dancer.

In fact, music, and especially dance *as a discourse of the body* may be especially vulnerable to interpretation in terms of essentialized identities associated with biological difference such as “race” and gender (Desmond 1994, 42). Indeed, the discourse around the stereotype of “having the rhythm in the blood” in music as well as in dance is recurrent throughout the world (Wieschiolek 2003; Desmond 1994; Radano and Bohlman 2000). In the actual ‘globalized’ world, ‘race’ or ethnicity is one of the most enduring factors contributing to the formation of musical and dance difference (Radano and Bohlman, 10).

In relation to this point, I have met very few non-Spanish dancers who were hoping or trying to make a career in Spain. Actually, it seems to be rare that non-Spanish dancers even think of wanting to make a career over there. Interestingly, this was also the case of Zoé who has remained focused on the learning process rather than on career expectations. Thus, the primary reason that draws international aficionados to Spain remains the learning experience.

To focus now on the economical aspect of making a dance career in flamenco, it remains a precarious and often underpaid career choice, be it in Spain or elsewhere. The Spanish state does not seem to encourage small productions and young upcoming artists, preferring to finance bigger commercial productions that guarantee sales revenues. As Claudia, a Spanish dancer from Valencia used to say, it is hard to be an artist and live from your art. That is why Claudia cannot live from flamenco exclusively, although it contributes

to monthly cost of living. And as Kyon admitted in interview: *I prefer to dance, but I have to eat!*

However, it also seems that some places allocate better money to flamenco performances than other places, such as Belgium, France and Japan. According to Lote living in Brussels, she usually gets well-paid when she performs. However, the recurring problem lies in finding musicians and especially singers, as seems to be the case everywhere outside of Spain. Aldo complained about the fact that since there are no singers in Rome, he has to finance the train tickets in order to be able to perform along with a singer, making it even harder to rehearse with one. On the other hand, Mélanie, who mentioned to me that “it pays well in France”, is luckier in having a group of musicians along with another male dancer at home. Mélanie also gets a lot of support from her family.

It is becoming quite common for flamenco artists, even non-Spanish ones, to go to Japan either to teach or to perform since it is well-paid. I even read in interview articles with famous artists that flamenco in Japan is much more valued than in Spain. I also met a young Mexican woman who was about to leave for Japan for three months where she was going to work as a teacher and dance in a *tablao* once a week. She was due to design six choreographies for the classes she would teach over there. Zoé has also been dancing in a *tablao* in Japan for six months.

Whether in Spain or elsewhere, many dancers start giving lessons alongside a performing career in order to “survive till the end of the month”. In Montreal, however, only a few flamenco dancers are able to manage from teaching and performing exclusively. Hence, many shared their frustrations about the lack of performance opportunities, including lack of venues and reasonable income. A dancer I spoke to recently told me how ‘fed up’ she felt about the badly-paid contracts which are common when performing in restaurants and bars in Montreal.

Therefore, others might deliberately choose to pursue other work projects along with a flamenco dance career such as a Japanese woman I met. During a conversation in Seville, Mai said that she wished to eventually practice flamenco back in Japan, although she did not

want to do that exclusively since she needed to do other things and did not want to depend solely on flamenco revenues.

Finding Your Own Style or Way of Applying Flamenco to Your Context

As was previously mentioned, finding your own style as a flamenco dancer is something that is valued and expected, especially as promoted in the Andalusian way of dancing flamenco. Thus, many non-Spanish dancers will try to develop their own style within the parameters of ‘traditional flamenco’, i.e. within the *cuadro*. On the other hand, even though many try to apply what they have learned to their own context, performing traditional flamenco is not always possible because of the lack of musicians and singers who know the “language”. Finding your own style or way of applying flamenco is not obvious for several reasons, such as wanting to find a link with your cultural background and personality, instead of just “copying”. Thus, for Lote, finding her unique way of applying flamenco in her life had become a necessity:

It is like two worlds. The real flamencas don't have anything in common with me, how they dress, the pop music they listen to [...] it will never be real, I just copy. What is the Belgium culture? Classical music? I want to find something personal, special, not exclusively flamenco. I am jealous of my friend who is mixing flamenco with street theatre [...] I feel good when I dance the bulería de Jerez, when I can play the tonta [fool], that's my style! [...] For the last year I have had my own group of dancers and two guitar players. We perform in the street. I even have started to sing since there are no singers.

In interview, Lote shared her concern about finding something that would link her culture with flamenco so that it would become more personal and hence, more ‘authentic’. She also had to find a way to cope with the lack of singers, thus, she chose to sing herself. As I was able to observe and hear from other conversations, many non-Spanish dancers are concerned with finding a link between what they already know from their previous cultural background, with exploring and mixing with other performing arts forms. Although she did not know where it would take her, Kyon told me that she had had a kind of revelation as she could now clearly see (and hear) the link between Korean folklore and flamenco, especially

among the sadder *palos*. Kyon wished to do something related to flamenco, and she had even started to take *cajón*⁹³ lessons.

Although the ‘Andalusian style’ seems to be predominant among dancers in Montreal, some artists are trying to bring their own personal touch:

I like the variety in flamenco, I like the fusion with other music and dances, but it is important to know the tradition, to know where it [flamenco] comes from. [...] I prefer to dance with pants though I want to explore more my femininity, but it's hard! May, Montreal.

May and I shared a common experience in participating in a project with other dancers through mixing flamenco and Haitian dance styles. May would like to pursue such collaborations. She would also like to explore other dance forms, such as break dance and African dances in order to enrich her flamenco dancing style. However, she believes that it is important to always keep an eye on the ‘tradition’ in order to understand and respect flamenco’s origins.

I also met with a Mexican contemporary dancer in Seville who wished to be able to mix flamenco dancing with African styles that he already practiced, particularly making use of gum boots. Hence, others use their previous dancing experience or look for alternatives, such as theatre and poetry, sometimes even experimenting with different musical styles. It is a phenomenon that has also been taking place in Spain. This indicates a self-quest at a personal level, as well as looking for new ways of expression in order to enrich the flamenco genre. In doing so, artists are actively engaged in the debate around tradition and are redefining its practice each time they perform.

However, even though most of the dancers I know try to apply the flamenco style(s) they have learned in Spain since they view to it as the “real way”, there are a few dancers who wish to pursue the flamenco training they were already receiving back home. For example, Elisa still loved the bolero school style taught in her school in Zurich and wished to carry on that direction. She believed that both ways of doing flamenco, the one she encountered in

⁹³ Wooden box that now serves as the main percussive instrument along with *palmas*. Originally part of the Afro-Peruvian music, the *cajón* was introduced recently into flamenco and was made popular mainly by Manuel Soler and Paco de Lucia.

Seville and the other 'more classical' style in Zurich, enriched her dancing technically as well as emotionally.

Conclusion

Because many professional dancers have to deal with a very different context to the Spanish one, i.e. one where there are very few flamenco musicians for instance, dancers have to find new ways of making flamenco according to their local context. This serves as a good example of the dynamics between Bourdieu's notion of the field - especially the cultural and market fields - and habitus, where the dancers' reflexive habitus allows them to *strategically* choose to refashion their flamenco practice into a 'better adapted' one. Hence, the habitus can be transformed when perceptions and dispositions are "ill-adapted because they are attuned to an earlier state of the objective conditions" (Bourdieu 1986, 109; in Wainwright et al. 2006, 552). According to Bourdieu, the disjunction between habitus and field can lead to "a site of explosive forces which may await the opportunity to break out" (Bourdieu 1993a, 87). This is often the phenomenon for dancers who would like to apply flamenco as they have learned it, but have a hard time in doing so because they have to deal with issues such as the lack of musicians and audiences who are often not familiar with the flamenco language. However, I believe that the space provided, together with the impetus to find a personal style in flamenco, has a positive effect for these professional dancers in dealing with such issues: from one point of view, this is how "authenticity" continues to be guaranteed.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to illustrate and analyze the *modus operandi* by which individuals learn to incorporate a dance form which is not present in their everyday culture. I chose to take flamenco since it is a familiar case study for me. I wished to examine and render explicit such apprenticeship at the *level of the body*, without leaving aside the complexity of this process. This has been very challenging for me since, often, I did not possess sufficient or accurate theoretical background to verbalize the deep-corporeal phenomenon that I was aware of. Even though I don't claim to have resolved the epistemological problems related to body cognition that dance entails⁹⁴, I nonetheless strongly believe that some theoretical concepts such as "habitus" (Bourdieu), "mètis" (Faure), "body groove" and my own elaborated "dance embodiment" conceptual basis have been effective tools in translating and analyzing the incorporative processes that learning to dance involves.

Indeed, dance cognition entails an indwelling process through observation, performance and reflection upon experiencing (including imagination). Because dance cognition is an inter-relational learning process (principally through psychomotor socialization patterns), context - that is, place and time - are determinant in the internalizing of both movement styles, and aesthetic codes of the dance. Thus, the contextual learning settings are determinant in embodying and developing what counts as the physical capital (technical abilities) and the artistic capital (embodied cultural knowledge, including discursive practices) that eventually form part of the dancer's habitus.

On the other hand, because dance is a highly reflexive kind of activity, the dancer's acquired mètis allows him or her to strategically adapt to different situations, such as during unforeseen events on stage or in relation to performance settings other than those within the "dance lived context". This is often the case for non-Spanish dancers who have to adapt their practice of flamenco to their own context. Furthermore, when a dance form is brought to other settings, there is often a selection of some movement modalities over others (including

⁹⁴ Actually, I believe that such research enterprise should be interdisciplinary, in order to really give the seriousness and rigor which the dance cognition's complexity deserves.

attitude, facial expression and “body groove”). Moreover, the lack of structural components (such as the lack of flamenco musicians and the absence of the ‘knowing-how’ of dance dynamics) complicates the learning and performing of the dance. On the other hand, the influence of the dance history and dancing styles from other places can constitute an advantage for these dancers in coping with local “deficits” specific to flamenco.

One of the main goals of this thesis was to contribute to the anthropology of dance, and to human knowledge overall, through demystifying the still very common association between dancing abilities and biological issues. The apparent naturalness for many Spanish flamenco dancers of their dance practice mostly results from extensive informal training throughout their lives, whereas the challenge for non-Spanish dancers lies in the rather formal context that they move in at a later stage in their lives. On the other hand, while the learning process under such circumstances is made more complicated and requires more work - implicit within the process is also the emotional experience which is often very challenging - it is also a satisfying endeavor for these dancers: otherwise such a path would not be undertaken. This phenomenon of emotional satisfaction extends far beyond the realm of flamenco and thus indicates the value of its study and exploration: people are attracted to many performing arts, and decide to practice them seriously, going through challenging cultural experiences which allow them to step out from the mundane everyday life and express themselves differently.

Finally, I also wished to give voice to a marginal yet growing group of people who decide to dedicate their time and energy to an apparently unproductive and ephemeral activity, which is nonetheless very enriching and fulfilling on many levels. In choosing to study and practice flamenco dance, many people are confronted with several challenges, both along the learning and – eventually – the career-making trajectories. I believe that it will always be important to study popular arts such as dance, both for the potential they have for being agents for social change, as well as for the power they have in transforming individual practitioners through the profound broadening of cultural and personal horizons. Hence,

globalization can be seen to be about also being in contact with other cultural and artistic activities which both transform, and are transformed by, the individuals who practice them.

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