Once in movement she leads the dance
Dance as an empowering practice for migrant women

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Contents

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Introduction

I want to start my thesis by explaining my title – 'Once in movement she leads the dance' – which I took from a quote I found on the web page of Atol[1], a Belgian nongovernmental organization for developmental collaboration in South Africa. On the web page the quote follows a definition of empowerment. It is in my opinion a powerful quote, because it creates an intersection between empowerment, movement (embodiment and dance), gender, control and cooperation. This intersection is exactly my point of interest, for I wish to explore the ways in which dance can play a role in the empowerment of migrant women in Belgian society. My assumption is that empowerment is an important approach to tackle problematic issues, such as inequality, negative self image, undervaluation, discrimination, division and lack of self-awareness.

During my master in Gender Studies I came into contact with different lines of thought on the level of the body and I touched upon various concepts, such as empowerment, embodiment, gender, ethnicity, diversity, intersectionality and inter-disciplinarity. Learning more about these concepts and the discussions around them, I felt this gave me the opportunity to take up, in an academic manner, my question how the practice of dance can function as a way to empower. In dancing, a movement is not confined to physicality, but creates an interaction between a person and his/her environment, and between the body and the mind. This interplay with the environment and heightening of consciousness of the body made me wonder how dance can have an impact on other aspects of society, and how the individual body can merge with other bodies around it, creating a collective body that can interact and affect the broader society. Because, if I can become aware of my own body and the power it generates through dance, then dance might be able to evoke an empowerment in others as well, as individuals or as a collective of people dancing;

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[1] http://www.atol.be/nl/content/organisatieversterking (last accessed 2010-05-18).

that might then stir an empowerment of society as a whole.

My motivation to dig into this subject grew even more when I read the advice 'mind your body and embody your mind' in the thesis manual (Åsberg, n.d.; p. 15), because this is exactly what I believe dance can do. An important frame of thinking for me hereby stems from the post-Kuhnian revolution – organized by Harding and others – in which science is perceived from its socio-historical context and social activity, and performed by a specific group of people (Wekker, 2007). According to Harding (1998), knowledge is situated and subjective and can therefore never be neutral or universal. In order to come to a more objective standpoint, then, one has to take into account the various (oppositional) positions of the different people involved, critically regard one's own position and take responsibility for it.

To be able to say something about dance in relation to the empowerment of migrant women, I have to become aware of my own perspective and how my background affects my position, and of the standpoints and backgrounds of the actors involved in the project. I am a Dutch, 23 year old, white, heterosexual woman. I grew up in the Netherlands in a family tolerant of otherness, and I went to a public primary school[2] and a public secondary school. I did a bachelor in Social Psychology and am now finishing my master in Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics. In my life I have always loved to dance, in different styles and to different kinds of music. I have danced classical ballet during my childhood and I have danced flamenco since I was twelve years old. Besides these styles of dancing I took dance classes in many different styles of dance, such as street-dance, belly-dancing, modern dancing, salsa, and so forth. Dancing made me aware of my attitude and feelings, and it gave me the possibility to express them. For me, to dance is to feel, to let go and to let things be. Through dancing, but also through my education and my travelling, I have always had an open attitude towards multiculturality and immigration. Cultures with different customs, traditions and beliefs fascinate me and I am interested in increasing my knowledge about them. When I am in a different culture and/or in interaction with people from non-Dutch origin[3] and other communities than my own, I generally have an open, tolerant and positive attitude that I try to maintain, and I thereby pursue to step aside from stereotypical and generalizing characterizations.

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[2]This is a primary school that was set up by my mother and some other parents. She preferred me to go to a public school rather than a catholic school, because of the confinements of the latter to religion and the narrow-mindedness and low tolerance towards other groups in our society.

[3]With one's origin I am referring to a person's socio-cultural or ethnical background.

Besides my own positioning, I have to take into account the position of others involved in the project 'Thee in de Coulissen'[4] – the project by Lasso that I supervised during my internship – and become aware of the background of these migrant women and bear in mind how they position themselves towards dance, Belgian society and other aspects that influence the context. In this paper I will pick up the discussion from the perspective of the actors in the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' by Lasso, where I took my internship. These actors are: the women who participated in the dance atelier (the target group[5]); the professional artists[6]; the teacher of the dance atelier (Sarah Avçi); the supervisor of the project (who works for Lasso: Leen de Spiegelaere); and the Flemish Government. An awareness and validation of these perspectives, and also of the factors that are of influence in relation to this subject – such as ethnicity, sexuality, education and age – will be made clear in the course of this paper. This will be done by means of a critical analysis of the qualitative interviews I held with the actors of the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' and relating this to theory[7].

The first and second phase of the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' took place in four creative ateliers[8], amongst which the Oriental[9] dance atelier KAV Intercultureel.

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[4]When I am talking about a project in this paper I refer to the project 'Thee in de Coulissen', unless stated otherwise.

[5]In this paper these women will be indicated with 'the women/ participants in the project', with 'the target group' or with 'the migrant women'. Lasso selected ateliers for the project based on a variety of origins of the participants. This, however, does not say anything about the women being of white Belgian, non-white Belgian or non-Belgian origin, and whether they are the first or second (or third) generation of migrant women. De Spiegelaere (2009) said the focus is on women of diverse origin, thereby referring to non(-white) Belgian women of non-Belgian (grand)parents.

[6]The project took place with the Oriental dance atelier of KAV Intercultureel. The first time, from the end of 2009 through the beginning of 2010, the workshop was given by Laura Aris Alvarez and the second time, from September – October 2010, by Paula Opazo Osorio. I supervised the second phase of the project. The data have been gathered through interviews that I held with people involved in the second phase and interviews held by Julie Rodeyns after the first phase of the project.

[7]As I discussed before, information is situated and therefore bound to the context in which it is created or used. As the data of the interviews relate to the context of Brussels, that environment is therefore my point of focus. However, I will try to make some remarks regarding similar contexts through the analysis of literature and research that has been done in other places.

[8]A creative atelier is an atelier in which a specific type (or types) of art is being taught. This could be a cultural expression such as dance, theater, photography and fashion. A women's atelier only allows women to participate. The teacher is in this case a woman as well.

[9]Sarah Avçi calls her atelier the Oriental dance atelier and refers hereby to traditional Arab (belly) dancing. I use the same term to be consistent with her, while I am being aware of the (negative) connotations the term has. In Gender Studies this has been discussed in several courses, taking up the work of Said, for example, in which he describes a way of thinking based on an essentialist division between the East and the West; depicting the East from a Western viewpoint. I however chose to focus on other aspects and therefore I will not elaborate on that in this paper.

The aim of this project is to create a meeting between women of diverse origins[10], who are participating in creative women's ateliers in Brussels, and professional artists who work in the art sector of Brussels. Lasso thus selects the participants based on gender (women) and ethnicity (diversity of origins with a particular focus on non-Belgian citizens)[11]. And they use dance as a form of culture participation. Through supervision of the project and the workshops that took place in the Oriental dance atelier, and by personally participating in the dance classes, I had the possibility to find out the various motivations for increasing culture participation of migrant women from the perspectives of the different actors in the project. The reason for Lasso to focus on women with a non-Belgian (non-Western) background hereby reflects the idea of the Flemish Government, which thinks that many of these women experience thresholds when it comes to participating in the art sector of Brussels (I will go into a full consideration of those thresholds later). Lasso and the Flemish Government want to motivate women of non-Western origin to become more familiar and to participate more intensively in the art sector of Brussels and thereby to integrate more profoundly in Belgian society (De Spiegelaere, 2009). Their focus is on creating a change in the behavior and attitudes of the participants (Achten, 2010). Even though Lasso attempts to achieve this by conducting an exchange project in which both artists and participants learn from each other, in practice the project seems to me – as I concluded in my internship report (Achten, 2010) – to be a one-way process in which the participants have to change their attitudes and ideas, and in the long run adapt themselves to standards and ideas on art and culture that differ from their own; whereas the artist only adapts to the participants (and possible audience) during the workshop. I therefore developed an ambivalent attitude towards the project that reinforced my interest in the ability to empower people – and in this context migrant women – and (indirectly) society through dance.

In my opinion the target group – migrant women – is an interesting group. During the Genderstudies courses I learned about the double burden that non-Western women experienced during the processes of colonization. They were undervalued because of both their gender and their ethnicity. I assume that this double burden is still apparent in situations where people are discriminated based on gender and

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[10]One's origin stands for one's ethnic or socio-cultural or ethnic background.

[11]However, because the project works with creative ateliers in which Belgian participants also take part, the project aims at a 'diversity of origins' so that they will not be excluded from the atelier during the project (De Spiegelaere, 2009).

ethnicity. And as I will explain later, the Flemish Government finds that certain groups of people experience specific thresholds to participate, amongst which women and people of non-Western. As I learned in Gender Studies, both women and people of non-Western origin have been 'bound' to their bodies and emotions, and they are devalued in the opposition with men and Western (white) people, who are characterized by the capacities of the mind and rationality. I experience this valuing of the mind and rationality also in the academic world, which is a knowledge-based environment where the scientists and students generally focus on the capacities of the mind. These experiences created my desire to disassociate from this focus and explore the capacities and strengths of the body. So the goal in this paper is to gain insight into the effects of dance as an empowering practice for migrant women in Western society. This insight can provide a structured approach to and support of the empowerment of migrant women in society and indirectly of society as well. I will elaborate on the social relevance of the empowerment of migrant women in society in chapter three.

The research question is: What are the effects of dance – such as 'Thee in de Coulissen' – as an empowering practice for the participants and on society? And in order to answer this question I have divided it into the subquestions: In what ways do the actors think (and wish) that the target group participates in the art sector? And in what ways do they (un)consciously make use of the empowerment function of dance in the project?

In my method of working I use a pragmatic-constructivist approach. Pragmatic-constructivism acknowledges the influence of the context ('situatedness' or 'politics of location') and values change and transformation. I focus on 'the interaction and transaction between people and their socio-cultural environment' (Dusschooten- de Maat, 2004; p 156). My attitude is active, social and creative. I work in varied ways – both individually (thinking, reading, writing, reflecting, and so forth) and in relation with other people (interviewing and discussing) – and I thereby try to think of new ways to construct knowledge. I am aware that this takes up a lot of time and that I constantly have to be critical that what I am receiving and producing are perspectives on the world and not universal truths. In this paper, I will critically analyze qualitative interviews with the actors in the socio-cultural field ('Thee in de Coulissen') and take them to an academic level so that I am able to discuss their

perspectives in relation to theory.

The relation between theory and practice is, in my opinion, beautifully expressed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p. viii), as she says: 'Theory allowed me to see all of these associations with fresh eyes, while concrete experiences challenged the world-views offered by theory.' And so I will use theory to become aware of how notions related to my thesis have been defined and discussed from different perspectives, and I will use the data to critically review theory. The theory concerning gender, ethnicity, embodiment and empowerment will mostly be acquired through articles and books that have been discussed in Gender Studies courses. Amongst these are *Volatile Bodies* (Grosz, 1994), *Gender in media, kunst en cultuur* (Buikema & Van der Tuin, 2007), *The Mind's Eye* (Keller & Grontowski, 1983) and Afterword: the subject and power (Foucault, 1982). Theory regarding dance, culture participation and empowerment through dance includes *Interculturele intoxicaties. Over kunst, cultuur en verschil* (Jans, 2006), *Cultuurparticipatie en maatschappelijk kwetsbare groepen* (Vos, 2003), *Thee in de Coulissen, proces en resultaten* (Rodeyns, 2009), *De kracht van dans. Dans als krachtig instrument tot empowerment en development van individuen in gemeenschappen in armoede in Zuid-Afrika* (Seynnaeve, 2008), *Dance, sex and gender. Signs of identity, dominance, defiance, and desire* (Hanna, 1988), *Moving history/ dancing cultures. A dance history reader* (Dils & Cooper Albright, 2001) and *Hindustan Lever's Shakti-project. Empowering rural Indian women. Master Thesis Development Studies* (Loman, 2006).

In the first chapter I will explain the main concepts of this paper; elaborate on culture participation and dance; and contextualize these notions to the field of this paper through the analysis of the interviews and articles produced by people in the cultural, social or political sector. I will explore the ways in which the actors (wish to) think the target group participates in culture. And I will also look at whether and how they take into consideration and negotiate these ways of thinking in (setting up) a socio-cultural project such as 'Thee in de Coulissen'.

Chapter two will treat an aspect of cultural expression that is necessary to reach empowerment, namely embodiment in dance, and what that means for the actors and for society. This includes an exploration of the different levels in which the body can be conceptualized in relation to socio-cultural aspects such as gender and ethnicity, and how this differentiation is also present in dance.

Chapter three explores the concept of empowerment by taking up the notion of

empowerment in relation to embodiment through the practice of dance. I will explore how the term is conceptualized by the actors involved in the project, which meaning it has to them and in what ways they (un)consciously make use of the empowerment function of dance in the project. I will thereby also analyze and answer the research question.

In the conclusion I will summarize the main points of this paper and give some final remarks considering this topic and thesis.

Chapter 1

Conceptualization and contextualization

'Art and culture are crisis concepts', says Jans (2006, p. 9) in his book *Interculturele intoxicaties*, for 'we do not know exactly what we mean when we use them'. What he means is that a concept that can be defined in multiple ways needs to be situated and defined in order to understand what one is referring to when using it in a particular context. To contextualize my thesis, I will start with a quick explanation of my use of the central concepts in this paper, including culture participation, the (professional) art sector, dance, embodiment and empowerment. After this brief conceptualization I will thoroughly examine culture participation and the art sector of Brussels, to situate the context of the project. And in the following chapters I will elaborate on the other central concepts.

1.1 The central concepts

Culture participation is composed of two complex concepts, each one related to a variety of interpretations. When talking about **culture** one generally refers to the customs, beliefs, norms, values, traditions and other ethnical aspects that characterize a society (Jans, 2006). However, as Jans explains, in the course of events over time a distinctive and more confined conceptualization of culture was brought forward by Matthew Arnold (1869), who saw culture as civilization that is being expressed in education, literature and art. This definition of culture comprises that what is not a primary necessity of life (such as food and shelter) and is thus often considered to be a luxury. People in the lower classes of society (people in poverty)

are therefore expected to focus on the basic human needs and are therefore permitted less engagement in art. However, in 'the new cultural politics of difference' West takes an interesting path to indicate a shift in the conceptualization of culture that changes its meaning in society, so that culture relates to 'diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity' and becomes 'specific and particular' (1990, p. 93). Culture thus has to be 'historicized, contextualized and pluralized' (1990, p. 93), because culture is not a static entity – as Arnold (1869) argues – but it is always multicultural. Culture aims at 'verbs that refer to activity, movement and change', such as 'provoking, confronting, transforming, combining and canalizing' (Jans, 2006; p. 15). Everyone is and has culture (Janssens, 2003). This conceptualization thus does away with the class fixedness of culture and the binary opposition between high and low culture, by looking at specificities and the fluidity of culture as an ever-changing concept. Corijn (2002, as cited in Vos, 2003; p. 36) distinguishes three (overlapping and intersecting) meanings that define 'folk culture' as 'a way of life, a whole of social behaviors that direct daily life'; 'cultural and artistic production'; and 'civilization, to the most general, symbolical order' (p. 159). In this paper I will make the distinction between culture as the 'whole of social behaviors that direct daily life' – thereby referring to the customs, beliefs, norms, values, traditions and other ethnical aspects that characterize a society (Jans, 2006) – and culture as a specific form of the former definition that refers to art – 'cultural and artistic production'- and everyone involved in the art sector.

The second part of the term culture participation refers to an action in public, namely **participation**. For my research I stipulate participation as taking part in the art sector. Participation in this context is determined by socio-cultural aspects that I will elaborate on in the next section. Because of my focus on embodiment in this paper, I will limit the scope of participation to physical interaction and I will not integrate other forms of participation, such as watching a performance as an audience. 'Culture participation' thus refers to the act of taking part in the cultural sector of a society, for example, by dancing in a creative atelier or by watching a play in a theater.

The **art sector** refers to the artists, organizations and institutions involved in the field of (professional) artistic performance, such as dance companies, artists, choreographers, museums, theaters, libraries, concert halls, ateliers, and so forth. This

sector focuses on the experience of art[1] and culture in a social environment via a cultural agenda that an audience can attend to. As it focuses on the specific realization of culture, namely art, it mainly aims at the recreation of people[2]. My focus is on the cultural offer[3] of the art sector of Brussels, relating to dance. I thereby primarily focus on the Oriental dance atelier of KAV Intercultureel in the project 'Thee in de Coulissen'.

'Movement becomes dance because of a variation in rhythm and speed', says Annabel van Baren (2010) in a lecture on contemporary dance for the Springdance festival in Utrecht. This variation is often related to characteristics of a culture or society and thus carries a great deal of cultural meaning. In this paper I will talk about **dance** in relation to the styles of dancing in the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' (modern dance and Oriental[4] dance); and as an expressive and performative art form that has the potential to become aware of the body and to express ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and other elements that stem from the mind, through the body. This potential is my focus point to gain insight in how dance can empower individuals and (indirectly) the society they are part of.

Embodiment argues against the idea of a separation between body and mind – which goes back to Plato and was later appropriated by Descartes and others (therefore it is also called Cartesian dualism) – but refers to the (un)conscious awareness of the mind-body integration. We perceive and conceptualize through our bodies or, as Fischer-Lichte (2008, p. 82) explains: 'the actor no longer lends his body to an exclusively mental process, but makes the mind appear through the body, thus granting the body agency'.

The last central concept is **empowerment**. In society, empowerment is generally seen as a need for people in disadvantaged positions often related to human rights, such as education, health, economic activity and representation in politics. These people are, for example, people with certain beliefs (religions), women, foreigners, detainees, and people who experience specific obstacles due to a physical or mental disability (Gesubsidieerde projecten, n.d.; Decreet: memorie van toelichting, 2008;

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[1]Art can be subdivided into a number of categories, like performing arts, craft, music and creative design. In this paper I will focus on (the performing art of) dance.

[2]But it also aims at, for example, integration, as I will explain later.

[3]'Cultural offer' refers to the Dutch term 'cultuuraanbod', a term that indicates the cultural and artistic productions, and cultural activities of the cultural sector that people can attend.

[4]See footnote eight.

Boiserie, 2008). The thresholds these people experience are diverse and relate to psychological and practical factors that are financial, social, time related, language related, political, religious, generational, emotional, related to their knowledge of and familiarity with something, and so forth (Avçi, 2009; De Spiegelaere, 2009). In this paper, I will refer to empowerment as a multi-dimensional process that is situated, subjective and social (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998, p. 6; Page & Czuba, 1999) that requires an active attitude and responsibility from the target. Page and Czuba (1999) thereby distinguish between dimensions such as the psychological, economic, political and sociological; but also between individual, group and community. Important elements are a feeling of control and an active attitude. Empowerment develops, it changes and it transforms through the course of time.

How empowerment works, how the feeling of control influences one's self esteem and how it can be beneficial to people through the practice of embodiment, will be elaborated on in chapter three, when I am talking about empowerment in relation to dance as an embodied practice. But first, I will dilate upon culture participation and its implications for the art sector of Brussels and Belgian society.

1.2   Culture participation in the art sector of Brussels and Belgian society

This paper deals with the effects of dance. Dance is a form of culture participation (De Spiegelaere, 2009). Arts and culture policies usually address culture participation to include all forms of art. I will therefore first of all explore this concept. A current assumption of the Flemish government and the art sector in Brussels and Belgian society is that participation in the art sector is a valuable contribution to the quality of life, and that participation in the art sector by a diversity of people in society promotes integration and creates a social enrichment of society (Boiserie, 2008). In this section I will explore what culture participation (and thus dance) means in the context of Brussels and the art sector of Brussels and Belgian society.

The idea of Lasso is to become aware of the wishes of women of diverse origin and use these wishes to motivate them to participate in the art sector. Although an exchange between participants and professional artist is one of the goals of the project, and although the artist is interacting with the participants, the problematic issue

for me is that the project still seems to be a one-way process. Reflecting the goal of the Flemish Government, the integration into the art sector by Lasso is part of a broader integration process of these women (and their families) into society, a process in which they have to adapt to new customs, rules and ways of living. Culture participation can have a community building and integrating function, according to De Spiegelaere (2009) and the Flemish Government (Gesubsidieerde projecten, n.d.; Decreet: memorie van toelichting, 2008; Boiserie, 2008). Integration can thereby promote interculturality[5] and, according to Bourgeois (2004) – Prime minister of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs, Domestic Policy, Integration, Tourism and 'Vlaamse Rand' – it stimulates solidarity and mutual respect. Integration, says Bourgeois, is 'an important source of renewal [...] a constant learning process of interaction, that provides space for exchange and negotiation' (2004; p. 17).

In the definition of culture as that what is produced culturally and artistically, culture participation refers to taking part in the art sector. As culture participation is defined by social behaviors that are transformed and applied in the creation of art, it is influenced and affected by socio-cultural aspects that intersect and overlap each other. These interrelated socio-cultural aspects affect how, why and when someone participates in culture, and the ways in which they are enacted differ from one culture to another (Desmond, 1997). Important socio-cultural aspects in 'Thee in de Coulissen' are gender and ethnicity. Dancers who develop a certain style of dancing may attach a certain meaning to particular movements. However, people from a different community might interpret those movements differently. An example is contact with the ground, which is done in modern dancing with the whole body by crawling, rolling, lying down, and so forth. In Oriental dancing there are different techniques that can be more grounded (lower movements concentrated to the earth) or up (directed towards the sky), but literal contact with the ground is considered as dirty and physically lowering yourself also holds subordinating yourself (Avçi, 2009). Crawling and lying on the ground are thus unthinkable. Another example is that the participants in the project considered movements performed by women in modern dancing – such as bending the pelvis forward, making movements that might be sexually arousing or performing (partly) nude – as obscene and vulgar

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[5]I here refer to 'interculturality' defined as: 'dialogue, mutual exploration and encounter between people of various ethno-cultural backgrounds' (Decreet, 2008).

(Participants, 2010)[6].

Like I said, there is also a gender distinction visible in participation in dance. In relation to the context, modern dance is danced by and for both men and women, while Oriental dance is originally danced for and by women only. The latter has to do with the connotations of the female body in Arab society, in which the female body is essentially considered to be sensual, and the (Arab) woman should therefore be careful not to emphasize this sexual connotation of her body and risking the arousal[7] of men in (if they are present) in dancing (Participants, 2010). This gender and ethnic difference can also be found when considering different styles of dancing. In classical ballet, for example, it is the man who does the lifting of the woman and it is the woman who is wearing a tutu. In flamenco, the movements of the body are also gendered: the woman moves gracefully and makes more movements with the hands, while the man moves more firmly and rigidly. In classical ballet the proportion of female artists is much higher than in break-dance[8]. This also links to the age difference. In Dutch society girls are generally taking more dance classes and start to dance at a younger age than boys[9]. And certain styles of dancing are generally more danced by people at an older age (ballroom dancing, for example, in the Netherlands), while other styles are more danced by people at a younger age (breakdancing, for example).

In creating an understanding of what culture participation holds and how it is influenced by an intersection of socio-cultural aspects, I have not yet positioned the actors that are taking part and influence the process of empowerment. I will therefore consider them now.

1.2.1   The actors in the art sector

In the context of the art sector and culture participation – specifically in the socio-cultural project 'Thee in de Coulissen' – I see four great actors involved, namely the

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[6]When referring to 'Participants (2010)' I am talking about five of the women whom I interviewed. They all took part in the first phase of the project and are all of Moroccan descent.

[7]In the interview with Sarah Avçi (2009), Avçi explained the origins of Oriental dance. In Oriental dance the pelvis is the most important part of attention, as it is the area of fertility. People believed (and still believe) that through Oriental dance the fertility of a woman is being stimulated (Avçi, 2009).She thereby emphasized that it is traditionally danced by and for women only, and she stressed that it is not supposed to be arousing. It later became a form of entertainment in public and through American film stars in Hollywood it became connoted to sexuality and the exotic.

[8]I am, however, not aware what the percentages of male compared to female artists are when considering the audiences of different styles of dancing.

[9]I have no academic data on this, however.

Flemish Government, the (socio-) cultural institutions, the professional artists, and the participants. This section will pursue the positioning of these actors. The ways in which they regard and deal with the culture participation of the target group (migrant women) will be addressed in chapter three.

The Flemish Government is an actor that has great impact on the art sector. It develops and maintains cultural policies, and thereby renders subsidies, supports projects and influences what the art sector incorporates. According to the Flemish government the target group – migrant women – does not participate enough in culture (referring to the art sector) and thinks that this has to do with thresholds which they attempt to remove so that the culture participation of these people will increase (Gesubsidieerde projecten, n.d.; Decreet: memorie van toelichting, 2008; Boiserie, 2008). One way of doing this is by subsidizing socio-cultural projects.

The **(socio-) cultural institutions**, such as Lasso and KAV Intercultureel, carry out (parts of) the policies with the subsidies they receive. They also give feedback on the theory and research of the Flemish Government from a practical viewpoint. These institutions are often the mediators between the audience and the art sector, when the art sector is not easily accessible for specific audiences who show interest and motivation to participate in it. They therefore organize activities or projects to create opportunities for people to take, for example, dance classes or to go to an exhibition or an opera.

As a mediating organization, **Lasso** makes information concerning the art sector accessible to the other the sectors in Brussels (such as the social and educational sector) and motivates these sectors to work together and consult each other during their cultural activities. The supervisor during the first and second phase of the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' was **Leen de Spiegelaere**, a Caucasian woman of Belgian descent. Her functions are project coordination and supervision; communication and providing advice concerning the art sector to other socio-cultural institutions (De Spiegelaere, 2010).

KAV Intercultureel (intercultural) is part of the women's organization KAV. Its focus is on extending the horizon of migrant and non-Western women through socio-cultural activities. The teacher of the Oriental dance class, **Sarah Avçi** is of Turkish descent and born and raised in Gent. She studied international management and intercultural communication and has a diploma for social assistance.

Both institutions (and employees) seem to be culture realists. *Culture realism* argues that the production of culture and art may be bound to a specific social group, but the consumption of it is not, as people of other social groups might also 'consume' it (for example, hip-hop is a style of dancing traditionally created by black people of the lower classes in America, but it currently is a popular style of dancing taught in dance schools all over the world and for all kinds of social groups). It thus advocates a diversification of cultures. People can be part of different cultures, and cultures are formed by groups of people with similarities in some aspects. People advocating culture realism think participation in a specific culture is a personal choice and should therefore only be promoted for those who are interested in it. De Spiegelaere therefore wants to create the possibility for people to try different kinds of art and participation in the art sector, so that they can decide whether they want to participate or not, based on experience. For Avçi (2009) – supervisor of the Oriental dance atelier - this is an intrinsic principle ('Participation is for me the possibility to make your own choice'). Her role in this, as she sees it herself, is to direct the women in the atelier to a certain activity, such as modern dancing. And Avçi prefers to direct them towards something they recognize, so that the gap between them, for example different styles of dancing is reduced and therefore easier to cross.

The professional artists are the third group of actors. They create a performance for an audience by artistically expressing attitudes, beliefs and experiences that are personal, communal or cultural. **Laura Aris Alvarez** is a Spanish, professional artist who took part in the first phase of the project. **Paula Opazo Osorio**, who participated in the second phase of the project (the one that I supervised), is of Chilean descent. Both women personally experienced immigration and living in different cultures with different languages. That proved to be very helpful in the project, for example, in making a bridge between different styles so that the participants would open up to a new style of dance.

The last group of actors is the group of **participants**, who take part in the art sector as an audience or as active participants in, for example, a dance workshop. In relation to participants dancing themselves, they indicate that dance is for them a way to relax, to forget problems, to come together with other women and to improve their dance techniques (Participants, 2010).

Now that I have conceptualized the central concepts of this paper and contextualized culture participation in the socio-cultural field of Belgian society and Brussels in specific, I will continue with an elaboration of embodiment and corporeality through dance.

Chapter 2

Exploring embodiment and corporeality through dance

In the previous section I have set out the ways in which culture participation, embodiment and dance are being defined, and how they are used in the context of a socio-cultural project such as 'Thee in de Coulissen'. Embodiment is one of the central concepts of this paper, because an awareness of (the connection between) body and mind requires experiencing it personally. Grosz says: 'I have access to knowledge of my body only by living it' (1994; p. 86), and Sklar argues that: 'movement is always an immediate corporeal experience' and 'the cultural knowledge that is embodied in movement can only be known via movement' (Sklar, 2001; p. 31). Dancing creates a sense of serenity and delight, and creates an awareness of oneself through self-observation, and the meaning of exercises in the workshop of the project can only be explained through personally experiencing and feeling it (Opazo Osorio, 2009). According to De Spiegelaere (2009), in this way dance is very personal, but at the same time impersonal because "you do not have to dare, you just do it!" I therefore focused on the empowering effect of dance when people are dancing themselves and not, for example, when watching a dance performance.

The above references to Opazo Osorio and De Spiegelaere come from the interviews I have conducted during my internship. In total I conducted five qualitative interviews with the actors involved in the project 'Thee in de Coulissen': a focus group with five participants in the creative atelier who took part in the first phase of the project; a focus group with three participants who took part in the second phase

of the project[1]; and three individual interviews with Sarah Avçi – teacher of the creative dance atelier-, Leen de Spiegelaere – project supervisor- and Paula Opazo Osorio – professional artist-. These interviews helped me to get an understanding of their positions in the context of dance and empowerment, and gave me insight in the meaning of dance in relation to embodiment from their point of view.

The following section will elaborate on the conceptualization of the body in relation to the mind, by going into the levels in which the body is perceived. But first I will set out the theory regarding the relation between body and mind.

Body and mind are often split from each other to demarcate the first as the biological and emotional and the second as rational and intellectual. The split between body and mind – named Cartesian dualism – that was developed during the Enlightenment was based on theories of Plato and others. This dualism created a hierarchy that placed the consciousness above corporeality (Grosz, 1994; p. 7). This binary opposition of body and mind has often been discussed in Gender Studies' courses and articles[2] thereby discussing articles from the end of the 20th century, in which theorists disregard the conceptualization of the body as feminine, emotional and inferior in contrast to the masculine, rational and superior mind. Women (and also non-Western people) were seen as bound to their bodies and therefore not capable to think rationally and become great intellectuals. This idea placed them at the bottom of the opposition with (Western) men, who could disconnect from their bodies and let their intellectuality grow. They argue for a re-integration of body and mind, because integration denigrates the body as the 'suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart' of the mind (Grosz, 1994; p. 3) and limits the potential and the power of the body and the individual. A split also suggests the possibility of taking up a universal standpoint from which one can speak of all that is happening in this world, for the mind is detached from the body and its situatedness. This view excludes people (like women and non-Western people) who are supposedly bound to their bodies and thus unable to think rationally, and are therefore unworthy of

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[1]I will not use this data, because the information that the focus group provided was not of additional value to this thesis. One of the women hardly spoke any French or Dutch, and could not give an answer to my questions, and I felt that the questions I posed were not interpreted and translated well by the supervisor of the dance atelier. I therefore decided to focus on other data I had collected.

[2]Thereby discussing the viewpoints and considerations of scientists like Keller and Grontowski (1983).

being listened to. Besides the inequality amongst people, Haraway (1991), Harding (1998) and other scientists argue that a universal standpoint is not possible, for you are bound to a context and background that influence your perspective. Knowledge is therefore a subjective reality, bound to the context in which it is produced and used. The mind is thus limited to the body which it is part of and the context that it is in. Being aware of your position and how this affects the situated knowledge you produce, makes your argument more grounded for application and thus requires an integration of emotions and ratio. As Wekker (2007) discusses, Adrienne Rich (1987)[3] calls this production of thought from a specific situation at a specific moment the 'politics of location'. Rosi Braidotti[4] talks about embodiment as: 'a term in a process of intersecting forces (affects), spatio-temporal variables that are characterized by their mobility, changeability, and transitory nature' (1994, p.112). Bodies are therefore located, embodiment is subjective and identities are not fixed.

Before I explain the value of embodiment in dance and the value of dance in society, I will first give further consideration to the different levels in which the body is conceptualized. These corporeal and social levels in their turn intersect and influence the micro, meso and macro levels in which a person or a group can be empowered, but I will come to that in chapter three.

2.1 The corporeal body and the social body

"The beauty of Paula [Opazo Osorio] is that it is like she is a unity", says Avçi (2009), appreciating the ways in which Opazo Osorio creates a bodily consciousness while starting from the conceptual framework of a female identity. It is a consciousness that works through dance to create an awareness of one's sensory perceptions, mind and bodily structures. Identification and representation can occur at different levels of the body, which I will enter into now. Please be aware that the effects of these levels often overlap and the demarcation between them is therefore not always clear.

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[3]An American poet and feminist or queer theorist, who discussed French feminists (Irigaray, Kristeva) and French theorists (Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan) in depth.

[4]An Italian philosopher and feminist or queer theorist, and former professor in Gender Studies at Utrecht University who 'published extensively in feminist philosophy, epistemology, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis' (Switala, 1999).

2.1.1   The corporeal body

In academic circles there was and still is a lot of debate regarding the body. Grosz (1994; p. 12) – an Australian philosopher and feminist or queer theorist – puts a great focus on corporeality in her work. She captures the discussion around the body in her conceptualization:

> In short, bodies, individualities, are historical, social, cultural weavings of biology. The organism or entity strives to affirm, to maximize its potentialities, its powers, its possibilities. This impetus is not simply an effect of its inner constitution but can only be gauged, actualized, in terms of the concrete options its situation affords it.

And, although the body is a biological entity,

> The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. (Grosz, 1994; p. 23)

Biological bodies are thus constructed, in part, by the culture they are situated in. An embodied identity is then created at the intersection of different levels of experience or, as Jans (2006, p. 93) says, 'identity is relational, retrospective and a sequence of identifications'.

The corporeal body expresses a personal identity and focuses on the individual[5]. It is subjective and therefore specific to factors such as the people, the location and the time. However, the body can also be viewed on a social level. It then acquires a different meaning.

2.1.2   The social body

At the social level, the body is not seen as the biological entity of an organism, but as a uniting element that binds the members of a group and that makes the outside consider them as a group as well. Uniting factors that are constructed or ascribed to identify a group can be religious, ethnic, territorial or national (Jans, 2006; p. 20). Expression of this social body can occur through individual bodies, which express elements that characterize that social group or society. It can reflect a broad

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[5]And thereby on what that individual feels, thinks, experiences, desires, and so forth.

range of socio-cultural aspects such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class, generationality, and so forth. In dance, this can be done through the semiotics of a certain style of dancing that regards the body and the world in a particular way, or through a specification within a certain style of dancing or outside the structures of a specific style.

Forms of culture participation, such as dance, carry a language through which performers can communicate with other performers or with an audience. According to Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o (Wa Thiong'o)[6] this language cannot be seen separate from its specific history, its culture, the value(s) and the perceptions of a community. Sklar supports this idea: 'All movement must be considered as an *embodiment* of cultural knowledge' (Sklar, 2001; p. 30). Although connected to its background, language is adaptive to its circumstances and local needs. Just like the culture it is hybrid and fluid. Language, which holds all forms of human expression – and thus also of body language and the language of art and culture – is essential to our identification and understanding of ourselves (Taylor, 1994). We develop in interaction with others and we thus constantly need to re-identify ourselves in relation to the context we are in. But how exactly does embodiment take place in dance?

2.2 Embodiment in dance

As I discussed in chapter one – and will dwell upon in chapter three – empowerment requires an active and conscious attitude from the target group (migrant women). I also argued that participation is most effective when it is physical (personally performed) and thus embodied. As regularly discussed in Gender Studies, women and non-Western people have been bound to their bodies in history, which was considered as negative. I, however, see the influence of the body and its connection to the mind (embodiment) as a powerful tool for empowerment. This goes for empowering migrant women in particular, for both the non-Western women and the body in general have been devalued in Western history. Empowerment of this target group through the body therefore upgrades both.

Empowerment of migrant women in society through embodiment requires a change

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[6]Wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan 'novelist and theorist of post-colonial literature and Distinguished Professor of the Departments of Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine' (Wa Thiong'o, n.d.).

in signification of migrant women as well as the body. Dance is here an expression of embodiment. On the one hand, it is universal, because every person who can move can dance. On the other hand, dance is very specific, for

> its meaning is situated both in the context of other socially prescribed and socially meaningful ways of moving and in the context of the history of dance forms in specific societies (Desmond, 1997; p. 31).

In interaction with other people, dance can be a way of communicating. Many styles of dancing carry a language. A movement in itself might not have significance, but becomes meaningful when placed in, amongst others, a specific context and culture and by a specific person from a specific gender, ethnicity (and so forth).

Although different styles of dancing consist of specific vocabularies in which they transfer a message, certain aspects, such as emotions, are often expressed by people in similar ways and thus understood by many. Acocella (2001) also connects the aspect of universal communication and understanding to dance:

> So much of life is spent in the difficult task to understand things, to see through them to what's on the other side. But the truths of dance are not on the other side. They are in the very bones of the dance, which our bones know how to read, if we let them. (p. 16)

In this chapter I have explained how embodiment comes into being through the corporeal and social body, and how dance is an expression of embodiment. In the following chapter I will now pursue the empowering effects of embodiment for migrant women, in the socio-cultural context of 'Thee in de Coulissen'. I will thereby also consider some aspects of empowerment that need to be taken into account when using it.

Chapter 3

Becoming empowered through the practice of dance

In chapter one I gave a brief conceptualization of 'empowerment'. I thereby pointed out that the motivation of an institution for increasing empowerment of a target is often based on the discrimination of a socially vulnerable population[1]. I also indicated that I focus on empowerment as a subjective, situated, multi-dimensional and social process, and that a feeling of control is essential to become empowered (see page 9-10). Chapter two discussed the ways in which dance is an embodying practice and therefore a valuable way to reach a state of empowerment. In this chapter I will make a transition from theory to empiricism. I will examine empowerment further by going into the implications of empowerment in relation to dance. I will thereby explore the ways in which the actors in the project value this empowerment – as described in chapter one – and how the participants are embodying dance as an empowering practice by answering the main research question: In what ways does dance and the engagement in a socio-cultural project – such as 'Thee in de Coulissen' – have an empowering effect for migrant women and for society?

3.1 Conceptualizing and contextualizing empowerment

Empowerment is one of the core goals in the radical women's movement, which stood up against a society in which men used their power to suppress, exclude, dominate

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[1]Including people who are discriminated on the basis of their (mental/ physical) disability, race, ethnicity, gender or religion.

and discriminate and take control over women (Dusschooten-de Maat, 2004). Empowerment works from the force-approach and thus focuses on the capabilities and strengths people have and how they can increase them by developing and improving their skills. Through personal growth people can gain more control over their lives, improve their positions in relation to others and evoke an impact on society. Empowerment is therefore often considered to be a need for oppressed and vulnerable people/ groups in society. Empowerment is an interactive process and thus affects individuals as well as groups. Important to note is that it is a situated and subjective concept, and its meaning and impact are therefore influenced by the context. Itzhaky and York (2000; p. 227) also indicate a gender difference in the ways in which power is used and empowerment is reached. For example, while women feel empowered when they are allowed to be present or be part of a decision making process, men indicate that they also need to have the feeling that they are representing others in order to feel empowered (Itzhaky & York, 2000; p. 232). Although I imagine that there might be a cultural (ethnic) difference too in the ways that empowerment is achieved, it is hard to find literature on that topic.

In academic literature, empowerment and emancipation often seem to be used interchangeably. They are both processes that focus on an improvement of the situation of (mainly) socially vulnerable groups of people in society in different fields (economically, socially, politically, and so forth). I, however, chose to focus on empowerment, because I think it puts more emphasis on personal responsibility and activity in the process. Furthermore, according to the psychologist and consultant Dusschooten-de Maat (2004), empowerment goes further than the Marxist motto 'together we stand' – prominent in emancipation – and the struggle against social inequality and injustice, because empowerment is focused on personal growth and the development of competences to become a strong individual.

Atol distinguishes fives elements that are important for empowerment: the process; active participation; group identification; strengthening oneself; and the opportunity to make decisions. Thomas – a researcher focused on conflict and stress management, and intrinsic motivation – and Velthouse – whose primary areas of research include empowerment, power, ethics, and leadership (Velthouse & Kandogan, n.d.) – differentiate four dimensions through which empowerment can be assessed, that resemble the elements Atol discerns, namely: 'choice (self-determination), competence, meaningfulness and impact' (1990, p. 671). The presence of choice seems to

be an important aspect that Loman (2006) also emphasizes in tackling the concept of 'agency'. The aspects of empowerment that are most important in the context of this paper are, in my opinion: personal growth; development of skills (social, technical, intellectual, and so forth) and defensibility; having an impact on the environment and being acknowledged for that. Preconditions for the target to reach empowerment are: the ability to choose and implement that choice, and an awareness of that; major commitment, active participation in the process; the availability of necessary means and opportunities to empower; and the acknowledgement and appreciation of the target's reinforcement by the environment.

Empowerment is not an easy goal to achieve, and it requires skills such as responsibility, perseverance, self-discipline and courage (Seynnaeve, 2008). Empowerment cannot be accomplished without internal motivation and an active attitude of the target. If the target wants to become empowered, others can assist to acquire the necessary means and skills to succeed. Dusschooten-de Maat (2004) and Atol see empowerment in line with pragmatic-constructivism[2]. On the webpage Atol (n.d.) says that

> Many disadvantaged, suppressed and/or excluded persons and groups do not get the chance to live the life they wish for. By showing these persons and groups how they can let others hear their voice, where they can find the information necessary, how they can get access to financial, social and natural means and how they can influence the policy, in short by strengthening these persons and groups, they get more power over their own lives and the society they live in and they can determine their own future. This process of the reinforcement (of the organization) we call empowerment[3].

Important for an empowerment of the target group is the acknowledgement by the organizations in the socio-cultural field and the Flemish Government that, instead of holding on to traditions, 'members of minority groups are capable of defining and describing their own position: that of 'uprooting' and shifting' (Jans, 2006; p. 93). They should thus listen to the people concerned, to hear them and try to understand them, without interpreting all too easily and letting your background formulate their

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[2]For a definition of pragmatic constructivism see the introduction of this paper.
[3]http://www.atol.be/nl/content/organisatieversterking (last accessed 2010-05-18).

opinion.

Now that I explained what empowerment entails, I want to enter into the ways in which empowerment develops in dance.

3.2   Dance as an empowering practice for migrant women

Taking up the question of how dance is an embodied practice – thereby taking into account the ways in which it is implemented and the implications for the participants and the environment – and how the socio-cultural institutions exchange these ideas, I have now come to the main research question of this paper: In what ways does dance and the engagement in a socio-cultural project – such as 'Thee in de Coulissen' – have an empowering effect on migrant women and on society? As I explained earlier in chapter two and three, I maintain that empowerment is most effective if it develops through the practice of embodiment. I have also clarified the hybridity of dance, as it interrelates identity, language, culture and socio-cultural aspects such as gender and ethnicity. Dance as an empowering practice can thereby make you become aware of your body and mind.

The three levels at which empowerment through dance can occur, as I distinguish them, are: micro (meaning for the individual), meso (meaning for the community) and macro (meaning for nation) (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002, as cited in Loman, 2006; p.10; Seynnaeve, 2008). The project 'Thee in de Coulissen' is directly focusing on the micro level (to increase culture participation of individual migrant women), and indirectly on the meso (integrate them – as a group – in society) and macro level (make the art sector available to all citizens). I shall extend on the empowering aspects of dance by distinguishing between these levels. Please keep in mind that these levels are interrelated, for the meso and macro level exist of individual bodies. Aspects of empowerment thus have influence on the various levels, but the meanings of those influences are level-specific.

In distinguishing the diverse (interrelated) properties of empowerment through a dance project, such as 'Thee in de Coulissen', I took up some of the ways in which dance empowers individuals in poor communities in South-Africa, according to Seynnaeve (2008, pp. 29 – 37). However, empowerment and the ways in which it is

achieved are context-bound, and the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' has different points of focus than the project Seynnaeve considers. Based on the analysis of my data and theory I therefore indicate different ways in which empowerment is achieved for the target group through dance and participation in the project. Besides the division in the three levels of empowerment (which they call individual, group and community), Page and Czuba (1999) distinguish between dimensions such as the psychological, economic, political and sociological. The dimensions I find most important in the context of dance are psychological and sociological. The psychological dimension, however, only applies to the micro level. Besides a division based on the different levels of empowerment, I therefore subdivided the properties of empowerment through dance per dimension (psychological and social) in the micro level.

3.2.1 Empowerment on the micro level

Empowerment through the corporeal body puts a focus on the (biological) body of the individual as a whole and thus on personal empowerment. This form of empowerment aims at the awareness and achievement of skills and knowledge to use empowerment for specific (personal) purposes (control, autonomy, respect, etc). The idea behind this is that people (and their bodies) are perceived in particular ways, based on cultural (socio-ethnic) beliefs, attitudes, experiences, values, and so forth (Grosz calls this 'inscription', 1994; p. xiii). As these perceptions are highly dependent on the context (moment in time and environment), this creates the possibility for people to change unfavorable perceptions and to represent themselves (and their bodies) in different, more beneficial ways.

Based on the theory and the analysis of my data, I distinguish eight properties of empowerment through dance, on the level of the corporeal body. There are five properties in the psychological domain and three properties in the social domain.

Psychological domain

1. **To elevate your self-esteem and self-confidence.** As the target women of the project said, they dance to let go of the daily routine and problems and to go on a journey with the music (Participants, 2010). Dancing is for them thus a moment for themselves and it makes them feel good. They can develop themselves in a stimulating context that allows for exploration and making mistakes, as the dance workshop teaches migrant women techniques and skills

to improve their dancing and to enjoy dancing. One of the Arab participants, who already knew the basics of Oriental dancing, said that teaching other women – especially Belgian women – made her feel proud of herself. Dancing thus makes you feel good about yourself through your own body, but also through the respect and appraisal of others. Seynnaeve therefore thinks that performances for an audience are crucial for someone's self image, self esteem and self-confidence (2008; p. 30). She notes that in society this has a positive influence on the participants as well, because they can better resist bad influences (such as crime, drugs and alcohol).

2. **To create autonomy over your body and mind.** Natural instinct and cultural patterns can be controlled by individual choice through disciplining the body. In taking control over one's own (corporeal) body he/she creates the power and freedom to use it for a certain purpose and in a specific way. This also goes for dance. Becoming aware of their bodies and their needs, and the connections between body and mind gives these women the possibility to use it more consciously. It also makes them more aware of the bodies (and mind-body connections) of other people in their context. Being aware of this creates the possibility to have more (sense of) control over their own lives and the context they live in (Seynnaeve calls this 'ownership', 2008; p. 37). As I discussed before, it is important for participants to have the ability to make a choice and to be able to put it into practice. Loman (2006) mentions this in his conceptualization of 'agency'. In explaining the power of agency, Loman (2006; p. 7) quotes Weedon

> The political interest and social implications of any discourse will not be [realized] without the agency of individuals who are subjectively motivated to reproduce or transform social practices and the social power which underpins them (1997; p. 93).

Empowerment thus requires an internal motivation and responsibility over the decisions that are being made. Weedon also indicates that people have the power to make changes in the dominant discourses. Empowerment is a process that requires involvement and active participation of the people that it concerns. But 'culture participation is a choice', says Avçi (2009). 'Not wanting to participate is a choice; not being able to participate is exclusion' (Haesendonckx , 2001, cited in Vos, 2003; p.3).

As Thomas and Velthouse (1990) indicated, Deci and Ryan (1985) observed that perceived choice (self-determination) produces greater flexibility, creativity, initiative, resiliency, and self-regulation. In contrast, the sense that a person is controlled by events leads to tension, a more negative emotional tone, and decreased self-esteem (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; p. 673).

We cannot expect that everybody wants to participate in (all aspects of) the art sector if the thresholds they experience are being removed. In order to make a decision one needs to have the opportunity to make a choice. And that opportunity can be created by others (Vos, 2003). Other people can support and provide the target group with the means to empower themselves, but should thus not act on behalf of them or impose (forms of) empowerment on them.

3. **To create resilience.** According to Seynnaeve (2008), resilience is a necessary condition for empowerment, and one of the ways to develop resilience is by dancing. Resilience holds 'the ability of an individual, group or community to capable to cope with misfortune' (Seynnaeve, 2008; p. 33). As I indicated before, one of the reasons the women in the project dance is to forget their daily problems (Participants, 2010). Just like empowerment, resilience approaches people from a power position (instead of complaint position, Vos, 2003). Resilience requires active participation of the target and the availability of means and opportunities to act in the environment. The impact of humor should not be underestimated in coping with the context, says Seynnaeve, because it tones down the seriousness and makes the situation more light-hearted.

The invigorating effect of dance is expressed extensively in music and film too. I therefore selected only a few clarifying quotes. The Steve Miller Band (1976) sings 'I don't know, but I've been told, if you keep on dancing, you'll never grow old' in their song *Dance, Dance, Dance*. In the film Zorba the Greek (1964), the character of Zorba (played by Anthony Quinn) explains that he intuitively lets his emotions flow from his body through dance, no matter whether he is happy or sad (for example, at a funeral). The Doobie Brothers (1972) sing: 'We will be happy and we'll dance. Oh, we are going to dance our blues away.' Paul van Haver sings: 'Alors on sort pour oublier tous problèmes. Alors on

danse' (Stromae, 2009)[4].

4. **To provide meaning.** Subsequently to the effects of dance expressed in music, The Beatles (1964) give dance a very important place in their life and relationship, as they sing: 'In this world there's nothing I would rather do. Because I'm happy just to dance with you.' Dance thus gives meaning to their lives. In her book *Black feminist though: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins says: 'When an individual Black women's consciousness concerning how she understands her everyday life undergoes change she can be empowered. Such consciousness may stimulate her to embark on a path of personal freedom, even if it exists initially primarily in her own mind' (2000; p. x). How dance evokes this consciousness Sklar explains by saying:

> Especially in the codified and stylized movement of dance and ritual, movement embodies ideas about life's "large questions": Where do I belong in the world? How do human beings behave? Where do I come from and with whom do I go through life? What do I value?' (2001; p. 30).

As the women in the project said, the Oriental dance class is for many 'their' moment in the week (Participants, 2010). During the dance class they become aware of their bodies and its needs and they focus on the here and now. They see it as a valuable and important moment in the week that they look forward to.

The workshop of the project, however, only took place two to three times. If the women indicate that the workshop provides an additional meaning to the regular dance classes, then the workshop could have an impact on them (their lives). However, if Lasso wants the project (workshop) to have a real (long term) impact on the women, the project should be prolonged (De Spiegelaere, 2009) and become a more structured support in their daily lives. Giving a workshop two or three times is too short to have a lasting impact on the target group (De Spiegelaere, 2009; Opazo Osorio, 2009).

5. **To be educated.** Dance also has an educational value. Besides learning to become aware of yourself and making personal choices, people also learn to take

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[4]Translated: 'Then you go out to forget all your problems. Then you dance.'

account of others. They do so by practising social skills, such as trusting each other (e.g. by letting themselves fall backwards in somebody else's hands; Participants, 2010) and collaborating. Participating in culture involves the engagement in social intercourses that are culturally decided (like symbols, respect and equality). They thereby learn different communicational styles and how other people interact. In the Dutch culture, for example, assertiveness and expressing yourself well in words are important social skills. The culturally decided intercourses are structured in styles of dancing and thereby a way to be educated and integrate in society (besides integration on other levels, such as learning to communicate in a vocal language). Besides social skills, people also learn skills in dancing that are intellectual, technical and problem-solving (Seynnaeve, 2008; p. 38). For example, learning to dance choreographies and move in a certain rhythm, but also learning to accept unfamiliar ways of dealing with each other. An important aspect of dancing for the target group is to learn what it can transfer through the body, according to Opazo Osorio (2009).

Dancing is thus also a way to learn about other cultures, and thereby becomes a valuable tool in the process of integrating migrant people in society. Dance reflects socio-cultural factors such as gender, ethnicity, class and generational patterns (Hewitt, 2005), even if they are not confirmed but questioned, invalidated or resisted through individual choice and discipline[5]. Seynnaeve (2008) gives the example of clothing in traditional dance which reflects the fashion in a society in a particular time period for a particular group of people, and also symbolizes groups of people and what they stand for (like, for example, the national flag). She also highlights the difference between traditional Oriental dancing and Western modern dancing. In Oriental dance, the pelvis is the most important part of attention, as it is the area of fertility (Avçi, 2009). Movements are thereby expressive of emotions and feelings, and tradition is valued highly. Modern dance, on the other hand, is visually very abstract. In modern dance the focus is more on the individual and his/her artistic expression, respiration and muscular movements (Van Baren, 2010). In modern dance, the body of a person can become an object that is being discussed and used to criticize patterns of thinking and behavior in society. The traditional

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[5]Hanna (1988; p. 6) illustrates this by saying: 'Distanced from the everyday, the performance is an arena in which we can safely challenge the status quo. After all, dance is illusion and pretend, close yet far.'

casting is thus not simply followed, but either made more conscious through exaggeration, discussion and rejection of the roles normally taken upon us in a culture. Objectification of the body removes the body's subjective interpretations that have been cast on it.

Social domain

6. **Expressing yourself and communicating.** As I explained in chapter two, some of the movements in dance are part of semiotic systems that are created to transfer a message, an emotion, a statement, and so forth. A message can thus be an expression of a personal idea, attitude, belief or experience of the individual, but it can also express an idea, and so forth of a group of people or a choreographer. Ruth St. Denis – an originator of contemporary dance in America – illustrates this by saying:'I see dance being used as communication between body and soul, to express what is too deep to find for words' (St. Denis, 2010). Through the project the women understood, as Avçi (2009) said:

> Every movement has a word, has a language, as a way of speaking and can form a sentence. It is a story on its own. And one story is clear because it is recognizable and we know it from our culture. But the other stories we do not know. And this way [through the project] we came to accept it and to know it.

Opazo Osorio (2009) stresses the advantage of working with the body instead of with words, because the body carries a universal language (in spite of cultural inscriptions), unlike vocal languages. It is therefore much easier to explain something, because the women can observe and copy the movements. Through my background in Psychology, I agree with Opazo Osorio that there are certain expressions of the body that are biological and thereby expressed by most humans[6]. Acocella (2001; see chapter two) also stresses the recognition of certain expressions through biologically determined knowledge grounded in the body. However, I think the line between knowledge and forms of expressions that are either innate or culturally defined, is very thin. The effect in society is that many cultural developments are considered biological through a

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[6]In Psychology there have been many studies conducted with, for example, babies to investigate how emotions like distress or happiness are expressed. The results often show similarities in expressions for babies from different socio-cultural backgrounds.

discursive practice (Butler, 1993). I argued before, I do think cultural norms, traditions, behaviors, and so forth have a great impact on the development of a person. Besides general, biological expressions in dance, dance is therefore also composed of culturally specific elements that cannot be understood if one is not familiar with the culture (relating to the way of life ánd artistic production).

De Spiegelaere (2009) thinks that in dancing the identity and attitude of a person are clearly reflected. During the project, De Spiegelaere said she experienced that people who are normally shy and restrained also have difficulty expressing themselves through their bodies in, for example, dance. However, I think dance can also make it easier to express yourself for people who are verbally not very strong. Like Seynnaeve says: '[...] dance is a universal language that can be 'spoken' by everyone, regardless of their age, physical and mental capabilities. [Verbality] is, by the way, limited. When words fail, movements can take over' (2008; p. 31). The value of dance over talking is, I think, well explained by Kings of Convenience (2004) in their song 'I'd rather dance with you':

> [...] Even if I could hear what you say, I doubt my reply would be interesting for you to hear, because I haven't read a single book all year. [...] The music's too loud and the noise from the crowd increases the chance of misinterpretation. So let your hips do the talking.

As a way of expression, dance thus communicates aspects of your identity and personality to the environment. Like culture, I believe that the identity of a person is not fixed, but instead it is multiple, flexible and situational. In dancing one can change the meanings you infer to dance as it provides people – as active agents – the ability to change traditional (dominant) styles of dancing from within by mixing them with other movements and elements of other styles of dancing, cultures and personal aspects; thereby making them hybrid, flexible and context-specific.

7. **To be part of a group.** 'People's lives are shaped by a commitment to the collectivity' is argued in the UNESCO rapport on sustainable development (De Schrijver & Pruyt, 2007-2008, as cited in Seynnaeve, 2008; p. 31). Belonging to a dance group thus creates identification of the individuals with that group;

positioning oneself as a member and, as Seynnaeve says (2008; p. 30), feeling less vulnerable and lonely.

8. **To position yourself towards others.** As I argued in the Introduction, women of different backgrounds and non-Western people in general have been devalued historically in relation to men and Western people. Being connected to their bodies – which are also devalued – they are less capable of being intellectual and claiming power in society. Empowerment of this target group (migrant, non-Western women) through their bodies creates the possibility to change the meanings they are connected to and to obtain more positive and powerful significations. Dance can be an instrument to show who you are and what you are capable of. Important in the process of empowerment is to

> replace external definitions forwarded by dominant groups with my own self-defined point of view. [...] It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. (Hill Collins, 2000; p. vi).

Being acknowledged in dance can also lead to acknowledgement of the participants as full citizens in society.

3.2.2   Empowerment on the meso level

Empowerment of the individual body also exerts an influence on broader levels. Here, empowerment is used for social ends such as interaction, the autonomy and the control of a group in society. I discern three properties of empowerment through dance on the level of the social body (both in the social domain), namely:

1. **To connect.** Dance creates a feeling of unity and connectedness (Seynnaeve, 2008). A physical connection can increase the psychological (emotional or social) connection between the participants, and between the participants and the teachers. 'Dancers', says Seynnaeve (p. 36), 'share the environment they are in, but also their skills, knowledge, ideas and experiences'. Itzhaky and York (2000; p. 226) state that 'community participation directly and indirectly increases empowerment'. Coming together in different formats increases mutual solidarity, says Avçi (2009). An open, more positive attitude towards and familiarity with the professional artist and a new style of dancing (Avçi, 2009) facilitates the acquisition of the goals of the project (to become acquainted with a new style of dancing and more likely to participate in it in the future).

2. **To position yourself (as a group) towards others.** Individuals can position themselves towards others in society through dance. Besides a positioning focused on the corporeal body, people in a group can also position their social body to situate that body and earn respect as a group in society. Opazo Osorio (2009) argues that in current society there is still no gender equality. Men are structurally more present in society and lie ahead in salary, working level and so forth. However, in dance the majority of the participants are female. This creates an environment in which they can come together and make a fist. According to Avçi (2009), the participants in the project felt the need to evolve and emancipate together as women, before they could take the next step and collaborate with other target groups. Leen de Spiegelaere (2009) indicated that, in discussions with the participants of the theater atelier, they said that they perform twice: once in front of a mixed group and the second time for women only. Reasons they gave for this division are that some women are not allowed to perform for men (for religious backgrounds, for example) and most women indicate that they perform more 'freely' when no men are present. Dirk Opstaele, the professional artist who took part in the first phase of the project 'Thee in de Coulissen' with the theater atelier, confirms that the participants – all women – reacted differently to him than he thought they would to a female artist, mainly because of his gender (De Spiegelaere, 2009). Laura Aris Alvarez, the professional artist who took part in the dance atelier, said that 'the fact that I was a woman made it a 100 times easier to accomplish something' (De Spiegelaere, 2009). Aris Alvarez explains this with the connections and interaction between the women and the intimate atmosphere she – as a woman – can become part of when the participants are, for example, drinking tea and chatting in the cafeteria of the dance studio after the dance class. This clear gender distinction in participation might be related to the art style, as both dance and theater are very physical forms of art expression. Collaboration with equally minded people is thus for Avçi a requirement for empowerment. They can thereby represent others belonging to the same community and thus create a positive effect for them as well. However, I emphasize that in speaking a group should take care on behalf of others, because they then claim to know and to be able to express the ideas and positions of those others[7].

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[7]For more information on this I want to refer to the feminist theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

3. To educate Instead of only regarding the influence of the teacher and professional dancer in the project, it is important to take up a 'more dialectical conception of cultural transmission' (Desmond, 1997; p. 35). St.-Gilles of the 'Beweging ATD Vierde Wereld' formulated in the General Report of the Poverty:

> Every social or ethnic group contributes to the culture of the society, from its own richness that springs from personal experience, traditions or history (Algemeen verslag over de armoede, 1995; p. 299).

The acknowledgement by society that the participants also have something that others, like the professional artist, might learn from (a vision, an attitude, experiences, and so forth), can be of great value to the participants and increase their self esteem (Opazo Osorio, 2009). An example of a possible cultural difference between the professional artist and the participants is expressed by Aris Alvarez, who referred to a different world of the participants that she had to become acquainted with[8] (Rodeyns, 2009). To her, dancing means concentration and a focus on your own body. For the women in the atelier the social aspect was also important (maybe even more than learning to dance) and they kept chatting and talking to each other during the workshop. Aris Alvarez found this very remarkable. This difference in focus might be based on a different motivation to dance (profession and training versus recreation). However, another reason might be that there is a difference in behavior due to different socio-cultural backgrounds (ethnic aspect). For Aris Alvarez, the most important experience of this project was the cultural confrontation and artistic challenge to connect the two styles of dance and make modern dance comprehensible: 'These women challenged me to work and think about dance in a way that I no longer felt in control' (Rodeyns, 2009; p. 1).

Awareness of the qualities and abilities of the participants was a goal of the project 'Thee in de Coulissen', as it should have an exchange value for participants and the professional artist (De Spiegelaere, 2009). Opazo Osorio (2009) – professional artist in the second phase of the project - said she reached this awareness when she became aware of the prejudices she had against migrant (Arab) women and when she had the ability – in the project- to experience

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[8]It is, however, not clear what aspects of that lifestyle she is referring to.

the values, ideas and ways of interaction these women had in reality. This awareness shows that the participants also have something to contribute. Becoming conscious of this is also important for the participants themselves, as Opazo Osorio (2009) argues. If they have something to offer (like an idea, a feeling or a perspective), to teach and to contribute, their self-esteem will rise, also in the broader societal context. Through acknowledging and validating their participation I think all people and organizations involved can benefit, because an empowerment of individuals (or groups) in society eventually leads to an empowerment of society as a whole.

4. **To generate a positive energy.** Dance distracts individuals from their personal problems and focuses on the group and the movements of the body of the group. During the dance classes of Avçi the participants, for example, had to focus on the movements of her, of themselves and of other people via the mirror in front of them. In the workshop of Opazo Osorio, she gave exercises like walking around at different speeds through a space that slowly became smaller and smaller[9]; thereby focusing solely on the movements of the group and open spaces. As these exercises required considerable concentration, it provided the participants room to clear their heads and enjoy (Participants, 2010).

'The workshop had an impact on the women, even if it only generated a positive energy', says Avçi (2009). Reasons the women themselves gave for dancing are, amongst others, to relax, to feel good, to be together and to have a moment for themselves (Participants, 2010). And also Opazo Osorio (2009) indicates that dancing can provide the target group with a way to feel, to enjoy and to relax.

3.2.3 Empowerment on the macro level

The effects of dance for the whole society are generally indirect and become visible in the long term. They are therefore limited. For the effects to become demonstrably the project has to take place for a considerable period and in a structured fashion. De Spiegelaere (2009) already indicates that this is not the case with the project 'Thee in de Coulissen', which only takes place during two or three dance classes, and

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[9]Opazo Osorio indicated with her hands the borders of the space that they could move around in.

thus becomes an experience that tries to motivate people to get more into contact with the cultural art sector. Dance, however, can have a powerful influence on society, and if the project could be elaborated, it can acquire three properties of empowerment for the migrant women in the project:

1. **To connect.** Dance has the power to connect people from different cultures, ethnicities, races, ages, genders, sexualities, classes, and so forth. It can level out differences between people and motivate conviviality. Culture participation is to Opazo Osorio (2009) the opportunity to leave your 'traditional, cultural circle' and to experience and open up for other cultures and ways of life. This uniting effect thus occurs at the level of the social body, as people are coming together and focus on the connections between each other and the movements of themselves in relation to others as a collective. And although discrimination also occurs in certain dance contexts, for every person there is a form of dancing he/she can take part in. If you can move, then you can dance is my belief. Maybe not at a professional level, but that does not have to be necessary.

2. **To increase active citizenship and to integrate into society** The idea of Lasso is to become aware of the wishes of women of diverse origin and use these wishes to motivate them to participate in the art sector. Although an exchange between participants and professional artist is one of the goals of the project, and although the artist is interacting with the participants, the problematic issue for me is that the project mainly seems to be a one-way process. Reflecting the goal of the Flemish Government, the integration into the art sector by Lasso is part of a broader integration process of these women (and their families) into society, a process in which they have to adapt to new customs, rules and ways of living. Culture participation can have a community building and integrating function, according to De Spiegelaere (2009) and the Flemish Government (Gesubsidieerde projecten, n.d.; Decreet: memorie van toelichting, 2008; Boiserie, 2008). Integration can thereby promote interculturality[10] and, according to Bourgeois (2004) – vice minister-president of the Flemish Government and Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs, Domestic Policy, Integration, Tourism and 'Vlaamse Rand' – it stimulates solidarity and mutual respect. Integration, says Bourgeois, is 'an important source of renewal [...] a constant learning process of interaction, that provides space

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[10]Defined as: 'dialogue, mutual exploration and encounter between people of various ethno-cultural backgrounds'. (Decreet, 2008)

for exchange and negotiation' (2004; p. 17). I think the integration of immigrant people into society is important for a multitude of reasons, such as: to procure a pleasant co-existence and interaction between people; to value their meaningfulness to society; to increase their self-respect; to secure their positions as true citizens of a society; to value them as mothers (or teachers) who are raising new citizens in society; to acknowledge them as citizens who are influencing society through their professions and by living in that society. It requires an open attitude, interest and motivation for interaction from both the society and the immigrant, and also an adaptation of both to the circumstances. If you want to reach new people, interaction is a requirement (Vos, 2003).

Participation in a dance project thus contributes to the integration of migrant women into society. As Sklar says: 'the cultural knowledge that is embodied in movement can only be known via movement' (2001; p. 31). Being recognized as full citizens prevents further marginalization of migrant women. They are thereby integrated into society and they also have the possibility to transform aspects of society from the inside and make society more hybrid. What I want to argue is that the cultural sector of Brussels should not 'use' different cultural expressions, such as Oriental dance, to motivate women to participate more actively in their culture. Instead, these forms of cultural expression should be analyzed and taken up as valuable tools to consider the culture(s) one is participating in.

3. **To prevent problems.** By providing meaning to the life of individuals and groups, dance can also diminish large scale social problems, such as alcohol and crime. Delahaij (2004) states that the stimulation of empowerment has positive effects on well-being and prevents psychosocial problems such as drugs use, school failure, depression and delinquent behavior.

I have now focused on the positive effects of dance. However, I should not forget to consider the pitfalls when examining the field of empowerment and setting up a dance project to stir empowerment.

3.2.4 Thresholds and points of attention for institutions and organizations in organizing a dance project to induce empowerment of migrant women

Treshholds

Empowerment is often seen as a need for people who are marginalized and stigmatized (amongst others migrants, people with a physical or mental handicap, seniors, people in poverty and women), by the Government, socio-cultural institutions or the majority of the population (see introduction and the beginning of this chapter). These people often experience thresholds when it comes to participation in society (and therefore also in the art sector). It is therefore possible that people cannot adequately assess the properties of empowerment. Those properties can then prevent someone from reaching a state of empowerment.

In her article Vos (2003) cites a Dutch research in which five decisive factors for culture participation are mentioned: cultural competence, strive for social respect, available time, financial room for expenditures, and spatial aspects. *Cultural competence* is related to one's ability to process cultural information. This is influenced by a person's cultural education, the social environment he/she grew up in and his/ her experience with the art sector. Strive for social respect has to do with whether the environment of a person appreciates it if that person participates in the art sector. The other factors relate to the availability and moments in time one could spend on participating in cultural activities; the possibility to spend money on culture participation; and accessibility of the offer and mobility of the audience. These factors can all benefit the possibility to participate in culture, but when there is a lack of them, they can become thresholds to participate in the art sector.

Haesendonckx (2001) sees nine thresholds when it comes to culture participation, in particular for people in poverty. The first six thresholds are technical-practical obstacles. **Information** refers to a lack of knowledge about cultural activities because of a lack in practical information, distribution or intelligibility. **Spare time** refers to an objective and subjective lack of time, and also the ability to plan long before the activity takes place. **Company** can become another obstacle if it is not present, because then people have to participate alone. **Money** can be another problem. People with a limited budget often do not have the choice whether they

want to participate in the art sector or not. They might have to spend their money on matters and goods that they or others regard as fundamental (and primary, such as food and shelter). As I said before, culture participation is often seen as a luxury and people with little money are expected to spend it on fundamental matters. **Accessibility** is referring to the accessibility of a cultural activity (with personal or public transport) and the mobility of the audience. This can become an obstacle when people cannot get access to these modes of transportation. The sixth obstacle relates to the **moment** when the cultural activities take place. This is normally during the evening, so (grand)parents have to find child care. Here, the weak social network, restraint towards outsiders and the price are important hindrances for people to ask for a babysitter. Besides technical-practical obstacles, Haesendonckx also names three underlying or psychological obstacles for people in poverty, namely: **the capacity to process cultural content** (through a lack of experience and education), **status embarrassment** (regarding their origin or home situation) and **status motivation** (participation in the art sector might not be appreciated as much as in other communities).

These thresholds neither only apply to people in poverty, nor solely to people experiencing incapacities and vulnerabilities in certain areas. Vos (2003) emphasizes that these people do not constitute a separate group in society, as their vulnerabilities are so diverse (poverty, discrimination, old age, lack of education and development, mental or physical handicap, and so forth). However, people in poverty often encounter many of these thresholds. Walter van den Broeck (2001) sees a clear relation between culture participation and people in poverty. He recognizes the binary division between high and low culture Mathew Arnold (1869) created, in which 'we' relates to the people in the higher and middle class, thus participating in high culture, while 'the poor' are part of the lower class, who participate in low culture. He even says that low culture is not regarded as a 'true' form of culture by 'us' (the middle- and higher class; the government, and so forth)[11]. Culture is thus related to art and the idea that people in the lower classes – who do not have a 'real' culture – benefit from the culture of people in the higher class. He also refers to the opinion of culture realists, who advocate a free choice to participate in a specific form of a culture. In rejecting the idea that 'high' culture is the only true and good form of

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[11]This is the culture that 'we' regard as 'the opera, the art exhibition, the concert hall'. (Van den Broeck, 2001; pp.2-4)

culture he also points out that this form of culture is still seen as a luxury[12]. Most of the participants in the project are part of the lower classes of society (and are probably living in poverty) and indicate that they have to be careful with spending their money (Participants, 2010). In society the Flemish Government and socio-cultural organizations like Lasso regard them as a group that experiences thresholds when it comes to culture participation and they themselves agree Avçi is often the one who makes the women aware of activities in the art sector, because the women do not know (or use) the means to acquire the cultural agenda and neither do others in their environment (Avçi, 2009). Language thereby also plays a role, as many participants only speak Arabic and French.

When Avçi suggests an event, she has to be aware that the women might feel a resistance to participate in a modern dance workshop because of a sense of fear caused by lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with the style of dancing (De Spiegelaere, 2009). And even if they want to, most of the women in the atelier do not go to a play because they cannot leave the house in the evening. As housewives, they have to cook, take care of the children, or their husbands do not allow them to leave the house at night. During the day they also have their household activities. So spare time is scarce and it is hard to find a good moment when they can take time off to leave the house (in which they are usually restricted to the cultural agenda, unless the art sector adjusts to the target group). The women also point out that culture participation is often so expensive, because it is not just the entrance fee they have to pay for. A night out also includes wearing suitable (often more expensive, stylish) clothes; paying for the cloakroom; the use of public transport (or fuel for the car); the purchase of a drink and possibly some food; and so forth (Participants, 2010). If they can overcome all these thresholds, then they may have to convince others to do so as well, because people generally go to a cultural activity with company. This might be hard, because people might find it inappropriate and awkward that a migrant woman is participating in culture (both people from their own environment and other participants in culture). Migrant women thus experience thresholds other people in society also experience. However, they also encounter some specific thresholds.

As I indicated above, some women of the theater atelier pointed out that they are not allowed to perform in front of men because of their cultural and religious background (Rodeyns, 2009). According to Buikema (2007) this attitude is based on

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[12]This is 'the culture that would have disappeared from the earth without subsidies'. (Van den Broeck, 2001; pp. 2-4)

two myths regarding the female as strange and deviant, and the female subject as bodily, erotic and stirring desire. Through these myths the woman has been placed in a hierarchical and binary opposition, as the historical 'Other' of the man.

So, if an organization wants to support migrant women in their process of empowerment, they have to take into account the risks of possible thresholds to participate.

Before reaching the conclusion, let me first highlight some points of attention the organizations and institutions in the socio-cultural field have to take into account when setting up a project.

Points of attention

My first topic of attention comes from Wolff:

> The implications for a feminist politics of the body are clear. Not just for dance, which is necessarily founded on the body as its medium of expression, but also for visual representation, performance art, and other arts disciplines. A straightforward celebratory art of the female body may have the welcome effect of producing positive images for women, in defiance of the dominant constructions of femininity in our culture. At the same time, it runs two kinds of risk: first, that these images can be reappropriated by the dominant culture and read against the grain of their intended meaning [...]; and second, that they may collude with a kind of sexist thinking which identifies woman with the body and assumes an unchanging, pre-given essence of the female. Any Body Politics, therefore, must speak about the body, stressing its materiality and its social and discursive construction, at the same time as disrupting and subverting existing regimes of representation (1997; p. 94).

We therefore have to find strategies for this kind of approach that might already have been used by feminists and critics for discussing other forms of representation.

Dancing does not automatically lead to empowerment. As Seynnaeve (2008; p. 38) argues: 'Dance workshops provide tools and skills that make them stronger as a person and as a dancer.' As I discussed earlier in this chapter, empowerment is a

personal choice, so people have to want it. But in order to make a decision, one has to be aware of the possibilities of which one can choose. Because people from a particular culture recognize and affiliate with familiar aspects of society in a specific style of dancing, most Arab women in the project knew how to do Oriental dancing on a particular level, because they learned to dance by observation (copying movements from female relatives and other women in their community). To make the women more aware of their corporeal bodies and improve the dance skills Avçi (2009) practiced techniques in the Oriental dance atelier that removed them from certain meanings they had about how to dance and thereby stirred new feelings. During the workshop with the professional artist this awareness was increased even more, as they regularly had to move their bodies in new ways and at new speeds and rhythms. Exercises, such as relaxation and closing the eyes and falling backwards into the arms of another person, also caused an awareness of body, emotions and thoughts (Participants, 2010; Avçi, 2009).

Avçi (2009) relates empowerment to citizenship, emancipation, bottom-up processes; the central concepts for KAV Intercultureel. 'To reach empowerment of its participants, an organization needs to work bottom up', she says, 'from the needs of its participants; giving impulses, stimulating them and creating familiarity but letting themselves be the ones to make the decisions that concern them'. Respect for personal tastes and the freedom to choose are crucial, for empowerment. Avçi says that familiarity is created by removing thresholds that are practical (such as entrance fees) and psychological (such as a fear because it is unknown) and bringing participants together in a certain format (for example a dance atelier or a trip). This gives the participants a better knowledge of a style of dance, so that they can decide to participate or not based on their experience with that style.

For dance – as a form of culture participation – to become more than recreational and to accomplish long-lasting effects in the different domains of the lives of targeted people, projects have to take place on a continuous and structured basis. This requires a structural approach of the Government, in which they provide different means to reach and maintain an empowered state of being (Seynnaeve, 2008), because creating a cultural change by the target group itself is not evident, as they often lack the means and opportunities to empower themselves without any support. Vos (2003) underscores this with a beautiful metaphor coming from Matarasso, who

analyzed the 'social impact of participation in the arts' in the United Kingdom:

> Rather than the cherry on the policy cake to which arts are so often compared, they [arts and culture policies] should be seen as the yeast without which it fails to rise to expectations. (Matarasso, 1997)

Vos responds to this by saying: 'Arts and culture policy is not just 'extra' but has to be a policy that feeds and shapes other domains of policy in a transversal way.' (Vos, 2003; p. 36)

Empowerment should not be regarded as a solution for all the problems in the world. However, as I explained in the introduction, empowerment is an important approach to tackle problematic issues, such as inequality, negative self image, undervaluation, discrimination, division and lack of self-awareness.

Conclusion

In this paper I have provided insight into the effects of dance as an empowering practice for the participants – in this case migrant women – and what meaning this has for society. I thereby focused on the context of a dance workshop in the socio-cultural project 'Thee in de Coulissen'. As I argued in chapter three, empowerment through the practice of dance occurs on the individual (micro), community (meso) and social (macro) level.

I have explained that empowerment is a complex concept. It is a term that is often seen as necessary for people experiencing specific thresholds. The most important aspects of empowerment I see in relation to this context are: personal growth; development of skills (social, technical, intellectual, and so forth) and defensibility; having an impact on the environment and being acknowledged for that. Using dance as an instrument to become empowered requires, to my mind, a consciousness of the target (migrant women) who dances. The target has to be aware of the empowering potentiality of dance and under which circumstances dance can be developed and used as an instrument for empowerment. For dance to become an empowering tool it demands: active participation; the ability to choose and practice a decision; and the means to reach it.

Socio-cultural institutions can support and guide people to reach empowerment, by – amongst others – removing the possible thresholds people can experience if they desire to participate. That requires a lot of dialogue and serious consultation between the target group and the socio-cultural institution, which demands a good mastering of listening comprehension of the institution. Through taking into account the empowering effects of dance, socio-cultural institutions (like Lasso) can effectively reach their goals to improve the culture participation of participants and promote their integration in society. They should be careful that, instead of falling

in the trap of acting on behalf of them, socio-cultural institutions have to explore and employ the qualities of the target. As emerged in the interviews, they can do this by keeping a constant interaction between institutions and target, thereby reflecting on the progress of the project, evaluating the process and, if necessary, adjusting it. The extent and ways in which the preconditions of empowerment are met influence the empowering effect dance can have on target and society.

In order to reach a lasting state of empowerment through the practice of dance, a structural approach of the Government and socio-cultural organizations is needed. Taking part in a singular workshop can be a stimulus to continue dancing, but that workshop alone does not cause an empowerment of the target.

I indicated that empowerment is not the answer to every problem that you may encounter, but it can be an important tool to improve one's situation. It is a state of mind, a feeling that the target is in control, but it also has tangible effects on her position in society, her relations, her possibilities, and more. Coming back to my title – 'Once in movement she leads the dance' – it emphasizes the impact dance can have on the various levels and domains of a migrant woman's life. The quote shows that dance connects the body and mind and creates an awareness of this process. I thereby maintain that dance carries more than a recreational value for these migrant women, because it has the potency to affect them on multiple levels (micro, meso, macro) and in various domains (psychological and social), for example, by using traditional styles of dance, but also by adapting these styles and creating new styles of dance that become hybrid forms of expression and communication.

If institutions want to bring about the empowerment of migrant women, they have to take into account and aim at the properties of empowerment through dance that I have described. This insight should provide a structured approach to and support of the empowerment of migrant women in society and indirectly of society as well.

Through the process of my internship and thesis I have tried to answer the questions I faced. However, through the process new questions kept emerging, several of which I could not answer. As I think that most of these questions should not be left undiscussed, I want to conclude with some recommendations for further research.

In this paper, I have taken into account the causality of some of the factors for empowerment besides dance, such as money, spare time, company, religion, and so forth. We should, however, be aware that there are probably more factors involved and should be sensible to detect them.

I have only focused on migrant women in this paper. It would be interesting to investigate whether and how dance might have an empowering effect on other target groups, such as men, adolescents, seniors, non-migrants, and so forth. I haven't found any research considering the effects of dance on the integration of migrants. As I argue that dance empowers and promotes integration, I argue that further research on this topic is needed.

Another focus in my paper has been on participation through actively taking part. However, observation and discussion of dance performances as an audience could also generate an empowering effect. This might be an interesting field to research further.

My last recommendation is to go into the effects of dance in relation to emancipating practices, which are given a great deal of attention in Gender Studies and socio-cultural projects. I chose to focus on dance as an empowering practice. For further research it would also be interesting to look at the distinguishing aspects of emancipation – in relation to empowerment – and how the practice of dance influences these aspects.

In the process of doing my internship and writing my internship report and thesis paper I often thought about the meaning of dance for myself. This process increased my awareness of how I use dance to express my feelings and to elevate my mood, so that I become more resilient to negative events, such as sickness of a friend or stress during the writing process. Dance makes me feel more confident about myself and proud of my abilities. It thereby creates a feeling of control and the feeling that I am empowering myself. Participating in the workshop of the project gave me the experience firsthand of how dance empowers me, and it gave me the opportunity to better grasp how empowerment has an effect on others. I want to end my paper with a quote by Brenda Dixon Gottschild that inspired me during my thesis and will keep on inspiring me in the future. It can hopefully motivate and inspire others as well who will engage in the field of dance as an empowering practice:

We don't need the answers: we need the questions; we need the dancing, not the dance (1997; p. 174).

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