

Politics of memory in 2001 Salento.

The re-invention of tarantism and the debate on its therapeutical value

Giovanni Pizza

Sezione Antropologica, Dipartimento Uomo & Territorio, Università degli Studi di Perugia (Italy)

During the last ten years – and intensively the last five years – there has been a revitalisation of de Martino’s thought in contemporary Italian anthropology and a parallel revitalisation of practices and discourses of “tarantism” in the local politics of culture and tradition in the Salento peninsula. This countryside is the part of Apulia home to “*tarantismo*”, the spider bite possession ritual linked to the healing cult of Saint Paul, and location of the 1959 ethnographic study conducted by Ernesto de Martino and reported in his classic book, *La terra del rimorso* (The Land of Remorse, 1961). Forty years after its publication, this book can be considered as the prime example in Italy of an anthropology of illness “at home”. *Las Indias de por acá* was the way de Martino called Salento, quoting the 17th-century Jesuit missionaries, and stressing the importance of an “endotic” field. Today several aspects characterise this process of revitalising practices and discourses concerning tarantism: the therapeutic value of “tarantism”; the use of the academic anthropological memory of de Martino on the local social, political, and cultural scene; the transformation of Ernesto de Martino into a symbol; the commodification of tarantism and, finally, its transformation into a sort of cultural capital. In this framework, the debate on the tarantism healing value takes the form of a conflict between those who still consider tarantism as a healing rite which, on the same track as de Martino, if not still visible, has not died but is concealed, and those who are bringing about the inversion of tarantism. Tarantism is no longer linked to social suffering but is on its way to becoming a “feast” and a public asset.

Politics of memory

In his article on the work of Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965), published in 1993 in *American Anthropologist*, George Saunders called de Martino “the founding father” of Italian anthropology and compared him to Claude Lévi-Strauss or Franz Boas, as «one of the most exciting, original and profound thinkers of 20th-century anthropology» (Saunders 1993: 865). The Italian debate on de Martino started up again, after quietening down in the eighties, in 1995. The 30th anniversary of de Martino’s death was the occasion for an important conference on his work entitled “Ernesto de Martino within European culture”, which provided the opportunity for a serious re-examination of de Martino’s thought. At the same time, however, it was a true celebration of the memory of this founding father of Italian anthropology.

Now this bit of good fortune has led to another important consequence. De Martino is remembered not only by academic scholars, by several generations of Italian anthropologists, but he has at the same time been rediscovered by local actors in the cultural contexts in which he did his fieldwork in southern Italy. In the Salentine peninsula, the local public memory of tarantism is above all the memory of de Martino’s fieldwork team, and the memory of de Martino’s monographic studies. Depending on the different positions of the diverse subjects on the local scene, de Martino’s work is at times the model for “correct” revitalisation practices, a sort of cultural map to be followed step by step by those who want to discover contemporary Salento, or a sort of guide to rediscovering places and people (de Martino’s informants). However, he can also be considered as the anthropologist who has branded the Salentine peninsula with the term *Land of remorse*, which, for most actors of the local scene, is an offensive term synonymous with backwardness. So they say that Salento is no more the “Land of Remorse” – meaning the land of a “bad past” – but the “Land of Renaissance”, and this transformation has been made possible by the continuous revision of tarantism studies. Another reason for this “renaissance” is that the cultural phenomenon he studied was really spectacular: a sort of spirit possession, a spider possession needing – as a therapy – dance and music. Tarantism is literally a “collective representation” in the true sense of a staged performance. Therefore, the academic rediscovery of de Martino’s work seems to be paralleled by the Salentine rediscovery of his figure and the rise of several local anthropologies. At the same time there is a revitalisation and a reinvention of tarantism, which is being freed from its former aspect of suffering and despair, and transformed into a “renaissance” discourse, “renaissance” being the specific term used by many

local cultural producers. The renaissance of tarantism is based on a rhetoric of nostalgia, above all for the original healing dance and music of tarantism: the rhythm of the *pizzica tarantata*.

The trance enigma: suffering or joy?

Recently Amalia Signorelli, an Italian cultural anthropologist who was part of the fieldwork team directed by de Martino in Salento in 1959, wrote a short note commenting on an article by a musical critic, Leonardo Nono. Reviewing a book by Gino Stefani, entitled *Intense emotions in music*, Nono wrote that the book was about “the vicissitudes of those who fall into a trance under the affect of tarantism, the phenomenon studied by Ernesto de Martino 40 years ago, in old Salento, *which unfortunately does not exist any more*”. Upon reading this comment, Amalia Signorelli declares herself to have been struck by the expression “unfortunately”. She says that she was “deeply bewildered, and indignant with Nono because she thinks it is simply abominable to think that «one could look back with regret on tarantism, on the practice of dancing the *taranta*, and lament its vanishing» (Signorelli, 1996, 591).

In Amalia Signorelli's opinion

«As I saw it in fieldwork in 1959, tarantism was sodden with suffering, individual and collective suffering, it was drenched with ‘psychological misery’ and was associated in each case with a deep material indigence».

Here Signorelli is quoting the term that de Martino himself took from Piaget to define the roots of ritual in the psychological and material conditions of indigence. From our point of view, Signorelli's comment is very suggestive because it stresses the public use of de Martino's legacy. Although Signorelli's position derives from the same “engagement” which inspired de Martino's work – the hope that tarantism one day will no longer be necessary, that it will vanish when the subaltern class finally overcomes – she does not intend to criticise the “correctness” of the re-reading of de Martino offered by this occasional commentator in the columns of Italy's leading newspaper, *La Repubblica*. The point of her comment is instead the way of transforming de Martino's thought simply by overturning his interpretation: the wish for the vanishing of tarantism has now been transformed into regret for its passing. The problem is to understand how knowledge about tarantism and Ernesto de Martino, the local knowledge which de Martino's book for the first time launched into the sphere of public debate, has now become circulating, shared

information, a sort of belief or a symbol, which can be thought or acted out in practice.

The transformation of tarantism into a positive symbol, set free from its connection to suffering, is possible only because the symbol has been totally decontextualised, reified, and projected into an ill-defined universal dimension. While in de Martino's book the trance of tarantism is an example of a dramatic relationship between the existential self and its presence in the world (Pandolfi 1993), and the tarantistic ritual serves to solve this cultural drama, the contemporary public's rereading considers trance and possession by the tarantula as a cultural good, a public patrimony. The music and the dance are not linked any more to suffering but are the instruments for entering into trance, which is the main aim of the ritual.

This way of idealising and, at the same time, reifying tarantism and all related altered states of consciousness, ecstasy, spirit possession, dream and enthusiasm, whose objective is the motivation of emotions and the rediscovery of corporeal experience, constitutes the salient characteristic of the incorrect rereading of de Martino in the mass media and public communication, and the essential salient characteristic of the transformation of tarantism into an outright cultural good. Furthermore, the ritual nature of the phenomenon of possession favours its representation as objectified, naturalised, and embodied historical memory. The reversal of de Martino's interpretation of tarantism is thus inserted in the anthropological debate concerning the exorcistic or adorcistic nature of tarantistic ritual, and accepts the criticisms levelled at de Martino by scholars including George Lapassade (1994) and Gilbert Rouget (1980), who accused him of not seeing tarantism as a true cult of possession, but merely as an exorcistic ritual. These adorcistic academic interpretations thus favour the local revitalisation reinterpretations. The search for possession becomes a sort of attempt to enter into contact with the past, to renew the past in the present through a practice of nostalgia (Battaglia 1995).

This rereading of tarantism is clearly evident in the new literature on the subject, which has been evolving in the Salento area over the last ten years, and with particular intensity over the last five years (Pizza 1999). Here we are confronted with the problem of the interweaving of the academic anthropological debate and the anthropological memory of de Martino, a literary sociology of the local reception of de Martino's work, and the cultural policies being put into operation in contemporary Salento which are revitalising and activating the memory of de Martino and tarantism.

Tarantism as “love bite” or as “rebirth”

I will now examine two figures that represent different approaches to the phenomenon of tarantism and to its healing value, as well as different ways of representing its historical continuity: the link between tarantism and suffering and that between tarantism and joy. This historical continuity should be understood as continuity with the Salentine “past” – defined broadly as the “origins of tarantism” – but also as continuity or discontinuity, according to the various positions, with de Martino’s treatment of tarantism, assumed as a model for memorialising Apulian tarantism which one may subscribe to or reject. The books written by these authors all take de Martino’s text as their fundamental model, often even imitating its style and composition with its photographic appendices and selection of sheet music, and are sometimes sold together with audio or video cassettes. One common horizon is a narrative expressing a sense of belonging to the place and dedication to the memory of the past. We are dealing with local insiders in the contemporary practice of Salentine tarantism who are also involved in the field of Salentine cultural politics both as organisers of traditional events and programs and as performers, leaders of musical groups inspired by the musical tradition of tarantism.

Luigi Chiriatti is the leader of the popular music group called *Aramirè*, and the author of a book on tarantism called *Morso d’amore* (Love Bite). In Salento, Chiriatti has been one of the chief operators in a program of rediscovery and conservation of tarantism, with a style that is rather averse to “contamination.” Recounting the story of his life, he defines his “entrance” into tarantism as an “initiation crisis,” stealing from anthropology concepts and terminology to explain his own choices. Sometimes he chooses the style of an illness narrative, a rhetoric of a suffering cured after his entrance into the world of tarantism. It seems that his body, the body of the writer, is “in pain” (Fabre 1998). The volume opens, in fact, with an evocation of the author’s own childhood in which cruel games with animals – snakes, lizards, spiders – which are characteristic of the folklore of children’s games in the rural Italian south – are experienced with a sense of guilt, especially with respect to Saint Paul, the saint who is both the agent of possession in the tarantistic ritual and the guarantor of the cure. His precocious attraction for the observance of the popular traditions of his local community – starting when he was ten years old and continuing up to a university thesis on tarantism – is recounted and interpreted in this book as a sort of vocation which grew out of the family environment. He begins by recording his parents’ singing and then journeys around Salento.

From this moment on, his research on local tarantism, which will lead to encounters with numerous “*tarantate*,” is described as a kind of challenge-dialogue between himself and Saint Paul, a dialogue similar to the ritual one between “*tarantati*” and the spirit that possesses them. It is an encounter between two double ambiguities: Chiriatti the researcher and Salentino, the Saint Paul who heals the bite but who bites (the agent of possession who is also responsible for the cure). Chiriatti describes his research on tarantism as a continuous attempt to escape from the possibility that he too will be possessed by the spider-saint. Therefore, he decides to continue his study of tarantism through the vehicle of his university thesis, but here too his approach is much more cautious, much less morbid than other ones (Di Lecce 1994). He assumes an attitude of greater modesty in following the Demartinian tracks, in contacting the same informants. So in the early 1980s, when he takes up his research once again, at the beginning of a process of revitalising theatrical performances of tarantism, he starts shooting a new documentary and discovers a new tarantata, Cristina, who will be his Maria di Nardò (the main “character” of de Martino’s monograph). But, in Chiriatti’s account, it happens that, at the moment she is about to be filmed, the tarantata doesn’t want to dance, she doesn’t feel, that is, the impulse of the trance performance, and it is then that he reactivates his competitive dialogue with the saint, has a vision, more or less real, of a snake, and kills it while yelling out the traditional magic chant which he had used as a child to challenge Saint Paul. Struck by the challenge, the saint-tarantula moves inside the body of his tarantata, so that the filming of the dance can begin. As we can see from this account, the phenomenon of tarantism is reconstructed in the expressive form of a story of memory, but the attempt to objectify tarantism is an ongoing challenge for Chiriatti, a real and true example of exorcism. The acts he performs in his study of tarantism are efficient only when he succeeds in winning his intimate challenge with the saint, as he is also “inside” the local tradition, an “initiate,” as he defines himself:

«The state of being inside the phenomenon as an active participant comes out anyway when I play the drum. During my performance of the *pizzica tarantata* there are moments when I completely lose all sense of reality and I enter, if only in a personal way, into another reality made up of sensations, emotions. [...] Perhaps it is this inside-outside freedom to go in or come out that gives rise to the conflict between myself and Saint Paul: the fact that I have not been captured by him, that I am not one of his possessed, has put us into conflict, sometimes dormant and sometimes diluted over time, but never resolved» (Chiriatti 1995: 21-22).

It is quite evident from the account that the concepts of “native” anthropology and the references to de Martino are utilised to achieve a re-evoca-

tion-reinvention of his own cultural memory. Outside Salento, in New York, the metaphor of “love bite” concerning the therapeutical value of tarantism is acted in musical and healing practices by Alessandra Belloni, who is a singer, percussionist, actress and dancer who works in the U.S.A. with her group of players “I Giullari di Piazza. I will analyse the case of Belloni in a forthcoming article. What I want to recall now is only that she teaches the frame drum in international schools of music-therapy and as a cultural producer she is engaged in an attempt to transform tarantism into a sort of “new age” religious and healing cult (Consolmagno 1999).

Tarantismo e rinascita (Tarantism and rebirth) is the title of a volume published recently by Pierpaolo de Giorgi (1999), an author of whom the book jacket states:

«Pierpaolo Giorgi took his degree in Philosophy at the University of Perugia, discussing a thesis in Aesthetics. He is currently the director of the regional centre for educational and cultural services in Copertino. He conducts intensive activity of research and promotion of cultural initiatives in the area of popular traditions and ethnomusicology. His interest in the practice of the performing arts led to his founding the group of “*Tamburellisti di Torre Paduli*”, with whom he has gone on concert tours throughout Italy and abroad. The group’s musical activities are aimed at the conservation and promotion of a whole tradition of Salentine music and dance, commonly known as “pizzica, pizzica”. With this volume he wishes to share with the public a broad range of his reflections on various aspects which come together to make up the universe of tarantism».

«This book... is me», began De Giorgi, at the presentation of his book in Perugia, a city in central Italy, before an audience composed primarily of people belonging to the Salentine community of Perugia. He thus rendered explicit the intimate motivation which pushed him to write the book: the attempt to find in tarantism an “ancient identity,” both individual and collective. This is also how he explains the book’s title. It is a title, which expresses, through the idea of rebirth, a reversal of the Demartinian concept of a tarantism connected with suffering. In a perspective which historians of religion would define as neo-irrationalist, De Giorgi attempts to subvert that which to him is a stereotype of a tarantism connected to individual and collective suffering, to arrive at an understanding of the archaic dimension of tarantism, rooted in the archaic mythologies of *Magna Grecia*. In regard to this point, we should bear in mind the broad range of De Giorgi’s activities. He is a poet, a musician in a neo-tarantist ensemble, who defines him as an ethnomusicologist and anthropologist who is employed in a cultural institution in the Salentine town of Copertino. He is among the most important figures in the contemporary movement for the revitalisation of tarantism. As he himself proudly states, his objective «is

that of protecting and recovering the Salentine heritage and in particular the culture of tarantism. The music that cured the *tarantate* must now enchant the crowds in the piazzas». Tarantism is dying in its canonical, Demartinian forms, but according to De Giorgi

«it is being born again, because it is nothing else but a philosophy of rebirth, a definitive resource for survival» (De Giorgi 1999: 47).

Therefore, from his perspective, the southern question becomes the question of the rebirth of forgotten folklore:

«Having shed the worn out clothes of cultural subjection, the Apulian folk tradition and more generally the Mediterranean folk tradition now appears in all of its exuberant potential for rebirth» (Idem: 51).

Images: the inversion of tradition

Now I would like to examine, very briefly, three examples of multimedia expression of the aesthetics of contemporary tarantism – the case of a painter, that of a photographer, and that of a director, all three Salentines who have achieved international success: the painter Luigi Caiuli, the photographer Fernando Bevilacqua, and the director Edoardo Winspeare.

The painter Luigi Caiuli recently donated to the town of Galatina – home of the Church of Saint Paul where the ritual of tarantism takes place – a collection of his paintings constituting a real and true cycle called *Le tarantate di Luigi Caiuli*. The cycle is composed of «twenty paintings, oil on canvas, representing stories of tarantate», as described by the town administration. These paintings were shown in 1998 on the occasion of an international conference organised by the scholar Gino Leonardo Di Mitri, a high school teacher in Maglie, a town in Salento, and supported and promoted by the Municipality of Galatina, by the regional administration of Apulia, and by the University of Lecce, and which was attended by a large number of academics and local historians. The conference was called *Tarantism: Forty Years After De Martino* and had, through the publication of the proceedings, the clear intention of going beyond the Demartinian thesis to achieve a substantially local reappropriation of the phenomenon and above all of its “official interpretation”. Reprinted in the appendix to the proceedings of the conference, Caiuli’s canvasses are introduced by the following presentation:

«The tarantate by Luigi Caiuli are the fruit of a twenty-year study which brings together the various themes of the painter such as society, peasant culture, and the historic folklore of Salento. His work is aimed, therefore, at

bringing to light all that which has come out of tarantism and moved into the realm of myth and legend. Luigi Caiuli's objective in donating these twenty paintings to the town of Galatina is that of not dispersing what could be defined as an artistic-cultural patrimony and to offer to future generations the visual documentation of a part of Galatina history which has been gradually losing its place in local memory» (Di Mitri ed. 1999: tomo II).

This cultural and patrimonial reading proposed here takes the place of an aesthetic interpretation. It is not possible to conduct an in-depth analysis here of the paintings and of the context in which they were produced, but even a superficial look at them reveals their connection to the Demartinian and post-Demartinian models of visual documentation, further radicalised in the erotic representations of the tarantate, in those corporeal figures of the possessed that her family members, during the possession rite, try to keep hidden from the eyes of observers, and which represent the "non visible" part of the ritual. Even the titles of the paintings recall expressions coined by de Martino: «fury and stupor; erotic fury; dance epidemic; domestic therapy; music therapy; the spider women etc.».

Along the same lines as Caiuli, and as part of a cultural program organised by the Galatina Fair entitled *Tarantati*, the photographer Fernando Bevilacqua, set up a show called "an uncontrollable desire to dance" which he defined as a documentation of "neotarantism" with the objective of «demonstrating the euphoria tied to the new phenomenon of the Salentine pizzica now so popular among young people». He also presented a musical video-clip entitled "Bit, pressed together in space without time" in which he states:

«It was necessary to give some dignity to the phenomenon of the tarantate that was different from the historical documentaries. It's a real music video created on the computer which explains what the poet Antonio Verri called the "long hiss," the close relationship that exists between the Salentine people and their land because today young people are consciously trying to recover their traditions. They play music and dance to achieve the joyful state of the trance. The taranta which instilled fear and was damned is coming back to the younger generation in the form of a joyous state of grace».

The inversion of the tradition (Thomas 1992) here could not be more evident. Bevilacqua was born in the Salentine town of Muro Leccese, where he was the town photographer, and now, by way of so-called neo-tarantism, he is able to sell his products in the main global markets of culture, even in Los Angeles. For this reason his neo-tarantism has an unequivocal positive sense. Furthermore, the phenomenon's close ties to the local community are used as a sign of authenticity that guarantees the typical nature of the cultural goods it produces.

This is also the case in the world of cinema. Apart from the creative and aesthetic values of these products, they have taken on the characteristics of cultural goods whose connection to the local community, whose “typicality” appears to be founded on the capacity they have to adhere to representations of local history and at the same time to project themselves into the global dimension of the market. This is the case of the director E. Winspeare, another Salentino, despite his odd-sounding name. His first film *Pizzicata*, from 1994, is constructed around a radical manipulation and transformation of the story of Maria di Nardò, the true foundation myth of the cult of de Martino. As has been observed by Georges Lapassade – one of the anthropologists closest to and responsible for this mediation between local discourse and anthropological discourse – «de Martino’s work provides the basis for cultural construction, which then follows from it. As if it were a permanent support for the *pizzica* which resists by way of its elaboration in folklore, a sort of *trait d’union* between past and present» (Lapassade 1995: 12; 1994). In 2000 Winspeare’s second film on Salento was released, *Sangue vivo* (Live blood), which was warmly received by the critics. The film is the story of two “pizzica” musicians, one a smuggler and the other a drug addict, who, as the critic Mario Sesti has written,

«confront each other openly on the arbitrary boundary between opposing views of life. A struggle for survival which moves between the risks of dissolution and the possibility of breaking through, in this umpteenth updated variation on *La terra del rimorso*, whose presence is felt in the suffocating, sun-baked landscapes, in which only music seems capable of relieving people’s pain. A substantially immobile world, in which the protagonists never succeed in escaping their destinies of self-destruction, the women never manage to overcome their look of pain» (Sesti 2000).

Tarantism seems to have returned once again to its representation of illness and suffering, or the incarnate critique of hegemony. One is surprised, therefore, to hear the rhetoric of nostalgia, which creeps in to the interviews of the Salentine director. After the success of his films, Winspeare is being used to promote Salentine products and has given a series of long interviews where he talks about typical Salentine dishes and the attractive qualities of the local cuisine.

Tarantism today

If we move toward a more open interpretation of tarantism as spirit possession, we can consider it as a wider system of thought and practice to

which local writings, pictures, films or music performances also belong (Boddy 1994; Pizza 1996, 1999; Lambek 1999). As we have seen, the books about tarantism by Chiriatti and De Giorgi cannot be considered to be the work of local historians, but they must be seen in conjunction with their activities as musicians, writers and artists. At the same time, they participate in the ritual healing performances of tarantism which are still put on in some local communities. What the works of these authors have in common is the “search for origins”, which is especially strong in De Giorgi. Their search does not constitute an anthropological or historiographical problem but belongs, along with De Giorgi’s other creative practices, to a complex rhetoric of identity and self, which attempts to effect a ritualised rebirth of history in the present (Boyer 1996; Lambek 1999; Csordas 1999), or rather to ensure the continuity of the past in the present by reincarnating it in the physical performances of dance and music, or by identifying a new symbolic life in a system of objects connected to tarantism, and in particular the drum, which, as happens in the hyper-symbolising mechanisms present in Western practices of neo-shamanism, is described as a cosmic instrument. De Giorgi writes:

«In my view the Salentine drum is a perfect symbolic expression of the contemporaneous presence of complementary opposites (the sharp notes of the rattles and the bass notes of the skin) condensed inside the unity of the magic ritual circle of the frame. More precisely, it is the instrument that allows the union of sky and earth, the sacrifice and the construction with the skin of the goat, the quintessential sacrificial animal» (De Giorgi 1999: 159).

Chiriatti writes:

«The drum is the most important instrument for the musical therapy of the *tarantati* and it must be made in a certain way because it represents the synthesis of musical therapy and is itself a synthesis of symbols. Circle, rattles, and skin must be assembled in a certain way [...] The circle represents, in its roundness, the universe and the magical-ritual circle in which the action of the ritual takes place. The rattles, always made of copper, represent disorder, the irrational, the obscure, the ugly, the discordant, reality that scratches you and falls on top of you. The rattles scratch, cause disturbance, refuse to enter into harmony with the other instruments, they are annoying, in discord with the pre-constituted rhythmic and harmonic order. This is the reason why the old musicians don’t appreciate the new drums with small, harmonious rattles. The skin represents the constant rhythm, the constant cadenced beat, which serves to reintegrate the taranta into the order of the things of daily life» (Chiriatti 1995: 27).

The “fetishist” symbolism of the drum is thus revitalised by local subjects in complicity with the neo-irrationalist and Jungian readings, which are proposed, often in the prefaces to books by academic philosophers and scholars. These academic professionals tend to deconstruct, on a scientific

level, the Demartinian interpretation of tarantism, almost as if they want to liberate it from the interpretative anthropological hegemony of Demartinian studies, obviously more attentive to the symbolic effectiveness and to historic-cultural contextualisation of symbols, and far from any idea of proposing “incentives” for their revitalisation. On the other hand, the neo-mythological and neo-irrationalist perspective lends itself well to the essentialist construction of identity and belonging and a cultural politics, which transforms tarantism into a saleable good capable of being projected onto the global market.

To study contemporary tarantism today means coming to terms with this complex interweaving which brings together various kinds of practices – writing, art, cinema, philosophical reflection, academic anthropology and cultural politics – put into play by local institutions. The actors in this complex field of discourses and practices appear to be organised in a sort of complicity which is manifested, on the one hand, through a certain contemplative rhetoric, based on the search for the “origins” of local culture and thus consciously intent on the reinvention and revitalisation of tarantism, and, on the other, by the embodiment of traditional knowledge through the performance of the metaphors of tarantism and through their naturalisation in daily practice. The complex ritual of tarantism offers itself as a complex device for the embodiment of these imaginative processes and it allows a rhetoric of identity to be created which simultaneously models and constructs its own sense of self. Anthropology has by now completely entered this process, offering the instruments that enable identity politics, its conception, objectification, and finally, its incarnation. Ernesto de Martino is transformed into an embodied symbol, to be recalled or rejected, evoked or repressed. Basically he has now become identified with Saint Paul as the guiding spirit both for anthropologists and local experts; he is the agent – and in this role, yes, ambiguous and ironic just like any self-respecting spirit – of a new form of possession, adorcistic and exorcistic. Or rather of a process of incorporation of local history and local memory, a complex process, which delineates a field managed by a multiform variety of social actors and micropowers, now in alliance, now at odds. A real and true division of labour is at work. This division of labour derives its structure from tacit or declared complicity between local, academic, and national authorities and institutions, and cultural operators and specialists in local culture, or can explode into open conflicts that take the form of discussions about the “purity”, the “authenticity”, or the “correctness” of the tradition.

In sum, what is being put into play is a politics of memory and tradition, which lets the memory of healing ritual interact with the identity politics (Csordas 1999) and the "visible evidence" (Mahon 2000) of practices and discourses of cultural producers. This process involves anthropologists and anthropology, and that is why it is a challenge for fieldwork, because it is leading us to reflect about our involvement in the realities, which we study. When anthropology is at home (Peirano 1998) anthropologists should be more aware of their own "aptitude" for complicity with local politico-cultural processes of imagining the past and reinventing identity.

References

- BATTAGLIA, Debora (1995) "On practical nostalgia: self prospecting among urban Trobrianders". In BATTAGLIA, D. (ed.) *Rhetorics of self-making*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 77-96.
- BODDY, Janice (1994) "Spirit possession revisited: beyond instrumentality". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 23, p. 407-434.
- BOYER, Veronique (1996) "Le don et l'initiation. De l'impact de la littérature sur les cultes de possession au Brésil". *L'Homme*, num. 138, p. 7-24.
- CHIRIATTI, Luigi (1995) *Morso d'amore. Viaggio nel tarantismo salentino*. Lecce: Capone.
- CONSOLMAGNO, Peppe (1999) "Alessandra Belloni". *Percussioni*, vol. 10, num. 94., p. 56-63.
- CSORDAS, Thomas J. (1999) "Ritual healing and the politics of identity in contemporary Navajo society". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, num. 1, p. 3-23.
- DE GIORGI, Pierpaolo (1999) *Tarantismo e rinascita*. Lecce: Argo.
- DE MARTINO, Ernesto (1961) *La terra del rimorso. contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- DI LECCE Giorgio (1994) *La danza della piccola taranta. Cronache da galatina (1908-1993). A memoria d'uomo*. Roma: Sensibili alle Foglie.
- DI MITRI, Gino L. (ed.) (1999) *Quarant'anni dopo De Martino. Il tarantismo*. Nardò: Besa.
- FABRE, Daniel (1999) "Le corps pathétique de l'écrivain". *Gradhiva*, num. 25, p. 1-13.
- GALLINI, Clara and Marcello MASSENZIO (eds.) (1997) *Ernesto de Martino nella cultura europea*. Napoli: Liguori.
- LAMBEK, Michael (1998) "The Sakalava poiesis of history: realizing the past through spirit possession in Madagascar". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 25, num. 2, p. 106-127.
- LAPASSADE, Georges (1994) *Intervista sul tarantismo*. Maglie: Madona Oriente.
- LAPASSADE, Georges (1995) *Prefazione*. In CHIRIATTI L. *Morso d'amore. Viaggio nel tarantismo salentino*. Lecce: Capone p. 5-12.
- MAHON Maureen (2000) "The visible evidence of cultural producers". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 29, p. 467-492.
- PANDOLFI Mariella (1993) *Le self, le corps, la "crise de la presence"*. In CORIN E. (ed.). *Folie/espaces de sens Anthropologie et sociétés*. vol. 17, num. 1-2, p. 57-77.
- PEIRANO MARIZA, G.S. (1998) "When anthropology is at home: the different contexts of a single discipline". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 27, p. 105-128.
- PIZZA, Giovanni (1996) "Sulla 'possessione europea'". *AM. Rivista della società italiana di antropologia medica*, num. 1-2, p. 261-286.

- PIZZA, Giovanni (1999) "Tarantismi oggi: un panorama critico sulle letterature contemporanee del tarantismo (1994-1999). *AM. Rivista della società italiana di antropologia medica*, num. 1-2, p. 261-286.
- ROUGET, Gilbert (1980) *La musique et la trance*. Paris: Gallimard.
- SAUNDERS, George R. (1993) "'Critical ethnocentrism' and the ethnology of Ernesto de Martino". *American Anthropologist*, vol. 95, num. 4, p. 875-93.
- SESTI Mario (2000) "Sangue vivo, la taranta sfida la trance artificiale". *Musica*, 15 giugno 2000.
- SIGNORELLI, Amalia (1996) "Il tarantismo... che purtroppo non c'è più". *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*, vol. 62, num.s. 20, p. 591-598.
- THOMAS, Nicholas (1992) "The inversion of tradition". *American Ethnologist*, vol. 19, num. 2, p. 213-232.