

Dancing on the margins of the state.
*Fragments for an ethnography of sovereign bodies in
Southeastern Italy*

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That is why [...] the entirety of the state is a margin. Or rather, the sovereign force of the law is expressed in the state's continual attempts to overcome the margin.

Talal ASAD (2004: 287).

Molecular

Contemporary anthropological research has allowed us to overcome the abstract nature of politological and philosophical definitions of the state. The state is no longer conceived as an abstract, rational and monolithic entity, but as a complex and contradictory form of life that is embodied in our everyday practice⁽¹⁾. This has become possible due to a change in scale – from geographical and politically abstract dimensions to those of the body and its potentialities⁽²⁾.

This attention to the micro-physical dimension of the state and to the bodily production of common sense that legitimates it within civil society, lies at the heart of the critical work of Antonio Gramsci. In Gramsci we find what can be termed as a *molecular anthropology*, in the sense of the micro-physical examination of the processes that impact upon the relationship between the body and the state⁽³⁾. His frequent use of the term “molecular” shows how intent he is in capturing embodiment processes by positioning himself as closely as possible to bodily experience. The notion of molecular, in fact, allows him to observe in political terms the relationship between embodiment and the state. The state acts, as Gramsci writes, with a «sentimental and ideological contact with the multitudes» (GRAMSCI A. 1975: 1122, 2197 [*Notebook 9*: §. 42, 1932; *Notebook 23*: §. 8, 1934]). It functions as a “body factory”, taking on the task of elaborating «a new human type» (*ibidem*: 2156 [*Notebook 22*: §. 2, 1934]) thus transforming the body in order to produce an embodied common sense.

Ernesto de Martino, in his important study on tarantism ⁽⁴⁾ in Puglia (Apulia, Southeastern Italy), *La terra del rimorso* [*The Land of Remorse*], seems to follow the Gramscian line when he writes about the necessity of “molecular” anthropological studies of “minor” cultural phenomena, as observed in their specific detail. In a way, *The Land of Remorse* is a reflection of a national citizenship, which is observed at the extreme margins of the state – in the Salento, the southern part of Puglia, the extreme southeastern strip of Italy (the heel of the boot), for centuries called the *finibus terrae* (ERRICO A. 2007, GALLINI C. 2008).

The book, which first appeared in 1961 in the first centennial celebration of the Unification of Italy, took on an important political meaning among Italian civil society – that of the reformulation of the socio-political and economic debate on the “Southern Question” in relation to what we could nowadays define as a bodily “scale”, identified in the dancing figures possessed by the bite of the tarantula. Tarantism is a cultural phenomenon existing in the Salento since Middle Ages. After the unification of Italy in 1861, however, it had become one of the symbols of the “backwardness of the South” and of the “Southern Question”, the oxymoronic place of an *endotic exotism*, the memory site of what de Martino himself had called *elective fatherland* (GALLINI C. ed. 2003), the terrain of what American scholars have recently called *orientalism in one country* (SCHNEIDER J. ed. 1998). If we connect this relationship between dance, social hardship and institutions to the “molecular anthropological analysis”, and at the same time project the question of the marginality of the South on a vaster scale, we can see that *The Land of Remorse* is a pioneering work in this field. According to de Martino:

«*The Land of Remorse* aspires to be a molecular contribution to a religious and cultural history of our South, in the prospect of a new dimension of the Southern Question. This means that the molecular phenomenon from which the historical discourse takes its cue – tarantism – is not considered in its local isolation. [...] For in a [...] broader sense, *The Land of Remorse* is our whole planet, or at least that part of it which has entered the shadow-cone of its wretched past» (DE MARTINO E. 2005[1961]: XXII).

In the last decades of the 20th Century, tarantism in the forms studied by de Martino has gradually disappeared. In its place, with the advent of the new millenium, a potent industry of cultural heritage safeguarding/commodification has seemingly made its way to the forefront, which has also impacted upon the memory of the founding father of Italian anthropology. What had actually happened in “the land of remorse” during the last ten of the fifty years after de Martino’s monograph?

Wandering as an ethnographer around the location of the most important Demartinian fieldwork, I have been observing the contemporary politics

of tarantism, exploring the fast commodification of de Martino's ghost tracks⁽⁵⁾. Observed from such a new ethnographic viewpoint, *The Land of Remorse* seemed to have become the land of intellectual and political-economic conflict over intangible cultural heritage, and, by means of that, the laboratory of an emerging, fragmented, and contradictory form of democratic sovereignty. Everything happened in the wake of an ongoing commodification process: a cultural marketing which involved knowledge, dances, bodies, and persons (anthropology and anthropologists included).

The political-economic development of these processes of heritage preservation has given rise to enormous conflictuality within the local and national democratic sphere. These processes and the consequent forms of commodification have mainly focussed on the various aspects of music and dance. Since these aspects are mainly corporeal, the commodification process has reached the point of commercialising the very notion of the person itself⁽⁶⁾. Increasing numbers of persons involved in the dances seem to have offered, through the rhetoric of heritage preservation, a new mode of legitimation to the local and national authorities. Almost as it used to happen once upon a time, according to the classical political philosophy of the state, when crowds of acclaiming bodies seemed to constitute the popular legacy of a sovereign power (AGAMBEN G. 2007).

In Gramsci's times, Italy used to be the laboratory of an insurgent democracy struggling against Fascism. Nowadays it seems to be the bizarre laboratory of the crisis of democracy itself, the Italian form of a kind of Neoliberalism, which is not only an economic doctrine or neoconservative policy, but which can also be conceptualised, as recently suggested by Aihwa Ong, «as a new relationship between government and knowledge» (ONG A. 2006: 3). Indeed in Italy today we have before us a unique form of populism, which is paradoxically mingled with a traditional "backward" common sense with strongly modern hyper-mediatic forms of public culture, whose goal seems to be the retreat from, if not a vigorous refusal of, critical approaches in any field⁽⁷⁾. Ethnographic research as well as any field of situated knowledge operating in Italy today can hardly ignore such an actual transformation of intangible democratic sovereignty.

Intangible

«From the ancient traditions of the Salento wide flouncing dresses and wrapping scarfs...», thus one could read from a popular fashion magazine that attracted my attention in the early days while I was carrying out eth-

nographic research on the politics of culture and tradition, and the processes of heritage safeguarding/commodification of tarantism in the Salento. I had been there once before in 1994 to do some fieldwork on the metaphor of the bite of the tarantula, that Ernesto de Martino had explored in 1959 but leaving a question unanswered – why had the tarantula specifically taken on the symbol of the conflict that was incorporated in social, physical and existential suffering and hardship? But when I got there, the re-elaboration of the symbol had already been so fully entrenched in the local bureaucratic and administrative policy-making network that my research goals were completely swamped. It was no longer a matter of exploring the symbolic dimension of the belief, but rather of reconstructing the modes of intellectual production of the expressive culture, the strategies of naturalisation of a corporeal metaphor, that had been distributed in the territory by the cultural policies of the local councillors. It was necessary, therefore, to begin with investigating the agency of the intellectuals in the daily reproduction of the public sphere (PIZZA G. 2004). The ethnographic *terrain* was coinciding with the intellectual *field* (BOURDIEU P. 2001, PALUMBO B. 2001). A field at times artistic, at times literary, at times academic-scientific, always political, current and historically profound; sometimes at the avante-garde world level – public meetings on tarantism were held between Calimera and Los Angeles.

Located on the southeastern fringe of the Italian heel and land of an historical orientalism played out on the body of the *tarantata*⁽⁸⁾, the Salento, at the end of the late 20th Century, was repositioning itself in the context of the global market of cultural differences. Through its institutions and by means of a strategic network of local bodies, as well as the Italian state, the European union, US markets and other supranational institutions (from the big multinationals like World Music to Unesco), a choice was made along the lines of the capitalisation of immaterial goods, even some years before the 2003 Unesco *Convention for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage*⁽⁹⁾. Goods that in the course of the ethnography, observed beyond the cultural dimension, would seem to become more and more identified with the local merchandise, derived from the processes of de-materialisation of the territory – from the trafficking of age-old olive trees uprooted and re-planted in the villas of Northern Italy; the black market of 18th century pavements of “restored” towns of the Salento; the rapid dismantlement of the last dry-stoned walls sometimes replaced with reinforced concrete ones; the creation of golf courses with lush green lawns to be watered, in an area where over the centuries water has been such a precious common good not easily available. Everything happened as if the

cultural *immaterialities* of the anthropologists and the financial *intangibles* of neo-liberal economy were going alongside each other⁽¹⁰⁾. This spurred the ethnographer to follow along the shadow lines of a political anthropology of the Salento landscape, at the very moment in which it materially emerged and re-emerged, under the cover of essentialist rhetoric on traditions and culture, thus nourishing, by means of a double bond between resistance and degradation, multiple forms of structural nostalgia (HERZFELD M. 2005 [1997]).

The relaunching of neo-tarantism had begun in 1994, when many local intellectuals who had written books that imitated the recently re-published *Land of Remorse*, began to place themselves in line or in contrast to an academic tradition which had been for quite some time exploring the tracks of Ernesto de Martino in the land of Southern Italy. The classical split between real ethnographic experience and the writing of the scientific account had by then definitely fallen by the wayside, under the blows of a progressive media saturation of the public sphere and ever growing popularisation of anthropology. *They* had already read what *we* were writing (BRETTEL C. B. ed. 1993).

Moreover, the drafting of books and the competition in the production of multimedial works, which was already the object of emotions, feelings and power games, was so evident that it could be compared to the tensions of academic life. Thus the first real ethnographic moment was that of attending the presentation ceremony of a local text on tarantism. And then, afterwards, participating in the presentation, often coming out without fear from the forms of a sociological *covert ethnography* which tends to conceal intentions and positions (CALVEY D. 2008). There were many initiatives of cultural production that would eventually lead to the success, in the new century, of the festival entitled *La Notte della Taranta* [*The Night of the Taranta*] – a kind of territorial marketing by the “cultural district” which was conceived and directed for the early years by a group of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists.

In the research on the rhetorics and politics of heritage preservation of tarantism, the contrast between a critical and an essentialistic vision of culture and traditions turned out to be a key problem. In fact it did not outline a dichotomic counterpositioning between the academic and local intellectuals. But it began to structure itself along more or less surprising transverse alliances between the two camps. At the same time the capacity of the local cultural-political machine of encompassing and defusing the ethnographic action by rapidly *patrimonializing* even the most radical critical reflections, had driven me to play the card of, let us say, an ethnogra-

phy that beat everyone to the punch by trying to dodge the blows and, at times, accepting the challenge even though with rather blunt weapons. I am referring, for example, to the considerable availability of local economic resources, which were far superior to anything upon which I could rely to carry out my study as a university researcher (basically my wage as a researcher). For those reasons an ethnography of local conflicts had to necessarily propel itself towards an examination of the forms of scientific dispute, the branches of scientific knowledge and the power relations operating in the academic field⁽¹¹⁾.

Untouchable

«The Tradition Sir! Yes Sir!» used to be my young nephew's ironic catchphrase, accompanying me during ethnographic fieldwork in the summer of 2004. A summer during which a very heated and contested debate arose over the destiny of the “untouchable traditions” – local ones as well as academic ones. The local debate was extremely conflictual. Inserting itself on the trunk of previous long-term disputes on the “authenticity” of tarantism music and dances, it began a year after the Unesco declaration for the valorisation of intangible goods, and spearheaded an internal conflict within the area of the Salento cultural policies which intended to contest the power which from 1998 the cultural event *La Notte della Taranta* had gained.

This festival, which was initiated after the creation of a consortium of Municipalities, had a centre-left political affiliation. It was started through the collaboration of anthropologists from the local university and the municipal, provincial and regional institutions and gradually gained ground as a potent tool of constructing “spontaneous” consent on the local and national public scene. The mayor of Melpignano, the town in which the festival is held, is also the regional leader of the most important party of the center-left coalition. He has become the principal animator of the festival, building up over the years quite a symbolic heritage at the media communication level.

The creation in 2004 of a web community coming from the lower Salento, soon becomes the hub of activity for the (trans)local youth audience (as well as the older set) to debate the legitimacy of cultural policy decisions and funding by the local institutions. The “monster” – the *Notte della Taranta* – is countered and challenged by the *pizzica-scherma*, the duelling/fencing dance of Torrepaduli, a hamlet of the town of Ruffano (48 Km from Lecce), in the heart of south Salento. Here during the night of *Santu Roccu*,

the feast of Saint Rocco, between 15th and 16th August, the *pizzica-scherma* takes its course. Organized in circles, rounds of performers, musicians and audience, called *ronda*, the dancing performance belongs to the ethno-choreutic category of “danced duels”: two men face each other in a fencing dance in which the fixed gesture of two fingers held tightly together (sometimes a hand held with the palm straight), mime the knife⁽¹²⁾.

Groups of supporters start to form for the *Notte di san Rocco* [Night of Saint Rocco] and rival supporters for the *Night of the Taranta*. But the conflictuality was also played out at the local level within each group. The mayor of Ruffano, the municipality to which Torrepaduli belongs, become the object of public accusations for not issuing public ordinances not allowing youth *pankabbestia* [gutter punk] groups to play their *djembe* drums while the *tamburello* drums were played during the night. The young people running the web community, together with other local intellectuals, initiated public debates centered round the exhortation to salvage and safeguard the duelling dance which seemed to be threatened by, on one hand, the *Night of the Taranta* and, on the other, by growing numbers of young invading “foreigners” that were spoiling the sound and setting of the *ronda*. The conflict took on the tones of cultural identity and heritage and on this front it was soon supported by Italian academics, anthropologists sensitive to the institutional valorisation of immaterial cultural goods (TUCCI R. 2004). At the local level, however, the conflict evoked a third less explicit but more disturbing element of contrast – the “gangsterish” nature of the dance⁽¹³⁾, deriving from prison everyday life, not only of the past, but also in its present connotations which rendered this dance ambiguous and contested in the even strong discursive conflicts about *patrimonialisation*, the granting for heritage status. This element seemed to somewhat embarrass the representatives of the local institutions, who were, however, conscious of the consensus and commercial value that these practices seem to activate, and who were ready to discuss the possible ways in which it could be conserved. Therefore in 2004, some dancers-fencers, guided by local intellectuals (sometimes graduated in the study of folk traditions), constituted the *Compagnia di scherma salentina* [Salentino fencing company], which claimed the intellectual property of the dance, and took the company on the cultural market and theatre circuit tour, producing books, DVD film/video, and music CD (MONACO D. 2006).

However, in the actual dynamics of the night of the danced duels, the conflict mounted to such an extent that there was the real risk of it exploding into physical clashes aided by the ambiguous code of the dance itself. One could say that the circle of the dance, the *ronda*, could represent a

metonymy of the public space in which political-patrimonial conflicts have developed in the recent historical stratification as well as in the diverse social camps – academic, local-political, and cultural-economic⁽¹⁴⁾.

Once, from one of the microphones of a scientific meeting, a young guy involved in local groups of *pizzica-scherma* supporters, had addressed the mayor by saying in a menacing tone that if he did not expel the djembe drum players, *they* [meaning the group of supporters to which he belonged] would have taken care of it themselves. But the problem in the rounds is that of stopping those who are not considered to be able to dance or play the music from entering the *ronda*. Some of the musicians, who to some extent also carry out the job of maintaining order, every now and then shout out so that the rhythm of the music be kept constant and also to stop naive tourists from venturing into the circle of the dance. But this is more often than not a way of producing tension rather than control it. And when scholars, students or tourists gather round with videocameras the tension is even more palpable.

In recent years this conflict has reached the point of projecting itself, on one hand, into the institutional organisation, and on the other, into a frontal but also transverse political conflictuality between the two political coalitions, that correspond to those that operate at the national level – the centre-left and the centre-right. If the centre-left had, not without its own internal conflictuality, managed to promote the development of the *Night of the Taranta*, in this way evoking and capitalising the ethnographic memory of Ernesto de Martino, the centre-right, on the other hand, rose to the occasion to manage and promote the development of the *Night of Saint Rocco*, in opposition to that memorial legacy. The dance-duel with its ambiguous bent for being the dance of prisoners, of the mafia or of an ethnic alterity like “the Gypsies” (according to diverse scholarly theories about its origins), became the object of a heritage preservation discourse on the part of an ample group of former extreme right-wing politicians, which now collocate themselves within the centre-right coalition. Two parallel cultural Foundations were soon created – the *Night of the Taranta Foundation*, and the *Night of Saint Rocco Foundation*. In 2008, the *Night of Saint Rocco Foundation* inaugurated its activities by means of a local conference held in Torrepaduli, which challenged the political and scientific authoritative memory of the anthropologist Ernesto de Martino, who had become the object of strong criticism on their part⁽¹⁵⁾.

Such a complex articulation of the political conflict reverberates in the gestures of the dance-duel and in the conflicts that it elaborates, involving an *intangibility* which becomes, in the concrete performance, a controlled

untouchability. The physical actions of the dance, that over the years had been kept secret and were exhibited only within the intimacy of the local cultural setting, were now exhibited in a kind of metadance – the dance is danced as if it were being continuously cited, by means of a disconnectedness between the action of the eyes and the action of the body. The eyes of the dancers are often looking at the crowd or the videocameras, while the body is engaged in the representation of the fight. A duality which is also the constitutive code of the dance. As the ethno-choreologist Giuseppe M. Gala notes, the dance-duel mimics a hostile duel, but – «it presents itself in the end as a double-faced medallion – the dispute on the front, the sodality on the back» (GALA G. M. 2005: 95). Something which recalls Michael Herzfeld's theory of "cultural intimacy", pointing at a double faced image of the state (HERZFELD M. 2005 [1997]).

The state's two bodies

Let's dance. The two bodies enter the *ronda* and move one towards the other performing in concentric circles. On the outside there is the circle of spectators, then the circle, the wheel of musicians, men and women, *tamburello* drums and guitars, and in the centre the two contenders, who in turn move in a circular fashion along the perimeter of the *ronda*. Here the performance is made up of bodily signs full of actions, that are projected and exchanged with those of the public and the musical rhythm in a three-dimensional performance, offering the spectator all the possible projections of the situation that is taking place.

The dancers are males. The dancer that challenges is always in the limelight as if he were winking or nodding to the audience or the videocameras. Then he meets the eye of his "rival". He proceeds along the perimeter but he is facing the centre, thus offering the public a three-dimensional view of the action. In the dynamics of such a scene, the spectator is in a continual exchange with the dancers, both spurred on by the musicians-singers. The challenger emits sounds of incitement towards his antagonist, or at times, vocal emissions or he stamps his feet at the beat of the music, which continuously plays on behind their backs. Introduced by the guitars and *tamburello* drums beating the rhythm of the *pizzica-scherma*, the two contenders stride into the circle in time with the music, they greet each other and shake hands with outstretched arms, which at the same time is a way of tugging each other into position in the centre and taking up their positions. The audience and the music incite the dancers to begin the chal-

lenge. After the salute, always accompanied by the music, they distance themselves from each other and raise their arms. The dance starts when they rotate their arms in a downward fashion and take up a challenging position simulating two knives with their fingers by holding their index finger and middle finger tightly together. Their arms rotate waving left and right, in a way that is complementary to the movement of the other contender, till the moment of striking, one aiming to touch/strike the other.

The dancers go around the perimeter of the circle, looking each other in the eye, with gestures, that in truth, seem to be more of acknowledgement and connivance rather than challenge. There is quite an evident amount of acting going on, to put on a spectacle. At times, they thrust forward an arm or two as if feigning an attack or a defence, at times bringing forward the right leg, as a form of protection against the other.

The duelling dancers never turn their backs on each other. With their eyes fixed on each other, they circle each other with their bodies facing towards the centre of the circle in time with the driving beat of the music, which gallops along while the dancers alternate slow and sinuous movements with intermittent rapid and direct movements, and pauses guided by the constant exchange of looks between them.

In the fragmentation of the gestures, with the mobilisation and immobilisation of parts of the body, the dancer carries out a kind of three-dimensional projection with respect to the audience. It is as if he is putting together a montage made up of close ups and long shots of his actions, while he dances along the perimeter of the circle – slowing down, accelerating or focussing on the moment. The touch, a small but decisive gesture, is what the audience is waiting for, aided by the music and song and the exploration and construction of the dancer. As soon as one of the dancers is even just slightly “touched” by the hand/knife of the other, he retreats and exits the circle while another challenger chosen among the audience is invited into the circle and the dance recommences.

The audience is quite varied but it accepts the invitation, or at least, those who know the duelling *pizzica* come forward to dance. The rules are complex, at least two – never turn your back and always look into the eyes.

Caught in the audience, the ethnographer is standing behind a documentarist who is impeded from filming the scene by some of the people there. The ethnographer knows those ones who are shoving the cameraman out. This contrast is part of the performance, enacted in the concentric circle immediately out of the *ronda*, and put on by the members of the danced duel supporting group. In this way they lay claim to the unassailable own-

ership of that *untouchable* scene. A form of violence is reflecting the simulacrum of the dance. A violent gesture which seems the first real execution of the eye commands that come from the *ronda* dancing fencers – it is performed and repeated within the circles that exist around the *ronda* in order to construct the untouchability of the touchers, in this way assuring their power in a public culture and on a political scene at the margins of the state. They are performing a violent act which is rhetorically represented as a heritage safeguarding action. Actually they are just claiming for the violent act itself, defending the insignia of their sovereign power, the empty simulacrum of a depleted ritual memory of the original prison dance setting.

Prison dance

On the 11th April, 1927, a year after his arrest, which was illegally carried out by the Fascist special police, Antonio Gramsci writes a letter to his sister-in-law Tatiana Schucht and recounts one of his experiences when he was transferred from one prison to another⁽¹⁶⁾.

In this account the danced-duel is observed with the acute gaze of a special “ethnographer” of the prison, and the relationship between the gestures and the state seems to be so insightful as it points at the bodily dimension of sovereignty:

«In Naples, among other things, I witness a scene of initiation into the Camorra. [...] One night at Castellammare A., in the carabinieri barracks. Then two days with approximately sixty detainees. A number of entertainments are organized for the occasion in my honor; the Romans improvise a wonderful group recital, Pascarella and popular sketches of the Roman underworld. Men from Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily present a knife fencing clinic in accordance with the rules of the four states of the southern underworld (the Sicilian state, the Calabrian state, the Apulian state, and the Neapolitan state): Sicilians against Apulians, Apulians against Calabrians, because the hatred between these two states is powerful and the clinic even becomes serious and bloody. The Apulian are the masters of all of them: unsurpassed knife wielders with a technique full of secrets and very lethal, developed in line with all the others and in order to outdo them. An old Apulian, aged sixty-five, much revered, but without “state” recognition, defeats all the champions of the other states; then, as the grand finale, he fences with another Apulian, a young man, with the most beautiful body and surprisingly agile, a high dignitary whom they all obey and for half an hour they demonstrate all the normal techniques of all the fencing schools. A truly grandiose and unforgettable spectacle in every way, because of the performers and the spectators: a whole subterranean world was revealed to me, extremely complicated, with its own life of emotions, of points of view, of points of honor, and formidable iron

hierarchies. The weapons were simple: spoons rubbed against the wall, so that the chalk marked off the blows on the clothes. [...] This will also explain how I pass the time when I am not reading; I think back over all these things, analyze them in the finest detail, become intoxicated with this Byzantine labor. Besides, everything that happens around me and that I'm able to perceive becomes extraordinarily interesting» (GRAMSCI A. 1994: 95-96).

Notes

⁽¹⁾ The anthropology of the state is one of the most important domain of contemporary anthropological research. With regards to the Italian nation-state see the two ethnographic monographs on Sicily by Bernardino Palumbo (PALUMBO B. 2003, 2009). For a comparative glance at different anthropological approaches and fieldwork locations, see: ARETXAGA B. 2003, HERZFELD M. 2005 [1997], DAS V. - POOLE D. (eds.) 2004, CORBRIDGE S. *et al.* (eds.) 2005, (insightfully discussed by Joanne Sharp about «the entangled nature of power relations through the state», see SHARP J. 2007: 602). For a collection of classic studies see SHARMA A. - GUPTA A. (eds.) 2006 (including an interesting large introduction written by the two editors: SHARMA A. - GUPTA A. 2006).

⁽²⁾ As the feminist geographer Alison Mountz has suggested: «[A] shift in the scale of analysis of the nation-state, from national and global scales to the finer scale of the body reveals processes, relations, and experiences otherwise obscured» (MOUNTZ A. 2004).

⁽³⁾ Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) rarely used the term “anthropology”, which in his writings has to do with his idea of man as an “historical product,” and with his rigorous critique of the naturalistic reductionism of the biological sciences. The term “molecular” is created by him because of the possibility it offers in referring to the minimum unit of life experience, to a specific detail drawn from daily life. For an insightful philosophical interpretation of “molecular” between Gramsci and de Martino, in the context of an analysis of tarantism, see TARI M. 2002. See also for an anthropological approach to Gramscian use of “molecular” PIZZA G. 2003.

⁽⁴⁾ *Tarantismo* is the spider bite possession ritual linked to the cult of Saint Paul, and the location of the 1959 ethnographic study conducted by Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965), and documented in his classic monograph (DE MARTINO E. 2005 [1961]). The ethnographic portion of the book is entitled *Salento 1959*. In the Salentino villages, women called *tarantate* claimed to be bitten by tarantula during their work in the fields. On Saint Paul's day, the 29th of June, they went to the city of Galatina. Inside and outside the church of St Paul they performed convulsions, which medical scientists classified as hysterics. The women were possessed by the spider spirit, and asked Saint Paul to help them recover. Previously, de Martino had observed possession and healing dance performances of some “tarantate” in their own homes. They were cured through music, dance and colour symbolism. This ritual has long historical roots, and has been the subject of argument between medical and catholic discourses since the Middle Ages. The medical profession classified the female bodily performances in three ways: as a disease caused by the venom of the tarantula; as an hysterical mental disorder; and as female fiction. Catholicism on the other hand introduced the figure of Saint Paul and progressively transformed a possession cult into a catholic cult of the saint. De Martino showed that the medical approach reduced the “symbolic autonomy” of tarantism, that is, it ignored its ritual function. He also argued that local bodily performances of spider-spirit possession should not be considered “subversive” to either medicine or official Catholicism. They were ritual performances in which ceremony and suffering were interwoven. Tarantism then was no longer understood as a mental disorder but rather as a ritual aiming to give a cultural meaning to female existential and social suffering.

⁽⁵⁾ On these aspects see PIZZA G. 1999, 2002abc, 2004, 2005, 2009. See also, for a different perspective, LÜDTKE K. 2009 and SANTORO V. 2009. Very interesting the recent contribution by Sergio Torsello about the history of the festival *La Notte della Taranta* (TORSELLO S. 2008). Torsello is also Author,

together with Gabriele Mina, of an impressive reasoned bibliography on tarantism (MINA G.-TORSELLO S. 2004).

⁽⁶⁾ On the “commodified persona” in the context of heritage industry see BUNTEN A. C. 2008; for case studies of the process of commodification in general, see ERTMAN M. M. - WILLIAMS J. C. (eds.) 2005.

⁽⁷⁾ The American anthropologist Douglas Holmes, in his Italian/European ethnography, had focused on such a process since its beginning, explaining current forms of Italian populist neo-integralism as a «commitment to traditional cultural forms [...] neither nostalgic nor residual; rather it formed the basis of a vigorous engagement with the modern world» (HOLMES D. 2000: 3). For the interesting suggestions from recent ethnographic investigations of democracy see PALEY J. 2002.

⁽⁸⁾ According to the times, intellectuals from various backgrounds have kept the discussion on tarantism alive – travellers, folk people, doctors, bishops, parliamentarians, anthropologists, archeologists, journalists, students carrying out university dissertations, tourism operators etc. (PIZZA G. 2004).

⁽⁹⁾ For a critical approach to Unesco Convention see GIGUÈRE H. 2006 on the Andalusian case. For an insightful critique of Unesco heritage culture and its role in producing global hierarchical taxonomies of values, see PALUMBO B. 2006, starting from the Sicilian case, see also PALUMBO B. 2003.

⁽¹⁰⁾ See on this aspect the study by Hélène Giguère on the case of Western Andalusia (GIGUÈRE H. 2006). According to Giguère «many critical thought confirm the relevance of an anthropological observatory about the current enthusiasm for patrimonializing living culture which, in many cases, is associated to a politic appropriation» (GIGUÈRE H. 2006: 126).

⁽¹¹⁾ Built in the last ten years the Apulian sub-region called “Grande Salento” (an administrative alliance among the southern cities of Apulia: Brindisi, Taranto and Lecce), also the glorious “Università degli Studi di Lecce” [The University of Lecce] changed its name – with the new university reform of the *three-plus-two*, it became “Università del Salento” [University of Salento]. Although its logo is not (yet?) that of the *taranta* “which bites and poisons...”. For some ethnographic approaches to academic cultures see MENELEY A. - YOUNG D. J. (eds.) 2005.

⁽¹²⁾ Several comparative works by Giuseppe M. Gala are devoted to the ethnocoreutic patrimony of this area, see among them GALA G. M. 2005. For a recent study about the ethnomusicological research in this part of Apulia see the important contribution by Maurizio Agamennone (AGAMENNONE M. ed. 2005). Some elements on the historical origins of the *pizzica-scherma* in the Salento are in MELCHIONI E. 1999. See also TARANTINO L. 2001 and in a more local perspective INGUSCIO E. 2007, TOLLEDI F. 1998. On different forms of danced duel observed in another southern Italian region, Calabria, and on its connection to *Ndrangheta* (the Calabrian “mafia”) initiation rituals, some short examples are provided by VISCONI F. 2005. On the rhetoric of secrecy in the public representations of Apulian mafia, the *Sacra Corona Unita*, see MASSARI M. 1998.

⁽¹³⁾ Some elements on the “politics of culture” enacted by *Sacra Corona Unita* are in. MASSARI M. 1998.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Since the American anthropologist Susan Reed wrote her review on the poetics and politics of dance (REED S. A. 1998), dance studies, from many different disciplines, have been increasing up to now. Among other scholars, anthropologists are still playing a «critical role in this new dance scholarship, contributing comparative analyses, critiquing colonial and ethnocentric categories, and situating studies of dance and movement within broader frameworks of embodiment and the politics of culture» (*ibidem*: 503). See among more recent collections of studies BUCKLAND T. G. (ed.) 2006.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The President of the *Fondazione Notte di San Rocco* is also the councillor for cultural heritage safeguarding at the Province of Lecce.

⁽¹⁶⁾ This letter is the most quoted source and the least known among the Salentino fencing dance supporters.

[translated from the Italian by Paul Dominici]

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