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# **Tarantism: from an Ancient Syndrome to a New Form of Heritage in Southern Italy**

Master's Thesis

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# Introduction

Folklore has always dealt with the relationship between humans and animals and how an animal can harm a human. The famous myth of Adam and Eve in the Genesis, about a snake that deceives a human couple, is a good example of this. However, it is not necessary to dig too much into the oldest pieces of folklore to discover tales about harmful animals. A contemporary legend collected in the United States tells about a woman who meets a spider while lying on a beach during a holiday. The spider bites the woman on her arm and lays some eggs into her skin. Baby spiders eventually hatch from those eggs and come out of the woman's body (Brunvand 1986: 76-77).

This legend is undoubtedly interesting as a specific example of the relationship between humans and spiders in folklore. While there are species of spiders that can actually be harmful and poisonous to humans, some are just believed to be dangerous. For example, Southern-Eastern Italians have alleged for centuries the existence of a spider called *taranta*, which could bite people and affect them with the syndrome of tarantism, a disease treated with music, dances and the intervention of Saint Paul. It was a unique phenomenon, impossible to explain scientifically and intertwined with complex cultural symbols and meanings. Due to its cultural value, tarantism, although extinct as a syndrome nowadays, has been reused and transformed into a representative piece of local heritage.

Tarantism has been a popular topic among Italian ethnologists, anthropologist and folklorists. Being an Italian researcher myself and interested in tarantism, I decided to discuss this phenomenon in my Master's thesis after conducting fieldwork on this topic in Italy in 2018. The aim of my thesis is studying tarantism as a contemporary element of folklore and heritage in the Southern-Eastern Italian region of Salento and highlighting the current importance and influence of the phenomenon.

I already had a preliminary knowledge of the topic of tarantism before approaching it in the field. During my bachelor program in Anthropology in Bologna, I came across tarantism because it was a research interest of the ethnologist Ernesto De Martino (1908–1965). De Martino is a famous and broadly studied personality in Italian ethno-anthropology, not least because he has published several works on cultural phenomena of Southern Italy, including tarantism. De Martino conducted fieldwork about tarantism in 1959 and published a book about his ethnographic experiences two years later. This book,

published in English as *The Land of Remorse* in 2005, is still a classical work of Italian ethnography and frequently quoted in academic classes and conferences in Italy. *The Land of Remorse* helped me also in the fieldwork process and I would consider it as the starting point of a wider research that has involved also other books, documentaries, visual and acoustic sources. In this regard, several books and articles, three films and six webpages will be included in my references. Furthermore, I will rely on the data that I collected in the field.

Speaking of my fieldwork, I have arranged it independently in the two weeks between the 20<sup>th</sup> of June and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. I decided to stay in a town of Salento named Galatina, which was the place where people affected by tarantism would gather in the past to be healed by the grace of Saint Paul. This gathering occurred every June 29 in the local chapel dedicated to the Saint and nowadays some re-enactments are organised in the town in memory of that ancient ritual. This is the reason why I chose to be in Galatina in that period and to observe and participate in the events held in those two weeks of summer 2018. Also, I took pictures and videos of the re-enactments and their rehearsals, bought some relevant books (De Giorgi 2007, Chiriatti 2011 and Nocera 2013), took vocal and written notes about my experience and recorded three interviews and two non-structured conversations. The interviews and conversations involved different people in the field, including an activist, an assessor, some scholars and some organisers of cultural events. Speaking with them, I could not only discover more details about the ancient syndrome of tarantism, but also understand the most recent aspects and issues regarding the phenomenon as heritage of Salento in the present day.

The thesis consists of an introduction, a theoretical and methodological part, a conclusion, a list of the references and a final summary in Estonian. The theoretical and methodological part is divided into two chapters, which look at the history of tarantism and research thereof and at the current issues regarding heritagisation and authenticity of tarantism, respectively. The first chapter and the second chapter are also divided into subchapters, respectively four and two.

I presented the main features and the historical transformations of the phenomenon in the first chapter. I defined the syndrome of tarantism and described the related healing rituals in the first subchapter proceeding a historical overview of tarantism and related studies, from the earliest medical enquiries to the latest ethnographic writings. Specifically, in the second subchapter, I mentioned Italian physicians like Caputo (1741), Baglivi (1828) and De Raho (1908), who have studied tarantism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup>

century and suggested the possibility that the syndrome was not caused by spider bites. Coming to the third subchapter, I moved to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and analysed broadly the work of De Martino (2005), whose research about tarantism has had an undeniable historical role for the Italian ethnography. Finally, in the fourth subchapter, I referred to more recent authors like De Giorgi (1999 and 2007), Chiriatti (2011), Pizza (2012 and 2015), Inserra (2017) and others, who have noticed and analysed the gradual transformation of tarantism into heritage and how this heritage has become popular within and outside of Salento.

In the second chapter, I moved to the contemporary analysis of tarantism as a heritagised phenomenon, with the help of my own fieldwork experience in Galatina in 2018. I described this experience and the outcomes of my research in the first subchapter, before coming to the more recent issues regarding heritagisation and authenticity of tarantism in the second subchapter. A broader discussion about those aspects of tarantism nowadays is necessary to understand the historical transformations that the phenomenon is constantly facing. In this regard, I based my analysis on recent articles and books by several contemporary scholars. Among them, I should mention Regina Bendix (1997, 2009 and 2018), Dorothy Noyes (2006, 2015 and 2016) and Valdimar Hafstein (2018), due to their reflections upon the issues of authenticity, heritagisation and folklorisation.

In sum, I described tarantism as a culture-bound syndrome within its historical context and then discussed the current transformations of this phenomenon into heritage and the related discourses from a fieldworker's perspective.

Since it has been heritagised, tarantism nowadays is preserved and promoted by locals as an element of the identity of Salento. Studying tarantism as heritage means studying it as a living tradition of a community and relating the topic to its contemporary issues, like authenticity. This focus on contemporary tarantism can be interesting and important for folklorists and ethnographers. However, it can be intriguing also for people from Salento, who may want to explore the issues regarding their own heritage and its impact on their own community and their own region. In this sense, ethnography is very helpful, since it is possible to get directly in touch with the locals and understand the issues regarding heritagised tarantism from their thoughts and their words.

Ending this introduction, I would like to thank Ülo Valk and Elo-Hanna Seljamaa for their support in the process of writing this thesis. Their work of supervision, their feedbacks and their suggestions have certainly improved the quality of this thesis and helped me to make it academically valuable.

# 1. Historical development of tarantism and overview of previous research

## 1.1. What is tarantism?

This thesis will be an analysis of a cultural and historical phenomenon of Southern-Eastern Italy, called tarantism. This phenomenon occurred mainly in a sub-region of Italy called Salento (part of the larger region of Apulia) and was witnessed historically from the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tarantism can be defined a culture-bound syndrome, experienced after the alleged bite of a spider called *taranta* or *tarantula*. Although the bite occurred once (generally during the individual's early adulthood), the bitten people would often feel sick periodically and every summer. The historian of medicine Jean F. Russell (1979: 410-411) provided a good description of the symptoms of the alleged bite:

Those who were bitten were anguished and depressed, had dyspnoea in addition to cyanosis, syncope, weakened pulse, and hyperpyrexia. [...] Many complained of headache, vertigo, anxiety, palpitation, disorder of the stomach, thirst, heart pains, and fatigue. Some said their bones ached as if they were broken, and some said they were seized with lethargy. Sometimes the onset was sudden, and sometimes slow. The attacks varied, some victims were so morbidly excited that they could not sleep, and would sing or laugh and dance continually. Others would leap into the air uttering wild cries, or hurl themselves to the ground arching their bodies in grotesque convulsions. Many were dejected and would weep constantly as if pining away; a few had constant tremor, a number were drowsy, others were scarcely in possession of their senses, and some were completely mad; indeed some even died.

I would like to add a further symptom to this list: the altered state of consciousness. Quoted by many scholars (De Martino 2005; Lapassade 2001; Nocera 2013), this state was often accompanied by mystic and religious hallucinations, with Saint Paul as the main interlocutor for the affected people. The role of Saint Paul is crucial. According to a widespread local legend,<sup>1</sup> the Saint stopped in a town of Salento, Galatina, to avoid

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<sup>1</sup> The Neapolitan physician Nicola Caputo reported the legend in a passage of his book *De tarantulae anatomiae et morsu* (1741). This passage has been translated into Italian and printed on a sign exposed in the chapel of Saint Paul in Galatina nowadays.

persecutions towards Christians. Hosted by a religious man, the Saint decided to reward him and his native town with the immunity from the bite of the *taranta* and the consecration of the water of his well. This legend explains why *tarantati*<sup>2</sup> never came from Galatina historically and instead reached the town every year to drink the water and receive the grace of the Saint. Moreover, the anthropologist Gino Leonardo Di Mitri observed in the documentary *Latrodectus* (2009) that people from Salento have always considered Saint Paul as the chief of spiders. The link between the Saint and spiders is hence strong, which explains why the Saint has always been an interlocutor for *tarantati* during their moments of altered state of consciousness. The documentarist Gianfranco Mingozzi showed in his short film *Tarantula* (1962) an example of this interaction, with a woman affected by tarantism dialoguing with the Saint in front of a picture of him. The woman heard the Saint asking her to donate money for a service in his honour; therefore, the Saint would have healed her after her donation. Broadly speaking, the interactions between the *tarantati* and the Saint were crucial for the final healing process, since the Saint always gave to the person the instructions to recover. However, healing was not always definitive as people would often experience the symptoms every summer after the first bite.

It is important to mention a further detail about tarantism: the healing therapies, for a *tarantata* or a *tarantato*, consisted mainly of dancing with the accompaniment of music. This music belonged to a specific genre, called *pizzica* (from the Italian verb *pizzicare*, to pinch), played also nowadays in Salento for recreational purposes. *Pizzica* is the local variant of another genre of music and dance called *tarantella*, named after *taranta*, and widespread in the whole Southern Italy. This has led some scholars to assume a larger diffusion of tarantism in the past (Inserra 2017: 7).

The family of the affected person used to pay musicians to play and make their sick relative dance, since the frantic movements were believed to help him or her to get rid of the poison of the spider (De Martino 2005: 37-40). Music and dances were the basic elements of the so-called “domestic therapy”, held in the house of the *tarantata* or *tarantato*. This therapy took usually place every year in June, lasting for one or more days and always before the date of June 29, when the final healing therapy occurred in the

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<sup>2</sup> People affected by tarantism, in Italian. I will also use in this text the variants *tarantato*, male singular, *tarantata*, female singular, and *tarantate*, female plural. Please note also that the male variants can be used also to refer to both female and male objects and people, according to the rules of the Italian language.

chapel of Saint Paul in Galatina.<sup>3</sup> The ritual of drinking the sacred water from Saint Paul's well, built on the external side of one of the walls of the chapel, happened always in that circumstance. I will come afterwards to the description of those therapies.

Although the state of illness of many people was real, scientists have never found and described the so-called *taranta*. Indeed, although the names *taranta* and *tarantula* inspired the scientific denomination of the real animal *Lycosa tarantula*, the local descriptions of the spider and its symptoms do not match with this animal. There is instead a closer similarity with the effect of the bite of another local spider, called *Latrodectus tredecimguttatus* (De Martino 2005: 35), even though the rarity of this arthropod and its scarce aggressiveness towards humans do not explain at all why the phenomenon was so frequent and widespread (Bettini 1964: 93-102).

Broadly speaking, many peculiar elements seem to question the idea that a spider or a similar animal can be responsible for the symptoms of the syndrome. Therefore, the explanations for tarantism are different from the alleged bite of a spider and are more likely intertwined with the symbolism inherited within the cultural context of Salento for centuries. For example, the idea of biting (or pinching, to be more precise) is often linked to the sphere of sexuality and sexual frustration, since the bite of *taranta* usually involves genitals (as explained, for example, by Gilberto Camilla in Nocera 2013: 11).

The ethnographer and expert of tarantism Maurizio Nocera (2013) mentions also links with Greek mythology. Pinching reminds of the classical Greek symbol of the *oistros*, the stinger who has affected the mythical figure of Io. The figure of the spider and its relationship with a deity is instead explored in the tale of Arachne. The connection between the spider, the bite and these classical myths suggest a more ancient origin of the symbolism of tarantism than the Middle Ages. Tarantism may have indeed originated during the first millennium before Christ, with the arrival of Greeks in Southern Italy or even the more ancient migration of the ancient people of Messapians to Salento. Nocera (2013: 27) suggests indeed that Greeks or Messapians gave birth to the phenomenon in order to deal with the consequence of a collective trauma (perhaps a war or the migration itself). Tarantism, according to Nocera, turned afterwards into a strategy to deal with something different, namely sexual frustration, and started to acquire a deeply ambiguous

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<sup>3</sup> The date of June 29 is dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, according to the Christian calendar. In Salento, people usually celebrate only Saint Paul in this day and, due to his role as a healer, used to bring *tarantati* into the chapel in Galatina for the final healing ritual during this symbolic date. Moreover, the date is in summertime, a period of more frequent occurrence of the symptoms of tarantism: healing *tarantati* on June 29 allowed them not to suffer from the symptoms for a very long time.



symbolism. The clearest expression of this ambiguity is certainly the figure of Saint Paul, who is both a pincher (as said in some folk songs, reported by Carpitella in De Martino 2005: 269-285) and the final healer for the bitten people, who could even experience altered states of consciousness after the bite and talk with the Saint himself. Going throughout centuries, tarantism has been able to preserve its cultural specificity, allowing the survival of its symbolism even nowadays, when the phenomenon has disappeared in favour of new related forms of local heritage in Salento.

I will come back later to the development of tarantism and to its inner symbolism. However, before analysing the historical witnesses of tarantism, I would like to clarify a further detail about the origins of the phenomenon. Nocera's opinion about the birth of tarantism is almost impossible to prove as are the different assumptions by other scholars and experts. Since there is no written source about tarantism until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, every possible hypothesis regarding its origin remains purely speculative. The link with Greek mythology and the Greek symbols of the stinger and the spider is not easy to demonstrate either, for the same reason: the historical discrepancy between the classical civilisation and the earliest written sources. A significant transformation of the phenomenon should have occurred in the in-between centuries and, with no documents about this process, it is almost impossible to trace it. It is even not possible to say whether tarantism is the result of this historical transformation or something that originated independently.

Therefore, I will not come back to the speculative debate about the origins of tarantism or to the link between the phenomenon and Greek mythology: this is not the purpose of my work. I will try instead to expound how tarantism developed throughout centuries, with the help of some significant historical sources and academic studies.

## *1.2. Early history of tarantism and the first related studies*

The first source that talks about tarantism dates back to the Middle Ages: that is the *Sertum papale de venenis*, a text written by the physician Cristoforo Degli Onesti in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Degli Onesti, from Firenze and living in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, wrote about tarantism as witnessed in the following manner:

For what reason do those bitten by the *tarantula* find miraculous recovery in various songs and melodies? It must be said that, music and song being a reason for cheerfulness,

both are thought to be useful for almost every poison: and since the bite of the *tarantula* produces a melancholic disease, and because the melancholy is treated in the most suitable way with cheerfulness, it follows that songs and music are quite healthy for those who have suffered such a bite. (Thornedike 1882: 534)

Degli Onesti described the methods to heal tarantism as just “thought to be useful”, revealing his scepticism towards those methods. This was certainly due not only to his background as a physician but also to the complete unawareness of the cultural symbolism related to the syndrome.

Many physicians have in fact written about tarantism, interpreting the phenomenon as a peculiar disease to be studied, according to the knowledge of their time. We may think for instance about Epifanio Ferdinando, Giorgio Baglivi and, broadly speaking, the Neapolitan school of medicine, which developed after the Middle Ages in Naples (De Martino 2005: 223-226). Naples was for centuries the biggest city and the capital of the Southern part of the peninsula. Thus, it is not surprising that Naples was the centre for the most prestigious medical studies in that geographical area. Salento, on the contrary, was a marginalised area, quite distant from large urban contexts and populated by peasants with their rural habits and their peculiar diseases. However, Naples was close enough to Salento to attract many physicians, who studied tarantism in the 15<sup>th</sup> and following centuries, observed the phenomenon in its original context (conducting hence a sort of *ante litteram* fieldwork) and consequently provided clinical descriptions of it. Despite the similarities, their approach was radically different from contemporary ethnography, due to profession and their cultural background. In fact, the influence of scientific revolution, enlightenment and positivism led those physicians to look for the physiological causes of tarantism, ignoring instead the cultural symbolism and significance of the phenomenon. However, talking about tarantism, some physicians realise that it could not be explained only as the physiological symptom of a spider bite.

For instance, according to the conclusions of Giorgio Baglivi in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, two types of tarantism were recognisable: a true one and a false one. Being in touch with the locals, he could realise that the spiders really bit some people, while some other individuals were just “celebrating their little carnivals” (Baglivi 1828). According to him, some people who danced to recover from the poison of the *tarantula* were in some way faking their illness, due to their alleged superstition and ignorance. This ideological statement was re-affirmed in the following century during the spread of the

Enlightenment by the physician Francesco Serao in his *Lezioni* in 1742 after further medical experiments conducted by his informants in Apulia. Serao even assumed that the “fake tarantism” postulated by Baglivi should have been extended to the entire phenomenon, observing that every disease in the region during the summertime was locally described as tarantism and, consequently, that actually no one was bitten by any spider since there were other physiological reasons for those diseases. Therefore, he thought that all the beliefs and rituals related to spiders, dances and music were just part of an “institution” with the function of healing a local “melancholy” not directly caused by the bite of the *tarantula* (De Martino 2005: 231-232).

Baglivi and Serao, thus, implied a social and cultural reason for tarantism, excluding the idea of a real spider affecting people locally. In particular, Baglivi received some credit from the erudite writer Francesco Cancellieri in a letter from 1817. This letter, written about tarantism, shows a clear statement regarding the nature of the phenomenon, defined “a true melancholy, or mental disease [...] to be satisfied with corresponding music” (Cancellieri 1817: 5). To demonstrate that tarantism was just a mental disease, Cancellieri quoted Baglivi, who had reported an experiment conducted in 1693 by a physician who made an actual *Lycosa tarantula* bite him in presence of witnesses and a notary; this physician, according to Cancellieri and Baglivi, could not experience any physical pain or the symptoms of tarantism (1817: 5-6). In sum, neither physicians nor erudite people since the Modern Age, approaching the study of tarantism, could believe that a spider could cause such trouble.

In the meanwhile, as studies proceeded and scholars kept researching the phenomenon, the institution of tarantism faced a gradual but relevant transformation, due to the conflict with more powerful and influential institutions. For instance, I have already mentioned Saint Paul’s chapel in Galatina. Originally, this building was not a sacred chapel but just a profane and public house. Nevertheless, people affected by tarantism have always gathered there to receive the grace of Saint Paul, who, according to the legend, consecrated that house after being hosted there. The house became a chapel only in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, coming directly under the institutional influence of the Catholic Church. Nowadays the chapel has become private property and, having a significant historical value, its owners have preserved it carefully from possible damages during public events. That is the reason why a sign in the chapel forbids dancing there,

although the owners could allow it during traditional events like the *Night of the Rounds*,<sup>4</sup> as happened in 2018. I will discuss this more in detail in the next chapter. It is possible that the institutionalisation of the chapel has been the first step to the gradual deconstruction of the original belief system of the region, leading to the almost complete extinction of tarantism nowadays.

However, the phenomenon survived in the 19<sup>th</sup> and until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During those periods, anthropology and ethnology entered academia, influencing the studies about tarantism too, as the example of Francesco De Raho shows. De Raho worked with *tarantati* between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and wrote in 1908 a monograph called *Il tarantolismo nella superstizione e nella scienza* (“Tarantism in Superstition and Science”). The title of the book shows a clear positivist approach (due also to the medical background of the author), even though the phenomenon was studied and documented in an ethnographic manner (De Martino 2005: 242). He wrote notes and took photographs about some peculiar features of the domestic healing therapy of his time, like the “rope dance” (De Martino 2005: 89-90), that had been described by his colleague Nicola Caputo already in 1741:

This woman [a *tarantata* met by Caputo] had suspended a rope from the ceiling of her humble dwelling, the end of which, just touching the floor in the middle of the room, she tenaciously squeezed between her hands; throwing herself upon it, she abandoned herself with the weight of her whole body, her feet planted on the floor, turning her head to and fro, her face glowing, with a surly look. (Caputo 1741: 111 ff.; translation by Dorothy Louise Zinn.)

The rope dance, as well as other ancient elements of domestic healing therapy of tarantism such as the sword dance, the symbols of water and mirror and the outdoor and bucolic setting for the therapy itself became extinct in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (De Martino 2005). In about fifty years, from the publication of De Raho's monograph (1908) to the fieldwork by De Martino (summer of 1959), many of these elements had gradually disappeared and tarantism turned into a dying phenomenon. A broader and more insightful look at De Martino's research can explain this statement and give a significant example of ethnography about tarantism in Salento.

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<sup>4</sup> The *Night of the Rounds* (in Italian, *notte delle ronde*) is an event traditionally held in Galatina between the two dates of June 28 and 29. It takes its name from the rounds formed by people (*ronde*, in Italian), who spontaneously gather in the town to dance and play *pizzica*.

### 1.3. Ernesto De Martino and tarantism

Ernesto De Martino (1908–1965), born in Naples (Italy), is considered one of the most influential anthropologists and ethnologists in Italy and worldwide. While *The Land of Remorse* helped him to be publicly acknowledged, his work is certainly wider and aimed to ethnographically and ethnologically describe the cultural context of Southern Italy of his time. His interest was also encouraged by his studies, conducted at first in the University of Naples, where he graduated in 1932, and then with the help of the influential philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). Croce inspired De Martino about the so-called “historicist” approach within ethnology, with the purpose of relating ethnology itself to history rather than to philosophical naturalism. This approach emerged in De Martino’s first publication, a monograph called *Naturalismo e storicismo nell’etnologia* (“Naturalism and Historicism in Ethnology”, 1941). This book was also the first milestone for his longer epistemological project of tracing and describing the religious history of Southern Italy. As explained by the Italian scholar himself in his book *Magic: A Theory from the South* (2015), “this is a religious history conceived as the exact measurement of the participation of Southern thought in the great opposition between magic and rationality, so important for the birth of modern civilisation” (2015: 132). We can also understand from this quote why the De Martino was interested in Southern Italian religious history. Indeed, Southern Italy was not only his birthplace but also an intriguing research field for those interested in the historical relationship between magic and rationality. We may think for instance about the Neapolitan physicians who studied tarantism with a rational approach in order to understand a complex and typical phenomenon of Salento, with its spiritual, magic and religious subtext. According to De Martino, Southern Italy (as well as the entire European continent, to a certain extent) took its unique identity by the encounter of rationality and magic. And, as said in the quotation, also modern civilisation is a product of this encounter, making De Martino's long-term project important from a historical perspective.

Dorothy Zinn, who has translated De Martino’s works into English, recognised three of his books as tracing the religious history of Southern Italy (De Martino 2015: 132, in the footnote): *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico* (“Death and Ritual

Mourning in the Ancient World”, 1958), *Magic: A Theory from the South* (2015, originally published in 1959) and *The Land of Remorse* (2005, originally published in 1961). All these works encompass some typical pieces of Southern Italian folklore, like funerals, magic and, obviously, tarantism. The reason why this last phenomenon was considered crucial for De Martino's historical religious research is in the introduction of his book *The Land of Remorse* (2005: 10-12):

The initial idea of carrying out an ethnographic investigation of Apulian tarantism – and thus beginning the projected series of contributions toward a religious history of the South[ern Italy] – came to me as I was looking at some of André Martin's excellent photographs<sup>5</sup> of the scenes which take place in the Chapel of St. Paul in Galatina each year from June 28 to 30. [...] These photographs could be seen as images of strange, eccentric behaviour, arousing a momentary curiosity, and so they would indeed have been “incidental” for the onlooker. But for me, they were a stimulus for anchoring the planned religious history of the South[ern Italy] to a circumscribed episode to be analyzed, to a phenomenon which recalled the commitment to historiographic coherence in an exemplary manner precisely because it appeared as a knot of extreme contradictions.

De Martino then describes these photographs and the contradictions behind the behaviour of the portrayed subjects:

The young woman jumping on the corbel of the altar, the supine old man yelling with raised arms, the other young woman and the mystic bride did not have much in common with the Apostle to the Gentiles who had so authoritatively anathematized the disorders in the Church of Corinth. [...] The knot of contradictions thus became still more intricate, since the bite of *taranta* [the same as *tarantula*, editor's note] could be interpreted on the one hand in a realistic sense as the bite of a poisonous arachnid – for example, *Latrodectus tredecimguttas*; on the other hand, the behaviors typical of tarantism seemed to be drawn from definite cultural choices, from mythical-ritual symbols. [...] There were, then, good reasons for choosing tarantism as the topic of a first concrete contribution to a planned religious history of the South[ern Italy], as conceived in the perspective described above.

De Martino saw in Martin's photographs the portrayals of the contradictions between the cultural and mythical-ritual context of Salento in the late 1950s and the institutionalised domains of Catholic religion and science. These contradictions are

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<sup>5</sup> André Martin was a French photographer who visited Southern Italy in 1958 and stopped in Salento to take some pictures of *tarantate*. More information available in Caruso 2016: 98-100.

moreover similar and comparable to the aforementioned one between rationality and magic, which was the basis of the European civilisation according to De Martino himself. Indeed, tarantism became a significant example of the discourse about the religious history of Southern Italy, from the point of view of De Martino. For this reason, he decided to conduct a fieldwork research in Salento in the summer of 1959, during the typical period of manifestation of the culture-bound syndrome and its healing rituals. A team of scholars and professional workers joined the Italian ethnographer in his expedition, lasting for three weeks (De Giorgi 2007: 35): among them, the psychiatrist Giovanni Jervis, the ethnomusicologist Diego Carpitella, the photographer Franco Pinna and the anthropologist Amalia Signorelli (De Martino 2011). The task of the team was to collect materials and analyse them, giving a broad and interdisciplinary perspective about the phenomenon.

The team reached Salento on June 20, 1959. Before coming to the place, everybody had studied the phenomenon from previous sources but had not any contacts with *tarantati*. The clear intention was to get acquainted with them directly on the place, as they were having their traditional domestic healing therapy. According to De Martino (2005: 38), “this was not an easy task, since we lacked a network of informants in the province [of Lecce, namely Salento; editor's note] who could notify us in season and scattered over a relatively wide area”. However, he and his team were anyway able to establish immediately a useful network of informants, getting acquainted at first with the owner of their hostel in Galatina, who had been previously a traditional musician, and then with some of his acquaintances who were still hired to play during the domestic healing therapies.

Just four days after their arrival, following the instructions of the owner, De Martino and his collaborators left Galatina for the close town of Nardò, where they could meet the aforementioned musicians and even attend a real traditional domestic therapy for tarantism. The protagonist of this ritual was a young woman called Maria, or “Maria from Nardò” (as De Martino did in his work). She was in a room of her house, re-arranged for the therapy with a white sheet on the floor and no furniture on the walls, so she could move freely in that space. Some objects were also put in that room, like the sacred images of the Saints Peter and Paul and a jug of the miraculous water from Saint Paul's well<sup>6</sup> (De

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the water became inaccessible from the well due to an ordinance from the mayor of Galatina issued exactly in June 1959 for reasons related to public health (the water was stagnant and dirty). Indeed,

Martino 2005: 39). The therapy started in this setting, with Maria in the centre of the room and the musicians in a corner. The instruments were at first played slowly and calmly but with a clear rhythmic pattern, followed by the *tarantata* while lying on the sheet and nodding her head. The music became soon louder and louder, encouraging Maria to stand up and dance frantically, moving her entire body in harmony with the music itself and jumping around in a circle repeatedly. Sometimes she also fell down and started to crawl, mimicking a walking spider (the *taranta* or *tarantula*, obviously). At a certain point Maria got tired and interrupted the therapy to rest, lying again on the sheet with a pillow under her head; however, as she recovered her strength, she was able to start again the therapy as described before, until she ended up tired again.

Broadly speaking, these cycles of dances and rest could last for more than one day, being subjected to the physical needs not only of the *tarantati* but also of the musicians, and finish completely as the *tarantata* or the *tarantato* was able to hear Saint Paul's voice, announcing her future grace on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June in Galatina. Different visions and acoustic hallucinations related to the Saint were experienced during the aforementioned cycles: the one about the grace is just the last before the final therapy on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Maria, for instance, heard this last voice on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, after two days of dances; her healing process in the last days of June 1959 was hence witnessed by De Martino and his team in the field (De Martino 2005: 33-49). Moreover, other 20 people affected by the syndrome (mostly women) were contacted and interviewed, increasing the number of ethnographic documents which *The Land of Remorse* was based on. In order to collect these documents, the team spent the last days of June in different villages in Salento, conducting interviews, performing psychometric tests (like Rorschach test) and listening to personal experiences of *tarantati* during their three weeks in the field (De Giorgi 2007: 35), before leaving in July 1959.

The culminating moment of the research was certainly the final healing therapy in Saint Paul's chapel in Galatina in the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, as showed by ethnographic documents. For instance, many pictures of the event were taken by the photographer of the team Franco Pinna (see De Martino 2005: 154-163). De Martino also reported in his book the description of the witnessed behaviour of *tarantati* and a further comment on the link between this behaviour and the cultural and historical symbolism of

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the well was bricked, and the sacred water used for Maria's therapy was hence illegally taken from the courtyard adjacent to the chapel (De Martino 2005: 82, footnote 22).



tarantism. De Martino noticed in fact that *tarantati* acted in a disorganised way, climbing on the walls, screaming and moving around without a precise direction, inside and outside the chapel. This phase of disorder generally preceded the ritual of drinking the miraculous water from Saint Paul's well; however, an ordinance of the mayor prohibited it in 1959, due to the bad hygienic conditions of the water. This ordinance was reported in *The Land of Remorse* (2005: 79), introducing in the book the theme of the "disarticulation of tarantism" – the gradual separation between the pathological mental condition of the so-called *tarantati* (described by De Martino 2005: 79 just in the framework of psychology and psychiatry) and the old mythical-ritual context that has shaped this condition as a culture-bound syndrome throughout centuries. In the epilogue of the study De Martino (2005: 247) came back to this topic, stating that:

[...] with the disarticulation of the organic and culturally conditioned link between crisis and choerutical-musical exorcism, and with the symbol of the *taranta* having entered into open conflict with all the hegemonic forms of cultural life and with the values expressed in them, tarantism began to recede to disease, and the historically conditioned efficacy of its horizons of recovery and reintegration gradually diminished. To the extent that the cultural defenses available to tarantism were dismantled and rendered inoperative, and their irremediable conflict with the motion of modern civilization was by then evident, what survived of tarantism got reduced to a bare crisis, exactly what we see in the extreme disorder of the Chapel of St. Paul in Galatina: the last, miserable local residue of a historical struggle which began with the disorders of the Church of Corynth and the polemic of the Apostle.<sup>7</sup>

In this quote, we can find De Martino's opinion about tarantism during his time, certainly not so positively stated. Reduced to a "bare crisis" and a "miserable local residue" of a wider cultural phenomenon, tarantism was going to lose its peculiar symbolism (according to the Neapolitan scholar) and in some way, it seemed to become not anymore useful as a therapeutic ritual for people encountered in the field. This statement can match the definition of folklore as formulated by the Sardinian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci, imprisoned by the Italian fascist regime due to his political ideas, started to write in jail in 1929 his *Notebooks from the Prison*, a collection of essays

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<sup>7</sup> This is a reference to Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (first century AD), addressed with the purpose of establishing a Christian orthodoxy in the Greek city of Corynth and in its Church, influenced by new heterodox preachers. De Martino mentions indirectly this episode as the starting point of the historical process that gave birth to Christianity and its local forms, like the worship of Saint Paul in Salento and its connection to tarantism.

where his idea of folklore came out and which inspired De Martino's works. Folklore “can be understood only as a reflex of the lifestyle of a people, even though it often persists when conditions are modified to a greater extent”, according to Gramsci (2012: 89). The Italian scholar Fabrizio Ferrari expanded this definition in his monograph about De Martino, declaring that Gramsci had explained folklore as the “meaning given to world and life by the historical subordinate classes” (Ferrari 2012: 45). Folklore, in sum, was for Gramsci the distinctive product of subordinate classes (opposed to the hegemonic ones and their culture) and a relic of the past, surviving in contemporary times despite its lack of significance within modernity.<sup>8</sup>

De Martino was indeed influenced by this conceptualisation of folklore as the culture shared within socially subordinate people, despite being not so bounded to the original definition by Gramsci, who also added that “folklore is an obstacle to the cultural unification promoted by Marxism” (Ferrari 2012: 45). More precisely, even though he had shared with Gramsci the same political ideas after the end of the Second World War, unlike Gramsci, De Martino was not interested in talking about folklore as a form of subordinate culture to be overcome in order to establish socialism and destroy the bourgeois hegemony. De Martino’s purpose was mainly theoretical rather than political. This is also the reason why he theorised, in an article published in 1951 in the Italian newspaper *L'Unità*, the idea of “progressive folklore” (Zinn 2015: 6-7). According to De Martino, folklore was not as an obstacle for development but the exact opposite thing, at least from the perspective of the subordinate people who were sharing it. Indeed, he tried to re-evaluate it as “progressive”, defining it in the terms of a “conscious programme to comment on or express the struggle for emancipation according to local historical and cultural patterns” (Ferrari 2012: 46, quoting De Martino’s article). In other words, folklore did not impede but, on the contrary, helped criticism and struggle towards bourgeois power. Folklore could become a tool for resistance against the hegemonic culture of the bourgeoisie itself and re-affirmation of the social identity of the subordinate people. The purpose of folklore indeed should have been the social progress of the lower

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<sup>8</sup> Compare with E.B. Tylor's concept of survivals. Tylor defined the survivals as “processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they hence remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved” (1871: 16). Indeed, Tylor followed and supported an evolutionary approach about anthropology, considering cultures as subjected to a unique process of development throughout history (even though not equally fast everywhere). Survivals, from this perspective, are just the relics of previous evolutionary steps within a more developed cultural context.

classes (which explains the adjective “progressive”) or, at least, the not complete subjugation of those classes.

As suggested before, this statement about folklore can help also to understand tarantism better. There is a link between the depiction of the phenomenon in the epilogue of *The Land of Remorse* and both De Martino’s and Gramsci’s definition of folklore. Folklore, according to the Sardinian writer, is a survival of an ancient context (with its, even though dying, symbolism) within a nation like Italy which was going to face the positive effect of the economic boom in the upcoming 1960s and, consequently, a general process of modernisation. Furthermore, there can be also a link between tarantism and the idea of progressive folklore, since the syndrome could be a tool for social redemption of the affected people. *Tarantati*, both men and women, were in fact victims of poverty and marginalisation within the context of Salento. Their behaviour, above all their dances during the month of June, was therefore a way to cope with these not good life conditions and find a way to overcome their psychological consequences. Quoting again De Martino (2005: 46):

Among other things, the case of Maria of Nardò had highlighted how tarantism constituted a symbolic apparatus for evoking and configuring on the mythical-ritual level those psychic conflicts which had not found a resolution on the level of consciousness and which operated in the darkness of the unconscious, with the risk of appearing as neurotic symptoms. These conflicts were periodically released and produced on the mythical-ritual level, relieving the periods between ceremonies of the weight of their urges, and facilitating a relative psychic equilibrium in those periods. In this way, we outlined the possibility of considering tarantism in a perspective in which certain conflicts found a horizon in a symbolic system of “first bite” and “re-bites” lived out according to traditionalized and socialized ways, times and places: the ways of the musical-choreutical-chromatic exorcism, the times of the seasonal and festive calendar, the places of home, fiefdom and chapel.

In this passage, thus, De Martino explained the function of tarantism as a way to solve psychic conflicts within the mythical-ritual symbolism of the *tarantula* and its bite(s). A psychic conflict that, as said, is undoubtedly tied to a social condition experienced by many people in Salento and explored broadly in the biographical data provided by De Martino in his book (2005: 331-332). The idea of “psychic conflict” is not new at all, coming from the framework of psychoanalysis. The influence of this approach on De Martino and his team is undoubted. Indeed, the psychiatrist of the team,

Giovanni Jervis, connected the crises of *tarantati* to the medical and psychoanalytical concept of neurosis. Jervis, adding his contribution in *The Land of Remorse* (2005: 260-261), quoted both Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm as the inventors and definers of the term neurosis, intended at first as the result of a conflict between individual biological needs and external cultural pressure. However, Jervis problematized this definition, considering the more recent transformations in the framework of psychiatry. Using his words (De Martino 2005: 260):

From a psychiatric point of view [...], the concept of neurosis was most radically transformed: the unsolved inner contrast which causes the emergence of the neurotic symptom no longer appeared related to conflicts between nature and society, between biological instinct and repression, but more simply to internal conflicts among contradictory conditionings. This led to the study of the objective contradictions of certain social conditionings.

Jervis mentioned Karen Horney, a psychiatrist who had studied neurosis in the United States in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Horney, a neurotic person is someone who had interiorised as a child the contradictions and the conflicts of his or her cultural context without solving them afterwards (Horney 1937: 284 ff.). As a result, the person can express an anomalous behaviour and a specialist can recognise it as neurotic. However, Horney had written about American psychiatric patients and not *tarantati*, whereas Jervis, even though suggesting a comparison between tarantism and neurosis, could not propose a complete homology between the two conditions. Moreover, tarantism appeared clearly as a more complex phenomenon than just a psychiatric symptom, being something completely understood if analysed within Salento and its cultural context and symbolism (De Martino 2005: 267).

Talking about Jervis, his main contribution to De Martino's fieldwork consisted of some psychometric tests given to *tarantati*. From one of those tests, specifically the one given to Maria from Nardò, De Martino named his book about tarantism *La terra del rimorso*, translated then literally into English as *The Land of Remorse*. Maria indeed associated the Italian term *morso* (bite) to the further Italian word *rimorso*, remorse intended as re-bite, as the comeback of a shameful past represented symbolically by the cyclical comeback of the symptoms of the bite of the spider. Maria's remorse was connected by the ethnographer to her personal life experience (like her unhappy childhood) and above all her sexual and sentimental frustration: she was engaged with a

young man who decided to break up with her and she then married a man whom she did not choose. Between these two moments, she was bitten for the first time and started to have visions of Saint Paul who ordered her not to marry. Being obviously not satisfied after Maria's wedding, the Saint then punished her disobedience with the syndrome of tarantism. De Martino interpreted instead this punishment as the consequence of bad life circumstances and choices. In other words, as a consequence of a remorse, both in the literal sense and as a re-bite. Going further with De Martino's interpretation and reporting his words (2005: 45-46):

In the mythical-ritual horizon of tarantism and the Christian graft of St. Paul's figure, Maria periodically released her conflicts and converted her frustrations into symbol, lightening the periods between ceremonies – that is, daily life – of the burden of unconscious stimulations which would have been extremely dangerous had she not found a socialized and traditionalized project of calendrical, festive treatment in tarantism. Through the mythic order of “*taranta*”, “bite”, “poison” and St. Paul, Maria gave a form to frustrating psychic conflicts, and through the ritual order of music, dance and colors, she got in touch with these conflicts through an annual treatment which evoked them in time and place and made them communicate with the plane of symbolic creations proposed by the myth. At the same time, Maria released aggressive drives against her undesired husband in an alienated form; she upset her conjugal life, economically harmed the family she did not love, and clamorously drew public attention – normally uninterested in her – to her drama.

In sum, De Martino's position about tarantism is undoubtedly tied to the context of frustration, poverty, isolation and lack of freedom in life choices experienced by people affected by the syndrome. All the *tarantati* met by De Martino were people with unsolved issues and in search for a stable role in their society. This is evident mostly thinking about the gender of many *tarantati*, who were in fact *tarantate*, that is to say women. Women like Maria were not only sexually unsatisfied but also without a husband, without children and instead completely involved in their manual job in tobacco plantations. The social deconstruction of their traditional role as wives, child-bearers and mothers brought them to experience a real existential crisis. De Martino had called this crisis the “crisis of the presence” in many of his works and, although not mentioning it in *The Land of Remorse*, he showed a link between the condition of the *tarantati* and his ideas regarding the presence. De Martino elaborated the concept of presence from the idea of *Dasein*, developed within philosophical existentialism and defined as the condition of being in the world (De Martino 1948). Presence is hence a synonym for “individual existence” but

refers also to historical roles and conditions that individuals experience throughout their lives. A job, a marital status, a place to live are just examples of the elements that constitute the individual's presence in his or her historical context. When the individual goes through a negative change, for instance losing his or her job or moving to a different place, he or she experiences a crisis, namely the crisis of presence. According to De Martino (Pavanello 2013: 30-31), magic is usually the symbolic act that can solve this crisis.

However, in the context of Salento, tarantism and the related healing rituals could solve the crisis of presence more efficiently. A *tarantata* who had experienced the deconstruction of her historical role as a woman could indeed solve her crisis reaffirming her existence with the healing rituals for tarantism. This is evident from the domestic therapy, a ritual when relatives should take care of the affected person hiring and paying the musicians. In addition, a reaffirmation could come from the final ritual in Saint Paul's chapel, when a *tarantata* (and a *tarantato* as well) could gain the attention of a crowd showing her unusual behaviour. Both healing rituals serve as solutions for the crisis of presence, since the affected person could establish a stronger relationship with her or his familiar and social context. Going through their experience of illness, healing and grace, *tarantati* could hence overcome isolation and recover their presence within society and history (Zinn 2015: 11).

De Martino's contribution to the understanding of tarantism is undeniable, as well as the epistemological solidity of his work. For example, during my fieldwork, I approached and read *The Land of Remorse* as a real guide for my own research, trying to establish a link between my experience and the ideas, concepts and interpretations that I have found in the book. However, before coming directly to my field experience, it is necessary to take a closer look at the history of tarantism (and some examples of the related studies) after De Martino.

#### *1.4. Recent development of tarantism and current debates*

De Martino's research and his work *The Land of Remorse* became extremely popular among anthropologists and ethnologists in Italy. It is easy to find references to De Martino's work in several authors' books, mostly about tarantism but also about

broader anthropological topics, such as manuals for students (for example Fabietti 2011). This has happened mostly in Italy, where scholars interested in tarantism have often referred to De Martino's work in their studies (e.g. De Giorgi 1999 and 2007, Chiriatti 2011, Pizza 2015, Inserra 2017). At the same time, tarantism faced relevant transformations too, disappearing as a widespread disease and turning into a heritagised historical phenomenon, catching the attention of several scholars interested more in tarantism itself than in De Martino's work.

Starting from the 1960s, it is worth mentioning Annabella Rossi (1933–1984), one of De Martino's disciples, who decided to conduct further research about tarantism between 1959 and 1965. Rossi's contribution was valid not only because she highlighted the influence of social and cultural environment on the onset of tarantism but also because her study was quite innovative. She based her research on an epistolary exchange with a *tarantata* named Anna, publishing then her results in 1970. On the other hand, Rossi's work seems to be the swan song of De Martino's investigation. Apart from the Neapolitan scholar, his team and his disciples, few people seemed interested in tarantism and almost nobody decided to conduct ethnographic research about it autonomously, at least until the end of the 1970s. In the meanwhile, several essayists approached the topic of tarantism and wrote about it. However, they chose to rely on second-hand ethnographic sources and historical documents instead of conducting fieldwork personally. Some relevant names of those essayists are Joan M. Lewis, Luigi Maria Lombardi Satriani, Brizio Montinaro, Miriam Castiglione and Luciana Stocchi (all quoted in Chiriatti 2011: 64-71 and all writing in the 1970s). These scholars focused above all on topics like gender and the relationship with the natural and human environment, trying to explain how being both a woman and a peasant could easily lead to social subordination, frustration and then the symptoms of tarantism. The topics of female condition and social subordination as roots of tarantism were not new at all, as *The Land of Remorse* had showed. However, those studies could explore those topics in detail after De Martino, providing new interpretations and perspectives about tarantism.

The phenomenon of tarantism was hence still intriguing for many scholars in the 1970s, but this academic interest could not encourage ethnographic enquiries in that decade. One of the reasons could have been the gradual disappearance of tarantism as a form of disease, as De Martino had predicted while talking about the “disarticulation” of the phenomenon (2005: 79). For example, as reported by the scholar and musician Luigi Chiriatti (2011: 108), only eight or nine *tarantate* were witnessed in Galatina on the 29<sup>th</sup>

of June 1970; on the same day, in 1994, two people (again, only women) affected by tarantism were asking for Saint Paul's grace in the chapel. Nowadays the old ritual of asking for grace to the Saint during the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of June has completely disappeared and been substituted by a public re-enactment, held by character actors. Some spontaneous dances in the chapel still happen: I personally witnessed those dances in the night between June 28 and 29, 2018. However, the traditionally witnessed phenomenon has gradually come to its end. Specifically, during the 1960s and the 1970s, the lack of public and ethnographic interest towards tarantism followed a general effort for modernisation in Salento, due also to the rapid changes in the entire Italian peninsula known as “economic boom” or “economic miracle”. It is important then to focus on this historical period to contextualise the public attitude towards tarantism in the decades after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup>

After the end of the Second World War, Italy was experiencing the consequences of the conflict: poverty was widespread and there was a public urge for infrastructures and new job opportunities for people. Due to the Marshall plan<sup>10</sup> (1947-1951), a new political stability given by the birth of the Italian Republic (1946) and entrance into the European Single Market (1958) Italy was able to overcome the initial difficulties and to establish itself as one of the leading countries of the West in the following decades. The increase of industrialisation, mostly in the Northern part of the country, helped the economic reprise too. Productive companies like FIAT, Pirelli and Eni were able to hire many workers and, therefore, produce wealth for the entire peninsula (Raftopoulos 2009; Castronovo and Paris 1975).

On the other hand, in the South, there were fewer industrial companies and agriculture remained the leading sector of the Southern Italian regions. This happened also in Apulia and, specifically, in Salento with tobacco plantations. However, also Southern Italy could benefit from the economic boom, mostly after 1950 due to the effects of the Southern Italy Development Fund (in Italian, *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno*) after 1950. The Fund consisted of several initiatives for the industrial and infrastructural development of the Southern Italy, with intended occupational benefits for the locals

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<sup>9</sup> See Raftopoulos 2009 for the description of the effect of the Marshall Plan on the Italian economy after the Second World War. See also Castronovo and Paris 1975: 399-439 for a wider overview of the Italian economic miracle.

<sup>10</sup> This plan was an American initiative. US decided indeed to finance the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War, as a strategy to enforce the NATO alliance against the Eastern Block. Italy was one of the European countries that benefited from the plan.



(Castronovo and Paris 1975). This process was obviously gradual and, when De Martino did his fieldwork in Salento in 1959, he faced a social reality that seemed to be stuck in time. War had been over for almost fifteen years, but economic growth seemed not to have reached the place, as showed by the extremely poor life conditions of *tarantati* recorded in *The Land of Remorse*.

However, as said, the situation was about to change, leading also tarantism to become rarer and rarer throughout time and to confront the issues of modernity and modernisation. This symbolic conflict has emerged mostly from the relationship between the inhabitants of Salento and tarantism during the 1960s and 1970s, rather than from academic studies. This topic was addressed in the documentary *Tradinnovazione – Salento, una musica glocal* (2011), which focused on how folk music from Salento was transformed into a piece of heritage and promotion for the territory. This documentary addressed also the topic of shameful tarantism, explaining how the processes of heritagisation for the local music and dances have helped to overcome the shared negative feelings towards the phenomenon. This process and the contemporary disappearance of tarantism as a syndrome (or its “disarticulation”, to use De Martino’s words) have completely changed its public perception within and outside the community of Galatina and the entire Salento.

Scholars and intellectuals gave a further contribution to this new perception at the beginning of the 1980s, as reported by Luigi Chiriatti (2011: 30-35), a musician and scholar interested in tarantism. He mentioned a multidisciplinary project run by the University of Lecce in 1981, called *Il ragno del dio che danza*, with the purpose of re-enacting the phenomenon of tarantism. The meaning of the title of the project is *The Spider of the Dancing God*, referring to Saint Paul as a vernacular god and as a dancer, like *tarantati*. Chiriatti himself joined this project, making a documentary called *Morso d’amore* (which is also the title of his book, published in 2011) with the help of a film crew. The documentary came just two years after Chiriatti’s graduation, in 1979, with a thesis about tarantism and its historical development after De Martino’s fieldwork.

These few years between the 1970s and 1980s have been hence fundamental for the reprise of the phenomenon of tarantism, at least in the framework of heritage and promotion. Indeed, not only scholars or tourists interested in the local folklore, but also the inhabitants of Salento started to re-discover tarantism in that period and kept on doing it in the following decades. For example, the administration of the small town of Melpignano, in Salento, started in 1998 the summer festival of the *Nights of the Taranta*.

This event consists of concerts by different folk and pop artists from Italy in different towns of Salento each year in August, with the final and biggest event in the town of Melpignano. The festival is the demonstration of how the symbol of the spider, the *taranta*, has lost its poisonous and shameful nature and become just a simple icon of Salento and of the *Nights*. The *taranta* is indeed part of the title and of the logo of the festival<sup>11</sup> being a recognisable brand for both musicians and tourists from the whole country. As said, again, by Chiriatti (2011: 46-47; my translation) about the recent transformations and evolution of tarantism:

[...] the phenomenon has lost its ritual roots. It does not show itself anymore as a disgrace and a duty. At the end, we have overcome the culture of sufferance. [...] Then, how is it possible to conjugate the new happenings with the past? [...] I want to deduce that in some way tarantism has come back, in new forms and modalities, but it has come back! Practiced by a social middle class, by young adepts, who almost choose to be *tarantati*, who look for the spider to be initiated within a path that will possibly bring them to their own personal, social, political and cultural identity. [...] Tarantism comes out [from this recent process] as broken, cut into several pieces. Each symbol of it, unique part of the whole, is used autonomously and lives by its own. Saint Paul [...] does not exist anymore! [...] It does not pinch anymore! He has stopped exercising his power over the *tarantate* and has started his life as a Saint. It does not create cultural discomfort anymore.

In brief, Salento has not only recovered but also redeemed or “folklorised” tarantism, considering it as a crucial part of its local identity and using it as folklore and heritage for the entertainment of locals and tourists.<sup>12</sup> However, as suggested by both Chiriatti and De Martino, the phenomenon appears certainly disarticulated and fragmented into different elements, which are not anymore reciprocally functional. Saint Paul, the local folk music (*pizzica*), the local dances, the symbol of the spider are examples of historical elements connected to tarantism, often used separately nowadays. Therefore, is it possible to say that the total disarticulation of the phenomenon, as prophesised by De Martino, is now complete?

There are some arguments against this prediction by De Martino. For instance, the Italian ethnomusicologist Pierpaolo De Giorgi (2007) criticised him and, indirectly, his idea of disarticulation, demonstrating how this perspective had derived from a reductive

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.lanottedellataranta.it/en/>, consulted on April 10, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> I will cover this aspect in the next chapter, referring to the concept of “heritagisation”.

and distorted view of the phenomenon. According to De Giorgi, De Martino had claimed a “dangerous and ethnocentric Western and historicistic ‘reason’ that should sweep away the ‘relics’ of the past” (2008: 35; my translation). However, disarticulation implies that tarantism had got completely broken into pieces, that its symbols had reached a complete autonomy from its original unity and that it was, therefore, more fragile than we may think. On the contrary, according to De Giorgi, these symbols still had their value and their role in the social context of Salento in the late 1950s, they still contributed to the formation of a complex phenomenon, consisting of an elaborated process of disease and healing within a symbolic horizon. According to De Giorgi, De Martino also underestimated the positive value of the trance as a form of communication with the sacred and the supernatural. Accordingly, De Martino did not recognise the importance of the consequent mental dissociation of the individual and could not compare properly tarantism with other cultural phenomena involving altered states of consciousness (2008: 58-59).

Following these criticisms, it cannot be clear for scholars who want to approach tarantism if the phenomenon has faced a total disarticulation or it has just transformed into something different. In any case, tarantism maintains its symbolic complexity and value, despite its huge changes. Transformations have indeed occurred and turned an ancient and painful syndrome (and the related healing therapies) into a new form of distinctive heritage, which has kept, on the other hand, many of its historical aspects.

Chiriatti and De Giorgi are just two eminent examples of scholars who have studied tarantism considering also De Martino’s contribution. More recently, the Italian anthropologist Giovanni Pizza (2015) has referred to De Martino comparing his results in 1959 to the more recent development and heritagisation of tarantism. According to Pizza, the increasing interest towards De Martino’s work in the last thirty years has encouraged not only new studies towards the phenomenon, but also new strategies of preservation and promotion of the old symbols and features of tarantism, like the *Nights of the Taranta*. Pizza has also published a book about possession in Europe in 2012, referring to tarantism and describing it as a form of possession by a spider towards a woman, similar in his opinion to further phenomena of possession throughout Italy and Europe. Pizza’s comparative approach received some criticisms, due to some inaccurate interpretations of phenomena of possession and hysteria. According to Davide Ermacora (2014: 180-185), for example, there are few similarities between those phenomena and tarantism; above all, the involvement of a small animal as the first reason for the

possession or the disease seems to be a peculiarity of tarantism and not shared with other phenomena. On the other hand, Pizza's works have certainly introduced new perspectives about tarantism, not just centred on the historical analysis of the phenomenon and focused instead on a comparative approach and on the framework of heritage studies. Talking about heritage, I can mention two studies. The first one, an article from Elina Caroli (2009), focuses on the idea of heritagisation of tarantism, that she calls "neo-tarantism",<sup>13</sup> and expounds the current influence of this process. An even more recent contribution comes from Incoronata Inserra and her book about Southern Italian folk dances, published in 2017. Based on interviews with Italian musicians and bibliographical sources, Inserra could enlarge her perspective to the global spread of Italian folk dances and to their significance as heritage nowadays. Her approach, as well as the ones of Caroli and Pizza, is hence comparative rather than just limited to a single context like Salento. Furthermore, all these scholars are from Southern Italy and with a background in comparative studies and anthropology. They are indeed interested in both their own regional background and in the recent developments of their own contexts within the larger framework of European and global society.

In spite of the increasing number of studies about the heritagisation of tarantism, interest towards the origins and the history of the phenomenon continues. One example of this is Gino Leonardo Di Mitri (2006) and his historical overview of medical research about tarantism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Di Mitri observed how physicians tried to explain the symptoms of tarantism and to define the species responsible for the alleged bite, mostly comparing the folkloric *taranta* with the existing *Latrodectus tredecimguttatus*. Some other recent historical studies come from non-Italian authors, like the one by the British researcher Jerri Daboo (2010). Daboo's work is mostly a summary of the history of tarantism, from the alleged origins to the most recent transformations. One of the chapters is dedicated to De Martino, his fieldwork and his concepts of "presence" and "crisis of presence", which Daboo mentions and expands with a wider reflection on the bad social and economic conditions of *tarantati* and *tarantate*. In addition, Daboo comes to the most recent processes of revival of the phenomenon in the last chapter of her book, highlighting

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<sup>13</sup> According to what I witnessed in the field, neo-tarantism is a different concept and refers to the behaviour of some people who suffer from psychological disorders and try to treat them with music, dances and the contact with Saint Paul. I will discuss this phenomenon in the next chapter and avoid using the word "neo-tarantism" to refer to heritagisation of tarantism.

the importance that this topic has acquired in the current framework of studies related to tarantism.

As the recent studies have showed, it is not possible to think about tarantism nowadays without talking about heritage and heritagisation. Ethnographers who want to approach this topic should keep in mind that studying tarantism means studying heritage too, since the old symbols and features of tarantism have been turned into pieces of heritage. In the next chapter, I will hence explore the process of heritagisation of tarantism, its popular perception and its effects on the social and cultural context of Salento nowadays. Moreover, I will do it with the help of my own ethnographic experience in the town of Galatina during the summer of 2018.

## 2. Tarantism and heritagisation

### 2.1. *A fieldwork experience about tarantism in 2018*

Tarantism is, to a certain extent, an extinct phenomenon. It is not extinct as an element of heritage for the locals, but it is definitely not around anymore as a syndrome. It is impossible to find nowadays women or men from Salento who claim to have met a spider that has bitten them. Almost nobody nowadays would intend music and dance as therapies, despite the strong role of both elements in local and regional folklore of the region. The inhabitants of Salento still venerate Saint Paul and still dedicate songs to him, but his role as a grace-giver is notably reduced (Pizza 2015).

An ethnographer nowadays should take all those recent transformations in account and approach the field in a different way than, for instance, De Martino did in 1959. For example, a contemporary researcher could not directly interview or observe people affected by tarantism, since they are not anymore alive. Nobody holds domestic therapies and final healing rituals either, and it is possible for an ethnographer to witness only the re-enactments<sup>14</sup> of these crucial events related to tarantism. Broadly speaking, a researcher cannot approach the phenomenon as a syndrome in the 2010s and should instead focus on the modalities and the strategies adopted by the local community to link its identity to the phenomenon: in brief, tarantism is a form of heritage for Salento nowadays. Making ethnography about tarantism means analysing this heritage closely and asking how it affects the self-perception of the locals.

There are also advantages about making fieldwork in Salento in the 2010s. Compared to decades like the 1950s or the 1960s, an ethnographer can refer to a wider range of academic writings about the topic. The huge number of publications about tarantism and the relatively easy access to them on the internet or in local libraries are a significant help for the current anthropologists, ethnologists and folklorists. Books and even audio-visual materials are crucial tools for the research, not only as preliminary

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<sup>14</sup> I have witnessed two re-enactments in the field: the first one of the domestic therapy and the second one of the final healing ritual. The first re-enactment took place in the former nunnery on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, whereas the second one in the square next to Saint Paul's chapel on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Both re-enactments consisted of performances of musicians and actresses who reproduced the ancient healing rituals for tarantism, as witnessed by locals, scholars, photographers and documentarists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

reading but also as guides during the fieldwork. For example, I have considered De Martino and his writing extremely useful for my own research. I have even told to one of my informants in the field that I have used *The Land of Remorse* in the same way as the archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann did with the Homeric poems to discover the location and the ruins of Troy. In fact, I did not know properly what I was looking for and where I should pay attention to at the beginning of my research. Luckily, on the other hand and as well as Schliemann, I was able to use the book that I was reading as a map for orientation within the complex topic of tarantism. Furthermore, I have collected other materials and documents that, even though not always significant for this writing, have been a precious tool for the comprehension and the connection with Salento and its peculiar culture and folklore.

Therefore, I will use my own fieldwork experience to show an example of ethnographic research in Salento nowadays. Even though I arranged it independently and could only spend two weeks in the field, the research has brought interesting outcomes. Above all, I could collect enough materials to reflect upon the process of heritagisation of tarantism and to compare what I have witnessed with the results of previous studies. I then reached the goal that I set in the first place when I organised my research: analyse the transformations of tarantism nowadays.

I spent my two weeks of fieldwork (from June 20 to July 4, 2018) in the town of Galatina, which could be regarded as the “centre” of tarantism since it is the only place where *tarantati* could receive the grace of Saint Paul. I decided to stay in a local countryside house (in Italian, *masseria*), about a kilometre away from the walls surrounding the town centre of Galatina. As I discovered that the walls physically separated the centre and the close periphery, it was easy for me to think about everything inside the walls as my main field, considering also the presence of the chapel of Saint Paul and other historical monuments in there. On the same day of my arrival (June 20), I decided to explore the centre and look for my informants, whom I was not able to contact before.

After that resolution, my actual fieldwork started: I have put a summary of my whole experience in this table, dividing the activities per date. Due to space limits, some crucial reflections about some informants and situations are missing in the table, but I have added them in the following text.

Date	Activities
20/06/2018	Asking for information in a local bookshop and meeting one of my informants (Andrea P.)
21/06/2018	Taking pictures from the field and visiting the town with Andrea P., who gave me further information about tarantism and Galatina
22/06/2018	Meeting Andrea C. in the local tourist office (where he works) and asking him some memories about tarantism in the past; visiting the local museum about tarantism with Andrea P.; phone calls with a further informant (Leo) and a future interviewee (Davide)
23/06/2018	Reading some materials, visiting the town, speaking with some occasional people and having a further phone call with Leo
24/06/2018	Meeting Leo and going with him, his wife and Andrea C. to the rehearsals for the public historical re-enactment of the arrival of the <i>tarantate</i> into Galatina
25/06/2018	First public event related to tarantism in the <i>ex-nunnery</i> : performance with music and dances before showing some documentaries about tarantism and the area where it has been spread for centuries
26/06/2018	In the morning, meeting with Andrea P. in the <i>Pro Loco</i> office <sup>15</sup> and further conversation about tarantism; in the night, second public event related to tarantism in the <i>ex-nunnery</i> (performance with music and dances before showing the film <i>Pizzicata</i> , 1996); interview with professor Nocera before the movie
27/06/2018	Further general rehearsals for the re-enactment - in the <i>ex-nunnery</i> but not opened to the public - and third public event related to tarantism, as well in the <i>ex-nunnery</i> : performance with music and dances before showing the documentary <i>Latrodectus</i> (2009)
28/06/2018	Re-enactment of the domestic therapy in the <i>ex-nunnery</i> ; meeting Davide, whom I interviewed, and going with him to the town centre for the <i>Night of the Rounds</i> (public dances on the streets); during that night, I could meet two young women dancing in St. Paul's chapel, the so-called neo- <i>tarantate</i>
29/06/2018	Re-enactment of the arrival and definitive healing (by St. Paul) of the <i>tarantate</i> in Galatina, in the morning; in the evening I met professor Nocera and other people debating about the historical nature of tarantism, again in the <i>ex-nunnery</i>
30/06/2018	Walking in the town centre and meeting the local artist Salvatore R., sceptical about the efficiency of tourism economy in Salento

<sup>15</sup> A *Pro Loco* is a common association in Italian small towns. It is a group of local amateurs who organise events related to their citizenship and its promotion. Every town has a *Pro Loco* and each of those associations usually do not belong to a unitary network of *Pro Locos*.



01/07/2018	Arranging the interview with the assessor Cristina D.
02/07/2018	Visiting again the tourist office and the <i>Pro Loco</i> in the morning; later, in the afternoon, bibliographical research about tarantism in the local library and interview with the assessor Cristina D.
03/07/2018	Further bibliographical research and consultation
After the 14 days of fieldwork	Transcriptions of recorded interviews and conversations

In sum, my fieldwork consisted of a period of participant observation integrated with interviews and conversations, recorded and translated directly into English during the process of transcription.<sup>16</sup> My participant observation consisted mostly of attending rehearsals and events organised in the month of June, with the immediate purpose of collecting documents like pictures and videos. Almost all those audio-visual documents portray the rehearsals and the re-enactments of the therapies of tarantism. I took notes too: I reported many of them in written form, whereas some other notes are vocal recordings of mine. I took written notes on an agenda each day before going to sleep, after spending the daytime in the town centre. I recorded the vocal notes while being in the field, in order to avoid forgetting important concepts and ideas that could suddenly come to my mind (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 31-32).

Since some time was free from social activities and encounters, I have spent this time reading materials related to tarantism, which helped me to dive into the phenomenon in the best way possible.<sup>17</sup> I could find other sources for my fieldwork through participating in social activities, like the film screenings and other events in the former nunnery (from June 25 to June 27). In particular, I saw the film *Pizzicata* (1996), directed by Edoardo Winspeare, a fictional but historically accurate story of a young woman becoming a *tarantata* after her lover's murder during the Second World War. I also saw the documentary *Latrodectus: qui mord en cachette* ("Latrodectus: it bites without revealing its presence", 2009), a French and Italian co-production that included

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<sup>16</sup> Except for the conversation including professor Nocera and other people in the afternoon of June 29 and in a room of the former nunnery, where we sat in a circle and talked about tarantism and its cultural meaning. Even though I recorded this conversation, its length and partial non-audibility convinced me not to transcribe and translate it. The echo of the room, the physical distance of some interlocutors and the occasional overlap of their voices contributed to this non-audibility. However, I considered some pieces of this conversation relevant for this thesis, like the details about the neo-*tarantata* that I had met in the night between June 28 and 29.

<sup>17</sup> Among those writings, I read the entire book *The Land of Remorse* in Italian, as well as many passages from De Giorgi (2007), Chiriatti (2011) and Nocera (2013). I have discussed these works in the previous chapter.

interviews with scholars like the ethno-psychiatrist Georges Lapassade and the anthropologist Gino Leonardo Di Mitri.

Talking about interviews, I followed a semi-structured model (Jamshed 2014: 83-84). All in all, I recorded and transcribed three interviews. The interviewees were the retired professor Maurizio Nocera and two younger people: the activist Davide Miceli and the assessor Cristina Dettù. I prepared some questions for the interviewees mainly to develop a longer discussion about the themes I was interested in. Depending on my interlocutors, some interviews had a clearer and more organised structure (Cristina and professor Nocera); another one started from general questions and developed in a broader and more digressive way (Davide). I tried to adapt the questions that I wanted to ask from my interlocutors to the situation that I was experiencing and to the people to whom I was talking. I have also recorded and stored two conversations about tarantism that I came across during my fieldwork. I just asked questions and expressed my thoughts when necessary, but I preferred mostly listening. The reason is simple: people involved in these talks were scholars, namely the professors Domenico Scapati and Maurizio Nocera. Respecting their experience and their authority in the field and in the subject, I decided to step back in these circumstances and become a mere listener. Whether I translated and transcribed the conversation with professor Scapati, I did not do the same with the one involving professor Nocera (for reasons explained in footnote 16).

I have not met just professors and researchers in Galatina, obviously, but different people with different opinions and ideas about tarantism. The diverse expertise, backgrounds and interests of people towards the phenomenon is something that I decided to focus on from the very first day of my fieldwork. My purpose was to get in touch with the variety of perspectives and contexts in which native people (re-)thought and (re-)discussed tarantism and to understand how they perceived the phenomenon and their own knowledge about it nowadays. However, I mostly interacted, conversed and made interviews with scholars and authorities related to cultural heritage (including politicians and organisers of events). People in the field considered those scholars and authorities as experts and I have followed this emic definition, distinguishing experts from non-experts. Also, I avoided interviewing non-expert citizens.<sup>18</sup> The reason for this choice was lack of confidence that many people who did not consider themselves experts showed towards

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<sup>18</sup> According to the Italian law, Galatina is a city, although populated by less than thirty thousand inhabitants. I will hence refer to local people as “citizens”, even though I will not refer again to Galatina as a city, due to its small population.

their own ideas regarding tarantism. Considering the display of knowledge about tarantism as a social performance (Bauman 2012: 102), those locals could explicitly ask not to be interviewed. However, I tried my best to avoid a possible underrepresentation of non-experts during my fieldwork. In fact, I considered all the opinions that I have come across as equally valuable and important for my research and for the definition of the emic point of view about tarantism.

In this sense, it is important to talk about my experience with the owner of the bookshop, an old woman called Emilia, on the very first day of my fieldwork. Working and living for many years in Galatina, she has got used to scholars and students who approach tarantism and its complexity after many readings and, presumably, many days, weeks and years of fieldwork. In my case, that was my first time in that field, I knew the topic just from readings and I could not consider myself an expert at all. Emilia noticed it immediately and for that reason she decided to introduce me to a local expert, a teacher who could indeed “teach” me what tarantism is and, therefore, make my research possible. Furthermore, she did not consider herself an expert on the topic and, thus, she appeared not confident in illustrating her view on tarantism. Indeed, while speaking with me, she refused to have me record her voice while saying that the recent re-enactments connected to tarantism are just bad imitations of the original phenomenon. The reason was that she felt embarrassed as well for my request, due to the better evaluation that she has given to the opinion of the experts rather than hers, as she also pointed out. Her position as a non-expert native is significant also as the consequence of the disappearance of the syndrome of tarantism, not anymore part of the everyday life of the local people.

At the same time, the improvements in primary and secondary education and the increasing contacts with tourists, ethnographers and scholars among the inhabitants of Galatina have presumably influenced the perception of their knowledge about tarantism. Common people, therefore, cannot help comparing their notions about the phenomenon to the ones of scholars and perceive their own knowledge as wrong or inadequate, mostly if they are directly in touch with some academic sources<sup>19</sup> and if they want to mediate this knowledge to outsiders. This is the case of Emilia, who works in a bookshop and constantly deals with texts due to her job.

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<sup>19</sup> This sense of inadequacy towards academic figures and sources can be also the consequence of the influence of ethnographers, anthropologists and folklorists in the public sphere regarding the processes of folklorisation and heritagisation (Hafstein 2018: 147). In other words, communities consider the work of those scholars undeniably important for themselves and hence respect the academic authority of those figures.

As said, Emilia introduced me to a young teacher of a local high school, named Andrea P., whom she called by phone and told to come to the shop. Andrea teaches history of art and had studied tarantism and the tradition behind this phenomenon out of personal interest. Due to his knowledge and his interest in local culture, he can be considered as a provincial intellectual, using the words of Dorothy Noyes (2016: 12). As I and Andrea met, and I talked about my research, we decided to have a small tour of the main monuments connected to tarantism in the town, like the chapel, the well and the church in front of the main square, the *basilica* of Saint Peter. We also decided to meet up in the following two days to visit other relevant places, like the town museum and, specifically, its section dedicated to tarantism. Andrea became one of my main informants and a very helpful guide in the very first days. He also introduced me to Roberto (around sixty years old), the exuberant owner of a small art gallery in the town centre of Galatina. Roberto, as well as Emilia, has been a further, although different, example of this discrepancy between the knowledge of experts and non-experts about tarantism.

Andrea and I met Roberto on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. On the same day, Roberto invited us to his gallery to see some paintings, inspired by tarantism. While reaching that place, Roberto told me his personal interpretation of tarantism, undoubtedly unconventional if compared to the ones by scholars and other citizens. He thought that *tarantate* were just nymphomaniac women who used the excuse of the bite of the spider and of Saint Paul's grace to come to Galatina and have sex with the local males. The connection between tarantism and sexuality (or, more precisely, lack of sexual satisfaction) is not original at all: the "little carnivals" mentioned by Baglivi (1796), the case of Maria from Nardò analysed by De Martino (2005) and more recent studies by Chiriatti (2011) and Nocera (2013) demonstrate this link. However, Roberto was explicitly sceptical towards all the academic knowledge about tarantism and its definition as a painful disease, connecting it just to a hyperbolic sexual desire. Since he used also some partly inappropriate language, Andrea scolded him, feeling responsible for Roberto's behaviour in public despite being younger. Andrea was also criticising his hypothesis about nymphomaniac *tarantate*, being more attached to the academic idea of tarantism as a disease provoked by the alleged bite of a spider. Differently from Emilia, Roberto was not at all ashamed of giving his personal opinion about tarantism, but he just did not receive any serious consideration from his more expert friend Andrea. This behaviour shows how some emic points of view are marginalised, mostly if they look reductive, purely speculative and in some way inappropriate, like Roberto did. On the other hand, this marginalisation appears to be

mainly part of a systematic process of increasing authority of scholars and decreasing contact of common people with tarantism. The inhabitants of Galatina and Salento, indeed, not experiencing anymore the disease in their everyday life, can occasionally have some vague idea or memory about this phenomenon, whereas scholars can develop a knowledge that positions themselves as experts and reliable authorities about tarantism. Scholars and experts like Andrea are actually useful to get in touch with the phenomenon and start studying it in the field. However, it would have not been possible to do fieldwork adequately ignoring completely the point of view of people like Roberto, Emilia and others who did not position themselves as experts about tarantism.

Talking about those experts, I certainly considered their reputation within the field. For instance, I noticed that everybody knew professor Nocera and referred to him and his authority regarding tarantism, especially during the public events held in the last days of June. All the scholars in Salento are obviously experts, but not just scholars. Other experts obtained indeed their knowledge and experience participating actively in the preservation and promotion of local heritage. The majority of those people are from Salento and, specifically, from Galatina: they grew up with tarantism and its cultural significance and they could not help studying the phenomenon or at least knowing it to a certain extent. This is the reason why many of those non-academic experts could be in charge for the organisation of the events in June, as happened with the UNESCO club of Galatina.

According to the website of the organisation, a UNESCO club “is an association of volunteers operating in a local, regional, national or international territory and promoting the ideals of UNESCO”.<sup>20</sup> UNESCO clubs have an official link with UNESCO, since they can use the name and the logo of the international organisation. However, at least in the case of Galatina, the club is not interested in the larger political framework of UNESCO and takes instead care of some small initiatives, intended mostly for the locals. Indeed, the members of the club in Galatina put a significant attention towards the heritage related to tarantism and I could appreciate their efforts during my fieldwork. In particular, I could not only witness directly the re-enactments of the domestic therapy and of the final healing ritual, but also the rehearsals beforehand.

I could meet the members of the club through a further informant, Andrea C., on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June. Around fifty years old, he works in the tourist office in Galatina and has

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.clubunescoagalatina.it/che-cose-un-club-unesco/>, consulted on April 1, 2019, and translated from Italian.

direct contact with travellers and ethnographers in summertime. Approaching him, he immediately introduced me Leo, a fifty-year-old member of the UNESCO club, by phone. So, Leo invited me at the rehearsal of the re-enactment of the domestic therapy on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June. As I met Andrea C., I asked him about his memories of people affected by tarantism, but I found out that he did not remember much due to his lack of interest towards the phenomenon when he was younger. On the contrary, in June 2018, he cooperated with the UNESCO club and joined himself the re-enactment of the domestic therapy as an actor, interpreting the father of the *tarantata* who bears the daughter to the place where she will dance. Thus, both Andrea C. and I needed to participate at the rehearsal on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, held in the countryside house of a further member of the club, Salvatore. UNESCO club members decided to arrange one of the rehearsals for the events in 2018 in this house due to the available space for musicians and performers.

Leo and his wife accompanied us by car to the house, where I could meet the further members of the club. I also met two ethnographers from Switzerland, some young local musicians and the two actresses, both around twenty, who were preparing for interpreting the role of *tarantate* during the upcoming events on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June. The actresses were not professional but had studied acting and dancing during their school years. One of them, Irene, told me that at first she learnt how to imitate *tarantate* just by watching some old videos of original domestic therapies and final healing rituals. Her performance (as well as the one of Adele, the other actress) was then the reproduction of what she had watched throughout historical documents and it could not be differently. Both actresses were from Galatina and declared that they prefer relying on audio-visual documents and academic writings, since they do not have memories of the old and currently extinct syndrome. Moreover, being turned into a public performance, the re-enactment of these rituals were not spontaneous at all and required instead a long and elaborate preparation, as well as a certain training in dance and acting. For that reason, Salvatore constantly monitored and advised during the rehearsal, asking them to follow some precise and standardised instructions. Irene, for example, was not good as screaming in public and Salvatore often asked her to do it, with the clear purpose of making her look like a real *tarantata*. Largely, I noticed that the standardisation of tarantism nowadays and the attempt to reconstruct it according to the historical and academic sources have crystallised

the phenomenon and stuck it in time.<sup>21</sup> In fact, I could see a gap between the institutionalised knowledge and events, organised by the UNESCO club, which try to reproduce tarantism as historically witnessed and the spontaneous, often accidental, circumstances where the phenomenon looks still alive and influential. In particular, I have witnessed this gap during the two dates of June 28 and 29, 2018.

Indeed, in the middle of the historical re-enactments of the domestic therapy (the 28<sup>th</sup>) and the final healing ritual (the 29<sup>th</sup>), the town of Galatina was preparing for the traditional *Night of the Rounds*. During the night between these two dates many people from Salento gathered together in the main square of Galatina, leaving just some circular gaps (called “rounds” or, in Italian, *ronde*) for occasional couples of dancers, accompanied by some musicians (mostly drummers). These couples could be a man and a woman or entirely male and female, like the two girls who, after spending some time dancing in the square, decided to move to Saint Paul’s chapel. It was 1 AM of June 29, 2018. In this building, accompanied by a drummer and an accordionist, they kept on dancing in front of the fresco of the Saint. At some point, one of the two girls started to move frantically, trying to reach a state of trance and to communicate with the Saint. Some spectators joined the improvised ritual, including me and the two ethnographers from Switzerland that I had met during the rehearsal in the countryside house. Specifically, our ethnographic activity motivated us to overcome the huge crowd gathered on the entrance of the chapel and to enter the building to film the event, which lasted for some time before 2 AM. During that hour, the crowd around the chapel and within the main square decreased gradually and, at the end of the ritual, it was possible for the owners of the chapel to approach the entrance of the building and close it to the public as everybody went out.

At this point, it is important to refer again to the sign in the chapel that forbids dancing there. The sign is one of the first things that I have noticed during my fieldwork and I have heard some criticism about it, as it happened with Gioacchino, the 16-year-old accordionist who played during the historical re-enactment and its rehearsals. Gioacchino told me that the sign in the chapel should not be there because nowadays there are people who need to dance for their own health. I had already heard about those people during my

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothy Noyes (2006: 36-42) noticed a similar process of standardisation in the Catalan festival of the *Patum*, from the small town of Berga. Some organisers nowadays depict the festival “as a survival from time immemorial” (2006: 40), intervening on its cultural and historical dynamicity. Also, the observation of Noyes (2006: 40) “suggest that the festival is becoming at once more liturgical in execution and more “lite” in feeling”.

two weeks in Galatina from Emilia and Andrea P., even though they looked sceptical towards their actual need. However, Gioacchino's statement persuaded me that something like the old tarantism, that I thought to be dead, was still part of the local experience of disease and healing. This conviction became a confirmation when I witnessed the dance in the chapel during the *Night of the Rounds* and asked the participants, after the end of the ritual, about what had just happened and how they were feeling while playing and dancing. The answers focused on the incredible and extraordinary nature of this experience, assimilated to a state of trance and altered consciousness.

After few minutes, being not able to do it immediately, I tried to approach the girl who was in a state of trance to ask her the same question, making however a mistake: I defined her dance a "performance". She, indeed, answered me sadly that her dance was not a performance at all, underlining that what she was doing was not a fake dance, but she really needed it. Feeling embarrassed and disrespectful towards her and the nature of her dance, I then decided not to pursue that conversation. I just discovered from Salvatore, after few days, that this girl had some unspecified psychological disorders and used the dance and the contact with the Saint to overcome her problems. Something like that could have happened to Maria from Nardò and other *tarantati* during the old healing rituals. Both experts and non-experts in the field called this phenomenon "neo-tarantism", to underline its continuity with the traditional illness of *tarantati*, but also the crucial differences from the old syndrome. Indeed, on the one hand the state of psychic crisis and trance, the dances as healing therapies and the relationship with the Saint look familiar to whoever knows about tarantism. On the other hand, some elements like the relationship with the spiders and the water seemed to be less relevant than in the past. Moreover, the social role of women has changed from marginalised collectors of tobacco to middle-class workers with an improved economic status and a decreased necessity of finding a partner and having children. The current context of neo-tarantism is undoubtedly not the same as the one of the ancient *tarantati* and this discrepancy impedes an easy comparison between tarantism and neo-tarantism.

Witnessing an improvised ritual of neo-tarantism and speaking with some involved people was probably the most interesting and fascinating thing that I have come across during my fieldwork. Unfortunately, I could hardly understand and access this new phenomenon, due to lack of time during my two weeks in Salento and physical and social distance from those dancers and musicians. Also, the dancers and "neo-tarantate" did not openly talk about their experience. Therefore, I decided to focus my research mostly on



different contemporary aspects related to tarantism, above all the processes of heritagisation that I am going to discuss about in the next subchapter.

## *2.2. Tarantism nowadays, heritagisation and authenticity*

I started the chapter saying that tarantism is dead as a syndrome, but alive as piece of heritage. I must admit that neo-tarantism and its psychological expressions that I witnessed during my fieldwork made me to reconsider this statement. However, I lack sufficient knowledge to discuss these hidden aspects of contemporary tarantism. Instead, I shall focus on the explicit and obvious idea that the old syndrome has been turned into heritage nowadays, undergoing the process of heritagisation. Thus, to understand better what tarantism is nowadays, it is necessary to discuss what heritage is. Valdimar Hafstein has listed some relevant features of heritage, which provide a good definition of this term. Mainly, he has enforced the idea of heritage building as the result of efforts within the communities and between the communities and the authorities, like UNESCO or national organisations (Hafstein 2018: 105):

[...] heritage reorders relations between persons and things, and among persons themselves, objectifying and recontextualizing them with reference to other sites and practices designated as heritage. Heritage assembles previously unrelated buildings, rituals, paintings and songs, and it addresses them as something to be safeguarded, that is to say, acted upon through programs, schemes and strategies carried out and evaluated by experts whose operation connect the calculation of authorities with the desires and the ambition of citizens.

Regina Bendix (2009: 255) has instead written on the more specific domain of “cultural heritage”, built as a result of a cultural effort: “cultural heritage does not exist, it is made”. Human agency has a crucial role in this process of creation, whether the result of this process is material or immaterial. Indeed, there is a further distinction between the two domains of material cultural heritage (for example, artworks) and “intangible cultural heritage” (like the current heritage related to tarantism). According to the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, ratified by UNESCO in 2003:<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>, consulted on November 26, 2018.

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

A common aspect between material and intangible heritage is certainly the idea of community, a group of people who is in charge for the preservation and transmission of one or more pieces of heritage. The peculiar aspect of intangible cultural heritage, on the other hand, consists of something “constantly recreated by communities and groups” and hence transformed in response to historical processes. However, as Dorothy Noyes (2006: 32-33) noticed, the idea behind communities “as bounded individuals [...] such that their traditions are distinctive and indeed unique” is quite problematic, as well as the definition of the boundaries of these communities. This point of view emerges mostly from the analytic perspective of folklorists, who often problematize the concept of community. On the contrary, a native group usually ignores this problematisation and wants to be considered as a community with a specific identity to preserve. Heritage can help to reach this goal, defining “distinctive and unique” features for a single group and empowering it as a community within a national and international framework.

This has happened to tarantism too. Political authorities and cultural associations in Salento, and specifically in Galatina, have in fact used the phenomenon to enforce the unique identity of the territory, involve locals in organised events and promote tourism from outside. There has been a precise and explicit intent of heritagisation regarding tarantism, mostly after the recent historical processes of disarticulation, extinction of the syndrome and renewed interest towards the cultural specificity of Salento. The re-enactments in Galatina are good examples of how heritagisation affected tarantism. The ancient experience of disease and healing is now a dramatic public performance, modelled for the entertainment of locals, tourists and even ethnographers.

I can also refer to the words of professor Nocera, whom I asked a question about the historical transformation of tarantism. He then mentioned the confluence of tarantism and its symbolism into the dance and musical subgenre of *pizzica pizzica*. *Pizzica pizzica* is the type of *pizzica* played and danced for recreational purposes, whereas the other

subgenre of *pizzica*, called *pizzica tarantata*, was intended for healing purposes and played during the domestic therapy. The distinction between the two subgenres is merely functional, since they are identical, musically speaking (De Giorgi 1999: 88). Nocera's words conveyed the idea that *pizzica pizzica* has reached a cultural status that never existed before, a status derived from the importance of tarantism as a fundamental element for the identity and the specificity of the region. The large and warm participation of locals in events involving *pizzica pizzica*, like the *Night of the Rounds*, has furthermore improved its status and its importance within Salento.

Broadly speaking, *pizzica* and the geographically wider and related genre of *tarantella* have become relevant examples of heritagisation in Southern Italy, as some scholars have observed too. Dorothy Noyes (2015: 303), for instance, has referred to *tarantella* as a traditional practice that nowadays belongs to the domain of intangible cultural heritage. Incoronata Inserra (2017: 31-57), whose book I mentioned before, has explained the development and institutionalisation of *tarantella* and *pizzica* as cultural heritage in Italy and worldwide. According to Inserra, the process of heritagisation is actually a form of revival, a re-discovery of an old cultural environment that was gradually disappearing within modernity. Groups like *Nuovo Canzoniere del Salento* and *Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino* have helped this process in Salento since the 1970s (2017: 34), but the regional genre of *pizzica* became popular just after the 1990s (2017: 39-47). Apparently, this has happened due to a renewed scholarly interest towards the genre in the last thirty years. Many scholars are native scholars from Salento who occasionally dance or play instruments: the researcher and drummer Luigi Chiriatti is a significant example in this sense. I can also mention again the project *The Spider of the Dancing God*, carried out by the University of Lecce in 1981 and involving Chiriatti.

However, there was even an indirect contribution of De Martino in that period, as Giovanni Pizza (2015: 68) noticed. In fact, libraries and bookshops started to sell and lend *The Land of Remorse* again in 1994, after a longer period when the book was not available at all. Consequently, new Italian readers started to approach De Martino's work and to re-discover tarantism and *pizzica*. Moreover, with the English translation of the book by Dorothy Louise Zinn in 2005, also non-Italian speakers could discover the phenomenon and feel encouraged to visit Salento or conduct ethnographic enquiries there. During my fieldwork in Galatina, for example, I met researchers from United States and Switzerland as well as local and Italian scholars. Therefore, despite the end of the syndrome, the national and international interest towards the phenomenon looks more alive than ever.

Talking about the revival of *pizzica* and tarantism and its national and international reception, it is fundamental to mention again the festival of the *Nights of the Taranta*, held in August every year since 1998. Inserra (2017: 40) described it using the singular form, referring to the biggest and last concert in the Melpignano, and connected the festival to the larger framework of revivalism and heritagisation in Salento after the 1990s:

The increasing popular attraction to these [Southern Italian] folk rhythms since the 1990s is reflected by the extensive organization of both local and nationwide festivals, courses, and workshops. The most important example of this phenomenon is the annual *Notte della Taranta* (Night of the *Taranta*) festival [...]. Following its large success, the festival has contributed to popularizing *pizzica* both nationally and internationally, while also boosting tourism in the region. Over time the festival's scope has become increasingly international, thanks to the presence of many artists from around the world, including artists from world music, rock, and pop music scenes.

The importance of the festival is undoubted, as well as its impact on tourism in Salento. Melpignano is the town that has mostly benefited from the promotion of the *Nights of the Taranta*, more than other places in the region. Data taken from 2007 to 2010 prove that the final concert brings on average one hundred thousand people, whereas the previous events hardly catch the attention of more than seventy thousand people at all (Attanasi and Giordano 2011). The reason is simple and connected to the larger activity of promotion reserved to the event in Melpignano. Indeed, even the official website of the event, when opened, reveals immediately the date and the place of the last concert, without mentioning the previous events connected to the one in Melpignano.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, I prefer to mention the festival as the “nights” in plural, following the concerns and the perplexities that people from Galatina have expressed when I met them. For example, interviewing the activist Davide Miceli and the assessor Cristina Dettù, both brought up the issue with Melpignano and the reason behind it.

According to Cristina, the idea of the *Night*, intended as the big concert in Melpignano, came at first to Sergio Blasi, an employee working for the town of Galatina. Blasi proposed the project of the *Night* at first to the mayor of Galatina in 1998, but

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.lanottedellataranta.it/en/>, consulted on April 10, 2019. The website already refers to the upcoming event of the concert in Melpignano in 2019. There are also two lists from 2018 of concerts in other towns of Salento, both available in Italian: <http://www.lanottedellataranta.it/it/programma-2018/concerti-ragnatela>; <http://www.lanottedellataranta.it/it/programma-2018/altra-tela> (both consulted on April 10, 2019). However, the structure of the website reveals that the main focus of the promotional activity is on the event in Melpignano.

unsuccessfully. Blasi then asked the mayor in Melpignano, who liked the idea and organised the first big concert already in 1998. Even though Galatina was the historical and symbolic centre of tarantism in the past, its mayor was not interested in organising this event in 1998. During my fieldwork, many citizens regretted the decision of the mayor of Galatina and saw it as a lost chance to improve tourism in the town. According to Cristina, on the other hand, the mayor certainly took a bad decision, but wanted at first to avoid an “extreme” depiction of tarantism and *pizzica*. In other words, the idea of heritagising tarantism by means of a big concert looked distant from the old and local dimension of the phenomenon in Galatina, altering its allegedly original and authentic nature. On the contrary, the same idea looked intriguing and remunerative in Melpignano, where the ethical issues regarding tarantism in Galatina were missing. Moreover, the historical relationship between Melpignano and the ancient phenomenon was less strong and less influential on the local identity than in Galatina. The larger number of visitors has proven that Melpignano was right in the first place and the success of the initiative has led other towns in Salento, including Galatina, to join the festival of the *Nights* with cultural events and concerts before the final concert in Melpignano.

However, Galatina has irremediably lost its central role regarding tarantism and *pizzica*, becoming nowadays just one of the towns that host the *Nights*: this is the main reason for the public regret in Galatina over the decision of the mayor in 1998. The town that Saint Paul blessed and protected from the bite of the *taranta*, the town that could miraculously heal *tarantati* is nowadays just one of the many places in Salento connected to the phenomenon. This new reality is obviously hard to accept for the citizens of Galatina, who are currently trying to enforce their cultural role regarding tarantism with events like the re-enactments and the *Night of the Rounds*. On the other hand, many locals have expressed their concern about preserving the historical, original and authentic identity of the phenomenon, which looks altered after the recent processes of heritagisation. In this sense, it is important to explore the issue of authenticity, as addressed in the framework of folkloristics and heritage studies.

Giving a definition of authenticity is not simple, but quite problematic. The term “authenticity” refers to something new and original, definitely not fake or copied. However, there are different explanations of this concept, according to the different frameworks in which it has been important to address the issue of authenticity. For example, according to Regina Bendix (1997: 15):

One definition of authenticity, used in the realm of art and antiques, refers to the clear identifiability of maker or authorship and uniqueness of an artifact, relying on the "made by one's own hand" etymology. Folklorists, in a peculiar reversal, for a long time located authenticity within the anonymity of entire social groups, or the "folk." Lack of identifiable authorship, multiple existence over time and space, variation of the items, and the social and economic circumstances of the "bearers of tradition" served, instead, as ways of testing folklore's authenticity. Once individual performers or makers of artifacts entered the discussion, the criterion of anonymity or nameless tradition began to unravel, and the problem of authenticity could have rendered itself obsolete.

In one word, the definition of "authentic" is controversial, in general as well as from the etic point of view of researchers in folklore studies. Speaking about communities and their emic perspective, there is instead a different claim for authenticity within each distinctive culture and tradition. Bendix (1997: 21) says that "the crucial questions to be answered are not "what is authenticity?" but "who needs authenticity and why?" and "how has authenticity been used?"". Therefore, instead of finding a universal way to define what is authenticity, these words suggest analysing the idea of authenticity from the point of view of people who produce folklore and claim it as authentic. This approach is useful, since it can help contextualising authenticity within a single community. However, finding the emic perspective regarding authentic folklore does not mean avoiding debates and controversies: there is not a unique emic point of view, but more different ideas regarding what can be authentic and what does not deserve this status. This is the case of Salento and tarantism, as also seen in the field.

Whereas the organisers of re-enactments, namely the UNESCO club, thought that the events were fundamental for the promotion of local heritage and certainly loyal to the historical witnesses of tarantism, some other people did not think the same. For example, the bookseller Emilia, introduced above. The re-enactments of tarantism were, according to Emilia, bad imitations and degenerate versions of what tarantism was in the past. Also, she thought that those re-enactments tried to imitate tarantism but failed miserably, since in her opinion they did not resemble it at all. In one word, the re-enactments were not "authentic".

I registered a similar opinion, although less severe, from a woman working in a bar that she owned and where I used to eat sometimes. The woman, aged around fifty and from Galatina, thought as well that the phenomenon had lost its authenticity and become something different from the past, something not recognisable as tarantism anymore. For

instance, she mentioned the loss of an iconic moment belonging to the rituality of tarantism in Galatina: *tarantate* reaching the town on a wooden wagon in the early morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of June for the final healing in the chapel. She might have remembered this iconic moment from her childhood, when tarantism still existed (although almost dead) and motorised vehicles were not so common in Salento. This memory carried hence a strong emotional value, since it referred to the symbolic instant when the citizens of Galatina started gathering in the town centre after the arrival of the *tarantate* to watch their healing ritual. Thus, it is not just a memory of the past: it is a memory of a socially significant symbol, nowadays lost with the end of the old syndrome. However, I could have a glimpse of that old memory as well: the arrival on a wagon of the actresses interpreting *tarantate* was part of the performance of the re-enactment in 2018. On the other hand, it is true that the old image of actual *tarantate* reaching Galatina is something that nobody can experience nowadays and that locals can just remember. This example shows a strong connection between authenticity and memory in Salento, especially about tarantism.

Tarantism becomes authentic, according to many locals, when they can recall the historical phenomenon and compare it with the new forms of heritagisation, perceived as fake or completely not inherent, like the *Nights of the Taranta* or the re-enactments. Nevertheless, talking just about the re-enactments that I could see in 2018, UNESCO club members re-arranged carefully the therapies for tarantism as historical sources and memories had reported. In other words, there was a significant effort in making the re-enactments as authentic as possible, despite their consideration as bad and inauthentic imitations of the original tarantism. This effort was thus not always effective on the locals, but certainly valuable for me, as an ethnographer, and for tourists who joined the events. In the case of both tourists and non-native researchers, it is not possible to compare the experience of being in the re-enactments in Salento with memories that only locals obviously have. It is at least possible for non-native ethnographers to compare what is seen in the field with the bibliographical and audio-visual sources, but this comparison is not supposed to be judgemental in terms of authenticity. A non-native researcher (as well as a local researcher) can certainly notice the differences between tarantism and its contemporary heritagisation, but should be also aware of the ethical and terminological issues of authenticity in order to avoid labelling the new phenomena of heritagisation as inauthentic. Consequently, both non-native researchers and tourists in Salento can

experience the re-enactments considering them as distinctive features of the cultural context and useful efforts for the heritage preservation and promotion.

Moreover, locals, tourists and researchers can also build a personal memory of heritagised tarantism, alternative but similar to the memory of the old phenomenon coming from some locals. Bendix (2018: 79-80) has explored the idea of memory of tourist experience, referring to a perception of authenticity that differs from the one that locals have:

Touristic longing [...] seeks ever-new experiences. The pleasure inherent to what some people term an authentic – that is, never-before-had-and-never-to-be-had-again – experience, couched in terms of an overflowing soul and the visceral impact it has on our body, haunts modernity. Travel and tourism may contain the quintessential and oh-so-rare manifestation of authenticity. [...] The most powerful evidence of the search of the singular, unique and authentic within tourist experience, however, is narration. [...] The process of narrating the experience recovers the moment, if not its experiential singularity, and allows for its communicative restaging and its ever-new mental savouring.

In the case of Salento, tourists, ethnographers and locals who approach the topic of tarantism can experience a sense of being authentically in that place or in that field. The re-enactments in 2018 enforced this perception and served as something to be remembered and retold by the visitors. The re-enactments are thus designed to be both memories and authentic pieces of the culture of Salento for tourists, researchers and some locals. Some other locals can show instead some scepticism towards the re-enactments and the recent processes of heritagisation of tarantism, even though recognising the economic importance of increasing tourism in Salento.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, for instance, I met an artist from Galatina who was selling his wooden sculptures in the street. This man, named Salvatore (not the same Salvatore in the UNESCO club) and around forty years old, expressed his concerns regarding the initiatives of heritage promotion in Salento. According to Salvatore, institutions sometimes do not understand how to promote cultural heritage or, if they do, they have not started this activity of promotion in the right time. His words revealed the importance of tourism for the economy of the region, highlighting sadly how lack of competence and the deficiencies of the institutions impeded the growth of the sector in Salento.

Also, Salvatore mentioned tarantism and how the phenomenon, originally tied to physical and psychological pain, could not have kept its negative nature in its process of



heritagisation. This is evident especially during the concerts of the *Nights of the Taranta*, when cheerful music and dances have substituted the original negativity of tarantism. However, I have also noticed a positive consequence of this historical transformation: tarantism is not anymore something to be ashamed of, as it was in the past. The re-evaluation of tarantism helped locals not only to reuse its symbolism to promote themselves, but also to cope with their historical heredity and heritage.

This aspect, for example, is helping significantly Galatina. The old “capital town” of tarantism has lost nowadays its central role in favour of Melpignano, but is trying to recover its importance with the re-enactments and the events in which I have also participated. The initiatives in Galatina are clearly a consequence of the loss of shame towards tarantism, in a period when the symbol of the *taranta* seems to be an efficient attraction for tourists, at least in the rival town of Melpignano. In this sense, it is easy to understand those initiatives as targeted not only to locals, but also and perhaps mainly to visitors.

Being in the field as an ethnographer and not mainly as a tourist, I noticed also how Galatina did not ignore the impact of researchers about tarantism on the local economy. I could spend some time in the town centre, visiting two book shops, some bars, the office of the *Pro Loco* and the tourist office. Interestingly, all those places were full of books, flyers and brochures regarding tarantism, each one giving basic or broad information about the phenomenon. Moreover, I could find books and other writings among the souvenirs for tourists. This was not obviously the case of book shops, whereas in places like the tourist office or the bars it was common to see texts about tarantism between magnets dedicated to Salento and gastronomic products. Tourists who visit Galatina may be interested in tarantism and in buying books about the topic, but apparently they are not the main target for those texts. Perhaps they are in the case of shorter writings, like flyers or brochures, but books seem to be addressed mostly to researchers who look for useful sources or intriguing readings about the topic.

Ethnographers, students and scholars from Italy and abroad often visit Galatina for fieldwork about tarantism and its heritagisation. This happens mostly in summertime and in the month of June, when the events connected to tarantism take place. The number of tourists and visitors increases, also from the surrounding towns, and ethnographers have more opportunities to meet people, interview authorities and participate into the events, as I did as well. Among those ethnographers, I mentioned students, namely university students who are writing their dissertation about tarantism or *pizzica*. I actually did not

find other university students in Galatina except myself, but I knew that I was not the only one when I bought some books related to tarantism in a bar. While paying for the books, the owner guessed correctly that I was going to use them for my thesis, suggesting that the main buyers of those texts were students and that it was common to find them in the town in summertime. On the other hand and as mentioned before, I met older scholars in the field, from both Italy and abroad. It is hence clear that, whatever the academic level of ethnographers, Galatina is a popular field for them and their research.

Accordingly, ethnography in Galatina represents a vital and influential sector of the tourist economy in the town. Ethnographers are different from tourists due to the diverse purpose of their visit and to a longer permanence in a single town, if required from their research. However, ethnographers may be interested during their permanence in touristic activities like sightseeing, shopping or eating in restaurants. In addition, they can also attend folkloric events, rituals and conferences and purchase books related to their research interest. Every activity has a positive impact on the local economy, increasing the incomes of hotels, restaurants, museums and book shops, for example. A town like Galatina knows it and, therefore, exploits the opportunity of having many researchers as visitors, in addition to ordinary tourists.

In sum, tarantism has been transformed in the course of heritagisation and has become a crucial part of the identity of Galatina and Salento. Tarantism as heritage is now the object of a conflictual discourse between the claim for its authenticity and the need for cultural promotion and touristic activity in the region. However, despite the controversies, tarantism remains an undeniably distinctive element of Salento, with an undoubted historical, cultural and folkloric value for the region.

# Conclusion

Tarantism is not a simple phenomenon. While repeatedly defined as a “syndrome” in this thesis, a conventional medical framework cannot explain properly the insurgence and even the existence of tarantism. For example, it seems that the spider that provokes the symptoms of tarantism does not exist in the local fauna. Also, the idea that dances and the intervention of Saint Paul can heal the syndrome obviously does not match the usual medical treatments for the bite of a poisonous spider. Culture and folklore have hence a strong role in defining the phenomenon of tarantism and its resolution. This is the reason why tarantism became so appealing for ethnographers, interested in cultural analysis that could explain properly the existence and the meaning of such a complex phenomenon.

Interestingly, tarantism still keeps its ethnographic appeal, in a period when the syndrome has disappeared. Historical changes to tarantism have occurred and helped transform it into a piece of heritage. Whereas many ethnographers have been interested in looking for the origins of and the reasons for the syndrome, many others have started to analyse the use of tarantism as a matter of regional identity, as done in this thesis. I explored the new interest in contemporary tarantism in this work, moving from the analysis of the earliest witnesses of the phenomenon to the most recent studies.

After tracing the historical development of tarantism and of the related studies, I analysed how tarantism has transformed nowadays and how it has reached its current local cultural and social significance. In order to expound on this significance, I drew on my ethnographic research in Salento in 2018 and the theoretical issues of heritagisation and authenticity from the perspective of tarantism. These issues were discussed in the field and led to different points of view and controversies. For example, members of the UNESCO club, who organised the re-enactments in Galatina, were locals interested in making those performances as similar as possible to the original therapies for tarantism. On the other hand, other people in the field highlighted the inauthenticity of the re-enactments.

Controversies arose also about the interpretations of the syndrome of tarantism. It is worth mentioning, for instance, how the voices of experts and non-experts can differ and how the expertise can become a matter of authority over non-experts. This is the case of Andrea P., who criticised the vernacular interpretation of tarantism by his friend Roberto. The experts in the field were usually interested in tarantism as a historical

phenomenon and not focused too much on the recent issues of heritagisation and authenticity. The UNESCO club and its members were the exceptions since they used their expertise to organise the re-enactments, believing in the positive value of their efforts for heritagisation of tarantism.

The issues of authenticity and heritagisation certainly influenced the current situation in the field. Reflecting upon their impact in the field, the analysis of these issues enabled me to focus on contemporary perceptions and interpretations of tarantism in Salento and on the social consequences of those perspectives and interpretations. The purpose of this work was hence studying tarantism mostly as a contemporary element belonging to the domains of folklore and heritage and related to the local communities of Galatina and of Salento.

First and foremost, tarantism has become heritage for people living in Salento, who have formed their regional identity around the phenomenon and put some significant effort in its promotion and in the preservation of its historical significance. Secondly, the heritagisation of tarantism has pointed out the problem of authenticity. Nowadays a symbol like the spider is just a promotional icon for the *Nights of the Taranta*, whereas music and dances have become exclusively recreational activities. The historical and original function of those elements is now lost. Also, events like the re-enactments are clearly not the same thing as the ancient therapies, even though imitating them; re-enactments are performances without a healing purpose. And, as emerged from the answer that I received from the neo-*tarantata*, a performance, in this case, is not something authentic from the emic perspective. A performance, even though well enacted, can be perceived often as fake, inauthentic and a bad imitation of something original, pure and lost in time.

Tarantism nowadays is in the middle of this conflict between performance and authenticity. Historical and cultural processes have gradually changed its nature and turned it into heritage, however preserving the symbols and the historical importance of the ancient phenomenon. It is still possible to witness tarantism through the re-enactments and to read and research about it. Until tarantism survives as heritage, scholars can study it and their contribution is necessary. There are still details to discover about the phenomenon in the past and recent transformations to trace in the present. These enquiries will certainly increase the awareness about this region of Italy that has fascinated many scholars, while helping its distinctive culture to survive in the future.

Talking about this thesis and this research, it would not have been possible as well without witnessing the contemporary aspects of tarantism. Highlighting those aspects, I focused on the current importance and relevance of the phenomenon, making it possibly more intriguing for people interested in folklore and heritage. Hopefully, this work will inspire some future scholars and encourage them to pursue their studies regarding tarantism.

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# Tarantism: iidsest sündroomist Lõuna-Itaalia uueks pärandivormiks - Kokkuvõte

Tarantism on Lõuna-Itaalias Salentos keskajast kuni 20. sajandini esinenud kultuuriga seotud sündroom, mida varem on peetud meditsiiniliseks seisundiks. Tänapäeval on tarantism saanud selle regiooni pärandkultuuris olulise koha. Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on analüüsida tarantismi kaasaegseid muundumisi.

Termin “tarantism” viitab sümptomitele, mis esinevad inimesel juunikuus tarantli (*lycosa tarantula*) hammustuse tagajärjel. Huvitaval kombel ei ole see ämblik isegi päris tarantel. Tegu on olendiga, kelle olemasolu ei ole teaduslikult tõestatud, vaid eeldatav. Tarantismi sümptomiteks olid iseloomulik kurbus ja melanhoolia, mis vahel segunesid ka füüsilise valuga. Tarantismi raviti tavaliselt kahe rituaaliga. Esimene, mida nimetati koduseks teraapiaks, leidis aset juuni teises pooles ja selle jooksul kutsus hammustuse ohvriks langenud inimene enda koju mõned kohalikud muusikud, kelle mängitud muusika saatel pidi ta ämbliku mürgi endast välja tantsima. Teise rituaali käigus pidi hammustatud inimene 29. juunil minema Galatinas asuvasse apostel Pauluse kabelisse ja paluma pühakult armu. Uskumuste kohaselt oli Galatina ainus tarantismile immuunne linn Salentos. Pärast armuandmist oli inimene ravitud, kuigi järgneva aasta juunis võis ta siiski veel tarantismi sümptomeid kogeda.

Käesolev lõputöö põhineb Galatina linnas läbi viidud kahepäevase välitöö (20. juunist 4. juulini 2018. a). Kuna meditsiiniline seisund on tänapäevaks kadunud, oli võimalik näha vaid taasetendusi ja mitte ajaloolist nähtust ennast. Välitöö koosnes osalusvaatlusest linnas korraldatud üritustel ja selle käigus koguti erinevaid materjale, nagu fotod, videod, helisalvestised, kirjalikud märkmed ja intervjuud. Kogutud materjale võrreldi seejärel teemat käsitlevate eelnevalt kogutud trükitud allikatega. Tänu nendele materjalidele käsitleb lõputöö tarantismi arengulugu ning seda, kuidas tarantism on jäänud püsima, muutudes pärandi osaks.

Välitööde ja kirjutusprotsessi käigus ilmnisid kaks peamist nüüdisaegset aspekti, nimelt tarantismi ümberkujundamine pärandiks ning nüüdisaegse tarantismi autentsus. Tarantismist on tänapäeval saanud kultuuripärand peamiselt suviti toimuvate ürituste tõttu, millest olulisemateks on Galatinas toimuv muistsete teraapiate taasetendamine ja terves Salentos peetavad “Tarantliööde” kontserdid. Just need kontserdid on

populariseerinud *pizzica* muusika ja tantsužanri, mida mängiti algselt eelmainitud kodustes teraapiates. Need kultuuriüritused on regiooni toonud ka palju turiste üle terve Apenniini poolsaare.

Salento kohalikud elanikud, kes on küll saanud majanduslikku kasu suurenenud turismist, ei ole siiski päris kindlad, kas tarantismi ümberkujundamine pärandiks oli hea otsus. Kohalike jaoks on peamine mure nüüdisaegse tarantismi ebaautentsus, sest seda nähtust peetakse ajaloolise sündroomiga võrreldes mitteoriginaalseks ja võltsiks. Nii näiteks pidasid mõned Galatina kohalikud inimesed tarantismi taasetendamist muistse teraapia halvaks jäljendamiseks.

Lõputöös pööratakse ka tähelepanu kohalike ekspertide rollile tarantismi mõtestamises. “Ekspert” on eemiline kategooria, mis hõlmab tarantismi uurinud teadlasi, poliitikuid, aktiviste ja kohalikke. Nende arvamusi peetakse kohalike seas väärtuslikuks. Samas käsitletakse käesolevas töös ekspertide ja tavainimeste arvamusi ja teadmisi võrdsetena, sest mõistmaks välitööde käigus tarantismi rolli, tähenduslikkust ja mõju Salento kaasaegsele kultuurikontekstile on oluline mõista mõlemat gruppi.

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**13/05/2019**