

University of Helsinki

**"LA DANZA CHE CURA" -  
DANCERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTHERN ITALIAN TARANTELLA**

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä Tutkielmani käsittelee Etelä-Italian perinteistä tanssia tarantellaa, jonka suosio on lisääntynyt huomattavasti viimeisen 20 vuoden aikana. Tarantella on yleisnimitys musiikille ja tansseille, joille yhteistä on 6/8 rytmi ja <i>tamburello</i> -rumpu. Tarantella on piirissä tai pareittain tanssittavaa. Tarantella tarkoittaa 'pientä hämähäkkiä'. Nimi antaa viitteitä sen yhteydestä tarantismiin, musiikilla ja tanssilla parantamisen rituaaliin, jota harjoitettiin 1950-luvulle asti Etelä-Italian Salenton seudulla. Tutkimusaineistoni koostuu 11 teemahaastattelusta, jotka toteutin kahdella kenttätymatalla vuonna 2013. Haastattelun tanssijoita, jotka toimivat esiintyjänä, opettajina ja perinteenvälittäjinä Italiassa ja eri puolilla Eurooppaa. Haastattelujen lisäksi osallistuin tanssityöpajoihin sekä musiikki- ja tanssitapahtumiin. Tiedonhankintaani helpotti italian kielen taito ja teatteriharrastustaustani. Tutkimukseni tavoitteena on tarkastella erilaisia diskursseja, joita liitetään tarantellaan nykypäivänä. Pohdin tutkimuksessani käsitystä tarantellasta parantavana tanssina. Analysoin, miten perinteen ( <i>tradizione</i> ) ja rituaalin ( <i>rituale</i> ) käsitteet ymmärretään ja miten nämä tulkinnat vaikuttavat tanssijoiden työskentelyssä. Tarkastelen, millä tavoin tanssijat vahvistavat ja haastavat sukupuolirooleja sekä historiallisia narratiiveja. Tutkimuksessani tanssi ei vain heijasta ympäröivää kulttuuria vaan myös luo sitä uudelleen. Akateemisen tutkimuksen ja tanssin välinen yhteys on tässä kontekstissa vahva, sillä tanssiperinteiden elvyttäminen lähti liikkeelle antropologi Ernesto De Martinon tarantismia käsittelevästä tutkimuksesta <i>La terra del Rimorso</i> (1961). Paikallisia tarantellatansseja on useita. Tarantellainnostuksen keskiössä on Salenton alueen <i>pizzica</i> , joka on pitkälti rekonstruoitu tanssi. Tarkastelen, miten tanssijat ymmärtävät perinteen käsitteen suhteessa omaan tanssijuuteensa. Suurin osa haastateltavistani ei ole kasvanut perinteisen tanssin ja musiikin parissa, vaan on tutustunut tarantellaan sen suosion kasvun myötä. Tarantellan tanssijoista useimmat ovat naisia, jotka joutuvat altavastaavan asemaan miesvaltaisessa kansanmusiikkikentässä. Tarantellan opettaminen on verrattain tuore ilmiö, jota ei ole aiemmin tutkittu. Kiinnitän tutkimuksessani huomiota kansainvälistyvään tarantellan harjoittamisen kenttään. Luen aineistoani narratiivisella otteella. Pehdyn kertomuksiin, joissa nousevat esille tanssille annetut henkilökohtaiset merkitykset. Haastateltavilleni tanssiminen on vuorovaikutusta, jossa perinteinen liikekieli ja sen kulttuuriset merkitykset kohtaavat autenttisen, jaetun tunneilmaisun. Ritualisoinnin käsitteen kautta analysoin, miten tanssijat kuvailevat tarantellaa rituaalina. Tanssityöpajoissa luodaan yhteisöllinen tila, jossa astutaan yhteyteen omien syvimpien tunteiden ja menneiden sukupolvien kokemusten kanssa. Tähän liittyy Etelä-Italian historiallisten todellisuuksien tiedostaminen, kuten aiempien sukupolvien naisten alistettu asema. Tarkastelen myös haastateltavien ymmärryksiä tarantismista. Tarantismi liittyy Etelä-Italian Välimeren alueeseen ja Pohjois-Afrikkaan, jossa on vastaavia tanssirituaalin perinteitä. Aiemmin marginaalisissa asemassa ollut rituaali on viime vuosikymmeninä nostettu näkyväksi representaatioksi tarantella-musiikkin ja tanssin suosion myötä. Tarantismi leimattiin viime vuosisadalla häpeälliseksi, primitiiviseksi toiseudeksi, joten sen muisto on edelleen vahvasti jännitteinen. Jotkut haastateltavistani tutkivat tarantismia taiteellisesti ja rituaalisesti. Tähän työskentelyyn liitetään mm. toiseuden kohtaaminen itsessä ja erilaisten käsitteellisten vastakkainasettelujen purkaminen. Tarantismien ympärillä käytävät ristiriitaiset keskustelut heijastavat osaltaan muutosta eteläitalialaisuuden kulttuurisessa arvostuksessa. Tutkielmani osoittaa, että tarantella koetaan autenttisena vuorovaikutuksen muotona ja yhteisöllisyyttä uudelleen rakentavana toimintana. Tanssi on ruumiillinen kieli ja tapa olla yhdessä. Tarantellan kautta luodaan yhteyttä perinteisiin ja luontoon. Tanssijat arvostavat ensikäden kokemuksia perinteisistä tavoista tanssia ja painottavat tiedon lisäämisen tärkeyttä. Kun tuntee perinteen, on oikeus taiteelliseen kokeiluun. Tarantellaan liitetään taiteellisia ja terapeuttisia mahdollisuuksia ja se koetaan universaaliksi kieleksi, joka yhdistää ihmisiä yli kulttuurirajojen. Haastateltavani suhtautuvat tarantellaan taiteellisella kunnianhimmolla ja haluavat edistää tarantellan asemaa ei-kulttuurisidonnaisena tanssitaiteena. Tarantellassa rakennetaan suhdetta menneisyyteen sekä luodaan uusia kulttuurisia kertomuksia eteläitalialaisuudesta. Tarantismien muisto elää tietoisuutena tanssin ja musiikin parantavasta voimasta, joka on vahvasti läsnä tanssijoiden kertomuksissa.		
Avainsanat Italia, Etelä-Italia, tanssi, tarantella, tarantismi, perinne, rituaali, parantaminen, yhteisö, hyvinvointi		
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## 1. Introduction

*"Some things can be said with words, other with movements. But there are also the moments when you run out of words and remain completely lost and disoriented. At this point the dance begins."*

*Pina Bauch<sup>1</sup>*

In this study, I approach dancers of southern Italian popular dance in contemporary Europe. In the last 25 years, there has been a cultural movement of the traditional music and dances of southern Italy. At the core of this bursting popularity is the *pizzica*, a music and dance from Salento in the region of Puglia in southern Italy.

I encountered the *pizzica* for the first time in 2007 when I was an exchange student in Venice and attended a concert of the music group Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino, one of the most prominent *pizzica* groups. I was impressed by the energy of the music and the way it made people dance joyfully. Later that summer I was travelling around in southern Italy and started to intentionally search for concerts of *pizzica*. I was fascinated by the energy with which people of all ages engaged in dancing together.

The *pizzica* is part of a family of southern Italian dances and music commonly called *tarantella*. The *tarantella* usually has a fast-paced 6/8 rhythm played with the tamburello frame drum. Other common instruments of *tarantella* are violin, guitar, flute, bagpipe and accordion. It is a music for dancing and the steps and movements are said to be easy to learn. The *tarantella* is danced in circles or in couples.

There are innumerable local variations of the *tarantella*, such as the *tammurriata*, a dance from Campania which is associated with worship of the seven Madonnas, the *tarantella calabrese*, the Sicilian *tarantella*, and so on. The *tarantella* of Salento, the *pizzica* is the dance that has gained the hugest popularity recently.

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<sup>1</sup> From Balduini 2014, my translation

The tarantella is now being danced in the *piazze* and at concerts, and is being taught all over Italy as well as abroad. There are hundreds of festivals of popular music, attracting thousands of people: the festival *La Notte della Taranta* in Salento has in the last years had more than 150.000 visitors. The revival of the traditional music and dance is commonly interpreted as a revival of southern Italian identity.

The origins of the tarantella are associated with the healing ritual of tarantism through its name (tarantella literally means 'little spider'). Tarantism was a healing ritual aimed at curing a believed spider bite with music and dance. Tarantism was practiced in the region of Puglia until the 1950s by the poorest peasants.

Healing practices in general deal with the precarious questions of life and death, as well as continuity and meaning in individuals' everyday lives.<sup>2</sup> These questions are not less relevant in today's world than before. The lingering discourse of the healing power of music and dance forms part of the fascination for the tarantella in present-day Italy.

The rising popularity of the tarantella is linked to discourses of traditionalism. Marginal groups worldwide have particularly since the 1960s been searching for alternative histories and engaged in reviving past traditions.<sup>3</sup> According to Paul Sant Cassia (2000), "modernity is increasingly pursued through the celebration of traditionalism" in societies on the margins of Europe.<sup>4</sup> Southern Italy, *il mezzogiorno* (mid-day) has for a long time been conceived as a marginal and problematic part of Italy.

J.H. Shannon (2007) writes that re-enactment or imagining of communal memories happens through arts, like music and dance.<sup>5</sup> Creativity is a way to

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<sup>2</sup> Utriainen et al. 2012, 193

<sup>3</sup> Huyssen 2003, 12

<sup>4</sup> Sant Cassia 2000, 282

<sup>5</sup> Shannon 2007, 313

access and re-imagine the past.<sup>6</sup> The revival is in common discourse in Italy often interpreted as a desire for belonging and of connecting to one's past. In this study, I will explore the specific ways in which this inventing and imagining of the past is happening. For this study, I have interviewed 11 tarantella dancers and dance teachers in Italy and in Europe. I was particularly interested in the dancers' personal experiences of dancing and the significances they attribute to dancing the tarantella.

Dance teaching is a quite recent phenomenon in the context of tarantella and has not previously been studied. One aim of my study is to investigate this evolving field. For this study, I have interviewed 11 tarantella dancers and dance teachers of tarantella.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Research on dance in religious studies

Music and dance are important elements of ritual and belief around the world. Music and dance speak to our senses, our bodies, and our spirits, they affect our emotional state, our relationships, and our understanding of the world around us. Music and dance have though until recently seldom been taken into serious analysis by scholars of religion.<sup>7</sup>

During this research process, when I was telling that I am doing a research on popular dance in the study of religions, I encountered many raised eyebrows and questions such as: 'What has dance to do with religion?' This reflects the western common understanding of religion as primarily a system of beliefs and conceptions. In the context of religious studies, Johan Roeland et al. (2012) write that "by neglecting the body, the discipline has followed the modern Cartesian dualism which divides mind and body, spirit and materiality, and

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<sup>6</sup> Trullson 2010, 185-186

<sup>7</sup> Trullson 2010, 214

which prioritizes the former over the latter.”<sup>8</sup> Christianity prohibited dance as a means of religious experience.<sup>9</sup> Because of this, the western understanding of dance differs from the perceptions of dance in those cultures where religious dance is practiced.<sup>10</sup>

Today, the boundaries and contents of the category religion are being reformulated and questioned. Religion has become a common-sense category, and its conceptual usefulness in academia is increasingly being challenged, according to Marion Bowman and Ülo Valk (2012).<sup>11</sup> From the viewpoint of vernacular religion theory brought forward by Bowman and Valk, there is no such thing as official religion. Religion is always a product of personal creativity taking place in different contexts. Vernacular religion theory directs the attention on how religion or spirituality is lived and practiced in everyday life.<sup>12</sup> From this point of view, the boundaries of the concept religion have become quite fluid. Mika Lassander (2012) writes: “in religious studies, the focus of research has contracted from descriptions of world religions, to studying religious movements and, finally (...) to studying subjective experiences and meaning making.”<sup>13</sup> In this study, I approach the subjective experiences and meaning making processes connected with the tarantella. It is worth to highlight that my intention is by no means to define my research objects as religious or practicing a religion.

Dance is culture-bound, so it reflects the history, values, and beliefs of a society. But dance also transforms society.<sup>14</sup> Before, dance research viewed dance in a functional way, that is, as a way to achieve certain means. This approach reflected an instrumental perception of the body. Nowadays, dance researchers approach dance as embodiment. Dance is a process, where culture happens. Dancing embodies discourses of identity and social order, gender roles and

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<sup>8</sup>Roeland et al. 2012, 242

<sup>9</sup> Gundlach 2006, 89

<sup>10</sup> Gundlach 2006, 91

<sup>11</sup> Bowman and Valk 2012, 4, 6

<sup>12</sup> Bowman and Valk 2012, 5

<sup>13</sup> Lassander 2012, 204

<sup>14</sup> Mendoza, 2000, 4-5

power relations.<sup>15</sup> When dancing, one creates, challenges and deconstructs culture. Dance can be approached as representation or as the embodied experience of dancing.<sup>16</sup> In my research, I focus on the accounts of embodied personal experiences of dancing.

## 2.2 Central conceptualizations: tradition and ritual

According to Pertti Anttonen (2005), the notion of tradition is a key issue everywhere in the world where battles are fought over cultural legacies and identities.<sup>17</sup> In various parts of the world are local cultures today assuming greater importance.

The modern meaning of the concept tradition was elaborated by the 18<sup>th</sup> century romantics and is an ideologically loaded concept. In the classical anthropological literature, traditional cultures were viewed as static and predetermined systems. This concept became part a common understanding of the cultural other, which could be the either the 'primitives' of distant colonies or the peasant population in Europe. Anthropological practices and conceptualizations of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were significant ideological contributions to the maintenance of colonial power inequalities and folk studies were contributing to the cultural imaginaries that were used to motivate the creation of nation states.<sup>18</sup> A discourse of difference conceptualized the cultures of people in rural and pre-industrial societies in Europe and elsewhere as modernity's otherness.<sup>19</sup> Also, the idealization of the pre-modern individual as a 'noble savage' was part of the discourse of difference.<sup>20</sup>

Today it is acknowledged that the difference between traditional and detraditionalized societies is not as significant as it has been thought. All cultures are and have always been processes of differing interests and

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<sup>15</sup> Mendoza 2000, 4-6

<sup>16</sup> Hughes-Freeland 2011, 237

<sup>17</sup> Anttonen 2005, 107

<sup>18</sup> Buckland 2006, 6-7

<sup>19</sup> Anttonen 2005, 32

<sup>20</sup> Anttonen 2005, 32



strategies. People express, negotiate and create traditions in complex and creative ways.<sup>21</sup>

Tradition has been perceived as a metaphor for stability and permanence, while modernity has been perceived as a metaphor for change and innovation.<sup>22</sup> The notion that tradition disappears in the face of modernity has been a powerful legacy but has not been realized to the extent that it was believed. Globalization and traditional culture were perceived as opposed to each other. But in today's world, they can also be seen as presenting two aspects of the same development. The understanding of tradition is a global construct, thus the concept of tradition is used and contested in various locations in similar ways.<sup>23</sup> In many locations around the world are local traditions being renegotiated and recreated, and subaltern traditions are being discovered.<sup>24</sup> At the core of traditionalization processes are peoples' longing for community, authenticity and belonging.<sup>25</sup>

There is a cultural tendency, writes Anttonen (2005) to locate positively charged aspects of cultural continuity and collectiveness outside Western modernity. In many traditionalization processes, traditions are perceived as ageless and profound, thus able to create a social and spiritual wellbeing that the Western modern societies have lost.<sup>26</sup> These kinds of conceptualizations are not mere romantic escapism, but they have played a significant role in the development of social criticism.<sup>27</sup> Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier (2007) elaborate the concept of cultural memory. How we remember the past affects profoundly how we live in the present. Cultural memory is a conscious and active process of approaching ones' past. While cultural identity is at times a significant political force, cultural memory does not necessarily work to affirm and secure our identities, it can also call into question it.<sup>28</sup> Andreas Huyssen (2003) claims that the way in which we think of the past, is increasingly in

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<sup>21</sup> Trullson 2010, 28, Bowman and Valk 2012, 3

<sup>22</sup> Anttonen 2005, 32

<sup>23</sup> Anttonen 2005, 120

<sup>24</sup> Sant Cassia 2000, 298, Huyssen 2003, 12

<sup>25</sup> Pizza 1999

<sup>26</sup> Anttonen 2005, 33

<sup>27</sup> Anttonen 2005, 33, referring to Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 3

<sup>28</sup> Rodriguez and Fortier 2007, 5-7

terms of 'memory without borders'.<sup>29</sup>

The revival of traditions must be viewed in the framework of transnational connections and global interactions.<sup>30</sup> Anna-Leena Siikala (2000) writes "individuals and groups create their selves on many planes of interaction, not only within their own immediate social and societal context but also in the worlds to which the media transports them."<sup>31</sup> The contemporary world creates new possibilities for dialogue between different localities and emerging connections between geographically distant phenomena.<sup>32</sup> According to Sant Cassia (2000), tradition revivals today are characterized by transgression and conscious manipulation of boundaries<sup>33</sup>.

In religious studies, there is not a single accurate definition of ritual. Many rituals are repeated, separated from everyday life and have a relation to the sacred. These characteristics do not apply for all rituals.<sup>34</sup> Rituals have generally been read as text and understood as expressions of belief. Scholars such as Émile Durkheim, Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep have been influential in conceptualizing ritual. In their analysis, though, they privileged structure and symbolism over actual practice.<sup>35</sup>

Ritual theorist Catherine Bell (1997) has a more phenomenological approach. Rituals are a language with which to express the unknown, the spiritual and emotional dimensions of life, according to Bell.<sup>36</sup> Bell wanted to locate ritual in the realm of practice and shift the focus from meanings and intentions behind ritual to the actual process of ritualization. At the center of Bells' theory stands the body, which through ritualization acquires a sense of ritual.<sup>37</sup> Ritualization can be to engage in certain practices in order to generate change or achieve an altered state of consciousness.<sup>38</sup> In this perspective is ritual not an expression of

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<sup>29</sup> Huyssen 2003, 4

<sup>30</sup> Siikala 2000, 82

<sup>31</sup> Siikala 2000, 80

<sup>32</sup> Siikala&Ulyashev 2011, 17

<sup>33</sup> Sant Cassia 2000, 296

<sup>34</sup> Keisalo 2014

<sup>35</sup> Trullson 2010, 64

<sup>36</sup> Bell 1997

<sup>37</sup> Trullson 2010, 68

<sup>38</sup> Trullson, 2010, 391

deep-seated beliefs or worldviews. According to Åsa Trullson, (2010) contemporary society is overwhelmed with ritual creativity, both within and outside of the religious field.<sup>39</sup>

Discourses on wellbeing can be enriched by studying the ways health, wellbeing and healing have been perceived before. Trullson's study "Cultivating the Sacred – Ritual Creativity and Practice among Women in Contemporary Europe" has been a useful point of reference during my research process. Trullson investigated spiritual practices and rituals in contemporary Europe.<sup>40</sup> She studied women's rituals centered on healing with spontaneity and experience as their main aim. Trullson's study helped me in situating my research into the field of religious studies, as there are several other possible approaches to the tarantella movement. It is important to note that my interviewees are dancers, who see themselves mainly as artists. Healing and ritual are contested discourses in my research context. Analyzing how the dancers of tarantella perceive ritual and healing is from my point of view at the core of understanding the contemporary tarantella movement.

### 2.3 Previous research on southern Italian popular music and dance

The revival of southern Italian popular music and dance, especially the pizzica, has been subject to numerous researches in Italian academia.<sup>41</sup> The cultural studies' researches have focused on discourses of tradition, authenticity and identity. The dance researchers Pino Gala and Placida Staro have made an important contribution in documenting traditional dancing in Italy.<sup>42</sup>

Some studies have been made about the pizzica movement outside Italy. Luisa Del Giudice is an Italian-American scholar who participated in the music revival in the 1990s. She edited the volume "Performing Ecstasies", which contributed to make the southern Italian revival movement and traditional music known in

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<sup>39</sup> Trullson 2010, 13

<sup>40</sup> Trullson 2010

<sup>41</sup> To mention a few: Santoro and Torsello: 2002, Pizza, 1999 and 2002, Chiriatti, 1995, Di Lecce, 1994

<sup>42</sup> Staro 2011

Anglophone academia and cultural field.<sup>43</sup> Karen Lüdtkke has in her study “Dances with Spiders: Crisis, Celebrity and Celebration in Southern Italy”, addressed the experiences and motivations of pizzica dancers.<sup>44</sup> Lüdtkke’s research proposes some similar perspectives and questions that my research aims to, such as investigating the relationship between wellbeing and dancing.

The ethnographic field research for these above mentioned researches was done in the late 1990s and early 2000<sup>th</sup> century. When starting my field research, though, I noticed that the field of popular dance has changed significantly in the last 10-15 years. The field of popular dance has professionalized, and numerous dance schools have been formed in Italy as well as abroad. The popular dance revival started with the pizzica, the tarantella of the Salento, but comprises today of a variety of Southern Italian tarantellas, such as the tammurriata of the Naples region and the tarantella of Calabria. From my point of view did the previous studies overlook the fact that the pizzica is but one variant of the tarantella. As an example, performance researcher Jerri Daboo’s extensive study on the pizzica does barely mention the existence of other tarantellas than the pizzica.<sup>45</sup>

The practice of dance teaching has evolved in the last 15 years. Discourses on tradition, cultural representation and women’s roles are continuously at stake. My informants do all work as traditional dance teachers and several of them have formed their own tarantella schools. The revival of tarantella has, as far I know, not previously been studied from the perspective of dance teachers’ experiences.

In fact, Del Giudice (2005) notes that “the female component of the folk revival is a chapter waiting to be more fully articulated”, and asks: “What form will female resistance and self-expression take in the future Salento?”<sup>46</sup> In this research, I try to answer her question. My research is not focused solely on the salentine pizzica, though.

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<sup>43</sup> Del Giudice and Van Deysen 2005

<sup>44</sup> Lüdtkke 2009

<sup>45</sup> Daboo 2010, 38

<sup>46</sup> Del Giudice 2005, 261

In this study, I will focus on individual dancers' experiences in order to diversify the image of the tarantella and present the ongoing evolution of the southern Italian dances in Italy and Europe. Also, I aim to diversify the perception of Italy and Italian culture in Finnish academia, by bringing up some perspectives on cultural change in Southern Italy.

#### 2.4 Research question

In this study, my aim is to analyze the ways how dancers in the contemporary movement of traditional southern Italian dances are contesting and reinforcing gender roles, history, and notions on tradition and healing. This study focuses on the individual narratives on dancing and experiencing dance. I am highlighting dancing as a way to reinforce, challenge and create cultural power structures and meanings. I will analyze the dynamics of change in the tarantella revival and particularly the transformations of women's roles. The aim of this thesis is to account for the experiences of dancers and dance teachers to reveal the variety of discourses surrounding the contemporary tarantella.

The discourse on tradition is a central issue. How are the interviewees narrating the intersections between creative artistic freedom, reviving of traditions and spirituality? What is the interplay of tradition and self-expression? One central issue is how the tarantella dancers understand the healing aspect of tarantism and how tarantism is remembered, situated and interpreted today.

The revival movement is cultural phenomenon evolving around wishes to create a sense of belonging and a relationship to the past through music and dance. In this sense, it is connected to a larger discourse of searching for continuity, community and authenticity in the contemporary world.

### 3. Field research: 'The tarantella tour'

This study is a multi-sited field research. During three weeks in May and December 2013, I interviewed 11 tarantella dancers in Rome, Bologna, Berlin and Paris, and took part in three dance workshops as an active participant. All the interviews and part of the talks during the dance workshops were recorded. I also did participative observation during my field trips. I took part in spontaneous occasions of dancing, socializing, concerts and other events connected with the tarantella.<sup>47</sup>

Traditionally, ethnographic field research has been about travelling to a distant location, staying there for a period of time and getting immersed into another culture that is perceived as a bounded and distinctly different cultural reality.<sup>48</sup> But the so-called research 'fields' are nowadays often dispersed and transient. There are more and more translocal communities in the world. Researchers need in some way to construct their fields of research.<sup>49</sup> Today, the 'research objects' tend to move between different cultural realities in the same manner as the classical anthropologist. Researchers should see other cultures as well as their own as experiential spaces that people inhabit or invent.<sup>50</sup>

The tarantella movement is not bound to southern Italy or even to Italy. The geographical area of southern Italy has been the concrete point of departure for many of the dancers in my study and serves as a symbolical point of reference, but the southern Italian dances are being practiced in many locations around

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<sup>47</sup> The research material consists of these 11 interviews, two workshop recordings and as secondary sources, some dance-related material on the Internet.

<sup>48</sup> Trullson 2010, 107

<sup>49</sup> Trullson 2010, 108, Malkki 2012, 14

<sup>50</sup> Trullson 2010, 107

Italy, Europe and beyond. The different realities of practicing traditional southern Italian dances are interconnected.

In the beginning, I hoped to find a research material on the Internet.<sup>51</sup> I found abundant amounts of material about the popular music revival, including webpages, articles and interviews with musicians, and so on. But I had a hard time finding material about the dance or about dancers, not to mention written by dancers. It was clear that the musicians were given the protagonist status in all the diverse media I went through. This discovery disturbed me. I decided to direct my attention to the female dancers as their voices seemed unheard. At last I found a blog by female dancers, *Tarantella Cruda* (Raw Tarantella). The blog brought up critical discourses on the revival, tradition and gender issues from a female dancer's perspective. Through the blog, I found the information about Meeting del Tamburello in Rome, where I did my first field research trip in May 2013.

The meeting was a festival of musicians and dancers working with frame drums in different traditions. I attended two dance workshops at the festival and interviewed three dancers and recorded during the workshops. My background in theatre facilitated my participation in the workshops. Together with the other workshop participants, I performed at the festival's closing night.

Facebook has been an indispensable tool for finding interviewees. The dancers I met in Rome suggested me other dancers that I contacted via Facebook. One encounter led to the next. All my interviewees were helpful in connecting me to other dancers.

In December 2013, I did my European 'tarantella tour'. First, I went to Paris to a tarantella dance workshop, invited by dancers I knew from Rome. At this workshop, the tarantella was approached through theatrical exercises on emotions. From Paris I continued to Berlin to meet one tarantella dancer. Then I spent one week in Rome meeting several dancers I had previously been in touch with. All the dancers I contacted agreed to be interviewed. Still, the field research was characterized by many surprises, mainly because I encountered

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<sup>51</sup> I was googleing words like *tarantella*, *pizzica*, *danza popolare*.

more dancers willing to be interviewed than I had expected. Some of the interviews agreed on in advance did not happen at all because I was in the wrong city doing other interviews. Some agreed interviews extended to days spent hanging around with people, interviewing dancers spontaneously and taking part in occasions of dancing, playing and going out. While this research was very exciting and rewarding, it demanded flexibility and openness towards changing situations. I am immensely impressed by and thankful for the degree of hospitality that the interviewees showed me. I was offered to stay at some of the dancers' homes without ever meeting them in prior, and I was welcomed into their family life. Some of my interviewees travelled especially to come to be interviewed.

Being a young woman from a Nordic country surely affected my positioning in the field. As an outsider, but with knowledge of Italian I was welcomed in a particular way. At times, I felt I was presented even as an exotic curiosity: 'this is the Finnish girl who is researching the tarantella!'

Regarding gender issues, the research process was influenced by my status as a mother of a small child and going through a divorce process during the period of research. Family questions were frequently brought up to discussion outside of the interviews and led to many conversations on relationships and women's roles in contemporary Italy. These discussions surely strengthened the gender perspectives brought up during the actual interviews.

The interviews are between 30 and 100 minutes long, with an average of about 50 minutes. The interviews were done in restaurants, in peoples' homes and outdoors. The environments where the interviews were conducted certainly affected the outcome of the interviews. The interviews done in someone's home by the kitchen table or in a closed space at the festival area, turned out more confidential and in-depth than those conducted in bars and restaurants. Apart from the interviews, I asked for permission to record the introduction talk to one of the dancer's workshop in Rome. This 1-hour introduction forms part of the core research material. Besides the interviews with the dancers, I interviewed one academic dance researcher in Bologna and one musician in Helsinki.



All the interviews were recorded and transcribed in Italian.<sup>52</sup> While my understanding of standard Italian is rather good, I am unfamiliar with the southern Italian dialects. The different Italian dialects differ to a great degree from standard Italian and also from each other. During the social interactions before and after the interviews I had often a hard time following the discussions between the dancers and other people present, of whom many spoke slang, different southern Italian dialects or a mix of these. The interviewees acknowledged my level of Italian by speaking standard Italian with me. This surely influenced the issues brought up in the interviews. I suspect that the fact of having to speak standard Italian with a foreigner directed some of the interviewees towards a scholarly dialogue. The interviews contain several interruptions, when I ask to clarify the significance of a word, which the interviewees then translate to standard Italian or to English.

The word interview derives from the French *entrevoir*, which means ‘to catch a glimpse of’. Through an interview, you get an incomplete image about an issue.<sup>53</sup> My interviews were open interviews with a loose thematic approach. Following Catherine Kohler Riessmann’s (2008) narrative approach, my goal was to engage in conversations in a way that would lead to storytelling.<sup>54</sup> Creating possibilities for extended narratives requires the researcher to give up control.<sup>55</sup> As the interviewees had no limitations in speaking, I soon realized that in order to get the most out of the interviews it was best to let the interviewees go in depth in the topics they considered important to tell to me. I tried to listen carefully and build up the discussion according to the issues brought up, not according to a structure decided in advance. As I was interested in the personal experiences of dancing, the interviews consisted to a great degree of autobiographical narratives.

Interview situations are always co-constructed between the interviewer and the

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<sup>52</sup> Due to technical reasons, two of the interviews were of bad technical quality, so they were not transcribed as a whole.

<sup>53</sup> Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008, 41

<sup>54</sup> Riessmann 2008, 23

<sup>55</sup> Riessmann 2008, 24

interviewed.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes, the interviews evolved into ordinary dialogue, leading to a spontaneous exchange of experiences and ideas.<sup>57</sup> For example, during one interview, I was accounting for the history of shamanism in the Nordic countries as part of the discussion on lost traditions and possession trance. I was asking myself: am I transcending the limits of the researcher's position in engaging myself in this way? But I didn't want to withdraw myself from the dialogue. A few of the interviews turned out to dialogues on healing, the meaning of dance in today's society in general, discussions on postcolonialism and nationalism and feminism, going far beyond the tarantella. All these discussions, though they went beyond the principal themes dealt with in the analysis section, were useful and important in shaping this research process. Withdrawing from participating would have limited my understanding of the tarantella as part of these larger discourses.

I perceived that my interviewees and me are operating on the same levels of cultural discourse in our own particular social and professional contexts that do not, in the end, differ so much from each other. It is worth to point out that several of my interviewees have studied anthropology and have written scholarly works on the tarantella. As Bowman and Valk (2012) say, contemporary scholars should consider themselves as "participants in a heteroglot dialogue of indefinite numbers of voices".<sup>58</sup> This experience of fieldwork did not position me first and foremost as a researcher but as a participant in the shared dialogue.

#### **4. A history of tarantella and tarantism**

In this chapter, I aim to present a background for the analysis. I will situate my study of tarantella dancers in its historical and cultural context. As an introduction, I briefly account for the political history of southern Italy. Then I proceed to present the tarantella and the concept of popular dance in this study.

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<sup>56</sup> Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008, 49

<sup>57</sup> Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2008, 46, Riessmann 2008, 23-24

<sup>58</sup> Bowman and Valk 2012, 2

I describe the historical records tarantism and the the different undestandings of the phenomenom in academia and the revival movement. I will then account for the history of the revival of southern Italian traditional music and dances.

#### 4.1 The context: southern Italy

Southern Italy geographically consists of the regions south of the capital region of Rome. The regions of southern Italy are Campania, Calabria, Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Puglia, Sardinia, and Sicily. Around 20 million of Italy's 56 million inhabitants live in these regions. Italy is a country characterized by regionalism. Italians identify often more with their home region than with the Italian nation.

Jane Schneider (1998) says that the unification of Italy (1871) led the formerly prosperous South to fell short of the progress of northern Italy. Since the unification of Italy, the south of Italy started to be seen as a problem to solve.<sup>59</sup> The South of Italy, has been, and to some extent is still perceived as the land of passion, superstition, exploitation, corruption and underdevelopment, in other words, the 'primitive' of Italy.<sup>60</sup> The so-called "southern question" in Italy reflected global colonialism and the discourses of racism and orientalism connected with it.<sup>61</sup> The stigmatizing of the south became internalized, and became part of the South Italian self-image.<sup>62</sup> Northerners' anxiety of belonging to Europe was projected onto the part of the country that was most far from the core of Europe. Southern Italy was seen as belonging to the Mediterranean cultural sphere more than to Europe.<sup>63</sup> The cultural features of southern Italy had difficulties in obtaining any positive recognition in the founding myths of the Italian Nation, apart from abstract references to its Greek and Roman past<sup>64</sup>.

Under Fascist rule was the southern question put aside while Mussolini

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<sup>59</sup> Schneider 1998, 1

<sup>60</sup> Crapanzano 2005, vii

<sup>61</sup> Schneider 1998, 3-5

<sup>62</sup> Pandolfi 1998, 286

<sup>63</sup> Tapaninen 1996, 112

<sup>64</sup> Gribaudo 1996, 72

propagated Italy as a future superpower. The experiences of World War II further divided the Italian nation.<sup>65</sup> Americans occupied southern Italy from 1943 on, while the North lived under the fascist republic of Saló until 1945.

The South is still dealing with deeply embedded social, political and economical problems. Following the crisis that started in 2008, unemployment rates are higher in the South than in Northern Italy. Southern Italy is part of the transit area for immigrants crossing over the Mediterranean.

In the anthropological research tradition of Italy, the opposition of North of South has been evident. Most studies have focused on southern Italy.<sup>66</sup> Maria Pandolfi (1998) claims that for the Italian anthropologists, southern Italy was what the formerly colonized peoples of Africa, Asia and the Americas were for the anthropologists of the colonial powers.<sup>67</sup> Giovanni Pizza (2002) argues that contemporary southern Italy is in a postcolonial condition, facing the same kind of challenges as many former colonies.<sup>68</sup> The contemporary revival of southern Italian music and dance arises from and is shaped by these political processes.

#### 4.2 Tarantella, the dance of the little spider

Tarantella refers to a variety of traditional dances and music in southern Italy. There are different tarantellas, such as the pizzica (*pizzicare* means 'to bite') from Puglia, the tammurriata from Campania, the tarantella from Calabria and many others. The tarantella music is generally in a 6/8 or 4/4 rhythm.

The instruments of tarantella can be violin, guitar, bagpipe, accordion, friction drum and the *tamburello*, a large, round wooden frame drum with bells, which often represents the essence of the tarantella. The tamburello resembles of other frame drums used around the Mediterranean.

Most tarantellas are danced in circle or in couples. The term tarantella became diffused during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From then on, various southern Italian dances

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<sup>65</sup> Pandolfi 1998, 287

<sup>66</sup> Tapaninen 1996, 112-113

<sup>67</sup> Pandolfi 1998, 286

<sup>68</sup> Pizza 2002, 59

were nominated tarantella. The tarantella has throughout written history been associated with the ritual of tarantism. It is important to note that the different tarantellas were danced for various reasons on many occasions, at weddings, village festivities, as a part of popular religious rituals. The music played during the ritual of tarantism differed from the music played at festive occasions.

Dancing has traditionally been an important cultural expression in Italy.<sup>69</sup> The tarantella is the best-known Italian dance outside of Italy. The tarantella motifs, rhythms and imaginaries of the spider-bitten dancing woman were widespread in European culture, classical music, literature and theatre especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Neapolitan tarantella was turned into a folkloristic dance performed for touristic display in beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,, and the word tarantella acquired a pejorative meaning.

In the analysis, I try to be loyal to my interviewees' ways of referring to tarantella as either traditional dance (*danza tradizionale*) or popular dance (*danza popolare*). One possible translation for *danza popolare* would have been 'folk dance'. The revivals of traditional music and dances have often been named folk revivals. In Italian, though, the term 'folk' associates with folkloristic dance, which my interviewees don't recognize themselves to represent. Therefore, I have in this study decided to use the term popular dance. Encyclopedia Britannica couples it with 'social dance'. In Italian, *cultura popolare* carries a strong significance of 'people's culture'.

It is important to note that in Italian, as in the other Latin languages, there are two words meaning dance: *danza* and *ballo*. *Ballo* (verb: *ballare*) is used to describe spontaneous, social moments of dancing. *Danza* (verb: *danzare*) refers to dance as artistic expression, for example in the the context of a performance. *Ballo* is grounded in the immediate experience of dancing, while *danza* refers to dance as an art form.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Staro 2011, 48-49

<sup>70</sup> Staro 2011, 46-47

### 4.3 Tarantism, a healing ritual

*“The symbol of the tarantula gives form to the formless, rhythm and melody to menacing silence, color to the colorless. It offers a means for imagining, listening and looking at that for which one is without pictures, blind and deaf, but which, at the same time, desperately needs to be imagined, listened to and seen.”<sup>71</sup>*

The ritual of tarantism was practiced in the region of Salento until the 1950s. Earlier, tarantism was present in larger areas of Italy. The region of Salento is the ‘heel of the boot’ of Italy. Salento is situated in the southern part of the region of Puglia. A peninsula between two seas, the Adriatic and the Ionian, its most eastern part is 75 km from the coast of Albania. Salento has been characterized until 20th century of feudal agriculture and poverty. Salento has throughout history been a territory of passage, experiencing many invasions and settlements.

Tarantism was a ritual aimed at curing a believed spider bite with music and dance. Those that believed to have been bitten by the spider, the *tarantate*, were usually women, belonging to the poorest classes who were working in the fields during summer. The tarantate experienced sudden states of confusion, melancholia or anguish. The pizzica, the musical genre of healing ritual, was believed to be the only thing that could cure the person so the family of the tarantata invited and paid for musicians to come and play for the afflicted. The musicians’ task was to find the right melodic structure that would please the tarantata and excite her to dance in response. They would encourage the afflicted to express her crisis. The spider as a possessing entity was real for the community involved in tarantism.<sup>72</sup> The crisis and the cure could not be separated but they were integral.<sup>73</sup> In the ritual context of tarantism, the tamburello player’s role was to regulate the rhythm of the heartbeat of the tarantata, making her to dance and then to slow down to normal heartbeat

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<sup>71</sup> De Martino 1961, 63, Lüdtkke’s translation from Lüdtkke 2005, 37

<sup>72</sup> Daboo 2010,184

<sup>73</sup> Lüdtkke 2009, 8

rhythm, when the cure had taken place.<sup>74</sup> There were believed to be different kinds of spiders, who would affect the bitten in different ways. The ritual could go on for hours or days, until the dancer stopped dancing, receiving the grace of St. Paul, the saint of the tarantate.

The pizzica is played in a 6/8 rhythm, often accompanied by a melody in 4/4 beat, which brings a certain ambiguity to the rhythmic framing. Described as a musical order and chaos, this constitutes the therapeutic feature of pizzica, according to many musicians.<sup>75</sup> The rhythm is believed to be the most archaic rhythm existing and is found in music styles worldwide that are inducing trance.

The tarantate were expected to thank Saint Paul in the chapel of Galatina on the Saint's day on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. There, they were re-enacting the spider bite, the dance, and the final curing, but without the music, since the church didn't allow music inside the chapel. Saint Paul (*Santu Paulu* in salentine dialect) was the saint of tarantism. The relationship between the spider, the saint and the victim of the bite was ambiguous. Saint Paul was seen to co-operate with the spider, so he both caused and cured the bite. He could even become the spider.<sup>76</sup> *Santu Paulu miu delle tarante, pizziche le caruse mienzu all'anche* (Saint Paul of the tarantulas, bite the girls between the thighs) is repeated in a one pizzica lyric.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes the tarantate were seen as Saint Pauls' brides. Tarantism was cyclical in nature, so persons once having been bitten usually continued to go through the ritual of tarantism each year at the time of the initial bite.

Before, tarantism was practiced in natural environments and often by the water, which is accounted for by for example Athanasius Kircher in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>78</sup> The ritual used to be linked to the sacredness of the natural environment. Tarantism is connected to the sea: there are accounts of tarantate drowning themselves in the sea. The pizzica of San Vito expresses the belief that the victim of the spider bite cures through an immersion in water.

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<sup>74</sup> Daboo 2010, 25

<sup>75</sup> Daboo 2010, 26

<sup>76</sup> Lapassade 2001, 68

<sup>77</sup> Del Giudice 2003, 27

<sup>78</sup> Daboo 2010, 126-127

Tarantism's historical roots stretch back to the Middle Age and probably further. In the past, tarantism was present in larger areas of southern Italy. In Sardinia and Spain there have been similar healing dance rituals. It is commonly claimed that tarantism's origin is in the Dionysian cults of the Ancient Greece.<sup>79</sup> This cannot be verified, though. However, the ritual has gradually been accommodated within folk Catholicism. From the 10<sup>th</sup> century on, southern Italy was subject to repeated invasions by Arabs. Immigrants from northern Africa and the Middle East brought along ritual traditions that probably influenced tarantism. Nowadays, tarantism's resemblance to African possession rituals is more acknowledged.

In the heritage commodification process in Salento today, there is a tendency to attribute tarantism to ancient Greece. This is problematic, because it draws upon the perception of western history as divided into three eras: the Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Modernity. Antiquity is associated with light and the Middle Ages with darkness. The antiquity came to mean a privileged and exemplary period of the past. The "dark" pagan and medieval ages found a parallel in the "dark" Africa.<sup>80</sup> The emergence of modernity was perceived as the time of the re-birth of antiquity, the renaissance.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, the movement of southern Italian popular music is also referred to as *rinascita*, renaissance. These discourses prevail in the heritage tourism today. Claiming that tarantism is a remnant of Dionysian cults of ancient Greece draws on these well-known oppositions.

Earliest written accounts on tarantism are from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The academic discourse on tarantism has for hundreds of years shaped the understanding and evolution of the phenomenon. Tarantism has been the subject of argument between medical and Catholic discourses since the Middle Ages. Medical discourse saw tarantism either as a disease caused by the poison of the spider

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<sup>79</sup> Lewis 1971, 81

<sup>80</sup> Anttonen 2005, 29

<sup>81</sup> Anttonen 2005, 29



or as a hysterical mental disorder.<sup>82</sup> Also early anthropologists compared tarantism to hysteria.<sup>83</sup>

The motivation of anthropology and folklore studies in Italy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as elsewhere was to document and collect the music, dances and oral traditions of traditional communities before they would be “contaminated” by modern civilization and then disappear as a result of industrialism and urbanization.<sup>84</sup> Ernesto De Martino (1908-1965) was the key researcher of tarantism. Being a southern Italian himself, he studied in Naples and while working for the Communist Party, he witnessed peasants’ struggles and the extreme poverty of the post-war southern Italy. As a religious historian, De Martino aimed at studying peasants as subjects of their own history. De Martino was influenced by existentialism, psychoanalysis and to a great extent by the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).<sup>85</sup> Gramsci saw marginalized people’s religious worldviews as an undeveloped class consciousness that contain political potential. Gramsci’s thinking influenced De Martino to research popular magic, mourning rituals and tarantism. To raise awareness of subaltern thinking, beliefs and agency would according to Gramsci eventually lead to a change in societal power relations.<sup>86</sup>

De Martino was bringing forward a critical ethnocentrism, which means questioning one’s own categories of understanding of the other and the self. If a researcher questions his research object’s concept of reality, he should question his own concept of reality as well.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, De Martino was ahead of his time. One of De Martino’s core concepts in many of his publications was *crisi della presenza*, a crisis of presence. With a crisis of presence De Martino meant a loss of subjectivity, a loss of a dynamic and intentional way of being in the world, experiencing the self as unreal and unconnected to ones’ surroundings.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Pizza, 2004, 200

<sup>83</sup> Ehrenreich 2007, 12

<sup>84</sup> Buckland 2006, 7

<sup>85</sup> Filippucci 1996, 60-1

<sup>86</sup> Honkasalo et al. 2004, 32

<sup>87</sup> Crapanzano 2005, viii

<sup>88</sup> Crapanzano 2005, ix

A crisis of presence can be understood as a loss of agency.<sup>89</sup> Subaltern groups of people are more vulnerable to crises of presence according to De Martino.

In 1959, Ernesto De Martino conducted a field-research in Salento with an interdisciplinary team. The work resulted in “The Land of Rimorse” which eventually became a classic of Italian anthropology and has shaped substantially the cultural revival of traditional dance and music in Salento.<sup>90</sup> The title of the book has a double meaning: Remorse means the morse, the bite that is repeated, but it but also means remorse in the sense of regret and shame. De Martino’s work is often cited and discussed as if it would give a perfect summary of tarantism even though it is based on a one-month field trip in a time period when the ritual was already in decline.<sup>91</sup>

Tarantism was, according to De Martino, “a culturally specific response to harsh living conditions and traumatic life experiences (..) a means of reliving and healing individual and social crises.”<sup>92</sup> De Martino’s initial scope was to prove tarantism a culturally conditioned practice and not a physical condition resulting from the spider bite. De Martino interpreted tarantism in a functional way, as a ritual aiming to give cultural meaning to female existential and social suffering<sup>93</sup>, a culturally specific, symbolically coherent response to personal crises,<sup>94</sup> or a mythical-ritual order for settling inner conflicts and reintegrate individuals to the group.<sup>95</sup> De Martino’s understanding of tarantism has influenced other researchers to highlight the community-building aspects of the ritual. Del Giudice (2000) saw tarantism as a healing ritual, where a private crisis was publically resolved and that sought to restore the weakest individuals back to social health.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Honkasalo et al. 2004, 33

<sup>90</sup> De Martino 2005/1961

<sup>91</sup> Lüdtke 2005, 39, Daboo 2010, 176

<sup>92</sup> Lüdtke 2005, 40

<sup>93</sup> Pizza 2000, 200

<sup>94</sup> Filippucci 1996, 63

<sup>95</sup> De Martino 2005, 36

<sup>96</sup> Del Giudice 2000, 45

Tarantism can be classified as a possession trance ritual. Possession trance is a feature in many religious traditions that ground themselves on the belief that a person can be possessed by spirits. Vincenzo Crapanzano (1973) defines trance as *"a complete or partial dissociation, characterized by changes in such functions as identity, memory, the sensory modalities and thought. It may involve the loss of of voluntary control over movement, and may be accompanied by hallucinations and visions."*<sup>97</sup> Western academic discourse has tended to medicalize possession trance, and tarantism is no exception. Barbara Ehrenreich (2007) writes that in anthropological studies on possession trance reproducing a colonial discourse, an important trait has been seeing possession trance as something "others experienced, savages or lower class Europeans. In fact, the capacity for abandonment, for self-loss in the rhythms and emotions of the group, was a defining feature of "savagery" or otherness generally."<sup>98</sup>

Gilbert Rouget (1985) situates tarantism among other rituals of possession, like Afro-Brazilian candomblé and Cuban santería, Haitian voodoo, l'Hadra in Maghreb, Ndoep by the Wolofs in Senegal, Zar in Ethiopia and Somalia, among others.<sup>99</sup> Also Georges Lapassade (2001) compares different rituals of possession worldwide in his work *Dal candomblé al tarantismo* (From candomblé to tarantism).<sup>100</sup> Erika Bourguignon (2004) writes: "possession trance constitutes a psychodynamic response to powerlessness", that demonstrates critical stresses in the society.<sup>101</sup> Taking into account examples of anthropological research of the Zar cult in Northern Africa, Vodou in Haiti, shamanism in Burma, Candomblé and other Afro-Brazilian cults, she claims that possession trance rituals offer individuals a temporary possibility to express forbidden wishes and anguishes. Identity is lost in possession trance, so emotions and intentions expressed during trance are not seen as the person's own. Like masquerades and carnival, possession trance gives the person affected by it temporary permission to express emotions that would normally not be accepted.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Crapanzano 1973, cited by Ehrenreich 2007, 4

<sup>98</sup> Ehrenreich 2007, 9

<sup>99</sup> Rouget 1985

<sup>100</sup> Lapassade 2001

<sup>101</sup> Bourguignon 2004, 557

<sup>102</sup> Bourguignon 2004, 559

Ioan Lewis (1971) viewed of tarantism a form of resistance to the patriarchal society, even as a feminist subculture.<sup>103</sup> Rouget (1985) noted the corporeal identification with the spider in tarantism, and saw the rhythmic interaction between the possessed and the musicians to be at the core of the tarantism's therapeutic dimension.<sup>104</sup>

Following De Martino, the researchers were asking whether tarantism is possession, trance, or ecstasy. These concepts are all problematic, as they have generally been applied from outside by researchers on what they have witnessed others experience in rituals.<sup>105</sup> Nowadays there is a preference to talk about altered states of consciousness, a more general term that can include different kinds of experiences.

According to De Martino, the psychological reason underlying tarantism was often sexual repression experienced by women, in a social environment with rigid codes of conduct. De Martino noted how many of tarantate had experienced forbidden love. They were unhappily married, could not marry the man they loved, or they had been married by their family to someone against their will.<sup>106</sup> The popular pizzica lyrics center very much around love, passionate, unanswered or forbidden. A common pizzica strophe is *beddhru l'amore e ci lu sape fa* (beautiful is love and the one who can make it).<sup>107</sup>

According to Pizza, (2002) has Salento since De Martino been a production site of Italy's "internal orientalism."<sup>108</sup> Tarantism was one of anthropology's research objects, that pictured 'the other', 'the exotic', and 'the savage' existing inside Italy. Ernesto De Martino's critical ethnocentrism was an attempt but maybe not an achievement to bridge this internal orientalism.<sup>109</sup> These dichotomies of otherness of the past are echoed in the contemporary discourses on the tarantella.

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<sup>103</sup> Lewis 1971, 82-3

<sup>104</sup> Lüdtke 2001, 301 Rouget 1985

<sup>105</sup> Ludtke 2005, 42, Lapassade 1994, 15

<sup>106</sup> Del Giudice 2003, 23

<sup>107</sup> Del Giudice 2003, 27-29, see also Chiriatti, 1995 and Hanna 2010, 18

<sup>108</sup> Pizza 2002, 58, Schneider 1998

<sup>109</sup> Di Nola 1998, 157-8

Tarantism experienced its decline in the decades following De Martino's research. The radical socioeconomic restructuring of society in Italy in post-War Italy led to the disruption of traditional peasant societies and their cultural and ritual expressions. The mass emigration from southern to northern Italy and other European countries furthered this development. When the living standards raised, the rituals, dances and music associated with the fatigue of agricultural work and the old way of living were abandoned. In Salento, a feeling of shame was connected to the imagery of tarantism. Following modernization, tarantism was increasingly seen as mental illness and primitive superstition and the former participants of the ritual internalized these attitudes. The few people still taking part in tarantism were disapproved. The introduction of pesticides in agriculture, which resulted in an extinction of the spiders in the fields, was commonly believed to have put a definite end to tarantism<sup>110</sup>.

Significantly, the position of women improved. Women gained more freedom, arranged marriages got less common, the new generation of women in the 60s and 70s were more and more part of and affected by the democratic and socio-economic progress and media images, celebrating individual (not at least sexual) freedom.

#### 4.4 The revival of southern Italian traditional music and dance

The revival of southern Italian traditional music started in the 1970s. One important group was the Neapolitan group Nuova Compagnia di Canto Popolare. The movement was initially part of the leftist cultural movement.<sup>111</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, the music revival was spreading simultaneously in many northern Italian cities. Following the massive emigration to the North, communities of southern Italians were formed in several cities. Their children and other young people were drawn to the traditional music of southern Italy.

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<sup>110</sup> Daboo, 2010 195-6, Lapassade 2001, 64

<sup>111</sup> Massimiliano Morabito, personal communication

Urban, academic persons often guide tradition revivals as cultural actors.<sup>112</sup> The revival of the traditional music of southern Italy was paralleled by a growing academic interest in tarantism. Following the reprinting of *The Land of Remorse* in 1994, De Martino was rediscovered in the academic field.<sup>113</sup> Researchers from Italy and other countries came to Salento and conducted studies on the pizzica and tarantism. These publications draw even more researchers. Some of these academics had a direct impact on the revival.<sup>114</sup> The fact is that the revival and the academic discourse are highly intertwined.<sup>115</sup>

Comparing the evolution of the pizzica to other ethnic music worldwide, one can notice certain cultural patterns. Blues, jazz, tango, samba, salsa, fado and flamenco are all musical styles that have developed in marginal settings, but have later gained popularity, transforming into national and global music cultures.<sup>116</sup> In the Mediterranean region, many musical genres such as arabesk in Turkey, flamenco in Spain, rebetika in Greece, ghana in Malta, as well as pizzica in Italy have initially been the music traditions of marginalized people. It is interesting that this cultural marginality of these musical genres has eventually transformed into their opposite, says Sant Cassia (2000).<sup>117</sup> For instance, flamenco in Spain, the music and dance of the stigmatized gypsies in Andalucía, was transformed into national culture during the Franco era. Nowadays flamenco has turned into a global artistic movement.<sup>118</sup>

The revival of traditional dance started later than the music revival, and it started with the pizzica. The pizzica that is now danced in Salento was initially re-created by Giorgio di Lecce and Cristina Ria in the 1970s.<sup>119</sup> The anthropologist Giorgio di Lecce and his wife, the ballet dancer Cristina Ria came to Salento to explore tarantism and the tarantella. They met Eugenio Barba, a Salentine theatre director visiting Salento with his Danish theatre company,

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<sup>112</sup> Del Giudice 2005, 242

<sup>113</sup> Lüdtke 2000, 302 and Pizza 2002, 59

<sup>114</sup> Daboo 2010, 211, mentions Luisa Del Giudice, see Del Giudice & van Deysen 2005

<sup>115</sup> Pizza 1999, 200

<sup>116</sup> Leydi 2001, 17

<sup>117</sup> Sant Cassia 2000, 288

<sup>118</sup> Washabaugh, 2012

<sup>119</sup> Massimiliano Morabito, personal communication

Odin theatret. Eugenio Barba had elaborated a theatre method called theatre anthropology. Di Lecce and Ria made field research among the old generations still familiar with tarantism. Following their collaboration with Barba, Di Lecce and Ria created a dance inspired by tarantism and re-elaborated with ballet. The dance of the victim of the spider bite was taken from its original ritual context, and put into the new context of stage performance.<sup>120</sup> The problem was that this dance was passed on as traditional, as Di Lecce and Ria didn't reveal that they had created it. Some of the dancers I interviewed showed that there are movements evidently taken from classical ballet in the pizzica.

In the 1990s, the British-Salentine film director Edward Winspeare and the pizzica group Officina Zoé started organizing pizzica clubs in Salento. Their aim was that the young generation would rediscover their local cultural identity through partying.<sup>121</sup> They highlighted the seductive aspect of the pizzica, inventing slogans like 'if you dance the pizzica, you make better love'. Meanwhile, Winspeare directed the film *Pizzicata* (1996) that became immensely popular. The film starred elderly musicians of traditional pizzica, which led to that the film was perceived as a documentary. The dance scenes in the film were though choreographed by Cristina Ria. The film became a point of reference for how to dance pizzica.<sup>122</sup>

The traditional music and dance revival brought the tarantella and pizzica to public spaces such as to the village square, the *piazza*. Earlier, the pizzica was not danced in public spaces, but in private homes and courtyards among family members. In other areas of southern Italy, the tarantellas are also traditionally danced outside.

The festival *La Notte della taranta* (The Night of the Spider) was founded in 1998, surrounded by a heated debate on the role of pizzica in Salento. The fact that the organizers were outsiders of the pizzica movement created a lot of controversy. Some saw the event as yet another example how things were

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<sup>120</sup> Massimiliano Morabito, personal communication

<sup>121</sup> Massimiliano Morabito, personal communication

<sup>122</sup> Massimiliano Morabito, personal communication

decided by some experts from elsewhere, even as a “colonial gesture”.<sup>123</sup> The audience of the festival has grown from a few thousand in the 1990s to about 150.000 people in 2014. According to Pizza (2000 and 2002), *La Notte della Taranta* is an example of the transformation of tarantism into a cultural commodity of Salento.<sup>124</sup> The cultural policies of the European Union have shaped the revival: when local governments arranging the festival got access of financial contributions by the European Union aimed at promoting interregional relationships between Puglia, Greece and the Balkans, the openness towards new musical influences was enhanced.<sup>125</sup>

The pizzica of Salento was the initial sparkle that triggered a growing interest in other Southern Italian tarantellas. In other regions, traditional dances were still practiced in their original contexts in villages and communities. The pizzica boom spreading around Italy in the 1990s and beginning of the 2000 intensified the interest to recover and research other tarantellas. Numerous festivals were formed such as *Notte della Tammorra* in Naples and *Caulonia Tarantella Festival* in Calabria. At the moment, the dancers and dance schools are attempting to raise consciousness of the diversity of tarantellas. As far as I see, this is a clear evolution compared to 15 years ago.

The pizzica revival has been used as a tool of political empowerment and a means to economic development through tourism. Tourism relies on easily recognizable images and symbols, so complex realities and cultural practices are reduced to stereotypical images. This kind of self-orientalism is a widespread practice used by most countries and regions in promoting tourism. Tourism also draws on the fascination for the ‘authentic, natural and genuine’ in contrast to contemporary western society.<sup>126</sup> Sant Cassia (2000) argues that the promotion of traditions in tourism can transform an ‘intimate otherness’ to an ‘exotic otherness’ also for the peoples themselves.<sup>127</sup> Celebrating formerly subaltern cultural expressions can also be seen as resistance to nation-state

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<sup>123</sup> Lüdtke 2000, 305, Pizza 1999, 216-217

<sup>124</sup> Pizza 1999, 202

<sup>125</sup> Pizza 1999, 216

<sup>126</sup> Trullson 2010, 40

<sup>127</sup> Sant Cassia 2000, 294, Trullson 2010, 40



politics and cultural hegemony.

Tarantism staged a psychic struggle with alterity. Possession trance is about the temporary dissolution of identity, an affliction by an 'other'.<sup>128</sup> Identity is seen as the opposition of alterity.<sup>129</sup> It is interesting how a cultural phenomena that has at its core the expression and cure of alterity has become an identity marker. A postcolonial rhetoric of identity lingers in the debate on the revival, according to Pizza (2002).<sup>130</sup> Rodriguez and Fortier (2007) claim that cultural memory can be about remembering suffering in a way that does not make us aggressive, but makes us reflect on those who suffer.<sup>131</sup>

## 5. Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze the research material. First, I present the method of analysis. I start the analysis by accounting for the informants' initial encounters with the tarantella. I then proceed to present my interviewees' perceptions of tradition and history, the contemporary music and dance movement, and questions about gender and representation. Finally, I look at the ways how the healing and ritual aspects of the tarantella are understood and enacted today.

### 5.1 Analyzing narratives on dancing

For this study, I interviewed 11 tarantella dancers in May and December 2013. The interviews were conducted in Italian and were transcribed. The transcribed interviews comprise of more than 100 pages. The interview material was rich and multi-faceted. It would have offered many other possible approaches than the ones that I chose to follow in this research. As my main interest is to study the personal experiences of dancing and dance teaching, I focus on the

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<sup>128</sup> Lundgren 2008

<sup>129</sup> Lüdtke 2009, 15

<sup>130</sup> Pizza 2002, 59

<sup>131</sup> Rodriguez and Fortier 2007, 5-7

storytelling occurring in the interviews. Accordingly, I use narrative analysis as my investigation method. Colette Daiute and Cynthia Lightfoot (2004) argue that narrative analysis is useful in addressing individuals' experiences in societal processes of cultural change.<sup>132</sup> Narrative analysis offers a reflexive and holistic approach to peoples' lives and focuses on how individuals create stories.<sup>133</sup>

The stories people tell are more than windows into their realities. Creating narratives is a way to organize and integrate experience and knowledge.<sup>134</sup> In the interview situations, the narratives are constructed in dialogue with the researcher. As I was asking people about their dancing experiences, it opened up the fact that dance can never be fully verbalized.<sup>135</sup>

The interviews open up perspectives on southern Italian traditional dance. The narratives which I analyze in this study, are of course not exhaustive on that issue. I have already described the intuitive process of finding the interviewees. This illuminates the fact that the conclusions drawn in this study offer but a few possible angles to approach the popular dance movement. In this study, the narrative approach implies that knowledge is understood as subjective and contextual.<sup>136</sup>

This analysis is a thematic analysis. Narrative analysis is often applied by concentrating on singular narratives. In this study, I compare the different interviewees' narratives to each other. I started the analysis process by distinguishing different themes occurring in the material. I organized the different speakers' sayings according to themes. The themes were tradition, gender, interculturality, ritual, tarantism and healing. In addition to that, I looked at the totality of the interviews, in order to understand the narratives of each interviewee as a whole story. I also looked at the coherency and ambiguity of the storytelling. I paid attention to the similarities and differences of different speakers' positions. In relation to certain subjects, I could distinguish quite

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<sup>132</sup> Daiute and Lightfoot 2004, viii

<sup>133</sup> Daiute and Lightfoot 2004, xi

<sup>134</sup> Daiute and Lightfoot 2004, x, Riessmann 2008, 10

<sup>135</sup> Saarikoski 2003, 11

<sup>136</sup> Ylönen 2003, 60

contradictory points of view, while on other issues, the interviewees share very similar viewpoints.

I have attempted to read my material in a way that acknowledges the diversity of voices that have influenced the interviewees.<sup>137</sup> I tried to observe the different kinds of interactions and positionings in relation to the field. In the analysis process, I try to connect autobiographical accounts and society at large.<sup>138</sup> There were subjects that frequently came up in the interviews that I chose to exclude from this research, such as how traditional dance is situated in the contemporary dance and theatre context in Italy.

## 5.2 Encountering the tarantella

My informants consist of 11 tarantella dancers and dance teachers. All except of one are women. All my interviewees have behind them many years of studying dance, dancing, performing and teaching. Some have a professional dance education in ballet or modern dance, while others have no formal dance education. All of them are regularly teaching tarantella. Some of the dancers are solely dedicated to teaching and performing tarantella, while others work as actresses, dancers, one is an anthropologist, one is an alternative health practitioner, one is a psychotherapist and dance therapist and one works as a primary school teacher. Some of the dancers are studying, performing and teaching also other ethnic dances, such as Indian, Oriental and African dances. What is common of all the dancers, regardless of if the southern Italian dances are their whole or just part of their professional and artistic career, is that they have dedicated years of their lives to dancing, exploring, teaching and performing the tarantella.

The dancers I interviewed are teaching the tarantella in various contexts. Following their professional activities during 2014, there have been tarantella workshops around Italy, in various cities in France, in Switzerland, Netherlands,

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<sup>137</sup> Daiute and Lightfoot 2004, 83

<sup>138</sup> Riessmann 2008, 10

Romania, Spain and Germany. Many of the dancers are teaching dance also to children. Three of my interviewees live abroad and teach the tarantella while many others travel regularly to teach and perform abroad. I will pay attention to this aspect of the internationalization of the popular dance revival, which has not previously been studied.

The dancers are born between the 1960s and 1980s. Most of their parents are originally from different parts of southern Italy. The backgrounds of the interviewees were quite diverse, though. A majority of the interviewees have indirect or direct experiences of internal migration in Italy: the migration from the South towards the North. A majority of the dancers have not grown up with the tarantella. As earlier described, traditional music and dances were for many decades disregarded. Following the Italian economic boom of the 60s, many of the parents of my interviewees rejected the traditional culture of their parents when aspiring for a modern lifestyle.

I start the analysis by looking at the stories of the initial encounters with the tarantella. In this way, I want to situate the realm of traditional dance into the contemporary world and its multiple opportunities for individuals. For many of the interviewees, moving away from southern Italy in order to study at university represents the moment when they felt the urge to get to know the southern Italian dances and music for the first time:

*Studiavo qui chimica all'università, e ho incontrato un danzatore di danza tango, che mi hai detto: Perché tu che sei di Lecce non insegni la pizzica? E io: Cos'è la pizzica? (...) Poi sono andata a Lecce, da Bologna sono venuta a Lecce, a scoprire la mia danza, così, ero come te: capito, da Helsinki vieni qui, così. Ero uguale io.*

I studied chemistry at the university and I met a tango dancer who asked me: You who are from Lecce, why don't teach pizzica? And I said: What is pizzica? (...) And so I went to Lecce, from Bologna I went to Lecce to discover my dance, like that, I was like you: coming from Helsinki to here. I was the same.

Arianna

Through the encounter with an outsider, Arianna realized that she does not know her culture. Similar stories are told by other interviewees. Some of the interviewees recall important and powerful experiences of going to southern

## Italy and witnessing traditional dance rituals:

*A san Rocco c'erano ancora i cerchi, c'erano ancora delle vere ronde, c'erano ancora delle ronde dei zingari, la danza dei coltelli, quelle vere, con il maestro che dice "tu puoi entrare, tu non puoi entrare". Solo la gente del posto poteva ballare, solo quelli riconosciuti potevano ballare gli altri.. tu non potevi alzarti ed andare a ballare se non ti conoscevano, dovevano dirti... A me mi hanno invitato a ballare, e va beh, io sono impazzita ovviamente per quella danza, ballavo continuamente, nessuna aveva mai detto cos'era, non mi aveva spiegato. Solo ballavo, ballavo, ad un certo punto mi hanno invitato nel cerchio, e mi hanno fatto ballare dentro del cerchio.*

At San Rocco there were still the circles, there were the real circles, there were the circles of the gypsies, the knife dance, the real ones, with the master who says "you can enter, you can't enter". Only the local people could dance, only those who were recognised, the others... you couldn't stand up and go to dance if they didn't know you, they had to tell you... They invited me to dance and well, I got crazy about that dance, I danced continuously, no-one told me what it was, they didn't explain me. I just danced and danced, and at a certain moment they invited me into the circle, and they made me dance inside the circle.

Elena

Eleonora was 17 years old when she went to Salento and heard the pizzica for the first time. She accounts for the experience as almost revolutionary.

*Siamo andati ad un concerto in Salento e ho sentito per la prima volta questa musica. Mi ha così shockato, mi ha fatto veramente venire i brividi, e eravamo in un posto molto isolato in una antica chiesa ai mezzo dei ulivi. E allora ho chiesto al mio amico, ho detto: devo rimanere qua. La prima volta che ho sentito questa musica ho capito che c'era una storia che dovevo scoprire. (...) Ho detto al mio amico: faccio il giro della chiesa e quando ho finito il giro ti dico come faccio a rimanere qua. E ho fatto il giro della chiesa, e dall'altra parte c'erano degli artisti di strada che avevano delle macchine, e mi hanno detto che potevo stare con loro e girare con loro.*

We went to a concert in Salento and I heard this music for the first time. It shocked me, it thrilled me really, and we were in very remote place, an old church amidst the olive trees. So I asked my friend, I said: I have to stay here. The first time I heard this music I understood that there was a story I had to discover. (...) I said to my friend: I go around the church and when I have finished the round I will tell you what I will do to stay here. And I walked around the church, and on the other side there were some street artists with cars, and they said to me that I could stay with them and drive around with them.

Eleonora

In Eleonora's narrative, the pizzica is connected to almost a sense of destiny. In the present, being a dancer and dance teacher, these first experiences of the dances are charged with significance. The moments of encountering the tarantella for the first time are described as turning points in life. Lucia tells about being taken to a concert of the pizzica group Alla Bua where she was suddenly brought up on the stage to dance:

*Non so come la tarantella è uscita. È uscita dai piedi. Da sola. Quella sera mi ha fatto talmente tanto piacere che da quel giorno(...) non ho più smesso di ballare. Ho cominciato allora a fare, l'anno dopo ho cominciato a fare dei corsi come professoressa(..) ho cominciata a fare dei corsi di pizzica soltanto. Poi piano piano ho scoperto le altre danze, la tammurriata che è della zona di Napoli, la tarantella della Calabria, la tarantella del Cilento. Ho cominciato a conoscere tutte le (quante) danze." (...) sono andata alle feste tradizionali in Campania, in Calabria, in Puglia, ho sempre guardato la gente che ballava per terra e la gente che ballava sui palchi. E quell'è stata la mia scuola.*

I don't know how the tarantella came out. It came out from my feet. Alone. I enjoyed that night so much so from that day on, I never stopped dancing. I started to do, the next year I started to do courses as a teacher, (...) I started to do only courses of pizzica. Slowly I discovered the other dances, the tammurriata from the Naples region, the tarantella of Calabria, the tarantella of Cilento. I started to know all the dances." (...) I went to the traditional feasts in Campania, in Calabria, in Puglia, I always watched the people dancing on the ground and the people dancing on stage. That was my school.

Lucia

Here, the subsequent career as a dance teacher is accounted for as the consequence of the initial powerful encounter with the tarantella. Encountering the tarantella inspired many of the dancers to study anthropology. Reading De Martino's *The Land of Remorse* and other anthropological literature on tarantism is generally perceived as an integral part of the learning process of the traditional dances:

*Ho letto la terra del Rimorso di De Martino, l'ho preso da un punto di vista intellettuale prima di sentirla nei piedi.*

I read *The Land of Remorse* by De Martino, I took it from an intellectual point of view before feeling it in my legs.

Lucia

Gabriele, Federica and Maria came in contact with the tarantella when they were already working as professional dancers. In their lives, the impulse to get to know the southern Italian dances came from encounters with other music and dance cultures. When living in Brazil, Federica was impressed by the abundance of music and dance in everyday life. She didn't know what to answer when people asked her about the music and dance of Italy. So when she returned back to Italy she started to explore traditional occasions of dancing in Italy by travelling to village feasts in Campania and Calabria. Gabriele is a dancer of Japanese Butoh. At one point of his career, his Butoh masters told him that if he wants to advance in his learning of Butoh, he has to search for his own cultural roots. He started to do anthropological research in his region of origin in Salento. Maria encountered the tarantella through an artistic research project, and her fascination for the expressive possibilities of the tarantella triggered her to continue exploring the tarantella as a part of her artistic work.

Personal crises, feelings of rootlessness, disrupted family ties or experiences of migration are by many of the dancers accounted for as part of the initiation process to the traditional dances. According to Rodriguez and Fortier (2007), individuals often discover their cultural memory through crisis.<sup>139</sup> A crisis raises questions and insights, which can lead to search for one's belonging, often through arts. Marta was born in Northern Italy, but her parents are from Salento. For her, the pizzica was a way to find a feeling of belonging:

*Sentire la musica era un modo per sentirmi più a casa (...) Era una cosa personale, ballavo a casa, da sola. Perché non ero tanto felice, avevo bisogno di sentirmi di appartenere a qualche cosa e avevo bisogno di sentirmi, sentirmi, ecco. (...) la danza e la musica mi ha aiutato tantissimo.*

Listening to the music was my way of feeling at home (...) It was something personal, I danced alone, at home. Because I was not so happy,

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<sup>139</sup> Rodriguez and Fortier 2007, xii

I longed for the feeling of belonging somewhere and I needed to feel, feel myself. (...) Dance and music have helped me so much.

Marta

Claudia is from the region of Puglia. She remembers her grandparents dancing and playing traditional music when she was a child. As a teenager, she encountered the pizzica again:

*(Ero) una dark. (...) e quando ho riscoperto poi le danze, mi ha cambiato la vita, dalla depressione del dark mi hanno dato una felicità immensa e io ho continuato così. Ho avuto la fortuna di incontrare delle persone che mi orientassero.*

(I was) a dark. (...) when I rediscovered the dances, it changed my life, from the depression of dark they brought me an immense happiness and I continued that way. I had the fortune to meet people who directed me.

Claudia

The different narratives on encountering the tarantella shed light on how processes of acknowledging one's cultural identity, memory and belonging are nowadays individual, globally linked paths that still share some commonalities. The interviewees' encounters with tarantella led to years of exploration, research, dancing, teaching and performing the popular dances. The fascination for the tarantella and pizzica is often described as an intuitive, inexplicable calling. Eleonora describes the pupils coming to her classes:

*Quello che mi ha sempre stupito (...) mi è sempre capitato di vedere le persone che arrivano a questa musica (perché) qualcosa che gli è successo (...) cercano questa danza perché quando l'hanno sentito per la prima volta gli è successo qualcosa, gli è cambiato qualcosa, hanno avuto una reazione forte a questa musica.*

The thing that always amazed me (...) I always so people approach this music (because) something happened to them (...) The search this dance because when they heard it for the first time something happened to them, something changed, they had a strong reaction on the music.

Eleonora



### 5.3 Dancing as communication

The tarantella is experienced as a space of encounters. Dancing tarantella is about communication, which is accounted for as the personally most significant aspect of, and ultimately the reason for, dancing.<sup>140</sup>

*(È) una lingua altra di comunicazione, quindi a comunicare con il corpo. Ti mettono in contatto, in disposizione con cosa vuol dire essere donna, cos'è il femminile, cos'è il maschile, e nella relazione anche tra il maschile e femminile. Ti rimettono in contatto con le diverse generazioni, e questa è la cosa molto bella delle danze popolari.*

(It is) another way of communication, to communicate with the body. (The dances) put you in contact with what it means to be a woman, with femininity, what is masculinity, and the relation between the masculine and the feminine. They put you in contact with different generations, and this is the very beautiful thing about the popular dances.

Eleonora

Like many other popular dances and couple dances, the tarantella allows people to relate to each others while dancing. Dancing offers an embodied way of communication and thus contests individualism:

*In un momento di estremo individualismo, queste danze hanno ridato la possibilità di un contatto fisico, collettivo, sudore, c'è sudore contro sudore, ballare dei passi semplici che tutti possono ballare. L'uomo individuo (...) ha ritrovato un cerchio ed è impazzito.*

In a moment of extreme individualism, these dances have given back the possibility of physical, collective contact, sweat, there is sweat against sweat, dancing simple steps that everyone can dance. The individual man (...) has rediscovered a circle and has got crazy.

Elena

In the circle, the aspect of democracy and equality is concretely enacted: all the dancers are in the same position. In the circle, the dancers are feeling part of a

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<sup>140</sup> Also Ludtke notes that dancing the pizzica provides alternative ways of socializing than the ways of everyday life. See Ludtke 2005, 51

whole. According to Elena, dancing the tarantella is responding to the need of contemporary people for a sense of community. Chiara experienced dancing in the circle as particularly appealing:

*Sentivo nel danzare in cerchio, danzare insieme agli altri (qualcosa) che non avevo mai provato quando per esempio studiavo danza classica, o danza jazz, o danza orientale, ho sentito subito qualcosa di particolare che mi tirava molto, un benessere o una forza di gruppo che nasceva da questa danza, una stare insieme molto bello, diverso, una stare insieme che poteva essere anche stare insieme con la danza no? Anche in altri situazioni che non fossero un luogo chiuso, una stanza, oppure altri situazioni come può essere uscire per andare ad un locale, no. Un modo diverso per comunicare, proprio una forma di comunicazione, cioè ho trovato una nuova forma di comunicazione.*

Dancing in circle, dancing together with the others, I felt (something) that I had never felt before, when I studied for example ballet, jazz dance or oriental dance. I felt immediately something particular that attracted me a lot, a wellbeing or a strength of the group that this dance created, a very beautiful and different way of being together, that could also be being together with the dance, right? As well as in other situations, not in a closed space, in a room, in other situations such as going out. A different way of communication, really, I had found a new way of communication.

Chiara

This sphere of communication and being together while dancing is perceived as a continuous learning process, as a way of life:

*Molti parti della mia vita sono segnate proprio dalla danza. Ho imparato a comunicare con delle persone, (...) a legarmi con delle persone attraverso la danza, quindi è tutto un mondo per me. Che non è solo lavoro, è proprio vivere, è una scelta di vita.*

Many parts of my life are really marked by the dance. I have learned to communicate with people, (...) to bond with people through dance, so it is a whole world for me. It is not only work, it life, it is really a choice of lifestyle.

Claudia

These realizations of the communicative aspects of dancing have sometimes been triggered by experiences of dancing in other cultures. Arianna says that

her experiences of dance in Morocco and Tunisia shaped her understanding of the tarantella:

*Lì (in Maghreb) ho imparato ad apprezzare la danza della mia terra. Perché ho capito che un tempo (poteva) essere vissuto la danza in questo modo per la comunità. E se io la guardo come danzatrice e attrice, e vedere un popolo che vive la musica, la danza, il canto come un mezzo di comunicazione, mi fa sorprendere.*

There (in Maghreb) I learned to appreciate the dance of my land. Because I realised that once the dance was lived in this way by the community. And if I look at it as a dancer and actress, it astonishes me to see a people who lives the music, the dance, the singing as means of communication.

Arianna

The traditional dances are easy to learn, it is often claimed. Learning to dance is about catching and following the rhythm. Arianna says that she has pupils who have never danced, but they still catch the rhythm and the steps immediately, while professional dancers might have much more difficulties in learning them. This is a way of highlighting the popular quality of the dance. Also Claudia explains how the tarantella is engaging:

*Poi si inizia così: Vai, balla! È bello perché comunque, nessuno rimane fuori di queste danze, se non sai ballare, non fa niente! Prova! Buttati! Questa è democrazia, il punto di vista di accogliere, accoglie tutti. (...) Unisce tutti, va bene per tutti, se non sai ballare non fa niente, se non sai manco che stai facendo, ti coinvolge, è bello per quello.*

Then you start like that: Go, dance! It is nice because anyway, nobody stays outside of these dances, if you can't dance, it doesn't matter! Try! Throw yourself in! This is democracy, the viewpoint of acceptance (...) It unites everyone, it goes well for everyone, if you can't dance it doesn't matter, even if you don't know what you are doing, it involves you, and that is beautiful.

Claudia

### 5.3.1 Can the tarantella be taught?

The evolution of dance schools and dance teaching is quite recent. Nowadays, there are many dancers who make a living out of dancing and teaching. Ten years ago the dance revival was more of a spontaneous movement of passionate amateurs. All my interviewees are teaching the tarantella in various contexts. Many of them have initially learnt to dance in contemporary contexts of the popular revival, such as at concerts and festivals, as well as in more traditional contexts of dancing, such as from elderly people in the villages.

Besides the pizzica, other tarantellas are becoming popular. The pizzica boom inspired people to explore other southern Italian dances. Numerous dance schools around Italy are teaching pizzica, tammurriata, tarantella calabrese and many other. The pizzica is by far the most popular dance of the southern Italian dances, though. The popular dances are taught in dance schools, community and wellness centers.

The idea of teaching the tarantella has been subject to heated debate. When the first dancers started to teach the tarantella 15 years ago, among them some of my interviewees, they were heavily criticized. Still, many musicians are against the idea of dance courses, arguing that the dances should be learned in the traditional way, by watching others dance.

Knowing the history behind the tarantella is regarded essential by all the dancers I interviewed. The socio-political history of southern Italy and the dances are intertwined. The consciousness of the submission of women and the harsh living conditions of the past are seen as prerequisites for understanding the tarantella. The dancers see that their role is to remove false myths, such as the myth of tarantism as an indefinite search for trance. It is also acknowledged to be important to raise consciousness about the fact the pizzica is reinvented dance.

Today, there are many self-declared tarantella teachers. According to my interviewees, this is problematic, as some teachers provide false information in their courses and mix dances and rhythms of different zones without knowing

it, for example. Some of my interviewees hope that there would be certifications for traditional dance teachers who possess the required knowledge.

As the society changes, the way of dancing changes, the dancers maintain. Claudia says that she tries to mediate between the past and the present. She is teaching how the dance was performed in the past, explaining the meanings of different movements and intentions, but also giving advice on how the dance can be performed today, trying to communicate a respect towards the past. It is not enough to only teach the steps, she says, you need to know the stories behind particular local dances and be able to explain why it is danced in a particular way.

But also the individual ways of dancing the tarantella are celebrated. The dance gives an opportunity to express oneself authentically. Two of the dancers say that if their pupils dance like them, they feel that they have failed. Claudia compares the dance to the alphabet:

*Per me quasi sono come l'alfabeto, sai le lettere, le parole, poi devi comporre per te, per quello che sei tu. Per quello dico sempre nei corsi che non si balla mai uguale, che anche io stesso personalmente la mia danza non è mai uguale, cambia di base alla persona che ho di fronte, cambia di base alla musica se mi piace o no, cambia di base alla giornata che ho avuto, (...) ed è quello che vuoi anche da miei alunni, che loro sappiano ballare così, sappiano viverla e non farla la danza, ma viverla.*

For me, they are almost like the alphabet, you know the letters, the words, but then you have to compose them for yourself, for what you are. In my courses, I always say that you never dance similar, that also personally, my dance is never the same, it changes depending on the person I have in front, it changes depending on if I like the music or not, it changes depending on what kind of day I have had. (...) It is what I want from my students too, that they learn to dance like that, learn to live the dance and not do it, but to live it.

Claudia

Learning the tarantella is in fact perceived beyond learning dance steps and movements. In Lucia's account, learning the tarantella is to 'wake it up':

*Secondo me, la tarantella non si insegna: la tarantella si sveglia. Perché è già qua! (puts her hand on the heart). Hai capito? Perché fa parte della nostra storia lontana lontana lontana, ma della mia coma della tua. È una storia della terra secondo me. In principio era una danza: la tarantella! (...) E come ci mettiamo insieme quando facciamo la tarantella che fa la tarantella. Quindi questa è importante che non si perde per me.*

According to me, you don't teach the tarantella, you wake it up. Because it is already here! (puts her hand on the heart). You understand? Because it is part of our history far back, my history as well as yours. It is a history of the earth, according to me. In the beginning, there was one dance: the tarantella. (...) It is how we come together when we do the tarantella, that makes the tarantella. It is important that this is not lost, I think.

Lucia

Also the dance school Led Space describe on their web page the process of the learning the tarantella as waking up a sleeping disposition in one's consciousness:

*(...) far riemergere attraverso la danza una predisposizione o attitudine culturale rintanata o dormiente nella nostra coscienza, ma che come lava che scorre nei canali di un vulcano attivo, la cui bocca è ostruita da più strati di terreno formatosi negli anni, può, in qualche modo riemergere e ri-manifestarsi da noi e dentro di noi, nel momento in cui ne riconosciamo il valore e l'enorme potenziale espressivo – creativo.*

(...) to bring out through dance a cultural predisposition dormant in our consciousness, but that like the lava that flows in the canals of an active volcano, whose opening is blocked by multiple layers of soil formed over the years, can, in some way, reemerge and manifest itself to us and within us, when we recognize its value and the enormous expressive and creative potential of it.<sup>141</sup>

#### 5.4 Perceptions of tarantism

The imagery of tarantism, the woman who dances to heal the spider bite, intrigues people. Even if tarantism is no longer practiced, does the cultural memory of tarantism linger in the movement of southern Italian popular music

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<sup>141</sup>Led Space dance school's presentation:  
[http://www.ledspace.org/danze\\_rituali\\_della\\_puglia.html](http://www.ledspace.org/danze_rituali_della_puglia.html)

and dance. The memory of tarantism functions as a symbolic resource.<sup>142</sup> The different interpretations, scholarly understandings and artistic elaborations of tarantism participate in an ongoing discourse of what tarantism was, what is left of it and what it can mean today. These questions are open-ended and different actors in the field provide for very different, even contradictory answers. From my point of view, it seems that the complex and contradictory understandings of tarantism form part of its fascination.

Most of my interviewees have come to know tarantism through anthropological literature. De Martino's work is regarded the most important and influential introduction to the phenomenon. I will account for the interviewees' interpretations and understandings of tarantism, that they have mainly accessed through the same literature that I have been reading on the topic. Many of my interviewees have though done extensive field research and have met people who have first-hand accounts of tarantism. In Salento, the cultural memory of tarantism is still present, though not always outspoken. These accounts will cast light on the understanding of the tarantella today.

The sociopolitical reality that surrounded the phenomenon is accounted for extensively. Salento was a land of extreme poverty and harsh living conditions. Women's submission is seen as central to the phenomenon's existence. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tarantism was an expression of women's extreme lack of freedom. Women were subjected to their fathers, brothers and husbands. Many of my interviewees describe tarantism as the moment of expressing a freedom that the women otherwise didn't have. Lüdtke (2009) says: "tarantism has worked both to liberate and to oppress. It has been a channel of release and resolution when there was no other perceived way out."<sup>143</sup> My interviewees depict the female submission as the primary condition creating the need and urge for the ritual of tarantism.

Many of my interviewees perceive tarantism as a holistic way of healing. These perspectives reflect a holistic viewpoint of health as not a mere physiological

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<sup>142</sup> Pizza 2004, 212-214

<sup>143</sup> Lüdtke 2009, 11

state but as a state of balance. Dance rituals have throughout history been a means for restoring individual and collective order.<sup>144</sup> Eleonora accounts for the efficacy of tarantism from this perspective:

*In tutte le culture extraeuropee, anche europee ma antiche, la malattia non era mai vista come esclusivamente come qualcosa personale, come qualcosa che ammalava solo te, ma era sempre una malattia legata alla comunità. Quindi poteva venire da una interruzione di rituali, da un tabù infranto, oppure poteva, una persona attraverso la malattia esprimere un malessere che era della comunità. Per questo la comunità riprendeva sempre, e non lasciava mai solo il malato, la prendeva in carico la malattia della persona attraverso il rituale che era collettivo. Questa è la cosa meravigliosa dei questi rituali, quello che noi abbiamo assolutamente perso anche per colpa della psichiatria, della psicologia, della, ma non solamente per colpa loro ma la psichiatria, la psicologia, la psicoanalisi, presentano una nuova maniera di vedere l'individuo, proprio come individuo, come una persona, e quindi lavorare con una persona al di là dei suoi legami. E le persone che quindi hanno dei disturbi, che hanno dei momenti di crisi psicologica, vengono isolati, considerati folli. Quindi da questo punto di vista della saggezza di questo rituale del tarantismo l'abbiamo perso.*

In all cultures outside Europe, as well as in ancient European cultures, illness was never regarded as something personal, that made only you sick, but illness was always connected to the community. It could be caused by a ritual interruption, from a violated tabu, or then the person could express the community's illness. Because of this, the community always recovered and did never leave alone the sick person, the community took care of the illness through the collective rituals. This is the amazing thing about these rituals, what we have completely lost by the fault of psychiatry and psychology, because they present a new way of seeing the individual, just like an individual, thus working with a person beyond her connections. And the persons who have some disorder or face a moment of psychological crisis, are isolated and considered crazy. From this point of view, we have lost the wisdom of the ritual of tarantism.

Eleonora

This discourse places tarantism as an ideal way of curing mental illnesses compared to western psychiatry. An important part of tarantism's efficacy was the experience of being seen and not being left alone in the context of the ritual, according to Daboo (2010).<sup>145</sup> Tarantism involved the agency of the individual

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<sup>144</sup> Staro 2011, 48-49 and Daniel 2005, 271

<sup>145</sup> Daboo, 2010, 78



in initiating and closing the ritual. Del Giudice (2005) says that tarantism's greatest value was the communal solidarity it created. The participation of the others standing around the circle was as important as the tarantata in the center.<sup>146</sup> The core efficacy of the ritual came from the belief on the spider bite and the healing power of music, though, as Alessandra points out:

*C'è questa cosa qua che univa le persone, con il fatto di crederci, di credere veramente che la danza potesse guarire, (...) quindi insomma contribuivano ognuno ad avere un compito in quella situazione no, per il bene dell'altro. (...) Quando si crede, si guarisce veramente.*

This is what united people, by truly believing that the dance could heal (...) each person contributed to the situation, for the good of the other person. (...) When you believe, you really heal.

Alessandra

There is a cyclic perception of life contained in tarantism. Alessandra points out that in tarantism, healing is preceived as a process, not a treatment with an definite beginning and end. She criticizes western medicine for attempting to remove illnesses completely. According to Alessandra, life is an ongoing process where good and bad things are interconnected:

*Il ripeterci delle situazioni, non è che tu facendo un rito per un anno, risolvi il tuo problema, perché la vita è un processo continuo, e quindi i processi, cioè così come i stagioni (...) Così come ritorna l'anno prossimo anche di nuovo l'inverno, e dopo l'inverno ritorna di nuovo la primavera. Così la vita si procede, procede attraverso i momenti belli e quelli brutti.*

The repeating of the situation, it is not like doing a rite for a year, it solves your problem, because life is a continuous process, thus the processes, they are like the seasons (...) Like the winter returns also next year, and after the winter the spring returns again. Like this life goes on, through good and bad moments.

Alessandra

Alessandra's interpretation reflects a holistic worldview. By embracing the good and bad, it is possible to find a balance. Jodi Lundgren (2008) notes that tarantism staged a struggle between the self and the other, but did not find a

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<sup>146</sup> Del Giudice 2005, 265

definite resolution. The spider bites back each year again. In this interpretation, tarantism subverts the dynamic of domination: the alterity of possession is not completely incorporated nor completely exorcised.<sup>147</sup>

Tarantism as possession trance opens up the possibility of an ethical encounter with otherness. When we let encounters with different forms of “otherness” transform us, we can go beyond the impulse to defend our borders.<sup>148</sup> The understanding of possession trance as the ‘otherness within’ opens up a political dimension, bringing forth a compassion for suffering and marginalization. Antonio Infantino, a musician and intellectual in the revival movement, says: “Moving from one state to another, like the Africans and Albanians on our shores, that is the trance.”<sup>149</sup> The renowned pizzica group Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino did a political statement to the ongoing crisis of boat refugees drowning in the Mediterranean with their piece “Solo Andata” (One-way only). The video refers to the symbolism of the victim of tarantism drowning herself in the sea.<sup>150</sup>

The interviewees position tarantism historically in different ways. Several of the dancers say that the tarantella is ancient, referring to the prehistoric rock drawings and ancient Greek vase paintings, found in Southern Italy and depicting dancing figures, that could be interpreted to dance the tarantella.<sup>151</sup>

References to Antiquity and the cult of Dionysus are common in the discourses around the tarantella’s origins. Tarantism is also seen as a remnant of pagan female spirituality.<sup>152</sup> The symbolic references to Antiquity are common in the contemporary artistic elaborations of the tarantella, but my interviewees do

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<sup>147</sup> Lundgren 2008, 4

<sup>148</sup> Lundgren 2008,4 see Levinas 141-142

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Antonio Infantino:

<http://www.siciliantagonista.org/interviste/antonioinfantino.mp3> (my translation)

<sup>150</sup> Solo Andata video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf-bH-aaLB4>. The group was awarded the annual arts and human rights prize by Amnesty International 2014 in Italy for the video.

<sup>151</sup> Festive dancing was a common subject for prehistoric artists throughout the world. See Ehrenreich 2006, 21-22

<sup>152</sup> Del Giudice 2005, 242

question these ideas. Referring to tarantism as a remnant of Dionysian rituals of Antiquity is a way to accentuate it as ancient but essentially European. Other dancers situate tarantism as Mediterranean and African, emphasizing the connections of tarantism to other, non-European possession trance rituals. These are interpretations that can be politically motivated and have political implications.

The comparison of tarantism to possession trance rituals of other continents and their evolutions during the colonial time places tarantism in postcolonial framework. Subaltern people around the world have practiced possession trance rituals despite repression from authorities or the church. Thus, the memory of tarantism brings forth proudness of the local, nonconformity and resistance towards the established order. This aspect of the discourse on tarantism explains a great part of the success of the pizzica in the Salento of today. In addition, bringing forth the consciousness of similarities between trance possession cults worldwide might lead to artistic experimentation with music and dances from other countries which share connections to possession trance rituals.

#### **5.4.1 Cultural interruption: the decline of traditional dancing**

The economic boom of the 50s and 60s in Italy brought with it significant socioeconomic changes. My interviewees account for the experiences of their parents' generation. After the war, the traditional music and dance were gradually abandoned. Dances like tango, waltz and rock music gained popularity. These music styles brought with them a freedom of expression for women and ways of dancing that would not have been allowed before. The generation born after the war aspired for a modern way of life, education and higher living standards, and the traditional music and dance became associated with the poverty, inequality and social taboos of the past.

The internal emigration has touched upon most of my interviewees. Many of their grandparents and parents have moved away from their regions of origin towards northern Italy, from the villages to the cities, leaving behind an

agricultural way of life. Many of my interviewees have visited their regions of origin in Southern Italy only during vacations.

The dancers account for these cultural changes in contradictory ways. At the same time as it has brought them many socioeconomic and educational possibilities that their parents or grandparents only could dream of, many express a sense of loss. This loss is described as a loss of cultural identity and continuity, of “roots”: a relationship to the earth, of a sense of community, and of knowledge of the traditions and customs of past generations.

At the end of the Second World War the Americans invaded Southern Italy, liberating it from Mussolini’s regime. The arrival of the Americans, the subsequent economic boom and the era of rock music are in many of my interviewees’ narratives interweaved together<sup>153</sup>:

*La generazione dei genitori (...) hanno diciamo vissuto in persona il boom economico italiano. Cioè la rinuncia al legno per sempre per comprare la formica, la rinuncia alla tradizione, alle danze tradizionali per ballare rock’n’roll. Ma perché la verità è che ci hanno liberato, ma ci hanno anche occupato. Quindi, diciamo abbiamo pagato un prezzo molto alto, noi italiani.*

The generation of our parents (...) have personally lived through the Italian economic boom. That is, giving up wood to buy plastic, giving up traditional dances to dance rock’n’roll. The truth is that they liberated us, but they also occupied us. So you can say that we have paid a very high prize, we Italians.

Arianna

This narrative is situated into the well-known discourse on Western cultural imperialism, according to which the local inevitably gives space for the global and politically and economically powerful nations impose their culture and values upon other nations. The dancers call the process of forgetting the traditional music and dances a ‘cultural interruption’. With interruption, they intend that the grandparents were not sharing their stories, songs and other

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<sup>153</sup> see also Pandolfi 1998, 287

cultural memories to their grandchildren, because the parents would disapprove it.

The tarantella and especially tarantism got connected with shame, *vergogna*. I tried to understand the content of this *vergogna* connected with tarantism my interviewees were accounting for. Still, it remained one of the subjects that during the analysis process left me perplexed. One of the dancers told that she had discovered that her grandmother after seeing her dancing the tarantella on TV, she didn't watch TV anymore. It is clear that the evolving depreciation of tarantism after the war was linked to the perception of tarantism as a remnant of a primitive past. The depreciation of one's own culture is often attributed to a colonial consciousness.<sup>154</sup> The concept of *vergogna* is according to Anna-Maria Tapaninen (1996) connected to a moral of exposure and concealing. This moral especially concerns how it is appropriate for women to appear publicly.<sup>155</sup>

The shame Arianna accounts for is instead connected to associating the traditions with poverty and subordination. Arianna tells that her father, who was the first in her family who was able to study at university, lived in two parallel worlds, the middle-class urban life and the life of a worker in the tobacco fields:

*(Mio padre) ha vissuto il mondo, sia diciamo il mondo cambiato della città, come anche il schiavitù. E quindi lui ha rifiutato tutto ciò che era tradizione, la musica, la danza, il tamburo, i racconti della mia nonna, i canti, quindi tutto della tradizione. Siccome la mia nonna ha vissuta nella nostra famiglia, il mio padre diciamo l'ha fatta stare in silenzio, nel senso che non sono mai usciti questi discorsi, e anche la mia nonna, immaginati, che lei era una donna che utilizzava questo linguaggio come linguaggio umano di scambio, se un figlio ti dice: non si parla di questo argomento. La mia nonna pensa che è un male parlare di questo argomento. Quindi è stato completamente eliminato, e io non so niente.*

(My father) has lived the let's say changed world of the city, as well as the slavery. So he rejected everything that was traditional, the music, the dance, the drum, the stories of my grandmother, the songs, everything from the tradition. Since my grandmother lived with our family, my

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<sup>154</sup> see also Pandolfi 1998, 287-288 on the "fracture of collective memory" connected with World War II in Italy

<sup>155</sup> Tapaninen 1996, 63

father let's say silenced her, in the sense that these issues never came up, and my grandmother, can you imagine that she was a woman who used this language as a language of human exchange, if a son tells you: you don't speak about this. My grandmother thinks it is bad to talk about this. So it was completely eliminated, and I don't know anything.

Arianna

The shame of the past was connected to the improvements in socioeconomic status. Even if her ancestors had been musicians, Arianna grew up not knowing about the pizzica. The cultural interruption was particularly strong in Salento. In some parts of Italy, traditional occasions of playing and dancing linked to popular religious devotion and yearly celebrations have continued without interruption until today.

Following the recent boom of the traditional music and dances, many southern Italians are becoming interested in and proud of their past. The stories of musicians, dances in one's family history are cherished. My interviewees said that some people in the popular movement might even invent a continuity of tradition. Arianna says that she used to be ashamed of the fact that she did not know the dances since childhood. She was very angry with her father for not letting her know the traditions. Now she sees her own family story as emblematic. The silencing of the past is part of the sociopolitical history of Salento, and fundamentally created the urge for the contemporary revival.

### 5.5 'Betraying tradition': perceptions of the contemporary situation

Many of the dancers describe the popular music and dance movement with the expression *tradire la tradizione*, which means to 'betray the tradition'. Some of the dancers use the expression in a more despising way, while others use the expression to appraise the creative, artistic re-elaborations inspired by tradition. As one of the dancers notes, the words in Italian have the same root, with the meaning of passing on. The word tradition in itself contains the element of renewal. To pass on, to transmit something forward to the next

generations inevitably changes something. The aspect of re-invention is especially true concerning the pizzica.

Still, the knowledge of what the dance was and what meanings it had in the past is seen as essential for being a dancer and dance teacher. The dancers I interviewed see that their task is to teach the history of southern Italy to those who come to learn the tarantella. The political realities, the poverty and the exploitation of the South are aspects of the past that need to be told for those aspiring to learn the tarantella. Some people who get interested in the tarantella have false ideas of the past and draw upon romanticized ideas of the dancing maenads from Greek mythology, for example.<sup>156</sup>

One of the dancers says that there is *una guerra di legittimazione*, 'a war of legitimation' going on. She intends the confrontations on who has the right knowledge to teach and perform. Those who perform or teach traditional dance without sufficient knowledge are not respected. To some extent, the dancers' origins count. Dancers who are not originally from a particular region have to make an effort to claim that they know the dances of that zone well, and still, some people will not accept them as traditional dance teachers.<sup>157</sup>

Many dancers of popular dances today have initially learnt to dance at concerts or from watching films like *Pizzicata*. The dancers in my research claim to be professional teachers, and affirm their knowledge of and familiarity with traditional dancing by accounting for where and with whom they have been dancing and in which traditional local contexts, and so on. Accounts of field trips to remote villages to learn dances from elderly people are told with pride, since these experiences are a way to legitimate one's status as a traditional dance teacher. In the beginning of the pizzica movement, learning properly the traditional dances was not valued, which Marta laments:

*Possiamo fare tutte le elaborazioni artistiche che vogliamo ma nel sapere cosa era, no. Perché da noi è stata, quando ho scoperto questo fenomeno della moda (..) inventato a tavolino, eh. Le persone che erano già dentro*

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<sup>156</sup> The female cult followers of Dionysus, pictured f.e. in Euripides' play *Bacchae*

<sup>157</sup> see also Siljamäki 2013, 89

*questa storia non sono preoccupate di andare a vedere come si danzavano gli anziani, capito. Hanno subito reinventato la danza, osservando qualche spunto. Il problema è nostra, e anche il nostro successo, è venuto da questo, dal tradire la tradizione. E lì c'è stato un grande, è esploso il fenomeno perché andava bene alla donna moderna di adesso, no.*

We can make all the artistic interpretations we want, if we know what was before. Because for us it was, when I discovered this fashion phenomenon (..) invented at the table. The people who were inside this story were not concerned to go and see how the elderly people danced, you understand. They immediately reinvented the dance, observing, noticing some cues. This is our problem, but also our success came out of this, from betraying the tradition. And because of that, the phenomenon burst because it suited the contemporary woman.

Marta

The contemporary pizzica is a reconstructed dance. Some of the dancers express the wish to deconstruct the prevailing myth of the pizzica as traditional. Not everyone in the popular dance movement share this consciousness, though. For the dancers I interviewed it seems that being a traditional dance teacher is like walking a thin line: at the same time trying to raise consciousness and spread right information but also market oneself and one's courses in a way that draws participants, which is often through the well-known imagery and the word traditional:

*Se tu fai dei corsi in qui sta scritto tradizionale, vengono di più, vengono più allievi, e quindi la parola tradizionale è diventata una buona pubblicità.*

If you do courses where it is written traditional, more pupils come, so the word traditional has turned out to be a good advertisement.

Eleonora

*La nostra tradizione vende molto, quindi cresce il marketing con la tradizione. Se uno dice che è una cosa del passato, antica, tradizionale, più è affascinante.*

Our tradition sells well, so the marketing with tradition increases. If one says it is an thing from the past, ancient, traditional, the more it is fascinating.

Marta

The dancers are clear about separating artistic interpretation from the realm of



traditional. Stage performances are perceived as artistic work, where one has the artistic freedom of expression. Many of my interviewees who are professional performers stressed that what they do as artists is not traditional but inspired by the tradition. The traditional is enacted in other contexts, especially the contexts of teaching as well as researching the still existing traditional expressions of dance, such as visiting elderly people, rituals and festivities. Most of my interviewees accounted for researching the dances in an anthropological manner visiting remote villages, interviewing and dancing with elderly people. Still, they stated to not be researchers, but artists.

Self-reflexivity about tradition is recurring in the interviews. My interviewees acknowledge the fluid processes of transformation and adaptation of tradition. Serena says that tradition is “a continuity in change, that means to find the red thread in the transformation” (*una continuità in mutamento, vuol dire trovare un filo rosso nella trasformazione*). The concept of tradition is though used in contradictory ways. Some of the dancers describe tradition as an unchangeable reality of the past that is inevitably getting lost while at the same time also positioning themselves as the continuators of that tradition. Anttonen (2005) says that tradition in modernity is always about interpretation, as “present definitions of the past are always influenced by past definitions of the past.”<sup>158</sup> This is especially true for the tarantella, which has been object of academic research and commodification processes for a long time, inevitably affecting it in various ways.

Teaching and dancing tarantella abroad brings about some different perspectives. Abroad, an Italian dancer easily becomes an authority, a representation of a perceived authentic Italian tradition. Abroad, exotization can be used as a way of marketing to a greater degree. Outside Italy, the people who are drawn to tarantella courses are mostly not aware of all the complexities of the history of southern Italy and the scholarly discourses surrounding tarantism. The attraction of the contemporary tarantella abroad is a recent phenomenon. World music and ethnic dance festivals and events host tarantella workshops. These recent evolutions are accounted for in celebratory terms.

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<sup>158</sup> Anttonen 2005, 107

Many of the dancers stretch the transcultural or even universal qualities of some elements of the tarantella, while at the same time wanting to be precise and well informed when claiming traditionality. Specific localized knowledge is valued high. There seems to exist different realms of working with traditional dance. There is the realm of the specific knowledge and skills: such as specific choreutic knowledge, the familiarity with local communities and their beliefs, traditions and customs, anthropological and sociopolitical consciousness. This knowledge is acquired through encountering and learning directly from so-called tradition bearers, from significant teachers and through anthropological research. Parallely, the dancers work artistically and experimentally inspired by these and other experiences, elaborate theatrical works dealing with tarantism, create new rituals and elaborate and blend knowledge of dance therapy and other healing methods with their dance teaching. Some of the dancers, such as Marta, who is also a dance therapist, see these two different realms as clearly distinct paths, while others may perceive them more as one path.

The discourse on authenticity versus artistic renewal is one of the major schisms in the contemporary debate on the popular music and dance.<sup>159</sup> Felicia Hughes-Freeland (2011) notes that authenticity is problematic in judging live cultural products, such as music and dance that are created in the moment. The dynamics of social change and processes of interaction are of considerable importance. The moment of being and creating is in a way always authentic.<sup>160</sup> Roberti Leydi (2001) says that what is believed "authentic" is always just a testimony of one step in the transformation, evolution and modification processes the tradition has gone through.<sup>161</sup> John Connell and Chris Gibson (2003) remind that tradition is a process rather than a thing, and that there is "no particular moment at which any culture somehow becomes inauthentic, in its incorporation of external elements, since society was and always is in flux".<sup>162</sup> Most importantly, the body is authentic beyond one's aspirations. No matter

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<sup>159</sup> Daboo 2010, 213, Pizza 2000, 215-6

<sup>160</sup> Hughes-Freeland 2011, 200-1

<sup>161</sup> Leydi 2001, 18

<sup>162</sup> Connell & Gibson 2003, 27

how traditional one wants to dance, a contemporary individual has a contemporary body:

*Se tu sei una persona cha ha lavorato nei campi quindici ore poi vai a ballare o hai sessant'anni e hai lavorato tutta la vita nei campi, è diverso che se lo ballo io, anche lo stesso passo, però che se lo ballo io.*

If you are person who has worked on the fields for fifteen hours and then go to dance, or if you are 60 years and you have worked in the fields for all your life, it is different than if I am dancing, even the same steps.

Eleonora

The ability to dance the pizzica in the traditional way is thus associated with the peasant way of life and the hardships of working the earth.<sup>163</sup> Today, the pizzica is frequently danced barefooted. The jumping, oscillating movements of the pizzica are perceived to embody a close relationship to the earth. *Terra* can mean both ground, earth as well as country and region. *Danzare la terra* is the name of one annual dance workshop and a dance school is named *Danza della terra*.<sup>164</sup> An environmental consciousness is frequently brought up in the interviews. Corruption and organized criminality has led to environmental disasters in many regions of southern Italy. One could say that the situation resembles the exploitation of the colonies' natural resources by the former colonial powers. Southern Italy has been exploited and the natural environment is in many areas destroyed, due to for example illegal waste dumping. The pizzica is connected to an increasing environmental consciousness. Dancing the pizzica today is perceived as recreating a closer relationship to nature.

Reinventions of tradition are often pursued with underlying political and economical intentions. The production and articulation of cultural identity is linked to social power and ways of inventing historical continuity. Cultural identity is always political identity, claims Anttonen (2005).<sup>165</sup> The revival of southern Italian popular music and dance is about an emerging cultural identity of empowerment connected to being southern Italian. This identity is embraced

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<sup>163</sup> Daboo 2011, 79

<sup>164</sup> see also Ferraiuolo, 2005, 133 concerning the tammurriata

<sup>165</sup> Anttonen 2005, 103

by many individuals with southern Italian origins living outside of southern Italy, in other parts of Italy as well as abroad. The identification to southern Italianness could be seen as a diaspora identification.<sup>166</sup>

My informants criticize the increasing competitiveness of the popular dance scene. Due to the rise of the dance schools, there are more people who know to dance. At festivals, dance groups perform and almost compete with other dance groups. Many of the dancers recall their youth in the 80s or 90s in the early days of the popular music revival, when no one knew how to dance, but the occasions of dancing were at best spontaneous, joyful and intergenerational. These qualities are seen as part of the ideal realm of popular dancing.

The commodification and commercialization of popular music and dance is criticized. Some of my informants show more understanding for it than others. The Salentine dancers say that they are happy that the pizzica boom has brought more tourism, thus economic growth to their home region. Without events like *La Notte della Taranta*, a lot of Italians would never have heard about the pizzica. Some of the dancers keep distance from such events, which they perceive as superficial. They criticize interpretations of the pizzica made by famous dancers who don't have a background in or knowledge of the tradition.

### 5.5.1 Representations of femininity: conformity and resistance

The tarantella that one easily encounters is a flirting couple dance. The dancers criticize that the tarantella has come to be perceived as only a *danza di corteggiamento*, a dance of courtship or flirting:

*Mi sono arrabbiata quando ho visto quello che facevano a Roma, e perché li sentivo tanto tanto lontano da quella che era la nostra storia (...) hanno sofferto tantissimo (...) venivano decise a loro il marito, non decidevano mai niente, capito. E allora si può pensare che nella danza sono tutte così ammaliatrici. È proprio contrario!*

I got angry when I saw what they were doing in Rome, because I felt it was so far from what our history was. (...) they suffered so much (...)

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<sup>166</sup> Brubaker 2005

their husbands were decided for them, they couldn't decide anything, you understand. And then you imagine that in the dance they are all that kind of charmers. It is really the opposite!

Marta

In the past, it was very rare that a woman would dance the pizzica with an unknown man. Today, there is a dissonant contest around the female body in the popular dance movement. On one hand, the tarantella is perceived as a dance of liberation. The tarantella is about coming together, dancing together. Skill and appearance are of secondary importance. In the popular dances, women and men of all ages find a way to express themselves, many of my interviewees say. During my field trips, two women told me that because of their physical appearance, they had been turned away from other dance contexts. In the context of southern Italian popular dance, they had found acceptance. At its best, the tarantella thus offers acceptance and alternative ways of perceiving one's body beyond the western beauty ideals. The same notion has been made in studies on other ethnic dances.<sup>167</sup>

*La danza accademica sacrifica la donna, perché chiede la pancia dentro, il culo, il petto così eh, invece la donna è donna, perché è un'amfora, (La danza popolare) accoglie qua, quindi, la danza si centra tutto qua, quindi la donna grassa, alta, magra, piccola, bella e brutta con la danza popolare ha trovato una capacità di esprimersi. E questo è la grande libertà. Finalmente, finalmente! Ovviamente però con un po' di codici. Non esaltiamo troppo perché becchiamo d'isterismo, di stregoneria, di cazzate di patriarcato. Siamo facilmente criticabili. Non perché non dovremo essere criticabili, però entriamo nei cliché, che non ci rappresentano più.*

The ballet sacrifices the woman, because it demands the belly inside, the buttocks, the breasts like this, but the woman is woman, because she is an amphora. (The popular dance) welcomes, opens up here, so the dance centers all around here, so in the popular dance, the fat, tall, thin, small, beautiful and ugly woman has found a capacity to express herself. And this is the huge freedom, at last! Obviously though with some codes. Let us not exaggerate too much, so they can blame us for hysteria, witchcraft, this crap of patriarchy. We are easily criticized. Not that we shouldn't be criticized, but we enter into clichés, that don't represent us anymore.

Arianna

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<sup>167</sup> Siljamäki 2013, 98

Arianna depicts the popular dance as a realm of freedom of expression, a realm of expressing the embodied 'real' femininity. It is clear that the field of tarantella is a very contested space for women, if references to phenomena such as hysteria and witchcraft are used as ways of offending the dancers. This reveals the cultural memory of shame connected to tarantism, accounted for previously. Arianna says that her tarantella is a dance of resistance, which can be understood in various ways, such as resistance towards the commodification of the tarantella into entertainment.

The performance field of popular dance is perceived as highly appearance-centered. Many of the dancers lament that popular dance is represented superficially on stage. The seductive appearance of very beautiful young dancers is the image of the dance that festival and event organizers often promote, excluding professional dancers. In this way, the dance becomes an appearance-centered realm of performance:

*Vedo anche le foto che le nuove danzatrici fanno, si proprio allineano con l'immagine allitterante che la società adesso vuole per la donna.*

In the photos that the new dancers make of themselves, they really align with alliterating image of what society wants the women to be.

Chiara

Many of my interviewees lament that Italy is a chauvinist society. They say that the media represents the female body as a mere object of desire of men. This imagery of women as sexual objects is prevalent in Italian television. The emphasis on physical attractiveness is high. The aspiration for physical perfection perceived as the principal prerequisite for success is corrupting young women in Italy, says one of my interviewees.<sup>168</sup> The issue is highly intertwined into the contest of left and right politics in Italy, since Berlusconi has had a strong hold of Italy's TV channels the last 20 years.

At the same time, the dancers have experienced a discrepancy in the expectations on traditional music and dance. The musicians are allowed artistic experimentation, while the dancers are expected to dance traditionally:

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<sup>168</sup> Lorella Zanardo's film: *Il Corpo delle Donne*

*Sulla musica per diverse ragioni viene permessa una contaminazione. Forse il fatto che la danza mette in gioco un corpo, e mette in gioco un corpo soprattutto femminile, invece viene scagliata tutta la rigidità dell'idea della tradizione ma con dei paradossi incredibili. C'è ancora anche io a me stesso mi sento dire "balla tradizionale". Ma balla tradizionale dove? Su un palco di sei metri con le luci, con uno spettacolo da fare, con la batteria al posto del tamburello, con i ritmi che sono molto più veloci, con un pubblico che ha pagato perché ti vuole vedere. E io devo ballare come se ballo con la tua nonna? È un paradosso, no?*

The music is allowed contamination. Maybe because the dance brings into play a body, particularly a female body, instead is charged with the idea of a rigid tradition, but with incredible paradoxes. Still I hear those who ask me to "dance traditionally". But to dance traditionally where? On a six-meter stage with lights, with a show to do, with drums instead of the frame drum, with much faster rhythms, with an audience that has paid to come and see you. And I have to dance like I would dance with your grandma? It is a paradox, isn't it?

Eleonora

The claim of traditionality is imposed on female dancers more than on male musicians. The dancers have to fight for their right to artistic independence. This original purpose of the pizzica, to heal with dance, is referred to in a way to claim a better status for the dance:

*Se un concerto funziona, funziona perché ci sono le persone che danzano. Se la gente che guarda il concerto no se move, vuol dire che la musica non funziona. Punto. Ti puoi fare tutti i trip mentali, di essere una grande tamburellista, di essere una grande percussionista esecutore di fare un sacco di cose sul tamburello, ma (...) se i danzatori non se godulane, allora vuol dire che non c'è il flusso. E tra l'altro, questa musica è nata per scazzicare, no, così si dice in dialetto, cioè per stimolare perché in particolare la pizzica è una musica terapeutica. Cioè serviva per far danzare le persone, per far guarire le persone, quindi se a volte l'utilità è quella della guarigione, della cura diciamo, non è detto che una guarisca attenzione, però della cura, allora la sua funzione rimane quello, quindi la musica serve per la danza.*

If a concert works, it works because the people dance. If the people who watch the concert don't move, it means that the music doesn't work. Period. You can do all kinds of mental trips, to be a great drummer, to be a great percussionist who can do a lot things with the frame drum, but if (...) the dancers don't enjoy themselves, it means that there is no flow. Among other things, this music was born to stimulate. Especially the

pizzica is a therapeutic music. Its function was to make people dance, to heal, so if sometimes the usefulness was healing, lets say the cure, it is not said that one heals, though. But the function remains the same, so the music serves for the dance.

Arianna

Women constitute the majority of dancers on the piazzas, but most cultural activists are men, Del Giudice noted in 2000.<sup>169</sup> According to my interviewees, the situation is much the same still. Some of my interviewees have founded dance associations. These associations are guided by women and dancers and they organize courses, workshops, performances, and struggle for and promote the appreciation of the dance.

Some of the interviewees tell about repeated experiences of being mistreated by festival and event organizers. One of the dancers even says that the musicians are the biggest enemy of the development of the popular dance. The musicians gain artistic recognition and they are allowed an artistic freedom, while dancers are not treated as artists, but at times as mere beautiful appearance on stage. One of the dancers asked to speak at a seminar about the popular music, but she was told that dance is insignificant. The tarantella dance is a women's' culture, thus, according to one of my interviewees, perceived even as dangerous:

*La tarantella fa paura. Fa paura perché sono tante donne, fa paura perché è una danza di liberazione. Quindi se uno è (...) maschilista e ignorante, ma così. Hai istinto, la tarantella non piace, da fastidio, perché è una potenza forte, no. È una cosa che cambia, non ti lascia indifferente. Quindi perciò di dicevo prima è una battaglia, è una guerra.*

The tarantella scares people. It scares because there are many women, it scares because it is a dance of liberation. So if someone is an (...) uneducated male chauvinist, he instinctively doesn't like the tarantella, because it is a strong power, no. It changes something, it doesn't leave you indifferent. So that is why I said that it is a battle, a war.

Lucia

The subaltern position of the women in past societies is reflected in the dance movements of some tarantellas. The most traditional ways of dancing the

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<sup>169</sup> Del Giudice 2000, 251



pizzica and the tarantella calabrese are very contained, with small, delicate movements. In the tarantella calabrese, the woman is not even allowed to look directly at her dance partner. Some of the traditional tammurriatas are instead very sensual and erotic. The traditional qualities of dancing are embraced by the dancers as ways of approaching, understanding and respecting the past. The dancers who teach the most traditional way of dancing show the greatest disapproval towards the contemporary evolutions of the pizzica into an openly seductive dance. Other dancers take a more ambivalent stance. As dancing is a means of communication, women today express in their dance what they are and what they feel and that is how it should be, one dancer says. Claudia says that she teaches her pupils to take different positions, to dance traditionally as well as ways how one can dance today. When dancing with an elderly person, it is important to show respect for their way of dancing and adapt to that.

The issue of the female body and what and how a woman can express herself, especially publicly or on stage, is ambivalent. At the same time as many of the dancers are claiming to fight against the depreciation of female dancers and for the artistic and economical freedom of women, the different stances towards the right way of working with tradition generates conflictuality, leading to the condemnation of other female dancers' work. Acknowledging different contexts of dancing and following the appropriate ways of performing dance in each of the contexts is seen as crucial. In the closed sphere of workshops or in private contexts one is able to experiment with the dance more freely, while on public occasions and performance stages, the discourse of what is traditional dance and the expectations on how women should present themselves publicly determine the way one is allowed perform. In Italy, the demands on women to be feminine and sensual are at least in my experience very strong compared to the Nordic countries. This is reflected in the popular dance movement as well. The resistance towards the appearance-centered media representations of women is an important issue for some of my interviewees. Maria says that in her artistic exploration of the tarantella, she wants to show the beauty, the seductiveness and joy but also the anger, rage, resistance, imperfection and hesitation. Arianna says that her pizzica is a dance of resistance, a resistance towards the contemporary over-accentuation of seductiveness.

Understanding women's roles of the past is indeed essential when learning the tarantella, the interviewees maintain. But the positions differ on the extent in which one as a dancer should conform or transcend the traditional movement qualities and gender roles. Julie Taylor (2001) describes the reinforcing and contesting of gender roles in the tango scene in Buenos Aires in the 90s, such as if a woman takes the lead, is it then tango at all?<sup>170</sup> Similar discourses arise in the context of the tarantella. Maintaining a contained movement quality can be understood as respectful towards tradition. The discourse of appropriate ways of dancing the tarantella in relation to women's roles today is unfortunately easily becoming counterproductive, when female dancers criticize other female dancers' work and way of dancing. Some of the dancers say that there is need for female solidarity instead of rivalry.

### 5.5.2 Tarantism on stage?

The concept of respect is frequently taken into discussion in the interviews. The dancers show depreciation to dancers who 'don't have respect'. The disrespectfulness can be understood to be towards the dance, towards the past, towards the traditions or towards southern Italy. To do the tarantella without respect can take different expressions.

The imitation of trance on stage is perceived as particularly disrespectful. The representation of tarantism has become commodified in stage performances to the extent of turning into superficial, cliché-like imaginaries of seducing women 'out of control'. Tarantism cannot be imitated, many of the dancers maintain. Behind this lies the perception of trance as a profound, transforming experience. Experiencing the trance that the possessed victim of tarantism was experiencing is seen as inaccessible for a contemporary individual. Imitating trance on stage is seen as disrespectful of the suffering and powerlessness connected to tarantism in the past.<sup>171</sup> One dancer wonders if it is because

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<sup>170</sup> Taylor 2001, 83-87

<sup>171</sup> see also Pizza 2000, 201

tarantism was a prevalently female phenomenon that it is nowadays vulgarized to such a degree. Other dancers say that they avoid dealing with tarantism:

*Il tarantismo, non lo tocco proprio. Nei miei spettacoli non lo considero proprio perché non è una parte che mi interessa, di meno portare alla gente. Era un fenomeno di dolore e lasciamo che rimanga lì.*

I don't touch tarantism. In my performances, I don't really consider it because it doesn't interest me, even less to bring to the people. It was a phenomenon of suffering and let us leave it there.

Claudia

At the same time, the issue of healing through dance and music is like an unanswered question, as one of my interviewees expresses it, which continues to trigger therapeutic, artistic and ritual experimentations. Possession trance and tarantism's experience of loss of presence, to come back to the central concept of Ernesto De Martino, can indeed be explored. Many of the dancers have worked with possession trance in somatic, experimental ways in closed workshop spaces. The scope for this kind of work may be to come in contact with the past, to heal, gain consciousness of the past and ones' place in the history, as well as to create a performance. Presenting instead of re-presenting is seen as something distinct for ritual performance.<sup>172</sup> The sphere of public representation of this work is though a delicate question in Italy. One dancer says that what counts is the intention behind these kind of representations. If the intention is respectful, then it goes well. Outside of Italy, it might be easier to present this kind of work as pure artistic exploration, without the risk of evoking the viewers' memories of past realities of domination and suffering and the socio-economical realities connected with it.

## 5.6 Southern Italy and beyond: intercultural understandings

Even though the dancers are criticizing the contemporary revival's aspects of commercialization, competitiveness and commodification, the broadening of interest towards the music and dance of southern Italy is appraised. For the first

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<sup>172</sup> Daboo 2010, 52

time after the unification of Italy, one dancer says, the south is seen as something culturally rich:

*Noi, identità nostra, l'abbiamo persa, c'è, abbiamo perso noi, cosa stiamo facendo al Meeting del Tamburello?(...) Stiamo cercando di raccogliere come veramente uno filo di erba nel deserto totale. Solo questo ma è già tanto! È già tanto, ragazzi, perché vuol dire che è rimasto un umus di base che fa sì che donne francesi e uomini francesi spagnoli americane del nord Italia e del sud Italia si riappassionino a questa storia. È una rivoluzione culturale.*

We have lost our identity, we have lost it, so what are we doing here at Meeting del Tamburello? (...) We are trying to pick up like a blade of grass in a complete desert. Only that but it is already a lot! It is a lot, because it means that there has remained a fertile ground, that does that French women and men, Spaniards, Americans, northern and southern Italians get passionate about this history again. It is a cultural revolution.  
Arianna

It has become 'cool' to be southern Italian and to speak the southern dialect, at least for the young generation. Following the revival of popular music and dance, many northern Italians are drawn to southern Italy during their vacations.

*Io credo che noi siamo fortunati, è un bel momento per il Salento, che mi piace che la nostra musica gira per tutto il mondo, la nostra danza. Io credo, io sono molto contenta di trovarmi in questo movimento. Almeno sai, i nostri vecchi hanno fatto la guerra, ma io ho fatto la pizzica, noi abbiamo fatto il movimento della pizzica pizzica!*

I think that we are fortunate, it is a good moment for Salento, I like that our music and our dances tour the whole world. I believe, I am very happy to find myself in this movement. At least you know, our elders have fought in the war, but I have done the pizzica, we have made the movement of pizzica pizzica!

Marta

The notion that dance skill is innate is related to ethnic dances. The concept of 'the rhythm in the blood' was expressed by many inside the dance and music movement of the pizzica, according to some earlier studies.<sup>173</sup> According to this belief, the ability to dance, in these cases the pizzica, is attributed to solely

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<sup>173</sup> Daboo 2011, 218, Pizza 2002, 49 and Lüdtkke 2009, 15.

salentines. Ten years later, interviewing dancers from another, perhaps more cosmopolite generation, this viewpoint seems to not be supported anymore. Without bringing the question up, several of my interviewees explicitly denied the innateness, stressing instead the universal quality of the tarantella, mentioning northern Italian or foreign dancers who are excellent dancers. The viewpoint of the tarantella as exclusive seems to prevail as my interviewees felt the need to express their opposition to it.

*Se uno trova la scintilla dentro non è importante se sei bolognese, sei pugliese (...) non è un diritto d'appartenenza la tarantella. Se uno ce l'ha dentro lo può fare.*

If you find the spark inside it is not important if you are from Bologna, from Puglia(..) The tarantella is not a birthright. If you have it inside, you can do it.

Claudia

Enhancing the dance not as a culture-bound but as a universal practice is perceived as a way to increase the appreciation of the tarantella as an art form. Many of my interviewees maintain that an ethnic dance has to gain recognition as an art form in order to survive in a globalized world. Eleonora wishes that the tarantella will transform into a globally acknowledged artistic dance tradition, following the evolution of flamenco and tango.

Many of the dancers I interviewed are dancing and teaching other ethnic dances than the tarantella, such as afro dance, Indian dance and oriental dance. Most of my informants also teach the tarantella abroad. I will look at the ways in which the tarantella is connected to an intercultural awareness. Yvonne Daniel (2005) says in her study on Afro-American possession dances: "Dancing is a way to understand and perceive the human condition. Through dance, one can get to know another cultural value system."<sup>174</sup> The relationship between dancing and cultural awareness is often brought up:

*Che linguaggio incredibile, la danza. Ti parla e parli attraverso di lei. Ti apre nuove porte che pensavi non potessero mai aprirsi e se ne chiudono altre. In un momento mi fa sentire figlia del mio Sud, in un altro mi fa*

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<sup>174</sup> Daniel 2005, 267

*sentire indiana. E poi all' improvviso scopro di essere anche africana. La danza ti fa viaggiare anche stando a provare in una sala. Ti fa fare nuovi incontri. Ti consente di conoscere qualcuno che ha sempre qualcosa di nuovo da insegnarti e da cui molto imparare. Ma soprattutto mi permette di esserci. Di provare la bellezza di essere su questo mondo.*

The dance is an incredible language. It speaks to you and through you. It opens new doors for you that thought that would never open and it closes others. In one moment it makes me feel daughter of my South, in another it makes me feel Indian. The suddenly I discover that I am African too. The dance makes you travel also when you are rehearsing in a room. It brings you new encounters. It enables you to get to know someone who always has something new to teach you and from whom you can learn a lot. But above all it lets me be here. To feel the beauty of being in this world.

Federica<sup>175</sup>

Federica describes the multiple cultural identifications that dancing allows her to experience. This brings about a richness of experiences, gratitude and sense of presence. The initial trigger to explore the southern Italian dances has for some of the dancers been the encounter with traditional dances of other cultures. The pizzica and tarantella might at first also have been experienced as exotic. Encounters with otherness, be it either the forgotten traditions of ones' own past or traditional dances and music in other countries, is something frequently accounted for. Arianna says she learned the tarantella in Maghreb. Living and staying in families in Tunisia and Morocco as part of an European cultural exchange programme, she witnessed communities where the traditional music and dance were still integral parts of social life. In Maghreb, she realized what it is to know one's culture and she started to imagine what role the tarantella had played in the lives of her grandparents:

*Ho cercato di ricostruire la mia storia guardando quella degli altri. La maghrebina, araba, anche un po' quella spagnola del flamenco (...)  
Guardando intorno del mediterraneo, ho cercato di ricostruire pezzo a pezzo, come la mia visione, la mia comprensione della storia della mia danza.*

I have tried to reconstruct my history looking at the history of others. The history of Maghreb, the Arab history, and also a bit that of the Spanish flamenco. (...) Looking around the Mediterranean, I have tried to

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<sup>175</sup> from Federica's facebook page 8.5.2014

reconstruct piece by piece my vision, my understanding of the history of my dance.

Arianna

Arianna says that in Maghreb, the women spent most of their time inside their homes, but dancing, singing and playing music were part of daily life. Arianna perceived this possibility to artistic expression as a profound freedom, that western women lack:

*Però intanto siamo dei grandi artisti, abbiamo questo, questa come dire, capacità, diritto di danzare. La danza, la musica, il canto sono proprietà nostra. Cioè noi dovremmo essere capaci di (...). L'uomo occidentale, l'uomo occidentale ha dimenticato questo.*

We are great artists, we have this how to say the capacity, right to dance. Dancing, music and singing belong to us. So we should be able to (...) The western man has forgot this.

Arianna

The interrelated learning processes of different dances and cultural embodied ways of expression are at best enriching each other. Through years of practice, the dance becomes part of ones' embodied knowledge. A dance tradition, which has become part of everyday life through practice, is hardly seen as a representation of an exotic other, according to Mariana (2013).<sup>176</sup> Trullson (2010) writes that dancers that practice different dances carry qualities of different traditions within themselves.<sup>177</sup> From this perspective, dancing can function as a means to decrease intolerance. Many of the dancers encourage their pupils to study other dances from the Mediterranean region, such as flamenco, African and Oriental dance, and couple dances, such as the tango. Engagement to multiple practices and traditions is regarded positively, and is seen to enrich the practice of the tarantella.

The importance of acknowledging one's own roots is also accentuated. Federica stretches the importance of finding one's cultural identity. She perceives that a

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<sup>176</sup> Siljamäki 2013, 103

<sup>177</sup> Trullson 2010, 386

constructive encounter between different people is possible only when one is able to express ones' own cultural identity:

*Solo sapendo chi siamo possiamo andare dove vogliamo. Possiamo andare verso l'altro e comprenderlo, perché nel dialogo è importante lo scambio per la conoscenza, solo scoprendo il grande tesoro che siamo, le nostre radici, possiamo parlare della nostra terra. Aprire un dialogo, lo scambio, senza riuscire ad esprimere la propria identità perché la si è sempre ignorata, senza saper parlare anche di noi, non si apre il positivo confronto. Amate la vostra terra. Scavatela, cercate voi stessi, la vostra storia. Solo sapendo chi siamo potremo accettare e convivere insieme.*

Only by knowing who we are, we can go where we want. We can go towards the other and understand him, because in the dialogue it is important that we exchange knowledge, only discovering the great treasure that we are, our roots, we can talk about our land. To open up a dialogue, an exchange without being able to express ones' own identity because it has always been ignored, without being able to talk about oneself too, the positive encounter doesn't happen. Love your land. Dig it, look for yourself, your history. Only knowing who we are, we can accept and live together with others.

Federica<sup>178</sup>

In the contemporary world, individuals may feel a belonging to different places, countries and communities at the same time. George Marcus (1992) notes that worldwide integration does not lead to an "easily comprehensible totality, but to an increasing diversity of connections among phenomena once thought disparate and worlds apart."<sup>179</sup> The processes of reviving traditions are nowadays characterized by the taking in of influences from other cultural contexts.<sup>180</sup> Dancing can be perceived as transcending an imposed cultural identity. Elena's father is African and her mother is Italian. In dance, she found a space where she didn't need to choose her identity as either Italian or African:

*Mi ricordo la terza lezione di flamenco, c'era una canzone di una gitana che cantava "yo no tengo patria" io non ho patria. Io facevo questo esercizio con questa musica, ho avuto una (...) illuminazione. Da quel giorno ho capito, in quel momento nella prima volta nella mia vita, avevo ventitre anni, io mi sono sentita al mio posto, mi sono sentita che non dovevo*

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<sup>178</sup> From Federica's facebook page, status update 2.5.2014

<sup>179</sup> Marcus 1992, 321

<sup>180</sup> Siikala 2000, 81



*spiegare più a nessuno da dove vengo, da dove non vengo, spiegare la mia identità. Ero centrata. In quel momento mi sentivo bene. Mi sentivo perfettamente in quel luogo. E quel luogo era il terzo luogo, non era l'Africa, non era l'Italia, non ero bianca non ero nera, ma era la terza via, e quello terza via mi ha portato a fare questo mestiere.*

I remember the third lesson of flamenco, there was a song of a gypsy who sang “yo no tengo patria” I don’t have a homeland. I made this exercise with the music, and I had an illumination. From that day on I understood for the first time in my life, in that moment, I was 23, I felt like being in the right place, I felt like I don’t need to explain to anyone where I come from, where I am not from, to explain my identity. I was centered. In that moment, I felt good. I felt perfectly in that place. And that place was the third space, it wasn’t Africa, it wasn’t Italy, I wasn’t black, I wasn’t white, but it was the third way, and that third way led me to this profession.

Elena

Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings about mestiza consciousness (1987) resonate with Elena’s experiences. When one is straddling between of two or more cultures, in Anzaldúa’s context Mexico and United States, there is a potential of creating a new culture, a culture with a consciousness of inclusion and tolerance for ambiguity and contradictions.<sup>181</sup> Elena dedicated many years to researching the tammurriata dances, music and rituals of Campania. That led her to discover the bond between African music and dances and the music and dances of southern Italy. One of her artistic projects is to unite African dances with the dances of Southern Italy, holding workshops called tammurriata nera. Tammurriata nera refers to the famous Neapolitan song from 1944, which tells about a young woman giving birth to a dark-skinned baby, whose father was an African-American soldier.

The migration experience often created the motivation to discover one’s cultural roots. Migration represents a rupture between past and present.<sup>182</sup> Marta’s parents migrated from southern Italy to the North and she was raised near Milan. Marta considers her double insider and outsider status as an advantage when teaching dance:

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<sup>181</sup> Anzaldúa 1987, 101-2

<sup>182</sup> Anttonen 2005, 121, quoting Appadurai 1996, 121

*Io penso, io ritengo che, con una storia così di essere un ponte. Allora mi dicono che sono brava d'insegnare, mi dicono. Io credo di essere brava d'insegnare per quello motivo, capito no, perché stando nella tradizione ma stando fuori anche, la riesco a tradurre.*

I think, I believe that with a story like this to be a bridge. They say me I am a good teacher, they say. I believe to be a good teacher because of this, you understand, because being inside the tradition but also outside, I manage to translate it.

Marta

## 5.7 Perceptions of ritual

In religious studies, dance is understood as a ritual when it aims at transformation or healing.<sup>183</sup> Researchers have tended to distinguish between healing or religious rituals and recreational festivities. These distinctions are based on the Western body/mind and sacred/profane conceptual separations. In the narratives, tarantella as entertainment is contrasted to tarantella as ritual. Many of the interviewees lament that people perceive the traditional dances as mere entertainment.

Rituality is perceived by many of the dancers as an essential, inherent quality of the tarantella. Ritual is perceived to be the origin of the tarantella. Words like ritual, rite and rituality are frequently mentioned in the interviews. The concept of ritual is linked to the social and communicative aspects of the dance. Quite interestingly, ritual in this context is not necessarily intended to ascribe anything beyond the sphere of social, shared dancing. Ritual is not necessarily linked to religious or spiritual meanings but to the practice of dancing together. The aspect of dance as communication is perceived to constitute the rituality of the tarantella. This resonates with Bells' (1997) ritual theory, according to which ritual is not an expression of belief. Ritualization is to engage in embodied practices to achieve an altered state of consciousness.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Daboo 183, Ehrenreich 2006, 18-19

<sup>184</sup> Bell 1997, Trullson 2010, 391

Performing and teaching are seen as the contemporary means to do the tarantella, as well as for many of my interviewees, the way to make a living. Some of these dancers said that they long for their youth when they were dancing spontaneously all the time, and their dancing was not connected to earning money. The ideal context of dancing is by most of the dancers explicitly expressed to be the informal, social context, the spontaneous occasions of dance.

The word ritual is charged with positive meanings. The understanding of ritual by many of the dancers is grounded on Ernesto De Martino's accounts of tarantism and studies in anthropology. The interviewees were all familiar with the anthropological understandings of ritual, many of them much more than I am. Some of the discussions during the interviews on ritual were significantly increasing my understanding of the scholarly conceptualizations of ritual. My informants' awareness of how ritual is understood in academic research is intertwined with their personal, embodied experiences of dancing. Academic knowledge and actual practice are mutually affecting each other: the knowledge affects experiences, and the experiences make the understanding evolve. Trullson (2012) notes that in the contemporary world, anthropological works on ritual are often used as sources for ritual creativity.<sup>185</sup>

The interviewees talk about ritual in connection to the tarantella without referring to tarantism. Frequently the word ritual is used to describe the dancing as a shared experience. Ritual is understood as the creation of a space of meaningfulness. The perceptions of ritual and tradition are interconnected:

*Nel Salento, la ritualità che era la tipica dei momenti di danza tradizionale è andata perduta. In Salento sì, (...) c'è stato questo periodo di nulla, di rimozione. Questa generazione quarantenne, si è persa la motivazione del rito no, la danza e la musica erano funzionali a un certo contesto sociale che si è perso, quindi il rito cambia. Perché il contesto rurale, popolare, contadino non c'è più. Quindi il rito diciamo si trasforma per i nuovi contesti.*

The rituality in Salento that was typical of the moments of traditional dancing is lost. In Salento, there was this period of nothing, of

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<sup>185</sup> Trullson 2010, 64

removal. The generation forty, it lost the motivation of the ritual, no, the dance and music that were functional to a certain social context was lost, so the the ritual changes. Because the rural, popular, peasant context doesn't exist anymore. Therefore the ritual lets say changes for the new contexts.

Chiara

Ritual are bound to their sociocultural contexts. When the peasant lifestyle is left behind, the rituals either disappear or change. In the context of Salento, Chiara perceives that there has happened a transformation of ritual. Many of my interviewees have witnessed traditional dance rituals and devotion rituals in rural contexts in Italy and elsewhere. Elena accounts for the traditional Easter devotion rituals she has witnessed in Campania:

*In Campania, non è mai finita. In Campania quando vai a Pasqua, alla Settimana Santa, ci sono i rituali veri (...) In Campania, è l'unico posto dove entrano in chiesa con i tamburi e cantano alla Madonna siccome fossero la loro amante, la loro donna. È la loro amante, la loro madre, la loro figlia. Carnalmente. Questo è un culto pagano.*

Elena

In Campania, it never ceased. When you go at Easter week to Campania, there are real rituals. (...) Campania is the only place where they enter the church with the frame drums and sing to the Madonna as she would be their lover, their woman. She is their lover, their mother, their daughter. Carnally. This is pagan cult.

Elena

Elena situates this devotional tammurriata ritual as a pagan and 'real' ritual, opposed to the contemporary practices of tarantella, that according to Elena are characterized by commodification and false claims of authenticity. One of my informants claim that the way to recover the traditional pizzica is through rediscovering its rituality. Some of the dancers are exploring the ritual dimensions of the tarantella in performances and workshops. I heard accounts from some participants of Arianna's workshop, who told that they were not learning any dance steps. I asked Arianna to tell about her approach:

*Io non insegno i passi. Io voglio che loro facciano i passi loro che sono sempre quelli, però voglio che vengano dalla loro esigenza, (...) Io li*

*conduco un viaggio, un viaggio dove loro possono trovare un loro spazio in questa storia.*

I don't teach the steps. I want that they do their own steps that are always the same, but I want that they come out from their exigency, (...) I guide them on a journey, a journey where they can find their place in this history.

Arianna

Even if Arianna is not teaching the steps of the pizzica in the workshop, following the pizzica rhythm is the prerequisite. Arianna says that discovering the ritual of the tarantella is about entering into its history. The ritualization of the tarantella happens through entering into a particular state of consciousness or emotions. This ritualization process is, according Arianna, essentially about going beyond the pizzica or the tarantella, but to dance 'the earth's dance'. Eleonora accounts for similar experiences of not learning steps during a yearlong course of dance therapy based on tarantism:

*Lei è stata fantastica perché non è mai partita dei passi. (...) Ci faceva fare tutto una serie di esercizi di lavoro sulle emozioni, di lavoro sul rituale che ci faceva portare determinati emozioni e poi ci faceva ballare. (...) Verso il fine del anno, io ho notato insieme a lei che a noi tutti stavano uscendo i passi che erano quelli, ma senza che lei ci ne aveva insegnati.*

She (the teacher) was fantastic because she never started with the steps. (...) She made us do series of working on emotions, on ritual that brought us certain emotions, and then she made us dance. (...) At the end of the year, I noticed together with her that all of us were dancing those steps, but she had not taught them to us.

Eleonora

I heard several stories of specific occasions of dancing the tarantella when 'things started to happen'. These occasions were characterized by strong, shared emotions, experiences of a transformation and healing, and strange coincidences. Usually these occurred in the closed workshop spaces, where they were also intentionally pursued. I heard accounts of that the dance has cured illnesses. Some dancers even claimed that dancing has saved their life.

I will account for an experience during my field research in May 2013. In a dance workshop, we were rehearsing for the final performance that was going to be performed at the festivals' closing evening. We were going through one of the last rehearsals of the piece we had worked on for three days. During the rehearsal, all the participants in the workshop, around ten women were dancing in a circle to the tunes of Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino's piece 'E chorà tu anemu'. Two women entered to dance in the middle, swirling around together, one of them holding the other. One moment the one who was held, started to cry. Suddenly I saw tears in all the other dancers' eyes. I realized that everyone was crying and me too. We concluded the dance rehearsal. The feeling that we had experienced something deeply moving together lingered around the group. The next day during the interview with Lucia I asked about what had happened.

*Io non lo so, ma è una cosa che succede spesso, proprio spesso. Che le persone fanno questa cosa che è un po' liberazione. E quello è proprio la tarantella, non lo so spiegare a parole, l'ho visto succedere tante volte, e non lo so, non lo so. Perché succede non lo voglio manco spiegare con le parole perché è una forza oscura veramente che passa e non si sa. (...) Io penso che forse un po' perché svegliamo qualcosa di ancestrale, qualcosa di proprio lontano lontano lontano lontano lontano. È un ricordo così potente che ci fa piangere.*

I don't know, but it is something that happens often, really often. The people who do this, it is a rite, and they feel bad but not bad. I think that in yesterday's crying there was some pain and some liberation. And this is really the tarantella, I can't explain it with words, I have seen it happen many times, and I don't know, I don't know. I don't even want to explain why it happens because it is a dark force that passes and you don't know. (...) Maybe it is because we wake up something ancestral, something from far, far, far back. It is memory that is so strong that it makes us cry.

Lucia

In my interpretation, Lucia understands the tarantella as bringing forward, on both a symbolic and embodied level, the memory of a marginalized, silenced voice of the past into the present, re-elaborating the oppression echoed in the dance in the present. The embodied memory arising in the moment connects the past and the present, but is difficult to verbalize.<sup>186</sup> Huyssen, (2003) says: "the function of public memory discourses is to allow individuals to break out of

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<sup>186</sup> see also Ylönen 2003, 60

traumatic repetitions. “Creative practices are important contributions to this process<sup>187</sup>. I think this is one key point of understanding the ritual dimension of the tarantella.

The ritual aspects of tarantella are acknowledged by my interviews, though approached in different ways. Some have more clearly an artistic or tradition-focused approach, while others are working with the tarantella in more experiential ways, often theatrically. The different approaches are not contradictory, but seem to blend into each other. However, many of the dancers experience their dance practice as a transformative tool of self-expression.<sup>188</sup>

In this chapter, I have made an attempt to approach tarantella as a way of re-ritualizing. I perceive that my understanding of tarantella as ritual is rather incomplete, as it is grounded on second-hand accounts of my interviewees and other people I met during my field research. Trullson claims that in contemporary ritualization, experience is seen as the path to authentic knowledge, experimentation and play are regarded essential, and the body is perceived as a locus of spirituality.<sup>189</sup> These characteristics are present in my research material, but how widespread these understandings are, I cannot say.

## 5.8 Dancing, healing and wellbeing

In this chapter I intend to present my interviewees’ perceptions of dance and healing. I come back to some of the understandings presented earlier but here my main aim is to analyze my interviewees’ accounts of how the tarantella relates to wellbeing. Lucia describes the tarantella practice from an embodied perspective:

*La tarantella interviene come tutte le danze di possessione del bacino mediterraneo sui dei punti precisi del corpo. Nella cultura orientale sono chakra, punti di energia del corpo, che sono simili a tutte le danze di possessione, tutte le danze rituali, del Bali, dell’Africa, del Maghreb, (...),*

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<sup>187</sup> Huyssen 2003, 9

<sup>188</sup> see also Lüdtkke 2005, 51

<sup>189</sup> Trullson 2012, 397

*quindi c'è un linguaggio comune. C'è un linguaggio che permette al corpo di riciclare l'energia negativa. Il processo della tarantella è questo. C'è il pensiero triste, lo ballo, dopo sto meglio. (...) È un riciclo di energia che tu fai insieme alla musica, ma soprattutto insieme alla gente. Per ciò ieri dicevo che la tarantella è un atto politico, perché ricorda alla gente che si può stare insieme, semplicemente accettandosi. Non c'è chissà che cosa, misteriosa dietro. È una semplice accettazione. È una danza democratica, sono tutti in cerchio, e nessuno è più importante dell'altro.*

As all the possession dances of the Mediterranean, the tarantella intervenes on precise points of the body. In the oriental cultural there are the chakra, energy points of the body, that are similar to all possession dances and the ritual dances from Bali, from Africa, from Maghreb (...) so it is a common language. It is a language that allows the body to recycle negative energies. The process of the tarantella is this. There is the sad thought, I dance it and afterwards I feel better. (...) It is recycling of energy that you do together with the music, but especially together with the people. Because of that, I said yesterday that the tarantella is a political act, because it reminds people that you can be together, simply accepting each other. There is nothing who knows what mysterious behind. It is a simple acceptance. It is a democratic dance, everyone is in the circle, and no one is more important than the other.

Lucia

Lucia perceives the tarantella as an embodied technique of enhancing wellbeing, similar to possession rituals. The tarantella transforms the negative energies into wellbeing. The democratic aspect of the tarantella is enacted in the circle. Lucia sees the circle as the essential beneficial component of the tarantella:

*Invece nella tarantella c'è il cerchio che accoglie tutto: la pazzia, tutto quello che esce dalla pancia, allora io penso che questo è il messaggio antico, che fa sì che uno finlandese lo può sentire.*

In the tarantella there is instead the circle that welcomes everything, madness, everything that comes from the stomach, so I think this is the ancient message, that also a Finnish person can feel.

Lucia

Many other dancers also describe the circle of tarantella as a democratic way of being together. The circle can be seen as a temporary community. In general, circle dances are seen to symbolize the non-linear cycle of life.

It is worth to clarify the concepts of wellbeing, health and healing. While health



can be objectively measured, wellbeing is more related to subjective experiences. Wellbeing is connected to happiness, joy, satisfaction, enjoyment, fulfillment, pleasure and contentment.<sup>190</sup> Sickness is meaningful experience and healing a meaningful interpretative process, from a holistic perspective.<sup>191</sup> The consciousness of tarantism as a healing practice and the beneficial effects of music and dancing in general contest the biomedical paradigm. It is questionable to generalize on the therapeutic effects of the pizzica music separating it from its original, ritual context. However, the therapeutic potential of the tarantella music and dancing exists, my interviewees maintain.

It is interesting that De Martino's concept of *crisi della presenza*, the crisis of presence is a suffering originating from a sense of loss of connectedness.<sup>192</sup> Some of the interviewees claim that an existential crisis in Italy is behind the contemporary success of the tarantella. The existential crisis and the contemporary suffering that the interviewees describe arise from a loss of connectedness, to spirituality, to a sense of community and meaning in life:

*Però noi in questo momento storico stiamo vivendo una crisi perché (...) la mistica è rimasta fuori, il contatto con altri stati diversi. Perché noi abbiamo dentro di noi questi stati, abbiamo dentro di noi, in modo naturale più personalità, più sensibilità, più livelli anche di coscienza, questo non lo dico io ma lo dicono anche i neuropsichiatri.*

In this historical moment we are experiencing a crisis because (...) the mystique has remained outside, the contact with altered states of consciousness. Because we have within us these states, we have within us more personalities, more sensitivities and more levels of consciousness, it is not only me saying this but also neuropsychiatrists say the same.

Eleonora

The tarantella responds to these exigencies, according to Eleonora. The contemporary means to do the tarantella is according to her in theatre. Lucia, who is an actress and theatre director, parallels theatre and ritual:

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<sup>190</sup> Utriainen et al. 2012, 192

<sup>191</sup> Lüdtke 2005, 42-43

<sup>192</sup> Honkasalo et al. 2004, 33

*Il teatro è un rituale. Ci mettiamo insieme e siamo tutti d'accordo che adesso succede qualcosa. È la stessa cosa la tarantella, ci mettiamo in cerchio e siamo tutti d'accordo che succede qualcosa, è lo stesso principio.*

The theatre is a ritual. We come together and we agree that now something will happen. The tarantella is the same thing, we come together in a circle and we agree that something will happen, it is the same principle.

Lucia

Lucia has studied theatre with Eugenio Barba and acquired his approach on theatre as a ritual. She uses his method of theatre anthropology in her work with the tarantella. She experiences the tarantella as a space for sharing one's true emotions:

*La tarantella è un pensiero triste che si balla. Allora io penso che quando uno ce l'ha un pensiero triste, ma proprio peso, è quello che lo chiama verso la tarantella perché è un luogo d'accoglienza dove la tristezza, la pazzia non è vista male.*

The tarantella is a sad thought that is danced. So I think that when someone has a sad thought, a real burden, it is that what calls one towards the tarantella. The tarantella is a place of welcome, where sadness, madness is not disregarded.

Lucia

The term *scazzicare* in Salentine dialect means to be stimulated by the music, to be carried away or taken over by an irresistible need to dance. It can be understood in relation to tarantism but also generally, throwing off the weight of suffering in the body through movement.<sup>193</sup> If suffering is perceived as a state of immobility and 'being stuck', weighted down by difficulties or oppression, *scazzicare* releases the feelings through letting the body go into dancing. In this sense, healing through dance can be perceived as the restoring of the original healthy state of change and flow of emotions in the body.<sup>194</sup>

The understanding of dancing as transformative tool appeals to some more than to others in the context of the contemporary tarantella. The lingering notions of

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<sup>193</sup> Daboo 2010, 180-181

<sup>194</sup> Daboo 2010, 182

tarantism and the tarantella as a healing dance have become commodified, which has led some dancers to highlight other aspects of the tarantella. Some of the dancers I interviewed said that they are more interested in the spirit of festivity of tarantella. Federica says that the aspect of the tarantella as a healing dance is over-enhanced nowadays:

*Però relegare la tarantella solo ad un discorso curativo adesso mi sembra un po' riduttivo, perché c'era la esigenza fondamentale che era una: la aggregativa, assolutamente perché vuoi che sia per cura, vuoi che sia per devozione, vuoi che sia per divertimento, comunque le persone si ritrovavano (...) insieme per condividere qualcosa, vuoi che era gioia, vuoi che era dolore, vuoi che era pazzia, vuoi che era quello che sia. Mi sembra anche un po' non bello attribuire adesso (alla tarantella) un discorso della cura (...) delle persone fuori di testa perché quella era una realtà di tante, che c'erano all'interno dell'Italia, una realtà (...) Il ballo è aggregativo, il fatto di stare insieme e non stare da solo a casa che fa star bene.*

I think it is reductive to confine the tarantella merely to a discourse of healing, because the fundamental exigency was aggregative. The dance could be for healing, for devotion, for having fun, in any case, the people came together (...) to share something, joy, suffering, madness, anything. I think it is not so nice to attribute to the (tarantella) the discourse of the curing (...) crazy people, as it was only one reality of many in Italy (...) Dancing is aggregative, to be together with other people and not alone at home is what creates well-being.

Federica

Still, a discourse of increased wellbeing and empowerment can be attributed to the tarantella. Some of my informants are holistic health and alternative therapy practitioners. Alessandra is a practitioner of qigong and a teacher of tarantella. She maintains that these practices complement each other. Marta was working as a psychotherapist when she encountered the tarantella for the first time. She says that her path of discovering the traditional dances and music and her profession as a psychotherapist are very much intertwined. She started to teach traditional dances and eventually she studied to become a dance and movement therapist.

*Nelle danze tradizionali c'è tutto quello che ci serve: esprimere il maschile e femminile, stare con gli altri nel gruppo, nella comunità. E la musica aiuta a vivere! Quindi di fatto il legame (con la psicoterapia) è molto stretto.*

In the traditional dances, there is everything we need: to express the masculine and the feminine, be with others in the group, in the community. And the music helps you to live! In fact the the connection (with psychotherapy) is very tight.

Marta

Siljamäki (2013) has done a research on the experiences of practitioners of ethnic dances in Finland. In her study, she defines empowerment as the experience of going beyond the realms of everyday life while dancing.<sup>195</sup> Empowerment in dance can be about the embodied experiences of pleasure, the sensation of music and dance becoming one, self-expression, learning new skills and being part of a supportive group.<sup>196</sup>

The significance of the tarantella lies in the meaningful communal relations it creates and gives space to flourish, in opposition to the distant and superficial human relations of contemporary society, according to my interviewees. The practice of dancing together creates wellbeing and a sense of belonging.

More people in the west are discovering dance as a means of experiencing and expressing religious and spiritual ways of being in the world, without necessarily defining them as religious.<sup>197</sup> Trullson (2010) defines spirituality as a “diversity of how the sacred could be experienced and conceptualized”.<sup>198</sup> Heelas and Woodhead (2005) give the following characteristics to contemporary spirituality: sacralisation of the self, relationality and the body as a place of sacred knowledge.<sup>199</sup>

By a few of my interviewees, the tarantella is explicitly described as a sphere of spirituality. Lucia says that she feels disconnected from official religion and religious authorities, but when dancing, she is approaching the divine in a way that creates a space of immediacy, resembling that of prayer:

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<sup>195</sup> Siljamäki 2013, 98

<sup>196</sup> Siljamäki 2013, 98

<sup>197</sup> Gundlach 2006

<sup>198</sup> Trullson 2010, 17

<sup>199</sup> Trullson 2010, 26, 29, Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 135

*Per me la danza è il mio modo di pregare.(...) Io non sono religiosa, non sono stata battezzata, non credo in Dio dei cristiani o dei musulmani. Ho provato d'avvicinarmi al buddismo perché mi interessava ma non mi trovo in una situazione così dove c'è il sacerdote, mi infastidisce, non mi piace. Allora ballare per me il mio modo a collegarmi al divino. È il mio modo per fare una preghiera.*

Dance is my way of praying. I am not religious, I have not been baptized, I don't believe in the god of christians or muslims. I have tried to approach buddhism because it interested me but I don't find myself in a situation where there is a priest, it annoys me, i don't like it. So dancing is my way of connecting to the divine. It is my way of praying.

Lucia

Lucia parallels the dance as a prayer to the tradition of veneration of the dead present in folk religion in southern Italy. Dancing is by Lucia described as another way to pray for those who that have left us.

## 6. Conclusions

In this study, I have analyzed the experiences and perceptions of tarantella dancers. The research material consisted of thematic interviews. I have focused on individual narratives about dancing and experiencing dance. I have analyzed how the dancers understand the concepts of tradition and ritual and how these understandings are applied in the actual practice of tarantella. I have approached dancing as a way of creating and challenging cultural meanings.

The popular dance movement in southern Italy has changed significantly in the last 15 years, since the tarantella dancers formed the first dance schools and started teaching the tarantella. Teaching the tarantella is a contested sphere. The contemporary tarantella movement that I encountered in my research process represents an ambitious, artistic dimension of the tradition revival movement of southern Italian music and dance. My interviewees maintain the

importance of a critical and conscious approach to the contested discourses on authenticity and tradition.

The dancers claim their artistic freedom to approach the tarantella while knowledge of tradition and the history is considered essential. It is regarded important to acknowledge the marginalization and subordination of past generations of women in southern Italy as the tarantella is bound to its sociopolitical history of southern Italy. The gender roles expressed in the choreutic language of the traditional dances are both reinforced and contested. Artistic interpretation and being faithful to the traditional ways of dancing are seen as two dimensions that are both opposed to and enriching each other. The dancers value specific, local, dance-related knowledge. The question of respect is attributed to the correct performance of tarantella.

Tarantism as a possession trance ritual is not practiced anymore, but the memory of tarantism functions as a symbolic resource for artistic and ritual elaborations. The complex, contradictory layers of scholarly and artistic interpretations of tarantism contribute to the fascination for the phenomenon. The discourse on what tarantism really was and what it means today continues. Some of the dancers perceive tarantism as a Mediterranean, African and essentially non-western, subaltern culture that has been kept down and marginalized. To theatrically and ritually approach tarantism is to approach an otherness within.

Intercultural experiences are shaping the practice of tarantella. My informants, born in the 60s, 70s and 80s have not grown up with traditional music and dance. Experiences of other cultures' music and dance traditions triggered some of my informants to become interested in their own cultural roots and the tarantella. Many of interviewees are engaged in other ethnic dances too. The interrelated learning processes of different dances and culturally embodied ways of expression are at best enriching each other.

Most of my informants are working as performers. However, the evolution of traditional dance into stage performance is problematized. Stage performances

dismiss the communal, shared qualities inherent in the traditional dances. The event and festival organizers often expect female dancers to perform conventional representations of feminine beauty and seductiveness. The female dancers have to struggle to attain artistic recognition and claim their right to artistic integrity.

I looked closely at the ways how my informants verbalize their experiences of dancing. Dancing is perceived as deeply meaningful in many ways. The tarantella is perceived as a language of communication and a way of socializing. Dancing the tarantella is about creating a field of embodied, authentic interactions that bring about well-being and a sense of community. The aspects of coming together, community and democracy are enacted in the circle. The tarantella is a practice for everyone regardless age, gender or skill. The artistic ambitions co-exist with this inclusive pedagogy.

The interview material illumites the meanings that the dancers ascribe to the tarantella. Most of my interviewees experience the tarantella as a way to reconnect to one's roots and cultural past. The sociopolitical history of southern Italy and the tarantella are closely connected. Through the tarantella, memories of suffering, subordination and marginalization are reworked and re-imagined. The tarantella can be a way to create new narratives of the past.

Some of my informants account for experiences that they understand as the awakening of ancestral memories during the practice of tarantella. The pizzica is referred to as a dance of the earth and is often danced barefooted. It is perceived as a way to recreate a relationship to the earth and the life of peasants in the past. While most of my interviewees have their origins in southern Italy, they live and work mainly in other parts of Italy and abroad. In my study, the tarantella dancers maintain and creatively elaborate symbolic references to southern Italy and its history.

The tarantella is described as a way of being in the world that offers transformative tools of self-expression. Dancing the tarantella is sometimes perceived as a technique for the body to recycle negative energies and for

individuals to work on emotions together with others. These understandings appeal to some more than to others. Some of the dancers are more interested in elaborating the celebratory and courtship aspects of the tarantella.

I have looked at whether the tarantella can be perceived as re-ritualization, understood as a practice of generating change. Dance as communication constitutes the rituality of the tarantella, according to my interviewees. Academic conceptualizations of ritual are intertwined with individual experiences of dancing. The consciousness of the healing potential of dance and music connected with the memory of tarantism, inspires the dancers to different kinds of artistic and therapeutic elaborations.

In this research, I have consciously not taken on the perspective of cultural identity and group identification that abounds in the research on tradition revival processes. The identifications that can be found in my informants' accounts are diverse and range from identification with southern Italy, the Mediterranean, the contemporary performance and theatre field, ethnic dances, leftist counterculture, nostalgia for the past, possession trance rituals worldwide, folk Catholicism, witchcraft, pagan spirituality, environmental consciousness, postcolonial consciousness and feminism. Many claim that the movement of southern Italian traditional music and dance have contributed to a more positively charged identification to southern Italianness.

While the tarantella might well strengthen identifications to southern Italian cultural belonging, the artistic practices of approaching ritual and experiences of possession, affliction and suffering do not easily contribute to the creation of a bounded cultural identity. The contemporary understandings of the tarantella and tarantism are contradictory and characterized by a transgression of boundaries, cultural, individual and conceptual (health/sickness, theatre/ritual, sanity/madness, freedom/oppression, to name a few). The contesting of established power structures constitutes one trait in the tarantella movement that I experienced. This opens up for creative possibilities for southern Italian music and dance in today's world.



I am very conscious that I engaged in a particular group of professional tarantella dancers, characterized by artistic ambitions and a critical consciousness. Interviewing amateurs or dancers that approach the tarantella in other ways would probably have offered very different perspectives. In my view, this study has though offered some valuable perspectives on a tradition revival process in contemporary Europe.

The research material that I attained during my field trips provokes further questions, such as the relationship between scholarly conceptualizations of ritual and the creative understandings of this knowledge in ritual practices.

This research process would have benefited from engaging more in the actual practice of dancing. I perceive that my understanding of the tarantella is rather incomplete, as I haven't properly participated in the variety of occasions of dancing that my informants are referring to in the interviews. A more throughout multi-sited, ethnographic research would bring deeper insights. The embodied aspects of the dance are crucial for approaching a dance practise. As Stark-Arola (1998) writes, "bodily experience is closely involved in the production of knowledge"<sup>200</sup>. In this research I had a narrative focus, interpreting the meanings and understandings my informants verbally ascribed to dancing. In a possible further study, I would like to engage more in embodied ways of doing research to gain deeper insights into the social interactions, embodied understandings, and actual ritualizations in the tarantella movement.

This study is the result of my curiosity and fascination for the tarantella that was born in 2007. Then, on the island of Giudecca in Venice and the village squares of Sicily, the pizzica music touched my soul as no other music had done before. Quoting one of my informants, I realized there was a story I had to discover. Personally, the research process has been immensely rewarding. In this study I was academically approaching traditional dancing and dance rituals. Meanwhile, in my personal life, the world of dancing with all its possibilities and experiences opened up to me. I am immensely grateful to all the dancers I spoke to, interviewed and danced with during these years.

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<sup>200</sup> Stark-Arola 1998, 31, see also Ylönen 2003, 78

My story with the tarantella does not end with the completion of this study. In the future, I will engage in artistic and cultural collaborations with tarantella dancers I got to know while doing this research.

## Glossary

**La Notte della Taranta** ('The night of the Spider') a festival of pizzica taking place every August in Salento, counting more than 150.000 visitors in the last years.

**Pizzica** (from 'pizzicare' = 'to bite'). The pizzica is the tarantella of Salento in the region of Puglia in southern Italy. The pizzica has a fast-paced 6/8 rhythm played with the tamburello frame drum. Traditionally, some of the pizzica songs were connected to the ritual of tarantism while others were played at festive occasions. The pizzica is the tarantella which has gained the hugest popularity in the last 25 years. The contemporary pizzica is a reconstruction and the least traditional among the tarantellas.

**Ronda** (also: cerchio) the circle of dancing, very common in the practice of tarantella.

**Salento** The southern area of the region of Puglia, southern Italy. In Salento, tarantism was still practiced in the 1950s. The pizzica is the tarantella of Puglia. In summer, Salento hosts numerous festivals of pizzica.

**Santu Paulu** Saint Paul, the saint of tarantism.

**Scazzicare** in Salentine dialect: to ravive, to get excited, to get aroused, to release a burden. In the context of the tarantella, it means to be stimulated by the music to the extent of being taken over by an irresistible need to dance.

**Tamburello** is the frame drum commonly used in playing tarantella.

**Tammurriata** refers to the music, songs and dances of Campania. The tammurriata is a couple dance and it is linked to the cult of the seven Madonnas. Choreutically it is characterized by moments of the couple dancing with interlaced arms or knees.

**Taranta** spider in Salentine dialect.

**Tarantella** is a general term for the dances of southern Italy usually characterized by a 6/8 rhythm and the use of the tamburello frame drum. Tarantella means 'little spider' which refers to the tarantella's association with tarantism. There are different kinds of tarantellas: tammurriata, tarantella

calabrese (pastorale del Pollino, Viddanedda) tarantella del Gargano, tarantella abruzzese (saltarella, ballarella) tarantella siciliana (ballettu), tarantella cilentana. The tarantella is danced in circles or in couples.

**Tarantata** (fem. masculine: tarantato, pl: tarantate) the victim of the spider bite in tarantism

**Tarantism** was a healing ritual aimed at curing a believed spider bite with music and dance. Tarantism was practiced in Salento until the 1950s. The pizzica was believed to be the only thing that could cure the spider-bitten. The musicians' task was excite the afflicted to dance. The ritual went on for days until the afflicted received the grace of Saint Paul, the saint of tarantism.

**Vergogna** shame, a feeling frequently ascribed to the memory of tarantism.

## Research questions

Where, when and how did you encounter the tarantella?

How did you learn to dance?

What are your family connections to popular music and dance?

In what kind of occasions are you dancing?

What does dancing the tarantella mean for you?

How do you understand the concept of tradition?

What do you think about the contemporary popular dance movement?

How do you experience the roles of women in the popular music and dance movement?

Do you perceive a healing aspect in dancing?

Is there a ritual dimension in dancing today?

How do you understand tarantism?

## Presentations of the interviewees

The names of all the interviewees have been changed.

### **Lucia**

(interviewed May 2013 in Rome)

Lucia's origins are in the countryside of Campania and she grew up in Napoli. Lucia is theatre director, actress and dance teacher. Lucia is currently living in France and where she runs a dance school and performance company. She directs theatre and dance performances where the tarantella is blended with contemporary expression. She is teaching pizzica, tammurriata and other tarantellas in France and Italy.

### **Eleonora**

(interviewed May 2013 in Rome)

Eleonora's parents are from Naples and Calabria and she grew up in central Italy. She is an anthropologist, dancer and dance teacher currently living in France. Eleonora is a researcher of transcultural psychiatry. She is teaching tarantella in France and Italy.

**Elena**

(interviewed May 2013 in Rome)

Elena's father is African and her mother Italian. She grew up in Northern Italy. Elena is a dancer and actress currently working as a choreographer for her own contemporary dance company in Rome. She is teaching tammurriata and West African dances.

**Gabriele**

(interviewed December 2013 in Paris)

Gabriele is from northern Salento. He is a butoh dancer and performing artist who has been directing ritual performances. He lives in France and teaches tarantella in France and Italy.

**Maria**

(interviewed December 2013 in Paris)

Maria is dancer and actress from Genova in Northern Italy. She works mainly in projects of contemporary dance but has engaged in several artistic research projects centered around the tarantella.

**Alessandra**

(interviewed December 2013 in Berlin)

Alessandra is from northern Salento but has lived in Berlin for 20 years. She is a dance teacher and qigong practitioner. She teaches oriental dance and tarantella in Berlin where she has an own dance association.

**Arianna**

(interviewed December 2013 in Bologna, workshop recording May 2013 in Rome)

Arianna grew up in Salento. She is a dancer and choreographer who was co-founding the first school of tarantella, Taranta Power 15 years ago. She has worked as a performer and choreographer at La Notte della Taranta and has performed and taught in several countries. She is considered one of the most renowned contemporary tarantella dancers. Arianna currently runs her own dance company and school.

**Chiara**

(interviewed in December in Bologna)

Chiara grew up in Salento. She is a dance teacher and performer and she is teaching the pizzica and other tarantellas in Italy. She is working for the same dance school as Arianna.

**Claudia**

(interviewed in December in Bologna)

Claudia grew up in Salento. She got to know the tarantella from an early age. She is a teacher and performer of tarantella, particularly pizzica. She has collaborated with the tarantella school Taranta Power and worked as a dancer for the group Arakne Mediterranea. Currently she runs her own performance project in Bologna.

**Marta**

(interviewed in December 2013 in Rome)

Marta was born in northern Italy. Her parents are from Salento. She started to research the traditional pizzica in her 20s among relatives in Salento, and is currently teaching the pizzica, being faithful to the traditional way of dancing. Marta is a psychotherapist and a dance and movement therapist.

**Federica**

(interviewed in December 2013 in Rome)

Federica is from the region of Lazio and lives in Rome. Federica is a professional dancer but she also works as a primary school teacher. She has performed at La Notte della Taranta and is regularly teaching and performing the tarantella in Italy and abroad. Federica is also a dancer of southern Indian classical dance.

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