

The Importance and Evolution of Folk Dance: Tradition-Revival-Identity

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ABSTRACT: In the description of the days dedicated to the field research, De Martino studies ad locum tarantism and the aspects that this ancient custom encompasses, guaranteeing solutions to the “crisis of presence”. From this point of view, the magic of traditional societies can be perceived as a compass in understanding the primordial representations of the world, through which De Martino distances himself from Benedetto Croce's optics and seeks to understand the world of magic using Heidegger's existentialist instruments, that provides answers to the problem of the “crisis of presence” and the “anxiety of history”, through the solution provided by the magic ritual, of the “rescue from the crisis”. In fact, this Heideggerian concept is treated separately in the chapter, trying to follow a series of aspects that can explain the many facets of this existential concept: from individual psychological aspects, such as suffering or fear of death, to the cultural frames of communities, that are contextualized historically. Last but not least, the intention to provide a clear and multi-angular image of tarantism made me investigate in detail De Martino's itinerary in Lucania, following the way in which the scholar doubled the observation, which followed in detail the specific ritual steps, with the analysis of a theoretical nature, in order to verify to what extent there is a high degree of validity between the intuitions of his thinking and the specific-therapeutic function of the ritual dance. It is known about the relationship of the Italian scholar with Romanian folklore, treated and viewed in comparison with the forms of manifestation of the Italian popular culture. In this context, fascinating aspects and similarities of tarantism and the ritual elements of the Romanian Căluș were noted. By examining the convergence of these cultural practices, we gain a deeper understanding of the universal characteristics present in different folk traditions.

KEYWORDS: therapeutic function, magic ritual, traditional societies, tarantism, solution, ritual steps

Introduction

Pizzicata – choreographic moments

“Pizzica, pizzica” folk dance

It is a notorious issue that dancing is a core element of many cultures practicing such activity on different occasions and in different choreographic manners. In the view of Gianfrano D'Aronco, dancing is a form of expression easy to understand by all of us. (D'Aronco 1983). The Friulan history paid special attention on such activity, presenting this choreographic action as a universal manner of expression, extremely ancient as origin, with strong religious sources, in expressing the fears related to love and war, the central elements of human preoccupations, following the expression of it by an artistic act. (D'Aronco 1983, 14)

In the Salento tradition, three dancing typologies may be identified: “ciupita tarantata”, “ciupita ciupita” and “ciupita scrima” (or the sword dance). The first includes ritualic choreographic actions, mainly specific to women practicing it for therapeutic purposes, with a view to cure the victim after being bitten by tarantula.

“Ciupita ciupita” (often called “heart ciupita” or simply “ciupita”) represents a rather “laic” manifestation of the first kind of dance, above presented, involving the couple, respectively the ritual based on the attraction of the couple. Ciupita scrima is rather a male activity, consisting in stimulating the weapon fight.

Ciupita is practically a folk dance that may be easily included in the area of the rituals specific to tarantism, although we refer, in this case, to folk music specific to south of Italy.

The moment of occurrence of this dance is related to the peak period of annual rural cycle, therefore, it has a wide range of manifestations: the dance was practiced on occasion of picking grapes and of the end of season feast or prior to passing to a session favourable for harvesting.

On first sight, the dance used to have a pure entertaining role, meant to reward the effort of long periods of work, specific to rural world. On a closer look, however, we cannot ignore the deep role of it in the ritualic and magic manifestations.

The dances are practically part of a wide range of traditions and rituals including the relation with the divinity, more exactly the gratitude towards the pagan gods, gradually substituted by characters of Christian religious tradition.

The south of Italy is characterised by such dancing classified as tarantellas, having as source an etymology oscillating between two origins: *tarantella*, understood as dance has the role of keeping away and neutralising the *tarantula* venom; and *tarantella* as dance with the origins in *Taranto* locality. D'Arronco rejects completely the first variant, asserting that the territorial origin of the word has a clearly superior explicative force.

Carmelina Naselli, on the half of 20th century, considers the etymological source of the notion of "tarranta" correlating it to the linguistic frame specific to classical ancient languages and saying, eventually, that: "*Taranto* is the base of "*tarantella*" but only during the intermediary phase "*taranta*". (Naselli 1953)

Tarantella (as we shall see below, *pizzica=ciupita*) is a dance characterised by slow movements at the beginning, following to increase as intensity, up to fast and dizzy movements.

"*Pizzica pizzica*" represents an element specific to Salento region, the concept representing, at the same time, the song, the rhythm and the dancing. There are several assumptions of researchers with respect to this word: one of the hypotheses is that the word has its origin in "pizzicare" which means plunking by fingers the guitar strings; other researchers accept more the idea that the word is related to the sound of the castanets replaced, during the modern period, with the finger cracking.

However, the most plausible explanation of this word is the analogy between *ciupita ciupita* and the tarantula bite, mostly considering that the music practice is the one used to care after a spider bite.

Giuseppe Galla is the one who makes a conceptual correspondence between *ciupita* and organology and ethnomusicology. Luigi Stifani, on his turn, as therapist musicologist, connects the *pizzica* word as well to the bite of the venomous animal. (Tarantino 2002, 9-10).

Therefore, it is a certain fact that the notion *ciupita ciupita* has a direct connection to the word *tarantella*, however, it must not be ignored that *tarantella* appears as word at the beginning of the year 1600, whereas *ciupita ciupita* dates back from the 19th century. (Gala 2002, 117-118).

Music: rhythm and rank force

La pizzica is the result of using several musical instruments, like tambourine, classical instrument from the South of Italy. Playing the tambourine involves a high degree of grace and talent, the three fundamental movements being successively executed by a specific rotation of hand which simply copies the dance movements of those in contact with the music.

As previously said, we refer to the use of different musical instruments: drum which adjusts the dancer's rhythm, harmonica, violin, guitars, barrel organ, accordion and other instruments specific to south of Italy.

The diversity of such instruments depended highly as well on the changes appeared in time, on historical evolutions, the introduction of doodle sack, for instance, being a novelty for "la pizzica" dance, being introduced in the orchestra at the beginning of 19th century and being substituted subsequently by other instruments.

Up to this point, we have noticed, in detail, the major therapeutic function, of care/"treatment" of the spider bite, involved by the choreographic action. There must be pointed out however other contexts in which, for the Salentin culture, the "*pizzica pizzica*" dance achieves other scopes as well, besides the ritualic ones related to tarantism. On laic level, dancing is a good opportunity to socialise, including beyond the closed family environment.

"*Pizzica de core*" is characterised as couple dance, not being innerly related to the intention of seducing a woman. This dance appears in other different contexts in time, being practiced during the weddings, baptisms, agricultural or carnival feasts, a special occasion mainly for youth of celebrating and enjoying the feasts by dancing "pizzica". These moments of feast were gathering, after a long time, the relatives of a family and they were celebrating the moment by couple dance.

The complex traits of "pizzica pizzica" dance may be identified mainly by the range of ethical and moral rules included by it, mainly related to the participation of women. They cannot refuse the dance invitation and have the obligation to express, by dancing, a range of feelings related to explicit sexual challenges and imitating the intention of running. The men must observe a firm dance style, in terms of energy and vitality, expressed by strong and wide movements, a completely different dance than of women's, who enjoy more delicate and gracious movements, specific to the choreographic moments (Gala 2002, 121).

Conclusion

The dance we are discussing can only be properly understood when placed within the broader context of southern Italian dances.

Starting from the posture and up to style and the choreographic reasons used, we refer to a tradition which maintains in detail the traditional form of folk dancing: frontal dance (face to face) and round dance, completed by repeated rotation movements, by using the hand and the arm; they are accompanied, for the couple dance, by crossed looks, that substitute the lack of physical contact between a man and a woman, imposed by the dance rule. The contact of dancers however occurs only on level of the hand and arm.

The frontal dance, of a man and a woman, suggests a range of feelings appeared between them, of erotic or seduction nature, however, being essentially expressed the attempt of getting close, but without doing it. On the moment of round movement, it is clearly expressed the mutual follow-up of the two dancers, ending with setting up the running attempt of the woman, when she turns her back to the man.

The steps of "pizzica dance" are performed face to face, whereas the round movement representing, on symbolic level the full seduction of the woman, appear when the music express some kind of rhythm change by acceleration, the woman moving around the partner by wide and slow movements of the arms. This is the moment when the man starts dancing around her, with the arms downwards, clapping and stimulating the woman to return to frontal dance.

This dance, with its therapeutic roots and social functions, exemplifies the enduring power of traditional cultural practices to address both individual and communal existential concerns.

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