

Incoronata Inserra, *Global Tarantella. Reinventing Southern Italian Folk Music and Dances*, Champaign (IL), University of Illinois Press, 210 pp., 2017. ISBN: 978-0252082832

«Salento, the land of celebration rather than a land of remorse». With such words, Incoronata Inserra seems to epitomize not only the destiny of that remote region of southern Italy, converted in few decades from a depressed area into a touristic resource for the whole country, but also the destiny of a large part of what once was the folklore of the Italian South. *Global Tarantella Reinventing Southern Folk Music and Dances* is Inserra's enquiry into the mutation of such a culture observed from a particular standpoint: the dance. The dance can really be seen for many aspects as the "heart" of the folk tradition of Southern Italy, certainly one of its most spectacular moments, and if there is a name with which southern Italian folk dances are unified and thought of all over the world, this name is "tarantella". As now everybody knows, the tarantella was originally a therapeutic dance used by peasants, in various forms, to ritually get rid of personal problems with the approval of their community. Romanticism made of it an emblem of the spontaneity and of the liveliness of the ordinary people of that land and, as such, the dance was long portrayed, and sometimes still is, in the collective imagination. Ethnologist Ernesto de Martino's rediscovery of the tarantella, which first gave the dance a proper ethnological and scientific explanation in his celebrated book *La terra del rimorso* (1961), as well as the first Italian folk music revival of the '70s, gave people the possibility of unveiling the Romantic myth built around it. Such a disclosure, though, did not produce effects on the dance itself, which kept on being confined in the peasant culture or, in its most violent form, just disappeared because of economic growth and modernization. It was a second folk revival, started in the '90s, that, instead, really impinged upon the reality of the dance, transforming it into something else: not an idyllic representation of something seen from afar, but a powerful tool of cultural identity. So it is this second revival to be the real subject of this book.

*Global Tarantella* is an ethnography of contemporary folklore: it does give information about the traditional dance but what really matters, for the author, is the ultimate eradication of tarantella from its native riverbed and its international dissemination with the meanings it has acquired in the while. Incoronata Inserra was long a lecturer at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa but she is from Gragnano, a small village in the peasant background of Naples, situated in an area that can boast a very rich folklore with a peculiar dance, often assimilated to tarantella, but which is actually quite different from it: the so-called "tammurriata", quickly assimilated to the tarantella in the second revival. This gives the book an "autoethnographic perspective" and explains the plural of the subtitle ("dances"). Inserra remembers, when she was still in Italy, how "cool" it was in the late '90s, for her and her friends, to join local peasants festivals as «an alter-

native model to globalisation in our own domestic roots». In such a way, she launches an interpretation of the second folk music revival as a peculiar response to the global economic and social processes taking place in those years and, consequently, inquires it according to this idea. After tracing a quick history of the first revival, she outlines a detailed description of the second revival in all its complexity and with its permeation properties, far superior to those of the first revival, which, after all, was exclusively in the hands of left-wing students and intellectuals. The author correctly considers the second revival as the point of intersection of a multiplicity of events: the birth of a new cinema (that of Edoardo Winspeare, for example), of a new narrative (the “Meridian Thought” of Franco Cassano), of a new kind of music (the songs of revival groups as Aramirè or Officina Zoè) and of a new way of looking at the traditional debate over the Italian “Southern Question”, that is to say the classic discussion on how the South of Italy was left behind after being united to the rest of the country in 1860 (like in the case of the popular Neapolitan musician Eugenio Bennato, interested in the brigands’ resistance to the unification of Italy). Inserra tackles successfully this creative movement which has led to a “decontextualization” of southern folklore and to its following “recontextualization” as a countercultural practice on a global level, certainly not avoiding some parallel aspects of commodification. In such a humongous phenomenon, she constantly hones in on the dance, analysing the new ways of performing tarantella and tammurriata, which lead to a new aesthetics of these dances, and how they are used to build and negotiate identities (with performers reclaiming their own as the “authentic” tradition). The relationship with the surviving old peasants, and the satellite commercial activities of books, DVDs, methods and private lessons to learn how to dance that the new approach to tarantella and tammurriata has brought about, are under the author’s lens too, so as it is the recovery of the centrality of women in folk culture, which conjures up a supposed “woman-centred shamanistic atmosphere”, given the pre-eminence of female cults in the Naples region dedicated to various Madonnas, often black and called with different names (and this is the case of Alessandra Belloni, a pioneer of Italian folk music in the United States, with her *Voyage of the Black Madonna*). *Global Tarantella* is a book which focusses on an important and long lasting Italian cultural trend, questioning folklore as a powerful marker but with the advantage of having been written by someone who is always conscious of the risk of exoticizing the folklore, when loving it, and careful in using all the possible cautions to avoid the risk.

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