

**Of Humans and Spiders in the Meridion(ist)
Space of Imperial Difference :
Resisting the Humanist Monologue**

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Abstract

While during Renaissance in Northern Italy, the first humanists theorized the revival of Hellenistic thought confronting Christian saturated culture, in Southern Italy people practiced afro-Mediterranean pagan rites thanks to the influence of ancient Greek culture (since Magna Graecia) and, later, to the influence of Islamic culture (since the VII century). The present essay aims at revisiting the humanist framework through a ritual cult known as tarantism: a trance-inducing ritual and related to the belief in the spider's poisoned bite and a consequent dancing cure. The father of Italian anthropology Ernesto De Martino defined it as a musical exorcism *cum* catharsis and, also, the Southern tangible way to resist 'Christianity's expansion', through the birth of new, minor local formations on the ruins of the orgiastic cults. Following Lévi Strauss, De Martino is also aware of the inner battle of the Western ethnographic journey, which on the one hand firmly 'lies within the framework of modern humanism'; on the other hand, it offers the possibility of 'coming-to-awareness of certain humanistic limits of one's own civilization'. Tarantism, then, may be a trial for Western humanistic limits and its cultural logic, whose matrix has been informed by what the decolonial thinkers call "coloniality of power" (Quijano), implemented not only in the space of colonial difference but also in the space of imperial one (Mignolo), that is to say, in Northern Mediterranean or, as the Jesuits called this part of "backward" Europe, "our Indies". The present revival of this ancient and vernacular ritual, called neo-tarantism, is reinterpreted by the French ethnologist George Lapassade less as an exorcistic cult than an adorcistic one, which would lead to the re-birth of disempowered people, who in the past used to believe in the spider's poisoned bite and now in temporarily autonomous zones of effervescent communal re-birth through dance. Perhaps, it is also a way of reimagining humanism in the third millennium, a posthumanist world where humans pay respect even to spiders.

Keywords: humanism, tarantism, coloniality, decolonial thought, imperial difference.