

# Singing La Grande Emigrazione: Watery Myths, Symbols and Metastoria in Southern Italy

ELISABETTA VISAGGIO

King's College London

This paper proposes an exploratory analysis of sung oral culture in the age of the *Grande Emigrazione* (post-Italian Unification until the start of WWI) from Southern Italy, with a particular focus on Cilento (Campania). It is part of a wider research project that interrogates how oral culture remembering emigration deploys symbols belonging to the South's *metastoria*. According to Ernesto De Martino, *metastoria* refers to a cultural horizon shaped by events, symbols and practices that perdure throughout the course of history.<sup>1</sup> This text will specifically address itself to the trope of water. It will demonstrate how fluids, sources, bodies of water and other elements related to watery ecosystems are marshalled to articulate and cope with difficult memories of migration. To do so, I will draw on the mnemonic implications of De Martino's nexus between the '*ritualismo dell'agire*' and the preservation of 'human presence': repetitive (ritual) practices that, by being periodically remembered and performed, uphold a community's socio-cultural life (presence). Essentially, I will implement De Martino's work to expose the importance of *remembering* and *remediating* watery symbols for the consolidation of Southern Italian socio-cultural landscapes. I will show that water (amongst other symbols) *mnemonically* anchors the experience of emigration to an overarching, mythicised cultural environment (*metastoria*). The case study chosen, a *canto di spartenza*<sup>2</sup> from Montecorice (Cilento), will efficiently illustrate this cultural framework.

Music underpinned the *Grande Emigrazione* from Southern Italy in two key ways: either as a professional opportunity (and therefore a reason to relocate), or as a tool to remember

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<sup>1</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, ed. by Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre e Marcello Massenzio, 3rd edn (Torino: Einaudi, 2019), p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Lit. song of separation/departure. While 'partenza' implies a return, 'spartenza' is intended as a permanent relocation. See Gianluca Zammarelli, *Craùni: canti tradizionali del Cilento* (etnomafia: 2014).

and negotiate the hardships of emigration.<sup>3</sup> At the time, the latter was mainly associated with a communal and generational transmission of oral culture, consequently aligning with the dynamics of communicative memory.<sup>4</sup> Drawing attention to the symbolic, social and cultural manifestations of memory in sung oral culture (specifically when it remembers migration) is significant for various reasons. These include heeding a relatively understudied field of inquiry, highlighting the mnemonic value of methodologies historically confined to Italian cultural anthropology, as well as deconstructing a monolithic view of the *Mezzogiorno* by illustrating the differences and intersections between its local cultures.

### **LIFE, PRESENCE AND ‘CRITICAL MOMENTS’**

De Martino describes ‘presence’ as a *conscious* experience of life which generates the different cultural, social and economic practices organising and defining the human condition. Essentially, ‘presence’ encompasses all human endeavours that transcend mere biological and physiological functions. Because of its ability to shape the fundamentals of human ‘organised’ life, presence operates by a logic of constant ‘re-affirmation’. To preserve a structured life, presence must be continuously secured through the enactment of the mores and principles of organised cultural and social co-existence. However, similarly to worldly biota and insofar as presence is an expression of life itself, it is precarious and can be vulnerable on a physical and cultural level. The instances that jeopardise presence are identified by De Martino as ‘*momenti critici*’ (critical moments). These are specific events (such as death, migration, births and weddings) that make apparent the ‘passage’, the ‘becoming’, the transition from one existential condition to the other. Critical moments are junctures where the flow of history manifests itself and irremediably alters life, consequently disrupting the continuous re-affirmation of presence. Critical moments can also be circumstances unfamiliar to an individual or community, making them events that

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<sup>3</sup> See Giuliana Fugazzotto, *Sta terra nun fa pi mia* (Udine: Nota, 2010); Michele Colucci and Stefano Gallo, *L’emigrazione italiana*, 2nd edn (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2023); Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell’Emigrazione* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> See Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning and Sara Young (Berlin/Boston: DeGruyter, 2008), pp. 109-118.

cannot be negotiated through ‘quotidian’ or ‘(re)current’ cultural practices.<sup>5</sup> ‘Quotidian’ or ‘mundane’ practices are intended as everyday manifestations of cultural life that are not specifically dedicated to commemorative rituals and/or providing stability during critical moments. For instance, sung oral culture can be considered both ‘mundane’ (when it narrates and is practiced in everyday circumstances to support that constant ‘re-affirmation of presence’), and ‘ritualistic’ (when it remembers and provides guidance during critical moments, i.e. funeral laments).

### **METASTORIA: MYTHS, RITUALS AND ‘REMEDICATION’**

De Martino posits that the uncertainty caused by the ‘novelty of becoming’ can be coped with by mitigating or temporarily concealing the ‘critical’ passage from one condition to another.<sup>6</sup> This can be done by approaching life through a cultural framework that ‘freezes’ or ‘smooths out’ time to hide the dreaded transition.<sup>7</sup> Put simply, to withstand critical moments, cultural consumption and production are situated in an alternate, dedicated dimension belonging to the sphere of myths and rituals: stories, symbols and practices that are cyclically revisited and remembered throughout history as they offer moral or spiritual guidance.<sup>8</sup> ‘Myth is everlasting’ and a-temporal, it ‘explains the present and the past as well as the future’, providing a solid foundation for navigating uncertain times.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, when negotiated in this dimension, presence (as ‘way of life’) anchors itself to a horizon of symbols and practices that provide it with temporal continuity and do not call for its constant re-affirming.

The alternate dimension of myth can be defined as *metastoria* and is implemented through the *ritualismo dell’agire*: ‘rigid’ behaviours and practices aimed at reclaiming and repeating culturally meaningful symbols that mediate and negotiate the experience of an event. Ritualistic behaviours access and summon the contents of the *metastoria* in ‘precarious’ circumstances to provide stability. Because of its periodic revisiting, *metastoria* is subject to individual or communal reinterpretation, processes which, while keeping it

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<sup>5</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all’analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, ed. by Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre e Marcello Massenzio, 3rd edn (Torino: Einaudi, 2019), pp. 426-433.

<sup>6</sup> De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all’analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, pp. 433-435.

<sup>7</sup> Marcello Massenzio, ‘L’orizzonte formale del partire’, in *Morte e pianto rituale*, ed. by Marcello Massenzio (Einaudi, 2021), pp. XV-LXX (p. XXV).

<sup>8</sup> De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all’analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, p. 435.

<sup>9</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘The Structural Study of Myth’, *Journal of American Folklore*, 68 (1955), p. 430.

alive, also leave a mark reflecting the flow of historical time. Therefore, while *metastoria* is not swept away by the course of history, it is still subject to its effects and threaded within its matrix.<sup>10</sup>

The *metastoria* and the ritualistic behaviours used to access it can be regarded as fundamental mnemonic tools to preserve the presence and cultural integrity of an individual or community. Indeed, this framework relies on following ‘what is narrated to have been done before’: that is, an individual or community’s critical moment is negotiated through the memory of relevant cultural products belonging to the *metastoria* (i.e. myths or other symbolic forms).<sup>11</sup> ‘Myths re-member...history’, they are ‘patterns’ of ‘powerful symbols’ creating the ‘mental maps that we refer to when we want to place something’.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the contents of the *metastoria* knit an important mnemonic fabric that can be explored, shared and used as a yardstick to interpret or cope with the complexities of human existence. Revisiting such myths-memories and circulating them within a community through ritualistic behaviours implies a process of ‘remediation’ whereby this cultural material is not only remembered, but also reconfigured to address a specific audience and situation. Remediation refers to the process of remembering, of re-elaboration, re-inscription and consequent alteration of symbolic forms and the memories they point to. It is inherently intermedial, transmedial and diachronic, as it progressively articulates mediated memories and mnemonic tools. In doing so, remediation supports the travels of memory – in this case also of the *metastoria* – through time and space, ultimately guaranteeing its survival.<sup>13</sup> Hence, diachronic reinterpretations leave their temporal and spatial impression on the *metastoria*, consolidating its entanglement with history.

In *La fine del mondo* (1977) De Martino examines the *metastoria* and *ritualismo dell’agire* in connection with religion. Nonetheless, his earlier writings prove these frameworks can also be applied to cultural practices that transcend the canonical bounds of religion, such as *tarantismo*, oral culture, ‘magic’ rituals and beliefs.<sup>14</sup> I therefore draw from this analytical structure to interpret a song remembering late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century mass emigration from Southern Italy. I will demonstrate how the ‘watery’ symbols

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<sup>10</sup> De Martino, *La fine del mondo: contributo all’analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, pp. 433-435.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435.

<sup>12</sup> Debbie Blake and Carmen Ábrego, ‘An interview with Gloria Anzaldúa’, *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (1995), p. 16; Mary Midgley, *The Myths We Live By* (Routledge, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Laura Basu and Paulus Bijl (de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> See *Morte e pianto rituale* (1958); *Sud e magia* (1959); *La terra del rimorso* (1961).

encompassed by the South's *metastoria* codify a set of ritualistic behaviours specifically used to remember and cope with the precariousness of displacement. In turn, this will shed light on the ability of these symbols to be remediated and effectively convey difficult memories linked to emigration.

### **'NOW THE SHIP IS LEAVING THE HARBOUR'**

The *Grande Emigrazione* (late 1800s – WWI) can be regarded as a critical moment, a juncture in historical time that jeopardised the cultural and physical existence of communities (particularly rural ones). The depopulation of towns and villages, the precarious political and socio-economic conditions of the newly unified South, and the hardship resulting from emigration constituted moments in time that would irreversibly alter the region's landscape.<sup>15</sup> As previously explained, these events could not be overcome nor remembered through 'quotidian' cultural practices, since the latter were themselves at risk of being erased by precarious living conditions. Cilento was one of the territories that emigration hit earliest and most harshly in the *Mezzogiorno*.<sup>16</sup> Because of this, emigration is a recurrent topic in the traditional music of Cilento. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* ('Now the ship is leaving the harbour', song A), uses 'watery' tropes to preserve presence in the face of departure. Recorded in Montecorice, it has been transcribed and preserved by Alfonso and Maddalena Toscano on an online independent archive dedicated to the musical, linguistic and culinary culture of Cilento.<sup>17</sup> This archive is partly inspired by a complex family history of transoceanic mobility toward the United States during the *Grande Emigrazione*, and features an extensive record of the motives, patterns and personal histories of emigration from Cilento towns to North and South America. This song was performed and passed on by Maddalena Toscano's own grandmother.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive historical analysis, see Michele Colucci and Stefano Gallo, *L'emigrazione italiana*, 2nd edn. (Morcelliana, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Vittorio Cappelli, 'Regioni migratorie e regioni politico-amministrative. L'emigrazione verso le "altre Americhe" da un territorio di frontiera calabro-lucano-campano', *Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana*, 3 (2007).

<sup>17</sup> 'Il Cilento e la poesia', n.d., <http://www.alfonsotoscano.it/poesia.htm>.

<sup>18</sup> I attempted to contact the owners of the archive regarding my use of this material for an academic publication but was unable to reach them. The song here featured is credited and used according to the values and principles of the original webpage.

*Song A*

Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto  
 resta quest' alma sconsolata e scura  
 parte ninnillo mio ch'è lo chiù caro  
 nienti vorria sapé, ca va sicuro.  
 L'acqua ca te vivi te sia chiara  
 ca into non ce fosse na fattura  
 spartenza dolorosa è quanto fai  
 chi sa domani sera addò ti scura.

*Now the ship is leaving the harbour  
 This sad soul stays behind  
 My most beloved is leaving  
 He will not change his mind  
 May the water you drink be clear (pure)  
 May it not contain a curse  
 You are causing a painful separation  
 Who knows where you will be tomorrow night.*

As reported by Toscano, chants could be sung or recited, and followed a *repetitive* scheme.<sup>19</sup> This tune is sung from the perspective of a person who did not emigrate and voices the grief caused by the departure of a loved one. Because of the gendered character of emigration<sup>20</sup> and the use of ‘masculine’ words of endearment (‘*ninnillo mio*’) to refer to the beloved, the lyrics conceivably lend voice to a woman. This trope is common in emigration songs, which often stage conversations, laments or addresses between masculine and feminine figures – although it is not always clear if these take place in marital or filial relationships. In this case, the singer attempts to beg a loved one to stay, but he is convinced to emigrate anyway.

A compelling aspect of the song is the agency that water is given. The ship is buoyed up by water; water also quenches the loved one’s thirst and is even capable of casting a curse (*fattura*). It is the vehicle through which the loved one emigrates, it is what eradicates him from his place of origin and other kin. Yet, water simultaneously links him back to *home* and channels the singer’s well-wishes. In this context, it is relevant to think of bodies of water as instruments that are part of a ritualistic engagement, which moors both singer and migrant to the cultural landscape of ‘home’ by evidently drawing on the South’s mythical and magic *metastoria*.

After evoking water, the last verse asks about the future location of the migrant. This line transforms the destination into a locus onto which, as Teti puts it, ‘the ones who did not emigrate can project their fears, hopes, dreams and wishes’.<sup>21</sup> The idealised destination

<sup>19</sup> ‘Il Cilento e la poesia’, n.d., <http://www.alfonsotoscano.it/poesia.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Women would often stay behind in the sender country, particularly during seasonal migrations. See Vito Teti, *La restanza* (Einaudi, 2022); Vito Teti, *Pietre di pane: un’antropologia del restare* (Quodlibet, 2024).

<sup>21</sup> Teti, *La restanza*, p. 13.

thus becomes a mythicised anchor point for the apprehension felt by those who stayed behind in the sender country. Equally, the singer's question could be read as a form of 'divination' or 'hydromancy', since the divinatory powers of water were at times mobilised to bear with the uncertainty fostered by departure. A formula from Grottole (Basilicata) implores Saint Monica to show the fate of the loved one 'far away'; if upon reciting the lines a gush of water was heard, it indicated a future of 'tears' and 'blood'.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, water can be read as a metaphor for death, plausibly bridging the gap with the afterlife in a near-mythological sense, as did for example, the river Styx.<sup>23</sup> In the process of transoceanic emigration, the sea performs a similar role. Indeed, mobility was understood as a process inevitably unfolding alongside death, nearly mirroring stepping into the afterlife. A 1912 newspaper states that the lives claimed by emigration 'far outnumber' war victims.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, *Michel 'u camposant'*,<sup>25</sup> a migrant song recorded in Vieste, features Michele, a figure facilitating the journey toward a port of departure. The song criticises emigration and metaphorically equates Michele to a 'cemetery', as he claims his fellow countrymen's lives by encouraging them to relocate. Interestingly, a partial version of this song is also remediated in Cilento.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, song A foregrounds the link between water and curses, as well as the 'purity' of water itself. Water was often used as an instrument to 'cure' a *fattura* (a curse deliberately inflicted upon someone) or *fascinazione* (a psychosomatic ailment induced by a supernatural force). *Fatture* and *fascinazioni* are key elements in the South's *metastoria*, as they were held responsible for most afflictions that could not be attributed to 'earthly' factors but entailed an interaction with supernatural forces. As a curative device, water could figure symbolically in spells (*scongiuri*) or songs. For example, a Lucanian *scongiuro* demands the *fascino* drowns in the sea to stop troubling its victim.<sup>27</sup> In other psychosomatic-magic afflictions such as *tarantismo* in southern Puglia, water sources and

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<sup>22</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e magia*, 11th ed. (Feltrinelli, 2013), pp. 25-26.

<sup>23</sup> See Ifor Duncan, 'Hydroreflexivity - Necro-Hydrology', *e-flux* (2023).

<sup>24</sup> *L'Italia*, 19 July 1912 cited in Lorella Viola, 'Narratives of Italian Transatlantic (Re)Migration, 1897-1936', *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (2023), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Accessed at Bibliomediateca di Santa Cecilia, [https://bibliomediateca.santacecilia.it/bibliomediateca/cms.view?munu\\_str=0\\_1\\_0&numDoc=5](https://bibliomediateca.santacecilia.it/bibliomediateca/cms.view?munu_str=0_1_0&numDoc=5).

<sup>26</sup> Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'emigrazione* (Milano: Garzanti, 1976), p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> De Martino, *Sud e magia*, p. 30.

bodies of water (i.e. the sea, fountains, rivers) were used in songs as thaumaturgic symbols that, once mentioned, alleviated the suffering of those who were ‘bitten by the spider’.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, water was used in its physical form to reduce the effects of curses and physical illnesses, to cure forms of *tarantismo* in northern Campania, and in southern Puglia, where the *tarantati* were partially submerged in the shallow sea or immersed in water-filled barrels.<sup>29</sup> However, water was also the vector of physical and spiritual illnesses, especially if ‘contaminated’ with other substances. In the Lucanian Apennines, it was believed pregnant women were more susceptible to birth defects if they stepped over water that had been used to clean fish.<sup>30</sup> Hence, it is possible to ‘go below’ the meaning of the wishes the singer expresses for the migrant. ‘May the water he drinks be *dear* or *pure*’, may it always be beneficial and not be *physically* or *spiritually* contaminated. Clearly, this is an attempt to ‘mitigate’ the critical moment of his departure, mooring it to a cultural horizon that sees water as a means to interpret, conceal or beat uncertainty. The singer and migrant, already aware of the powers water holds, can find in it both mythical and divinatory guidance.

## VARIATIONS

An untitled variant of song A had already been reported as early as 1872 in a compilation of traditional chants from Southern Italy.<sup>31</sup> This version (song B), recorded in Bagnoli Irpino (100km northwest of Montecorice), combines formulas related to water used in both song A and in other chants recorded in Campania, Apulia, Sicily and Calabria (song C).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* (EST, 1996), pp. 145, 152.

<sup>29</sup> De Martino, *Sud e magia*, pp. 17, 52; Annabella Rossi, Patrizia Ciambelli and Enrico Bassano, *U'nciarmë* (Field recording, 1976); De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, pp. 127, 145.

<sup>30</sup> De Martino, *Sud e magia*, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Antonio Casetti and Vittorio Imbriani, *Canti delle provincie meridionali Vol. II* (Ermanno Loescher, 1872) p. 297.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 297-300; Anna L. Chairidakis, *Calabria Bella, Dove T'hai Lasciate?* (Folkways, 1979). This tune is linked to both emigration and a rift between lovers.

*Song B*

Partenza dolorosa quanto è cara!  
 È giunta l'ora re lo mmio partire  
 'No vasciello a puorto mo' ssi prepara,  
 Pe' 'no stennardo ri partenza scura.  
 L'acqua ch'aggio ra passa' non so ss'è chiara.  
 No' so domani a sera addò' mmi scura.

*This departure is painful as much as it is costly!*  
*The time for me to leave has come*  
*A ship in the harbour is getting ready,*  
*For a long, dark absence.*  
*I do not know if the water I must cross is clear.*  
*I do not know where I will be tomorrow night.*

A quelle parti che te ne hai ra ire  
 Re fontanelle possono assecca',  
 No 'puozzi trovà' lietto pe' dormire  
 Manco tavola posta pe' mangià'.

} *Response*

*Where you must go*  
*May the fountains dry out,*  
*May you not find a bed to sleep in*  
*Nor a table set for you to eat at.*

The first six lines of song B are related to song A. However, the singer of version B remembers his own departure. Other symbols persist, namely the ship being ready to sail from the harbour, the doubts expressed on the 'clarity' or 'purity' of water, the pain of departure and the 'darkness' of future nights. In the last four lines of song B, the identity of the singer changes to that of a person who remained in the territory of origin, as seen in song A. The second singer responds to the fears expressed about departure in a scornful tone, consistent with the genre of *canti di sdegno* ('songs of contempt'), which often coincide with songs of departure – see i.e. *Michel 'u camposant'*. The last singer of song B *curses* her interlocutor, specifically by hoping *fountains* in the host country *dry out*.<sup>33</sup> This response is related to the different regional variations of song C, as they all wish for fountains to be dry. Furthermore, versions recorded in Naples, Airola, Morciano, Catania and amongst Calabrian immigrants in New York, hope for deluge and torrential rain to hit the land the loved one will reach (see Appendix). Interestingly, in a version of song C recorded in the region of Aci, the singer hopes for the contents of the migrant's glass to turn to poison. References to drinking contaminated water are also present in song A, although they are not made with malicious intent.

Fountains are a recurrent trope in the sung *metastoria* of Southern Italy: they can either symbolise prosperity – as they supply potable ('pure') water, or represent the social and romantic interactions that traditionally unfolded in their vicinity. Conversely, deluge and rain are arguably indicative of the hardship ensuing from floods and landslides. These hydrological disasters are common across the rural mountainous areas of the South, and

<sup>33</sup> Assuming song B presents a gendered dynamic, as does song A.

have historically led to the displacement of entire villages.<sup>34</sup> Hence, in song C, fountains and rain are used as tools to curse the prospective migrant, as the singer wishes him a time of scarcity, ill fortune and the collapse of his social relations. Importantly, the reproval of emigration plausibly conceals the desire for the loved one's return. Poison, water and fountains are also central themes of *Chiantu de l'emigranti* (song D), a migration song from Cosenza.<sup>35</sup> This tune also features two voices: first, the migrant laments his departure, then the loved one who stayed behind implores his return (as in song B). The last two lines of the first verse use a similitude to equate fountains to the singer-migrant's tears. The second verse opens by stating that these tears are not fountains, but 'bitterness' and 'poison' that have contaminated the migrant's life.

The centrality of water in songs A, B, C, and D demonstrates the importance of these tropes in the commemoration and negotiation of the migratory experience, as well as an engagement with ritualistic behaviour. Indeed, once identified within the broader *metastoria*, 'watery' symbols are reformulated and reassimilated within a specific context and cultural practice to provide stability. Water establishes and reinforces a social and mnemonic hydrography in which these songs can be anchored and passed on. In a few lines it is possible to re-member not only a particular event, but also a mythical image of the cultural lifeworld that mediated its perception. Water leads into other events, such as death or psychosomatic afflictions, carving out connective paths between 'critical moments' and the meaningful symbols used to process them. In song A, water follows the same prescribed cultural patterns featured in other magic-religious rituals that guarantee and preserve human presence. As a mythical symbol and thaumaturgic tool, it bears the power to guide and protect those who are suffering. Since, as previously mentioned, the condition of being a migrant is perceived as a precarious balance between life and death, water is fundamental in the negotiation of this 'third' state. However, because of its symbolic ambivalence, water

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<sup>34</sup> Teti, *La restanza*.

<sup>35</sup> Virgilio Savona and Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'emigrazione* (Garzanti, 1976), p. 72.

can also be associated with possible difficulties encountered during emigration, and used as a metaphorical repository in which anxieties and worries are externalised.

*Song D*

Strada mia abbandunata, mo te lassu,  
chiagnennu me ne vaju le vie vie.  
O quanti passi che da tia m'arrassu,  
tante funtane faru l'uocchie mie.

*My lonely road, now I leave you,  
crying I walk away.  
O how many steps separate me from you,  
my eyes turned to fountains.*

Nun so' funtane, no, ma fele e tassu,  
tassu che m'entassau la vita mia.  
Io partu pe' l'America luntana,  
nun sacciu adduje me porta la fortuna.

*They are not fountains, but bitterness and poison,  
poison that contaminated my whole life.  
I am leaving to the far away America,  
I do not know where destiny will lead me to.*

O Sant'Antuone mio fallo venire,  
e non mi fa' pigliare cchiù de pena! } *Response*

*O Saint Anthony, make him return,  
and do not make me full of woe again!*

## CONCLUSION

I have strived to unearth the thread connecting the symbols present in Southern Italian migration songs with the wider *metastoria* of this territory. Oral culture singing the *Grande Emigrazione* identified, isolated and mobilised meaningful tropes to steadily anchor, remember and remediate this transgenerational experience. In doing so, it preserved the 'presence' of communities at risk of depopulation. While Erll's 'remediation' alludes to mnemonic narratives, I have shown that mythical-ritualistic symbols can also be remediated and adapted to specific historical circumstances to reconstruct the memory of a social and cultural matrix. These symbolic forms shape a codified framework that can be repeated to stabilise a 'critical moment' and sediment its memory within a cultural landscape. Ritualistic behaviours are also inherently present in the modalities of transmission of oral culture. To be transmitted, oral culture must be continuously remediated and its verses repeated. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* and the symbolic references it contains, once only remediated within familial or community boundaries, are now kept alive through an independent initiative (and hopefully this text). The continuity provided by ritualistic behaviours and the symbols loaned from the broader *metastoria*, make migration songs a powerful tool for the consolidation of presence and the processing of difficult events and/or memories. *Mo se parte la nave ra lo porto* has served as a point of entry into this intricate

web of symbolic references, whose mutual interaction generates and upholds vital cultural meaning and relevance.<sup>36</sup>



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<sup>36</sup> Unless specified, all translations are mine.

**Appendix, variations of song C.**

*Antonio Casetti and Vittorio Imbriani, Canti delle provincie meridionali Vol. II, pp. 297-300.*

*Song C (Arnesano)*

Aggiu saputo ca te nd'hai de 'scire,  
O promituru mmiu, nu' mme lu fare!  
A quiddhe parti, addhù' spieri de 'scire,  
Pozzanu ssaccarire le funtane:  
Segge nu' puezzi 'cchiare pe' sidire,  
Nimmenu taula cu puezzi mangiare.

...

*I have learnt that you must leave,  
O my beloved, do not do this to me!  
Where you hope to go,  
May fountains dry out:  
May you never get chairs to sit down,  
Nor a table where to eat*

...

*Song C (Lecce and Cavallino)*

...  
A quiddha terra addhu' te nde voi 'scire,  
Pozzanu saccarire le funtane.

...

...  
*Where you hope to go,  
May fountains dry out.*

...

*Song C (Morciano di Leuca)*

Aggiu saputu ca te nd'hai de scire,  
Acqua, treni, e derlampi pozza fare!  
A quiddhu locu ci te nd'hai de 'scire  
Funtane e puzzi pozzanu seccare.

...

*I have learnt that you must leave,  
May there be water, thunder and lightning!  
Where you must go,  
May fountains dry out.*

...

*Song C (Airola)*

Aggio Saputo ca te ne vuo' ire,  
Chiovete, e maletempo pozza fare!  
Da chelle parti addò' te ne vuoi ire  
Sse pozzano seccà' puzze e fontane;

...

*I have learnt that you must leave,  
May there be rain and bad weather!  
Where you want to go,  
May fountains dry out;*

...

*Song C (Napoli)*

Aggio saputo che te ne vuo' ire;  
Chiovete e malo tempo pozza fare!  
Da chella parte che te n'haje a ghire  
Sse puozzano seccà' puzze e fontane!

...

*I have learnt that you want to leave;  
May there be rain and bad weather!  
Where you must go  
May fountains dry out!*

...

*Song C (Catania and Aci region)*

Sacciu, figghiuzzi, ch'aviti a partiri;  
 Sciroccu e malu tiempu pozza fari!  
 'Ntra 'ddu paisi unni aviti a ghiri  
 ...  
 'Ntra 'dda funtana ch'aviti a zeviri,  
 L'acqua davanti vi possa siccari;  
 ...

*I know, son, that you must leave;  
 May there be sirocco and bad weather!  
 In the country where you must go  
 ...  
 May in the fountain that you must drink from,  
 The water evaporate in front of you;  
 ...*

Hassi saputu ca vi n'hâti a ghiri,  
 ...  
 'Ntra 'ddu paisi ca spirati iri,  
 ...  
 E 'ntra 'dda tazza ca sperì viviri,  
 Vilenu, ca ti pozza invilinari.

*I have learnt that you must leave,  
 ...  
 In the country where you hope to go,  
 ...  
 And in the cup you hope to drink from,  
 May you find poison, and may it intoxicate you.*

*Anna L. Chairetakis, Villanella di Acri, 1979. (original translation)*

'E saputo ca a l'America vu jire  
 ji lu diluvio pe ttía se  
 ...  
 'U bu troveare nè d'acquá nè vino,  
 si vuanno di siccheare li funteane.

*I have learnt that you want to go to America  
 May deluge rain down upon you  
 ...  
 May you not find water nor wine,  
 fountains will dry out.*