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LAMENTS FROM THE SOUTH

Mario Banushi, Emma Dante, and Ernesto De Martino

ABSTRACT: In 1960, Cecilia Mangini adapted Ernesto De Martino's *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico* (1960) to the screen in the film *Stendalì – Suonano ancora*. Documenting a funeral rite and its laments in Southern Apulia, Mangini engaged with the same practices described by De Martino. Today, theatre similarly engages with Southern European funeral rites, as exemplified by Emma Dante's *Vita mia* (2004) in Italy and Mario Banushi's *Goodbye, Lindita* (2023) in Greece. The article investigates the mourning rituals staged by Dante and Banushi, arguing that they follow the footsteps of the laments described by De Martino and documented by Mangini. In particular, the article analyses on the characters' gestures, their non-linguistic and linguistic laments, paying special attention to the use of Palermitan dialect in Dante's case and to Albanian in Banushi's play. Ultimately, the article contends that the two directors adopt De Martino's analyses not just in the depiction of mourning rituals, but also in the promotion of subaltern Southern cultures.

KEYWORDS: Ernesto De Martino, Mourning, Funeral Lament, Emma Dante, Mario Banushi.

Introduction

A shot of church bells solemnly ringing announces to the audience that someone has died and simultaneously initiates the action in Cecilia Mangini's short film *Stendalì – Suonano ancora* (1960).[1] Following Mangini's desire to represent the "real Italy" (Cinquegrani 2023, 50) and to document her times, *Stendalì* revolves around the wake of a young boy in Martano, a small town in Apulia. At the same time, it also looks back in time: the film's title, "stendalì," meaning "they still play" in Griko, accounts for both the funeral sounds heard in the work and for the fact that these laments are seen by Mangini as the last traces of ancient rites.[2] As declared by the prologue, "the cry, so regulated and ritualised, is an archaic survival in a society that is in fact in many ways archaic" (Mangini 1:20-1:21)[3].

The title and the initial scene are the first instances of the film's interest in sound: after hearing the bells, the audience is completely engulfed by the sounds of the wake,

[1] While Mangini directed it, Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote the script and Lilla Brignone read the voiceover.

[2] Griko is a Southern Italian dialect that presents strong influences of Modern Greek.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, all the translations, including those of De Martino's texts, were made by the author of this article.

which occupy the entirety of the film. The wake is attended by a plethora of women dressed in black, who are filmed singing the lament in unison. The song is almost hypnotic because of its repetitive rhythm and because of the background sound of percussions. As the lament increases in speed, the women pull their hair, rhythmically move back and forth, and forcefully jump up and down around the casket, before erupting into chaotic screams as the boy's mother covers him with her body. Similarly, the voiceover also gains speed and force, paralleling the lament's climax. As noticed by Michaela Schäuble, "the importance of the non-verbal qualities of the lament is reflected in the soundscape and the skilful montage of various acoustic strands, such as the fictionalised dialogue, antiphonic singing, the non-verbal sighs, sobs, and screams" (2021, 69). While the wake filmed by Mangini is fictional, through its acoustic dimension *Stendalì* rightfully represents the funeral laments that were performed at the time in Southern Italy to process death. As commented in the voiceover, death "would be intolerable, meaningless, if its disruptive pain was not contained by the coarse institution of weeping" (Mangini 1:28-1:29).

Expressively, *Stendalì*'s wake was not only inspired by real Southern rituals, but also by the analyses carried out by Ernesto De Martino and in particular by Mangini's "fast paced and passionate reading of *Morte e pianto rituale*" (Cinquegrani 2023, 25). *Morte e pianto rituale nel mondo antico: dal lamento pagano al pianto di Maria* (1958, later re-titled *Morte e pianto rituale: Dal lamento funebre antico al pianto di Maria*) is part of a trilogy that includes *Sud e magia* (1959) and *La terra del rimorso. Contributo a una storia religiosa del Sud* (1961), which explore Southern traditions, rituals, folklore, religion, and marginalisation. The three volumes were informed by the research trips De Martino took between 1950-1959 in Lucania, a vast region in Southern Italy that today corresponds to parts of Basilicata, Campania, and Calabria (Massenzio and Dei 2024, xiv). In particular, the first text was influenced by De Martino's trips in Castelsaraceno, Càlvera, Senise, San Giorgio Lucano, Valsinni, Colobraro, Montalbano Jonico, Craco, Stigliano, Pisticci, Bernalda, Ferrandina, Grottole, Tricarico, Albano Lucano, Pietrapertosa, Avigliano, Ruoti e San Cataldo (De Martino 2008, 70). While the depth of the engagement of *Morte e pianto rituale* with Southern issues and themes has been debated, especially in comparison to *Sud e magia* and *La terra del rimorso* (Massenzio 2024; Gallini 2000), the text nonetheless places front and centre the investigation of funeral rites in Lucania.

In her production Mangini "has assimilated De Martino's canon, has learnt to recognise the ambivalence of the legacies of the past, the impact of anthropological changes, and it is this awareness that drives her to want to record … the last flickers of practices destined for extinction" (Rimini 2021, 214). In particular, the soundscape scaptured in *Stendalì* exemplify De Martino's analysis of laments that can restore "a possible balance between air and earth, instinct and irrationality" (Rimini 2021, 214-215). Through the depiction of the wake in Martano, *Stendalì* offered a visual and acoustic dimension to De Martino's theories, expanding the possibilities of the written text and becoming a productive appendix to *Morte e pianto rituale*. Furthermore, her work

can be seen as a precursor of other cultural products, which engage with the Southern context and with De Martino's enquiries, albeit not as explicitly.

For instance, De Martino's 'Southern trilogy' evocatively resonates with the oeuvre by Emma Dante. Dante is a Sicilian cultural practitioner, who is well-known for her work as director of plays, films, and operas. She has become one of the leading figures in the last 20 years in the Italian theatrical panorama because of her many works that engage with Southern Italy and its cultural traditions (Barsotti 2009; Billò et al. 2017; Camilleri 2020). In particular, she rose to fame following the creation of a theatrical trilogy called "Trilogia della Famiglia Siciliana," consisting of *mPalermu* (In Palermo, 2001), *Carnezzeria* (Butchery, 2002), and *Vita Mia* (My Life, 2004), which is "rooted in Sicilianness" (Barsotti 2020, 418). While they all engage with grief and laments, *Vita mia* strikes a chord with *Morte e pianto rituale*. First performed at the Romaeuropa Festival in Rome, it depicts a family's grief and mourning at the wake of the youngest of three brothers, "*Vita mia* is the foolish and desperate attempt to delay until the end the last lap before death" (Dante 2004).

Moving alongside a Southern axis, De Martino's works and Dante's plays can be suggestively connected to the theatrical productions created by an Albanian-Greek director, Mario Banushi. Despite having a limited repertoire, Banushi has intensely, and successfully, delved into family relations, being described by Michael Billington as an "exciting new talent" (2023). In recent years, he has directed a trilogy, comprised by the plays *Ragada* (2022), *Goodbye, Lindita* (2023), and *Taverna Miresia: Mario, Bella, Anastasia* (2024). It draws from his personal memories and explores family bonds, death, and mourning (Porcedda 2024). First staged at the National Theatre of Greece in Athens, *Goodbye, Lindita* was influenced by the death of Banushi's stepmother and by her wake, and it "tells the story of a family and the house where they live, where a series of strange events bring to the surface a hidden world made up of dreams and nightmares … What needs to happen for the final farewell to take place? How can life go on?" (Banushi).

Both *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita* depict a wake, staging similar funeral elements, i.e. laments, expressed through violent screams, desolate cries, and ritualistic gestures (hair pulling, back and forth oscillations, self-harming, and so on). This article investigates them, arguing that they follow the footsteps of the laments described by De Martino and documented by Mangini. Moreover, if the non-linguistic aspects of funeral laments have often been crucial for ethnographic analyses (Schäuble 2021, 65), this article also turns towards the linguistic forms; Palermitan dialect in Dante's case and Albanian in Banushi's play. Additionally, the comparison between the two plays is not only meant to highlight their individual similarities, rather to gesture towards the broader picture and towards a transnational approach to the European South. Indeed, the comparison can underline the continuity of mourning practices across the Mediterranean region (Amelang 2005) and what De Martino described as a "pan-Mediterranean and timeless form of ritualised mourning" (Schäuble 2021, 69). While the Southern Italian context and the Greek landscape from an Albanian-Greek

perspective are certainly different, they are two forms of South that were created through similar processes and that have specific moral qualities bestowed upon them (Dainotto 2011; Wanger 2017). Thus, challenging the epistemological marginalisation of both Southern Italians in Italy and Albanian-Greeks in Greece, the article argues that the two plays highlight the role of lament as "a poetic social commentary" (Schäuble 2021, 64).

Mourning Gestures

Ernesto De Martino's *Morte e pianto rituale* explores the funeral lament from ancient times to the contemporary period, investigating the passage from a pagan perspective to a Christian outlook towards death. The text begins with an overview of psychoanalytic studies about mourning, as De Martino argues that the death of another person could pose an existential danger. Indeed, "the mourning crisis is a special case of that risk of losing one's own presence (*presenza*)" (De Martino 2008, 15). In other words, the crisis described by him involves "the risk of not being able to transcend the critical moment of grief. The loss of a loved one is, in the most prominent way, the experience of what passes without and against us" (42). Thus, there is a risk of losing oneself in mourning, to lose being in touch with reality through a process of dehistoricisation (*destorificazione*), of being separated from the present moment (21-27).

To inform his analysis, De Martino indexes a list of tell-tale signs that demarcate the mourning crisis, such as an "astonished ebetitude" (*ebetitudine stuporosa*), lacking speech or gestures, or self-harming acts deriving from guilt and desperation (44). Another instance of the crisis is the perception of the dead body as a menacing presence, as it could either infect the living or haunt them. A final sign of this crisis manifests itself through a complete and delirious negation of the death that had taken place.

The mourning crisis that De Martino describes is the core narrative element of Dante's *Vita mia*. The play depicts a family composed by a mother and her three children, Gaspare, Uccio, and Chicco, attending the wake of the latter. As described in the prologue, "tutto è immobile: i gesti, i ricordi, le parole di conforto, i rimorsi, quell'ultimo ritmo di pulsazione del cuore che si ripete all'infinito. *Vita mia* è una veglia" (Dante 2020, 77).[4] As they gather in a room that is completely barren except for a bed and a crucifix above it, the play stages their inability to accept Chicco's death. This inability manifests itself through the gestures that the family members perform, replicating the same movements catalogued by De Martino in *Morte e pianto rituale*.

Initially, Chicco's mother walks around the room, describing her three children to the audience and expressing her wishes for their future. She is seemingly completely unaware of Chicco's death and of the wake that is taking place. It is a case of the dehistoricisation process defined by De Martino as "the various delusions of denial of what happened that

[4] "Everything is still: the gestures, the memories, the words of comfort, the regrets, that last pulsating rhythm of the heart endlessly repeating itself. Vita mia is a wake."

mediate no readjustment to the new situation and mark a progressive rupture with the historical and cultural reality of which one is a part" (De Martino 2008, 309).

The family's denial is emphasised by the fact that not only is Chicco's mother unaware of his death, but also he reappears on stage: as Gaspare and Uccio walk around the bed, they are accompanied by Chicco running in circles with his bicycle. Dante stages "the irrelative return (*ritorno irrelativo*) of the dead as an obsessive representation or hallucinatory image" (97). They see him and interact with him, creating an impossible moment.

As the children run around the bed, playing a dangerous game of lying down the bed that symbolises the eternal rest, the mother is forcefully and suddenly awoken from her stupor. Trying to stop them from getting close to the bed, she dramatically self-harms and drops on her knees. She is completely overwhelmed:

> *La madre si percuote il petto, bacia il crocifisso e per tre volte si accascia. Si alza e cade, si alza e cade, si alza e cade… Le cedono le gambe di fronte all'atroce spettacolo: il letto, inesorabile, attira i suoi figli come una calamita.*
> *La madre viene respinta da raffiche di vento, e quando riesce a raggiungere il catafalco lo rovescia, lo svuota e scaccia i figli. La iettatura si interrompe di colpo.*[5] (82)

Then, as if nothing had happened, she goes back to her oblivious status, adjusting the mattress, fluffing the bedspread, lighting the candles.

Despite his family's denial and following this game with his brothers, Chicco decides to finally lie down on the bed. He accepts his fate, as he "si addormenta con le mani incrociate sul petto. È duro, immobile, esanime" (87).[6] While the mother initially gathers his clothes for the burial, hinting at a form of acceptance, she quickly changes her mind and tries to revive him, beating him to bring him back from the dead. Foolishly, she convinces herself that he is in fact still alive:

> LA MADRE: Uccio, aspetta! Ti dissi: lassamìllu 'natr'anticchia!
> UCCIO: Mamma, Chicco è …
> LA MADRE: Zìttuti!
> GASPARE: 'Un si può muovere cchiù, mamà!
> LA MADRE: Ti sbagli. Si muove!

[5] "The mother pounds her chest, kisses the crucifix and collapses three times. She gets up and falls, gets up and falls, gets up and falls... Her legs give out in front of the atrocious spectacle: the bed, inexorable, attracts her children like a magnet.
The mother is pushed back by gusts of wind, and when she manages to reach the bedstead she overturns it, empties it and chases her children away. The cursing suddenly stops."

[6] "He falls asleep with his hands crossed over his chest. He is stiff, motionless, lifeless."

La madre si lancia sul figlio e lo scuote tentando di rianimarlo. Imprime con energia il movimento facendolo sobbalzare sul letto. Chicco segue per inerzia i sussulti generati dalla forza esterna ma, poiché la tendenza del suo corpo è di restar fermo, lentamente si spegne.

…

La madre non demorde e lo scuote più forte, supplicandolo di non fermarsi. Esasperata, raddoppia il ritmo dei sussulti che imprime sul materasso e il corpo rimbalza. Chicco si rianima e si spegne. Si rianima e si spegne, finché Gaspare con un gesto brutale afferra la madre e la strappa dal letto.[7] (87)

The mother translates her own gestures of mourning, her self-beating, into a form of violence against Chicco. She mimics the movements of the women observed by De Martino in Lucania, as he described a mother who "would beat her hands rhythmically and dance around the bed, interrupting from time to time to administer, now on the feet and now on the cheeks of the corpse, rapid pats as if to awaken her son from his evil sleep" (90).

In the fictional stage built by Dante, the mother actually manages to reanimate Chicco, albeit for a brief period of time. After the beating, Chicco bolts from the bed, running around. While it might seem that the play is moving towards a happy ending, he suddenly stops in his tracks. It is clear that Chicco cannot escape death, as he begins to tragically mimic the moment of his passing. Replicating his fatal bicycle accident, he renders his mother's attempts vain, "il tempo è tornato indietro, nel preciso istante in cui Chicco perde la vita… la madre è in ginocchio davanti al corpo esangue del figlio che giace a terra vicino alla Graziella piegata e ammaccata" (88).[8] Thus, his brothers and his mother are paralysed by his death, first interacting with his ghostly presence and then

[7] "THE MOTHER: Uccio, wait! I told you: let's leave him alone!
UCCIO: Mother, Chicco is...
THE MOTHER: Shut up!
GASPARE: He can't move anymore, mom!
THE MOTHER: You're wrong. He's moving!

The mother throws herself on her son and shakes him trying to revive him. She energetically moves him, making him move on the bed. Chicco follows the jerks generated by the external force by inertia, but as the tendency of his body is to remain still, he slowly dies.

The mother does not give up and shakes him harder, begging him not to stop. Exasperated, she doubles the rhythm of the jolts she presses on the mattress and the body bounces. Chicco comes back to life and dies again. He comes back to life and dies, until Gaspare with a brutal gesture grabs his mother and snatches her from the bed."

[8] "Time has turned back to the precise moment in which Chicco loses his life... the mother is on her knees in front of her son's bloodied body lying on the ground next to the bent and bruised Graziella."

forced to relive his accident. Initially, it seems that there is no resolution for them, rather, a very tangent risk of losing themselves to their suffering and to their self-harming.

Banushi's *Goodbye, Lindita* is similarly set at a particular moment in a family's life: the wake of the title character, Lindita. While one of the play's main themes is the mourning crisis frequently analysed by De Martino, the play opens to an unassumingly everyday scene. The stage represents the interior of a house, initially devoid of any element that could be associated to mourning and grief: on one side, a man and a woman watch a TV show, and on the other side, a woman folds clothes on the bed. It is evident that they belong to the same family, though their relationship to one another is never clarified. Then, one of the women places the fresh laundry on a cabinet, and the man vacuums the floor, removing the soil from it. Each gesture is carried out with the same slow pace, as they meticulously perform domestic duties and repeat familiar movements. The ordinariness of the scene is suddenly disrupted when the man moves the cabinet to the middle of the room, the woman pushes the neatly folded laundry on the floor, and they turn the piece of furniture into a bed and reveal a naked woman inside of it. It is Lindita, lying motionless on the bed, as the ordinary turns into a life-altering wake.

Acknowledging Lindita's presence, the women gather around the bed, oscillating back and forth, possessed by their pain. These movements replicate the ones described by De Martino and represented in *Stendalì*. They are continuous, hypnotising gestures. Afterwards, as other relatives enter the room, they begin cleaning the body. While the man walks off stage, the women are the ones performing the purifying ritual, highlighting its gendered dimension. Much like Chicco's mother was the one choosing the clothes for his burial, in this case, it is up to the women to prepare Lindita.

Once they have finished cleaning Lindita, they collect dirt and forcefully throw it on the body one by one, replicating the steps of a burial. In the words by Schäuble on Greek funeral rites, "the whole mortuary cycle – which is performed exclusively by women – encompasses the washing and laying out of the deceased body in an open coffin, followed by a period of ceremonial waking (*klama*) and lament singing" (Schäuble 2021, 65). However, in *Goodbye, Lindita* the ritual does not provide any resolution, as Lindita returns, getting up from the bed, much like Chicco in *Vita mia*. It is another *ritorno irrelativo*. It appears that Lindita's family is similarly stuck in a dehistoricising process, which halts their grieving and makes them face the impossible.[9]

[9] Furthermore, De Martino describes instances during the funeral laments, in which the mourners interrupt their actions due to a form of "technical hypocrisy, which stems from the dehistoricisation of a pain too acute and too psychically risky to be accepted and experienced in its historical reality" (2008, 106). These gestures are an integral part to the funeral lament, as he clarifies that "lament belongs to a ritual presence of mourning that can be evoked, maintained and suspended at will, or replaced with an opposing ritual presence of lasciviousness and nonchalant cheerfulness" (2008, 107). In the play, Banushi included moments of suspension of the funeral rites alongside the well-known and traditional mourning gestures. For instance, at the beginning of the play, soon after the shocking presence of the dead body is

Mourning Sounds

Before Christianity changed the approach to the dead and to death in the Euro-Mediterranean area, De Martino argues that one of the main ways to overcome the mourning crisis was the ritualistic funeral lament. The lament was a means to control suffering and grief, directing pain towards a series of gestures and sounds dictated by tradition, a "ritualistic control of suffering" (De Martino 2008, 58). In this way, the lament provided structure in the midst of a potentially existential crisis, it stops the living from falling into death's territories (Massenzio 2021, xxxv). As documented by Mangini in *Stendalì*, funeral laments are characterised by a specific crying technique. Moreover, "the recital of the lament is linked to certain periods of time and dates, is performed with traditional mimicry and melody, and constitutes a religious obligation" (De Martino 2008, 59).

While modernity has reduced the impact of the mourning crisis, especially in comparison to ancient times, De Martino noticed a few exceptions. In Southern Italy and in the Balkans, he was able to witness the residual traces of the ancient funeral lament, their "fragments and relics" (2008, 57). In particular, he argues that the Lucanian laments, the desolate, chaotic, cries that can be associated to a fraught mental state during mourning, as well as the dehistoricising tendency, became sublimated by the rhythmic singing adopted in the funeral rites. He argues that "the Lucanian ritual lament reshapes the shouting and howling into emotional refrains to be iterated periodically, so that between refrain and refrain the individual discourse is given a horizon" (2008, 80). Furthermore, as he conducted a taxonomizing accounts of funeral laments, he noted that the ones sung in Lucania were characterised on a melodic level by a rhythmic repetition, and on a literary one by short verses lacking metre or rhyme. The repetitiveness of the laments, simultaneously rhythmic and monotonous, allowed the performers to be in a light oneiric state.

A similar dream-like landscape, which combines the acoustic laments and an oneiric setting, is present in both *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita*. Furthermore, much like in Lucania, in both plays, the laments contribute to the mourners' relief. For instance, in *Vita mia*, right after Chicco's on stage death replicates his real one, the play assumes an oneiric atmosphere. As he lies on the bed, the mother lets her hair down, mimicking the ritualistic gesture of the many women who had performed the funeral lament in Lucania. Then, she seemingly performs a magic act:

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revealed, the family receives a call. The repeated ringing of the phone appears as a wrongful intrusion in the eerie and tragic environment represented on stage. Nonetheless, the man picks up the phone, talking to the person on the other end. In a scene that strongly contrasts the previous ones, the man laughs out loud, as the two women move around Lindita. The violent contrast portrayed side-by-side exemplifies the mourners' ability to pause the ritual at will.

In un angolo della stanza c'è una pianta di rose rosse, ultimo addobbo funebre. Tra i rami della pianta è poggiata una fascia rossa che si confonde tra le rose. La madre si toglie il velo nero e si scioglie i capelli, guardando Chicco con uno strano sorriso.

LA MADRE: (Si guarda intorno con gli occhi di una pazza) Uccio, m'avìa scurdàtu i ciuri!"

La madre sistema la pianta davanti alla testata del letto, prende la fascia e la srotola: appare, per incanto, un elegantissimo vestito rosso da sera.[10] (Dante 2020, 91)

She lifts Chicco and dances a final, dream-like dance with his lifeless body, clinging to him.

As she lies down on the bed with Chicco's body, she urges Gaspare and Uccio to cover them with a funeral veil. Refusing to let go of Chicco, the mother replicates on stage the religious imagery of the Christian Pietà. This visual image echoes the previous scene in the play in which she fell on her knees three times. Her sorrow indexes the Christian influences that are often present on Dante's stage. In this way, the play follows a path that is similar to the one described in *Morte e pianto rituale*: after having included gestures that can be traced back to ancient funeral laments, it equally incorporates Christian traces. Crucially, the two elements are brought together in the figure of the mother/Madonna.

While the mother and Chicco are covered by the veil, Gaspare and Uccio hide right under the bed. The family is at last peacefully reunited, held together by Chicco's death bed. As a last gesture, "*il piede nervoso della madre dà una spinta vigorosa alla ruota che si mette a girare. Sembra che il letto si muova. Una spinta, un'altra ancora e la ruota gira per sempre. Cullàti dal cigolìo della catena, la madre e i figli scivolano nel sonno*" (Dante 2020, 95).[11] The bed's squeaking and creaking is an uncanny sound that echoes Chicco's bicycle accident. At the same time, it subtly resembles the sounds of the traditional lament, due its rhythmic and monotonous soundscape. Thus, the bed has turned into a musical instrument of mourning through its circular movement and the previous chaos, made of bicycle rides, dances, impossible movements, is reduced to a moment of family unit. Though it recollects a moment of grief and agony, the bed's sound can contrast the

[10] "In one corner of the room there is a vase of red roses, the last funeral decoration. Between the branches of the plant rests a red sash that blends in among the roses. The mother removes her black veil and undoes her hair, looking at Chicco with a strange smile.

THE MOTHER: (Looks around looking insane) Uccio, I forgot the flowers!

The mother places the plant in front of the headboard, takes the sash and unrolls it: a very elegant red evening dress appears, as if by magic."

[11] "The mother's nervous foot gives a vigorous push to the wheel, which starts to turn. The bed seems to move. One push, one more, and the wheel turns forever. Lulled by the squeaking of the wheel, the mother and children drift off to sleep."

existential risk posed by the process of dehistoricisation, bringing the family back to the present moment and to their bodies' presence on and under the bed.

In *Goodbye, Lindita*, the oneiric aspect is fostered by the slow gestures of each character, by the mellow sounds in the background, and by the warmth of the light filtering through the stage. This dream-like setting renders Banushi's staging of a funeral lament feel like a natural consequence. In one of the play's earliest scenes, the women gather around Lindita's body, praying on their knees, and the oldest woman sings a lament in Albanian, directly looking at the body. While she performs, the others oscillate back and forth, filling the room with sighs and sobs. However, before the woman can finish her song, she is forcefully taken away by the others, who violently cover her mouth and drag her away from the stage. The lament thus does not reach its natural conclusion nor does it reach its goal. Lindita's subsequent resuscitation is the obvious consequence of the lament's interruption.

As the woman's ancient-like lament is halted, church bells sound slowly fill the stage, replacing it. They can be heard as the women wash Lindita in a water tank that turns into a baptismal font: using a small silver plate, the women gently clean Lindita, cleansing her and preparing her for the afterlife. While two women continue washing her, another one moves Lindita's arm to make the sign of the cross. Then, together with the man, they all hold Lindita's head and plunge it under the water three times. After the rite, the women dry her with a towel and gently guide her towards the golden icon of a Black Madonna and Child hanging in the background. Layer upon layer, they transform Lindita into a religious icon herself. They dress her, using white gloves, voluminous undergarments, an embroidered dress, tingling jewellery, a veil, and a heavy red cloth that they use to cover her face.

Lindita's wake turns into a religious procession, as rhythmic sounds of percussions, cymbals, and flutes create the soundscape. The melody increases in intensity, as Lindita is moved back and forth. Once the hypnotic sounds reach their climax, the red cloth is lifted, to reveal a golden mask covering her face and bouquets of flowers are thrown onto the stage. As the litany once again gains momentum, Lindita is hoisted onto a throne and slowly moved back and forth. The music intensifies, until a man, who is played by Banushi himself, emerges from the audience and hugs Lindita's body. If the previous, ancient, lament performed by the older woman was interrupted, similarly, the Christian ritual is also halted. The scene interrupts the sacralisation of Lindita, favouring instead a celebration of her humanity. Through Banushi's gesture, she has returned to her deathly dimension.

Once he lets her go, the women gently lower her down from throne and place her on an ordinary bed. Now, Lindita occupies an in-between position, adorned with sacral clothes, she has returned to the mundanity of the room. After having hugged the body a second time, Banushi's character places various chairs near the bed and moves over a television. As the family gathers around the television, a film is playing. The sounds and Albanian dialogues coming from it form a new lament for Lindita. If the traditional

lament performed at the beginning brought no resolution, now, the muffled and monotonous background sounds of the television sublimate the chaos, turning into a facet of mundanity. In a way, the family has accepted Lindita's death, turning it into an ordinary fact. They eat, laugh, and occasionally cry near Lindita. Her death has been processed and accepted, and they have been freed from the hold of mourning. Just like the bed squeaking did in *Vita mia*, the scene represents a contrast to the process of dehistoricisation documented by De Martino, as the television sounds "reinsert the afflicted into history and help to overcome the crisis through ritual praxis" (Schäuble 2021, 71).

Significantly, the religious imagery associated to Lindita is accompanied by the one of a figure that appears twice in the play. At the beginning, after the characters have briefly exited the stage, a Black woman enters the room, carrying a bundle of firewood. She gracefully and sombrely moves them across the stage, before halting in front of the golden Black Madonna and Child icon. She kneels in front of it and lifts her arms in pray. Subsequently, she removes the icon to reveal a dark nook behind It. Cautiously, she places the firewood inside, before climbing there herself, transforming into the icon and becoming herself the Black Madonna. The elderly woman is the only one that notices her: she curiously walks over, kneels down, and places the icon back in its place. Analogously, at the very end of *Goodbye, Lindita*, the background walls of the room open to reveal to the only character left, the elderly woman, the Black Madonna sitting on a nest made of twigs. The woman slowly climbs on her lap, assuming the Child's position, as the Madonna holds her and comforts her. The presence of the firewood and of the nest made of twigs resonates with the core role that agrarian rituals and harvest in particular had in the development of ancient funeral rites (De Martino 2008, 215). Thus, *Goodbye, Lindita* meaningfully closes with an image that combines the ancient and the Christian iconography, while still foregrounding a Madonna figure.

Both *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita* do not suggest a strict adhesion to Christianity over ancient funeral rites, rather a syncretic approach. This is exemplified by their centring Madonna-like figures, the Pietà in Dante's case and Banushi's Madonna and Child, following the footsteps of the *Mater dolorosa* described by De Martino in *Morte e pianto rituale*. De Martino traces the change from antiquity to Christianity, arguing that the former funeral laments were considered inappropriate in a Christian teleological perspective. Indeed, "a Christian is not suited to lament before death, but if anything to shed tears quietly, following the model of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus" (De Martino 2008, 290). However, the Virgin Mary, especially appearing as a *Mater dolorosa*, constituted a bridge over the division between pagan laments and Christian teleology, she is:

> A mediating figure who is entirely human. As such, she is susceptible to concede more to the earthiness of grief and at the same time removing human griefs from their risky isolation, and concentrating and resolving them in the symbol of a single act of grieving for a death that erased dying from the world. (De Martino 2008, 301)

Both *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita* rely on the figure of the *Mater dolorosa* as a way to represent the process of mourning, of embracing both antiquity and Christianity, of escaping from the existential loss of the self and of paving the path for a renaissance.

Mourning Languages

If the creaking sounds of the bed in *Vita mia,* and the television murmuring in *Goodbye, Lindita* denote a new form of lament, which can bring back to the present and can contrast the dehistoricisation process, the two plays also feature linguistic sounds that can achieve a similar goal. Noticeably, the language of Dante's play is mostly formed by dialectal words, while Banushi rejects Greek in favour of Albanian laments and television programmes. These two artistic choices are profoundly embedded in the socio-cultural context in which Dante and Banushi work. Moreover, they arguably turn the plays' linguistic laments into a political tool, underscoring the role of lament as "a poetic social commentary" (Schäuble 2021, 64).

Dante, as a Sicilian director, working in Sicily and producing plays about her region, needs to be contextualised in the 'Southern Question' paradigm. The term was popularised by Antonio Gramsci and refers to the socio-cultural division of Italy, which promotes a view of a modern North and a backward South (Gramsci 2014). De Martino, following Gramsci's incitement, saw Southern Italians as subalterns, using the term in an expansive way and to denote "the whole of the colonial and semicolonial peoples, and of the workers' and peasants' proletariat of the hegemonic nations" (De Matteis 2021, 7). Furthermore, his aim was to turn subalterns into a political subject and to take a political stance (Dainotto 2017; Imbriani 2020).

In particular, his engagement with the Southern Question focused on the way the hegemonic Italian culture saw Southern cultures as relics, trying to understand the way that "the subaltern popular world constitutes, for the bourgeois society, a world of *things* rather than of *people,* a natural world that is confused with the dominated and exploitable nature" (De Martino 2021b,19). Hence, De Martino's political aim manifested itself through a Gramscian desire to expand, open, break through the closed domain of cultural power with the cultural fervour of previously unknown humanity" (De Matteis 2021, 9). For instance, he argues that:

> The creation of a Southern consciousness finally adequate to the current stage of the class struggle in Italy and the world requires the in-depth exploration of the peasant communities of Southern Italy by... men who are dramatically engaged in the emancipation movement of these peoples, and for whom scientific theory is conceived as an enlightening moment and as an increase in the new humanism on the way. (De Martino 2021b, 55)

Investigating subaltern forms of culture was a Gramscian practice against hegemony for De Martino, who was moved by an intellectual "scandal" against hegemonic epistemologies (Signorelli 2015, vii).

Dante's inclusion of Palermitan dialectal words follows the footsteps of De Martino's analyses of Lucania. As noticed by many Italian activists and scholars, while Northern dialects are generally well-regarded and even seen as a form of cultural heritage, Southern dialects are perceived as a marker of backwardness (Fauzia and Amenta 2023; Palomba 2021). For instance, Claudia Fauzia and Valentina Amenta, activists of the queer transfeminist Sicilian collective *La malafimmina*, maintain that many Southerners are ashamed of their accents and dialects because of the negative connotations associated to them:

> Southerners, ashamed of their origin, often tend to disguise their accent when they are outside their home region. This happens because Southern regional languages are considered synonymous with ignorance and coarseness, as opposed to Italian, the idiom of those who are educated and occupy an important role in society. For this reason, it is not uncommon for Southern people themselves to censor the local dialect, their own and others', in the name of greater "refinement" and in opposition to the ignorant Southerners from whom they want to distance themselves. (2024, 44)

Furthermore, Fauzia and Amenta contend that Southern dialects are acceptable only when they are seen as a form of entertainment, when Southerners are depicted as stereotyped characters in films and novels (2024, 129). To contrast this negative perception, they revendicate and reclaim their accents, "to be a Southerner with an accent means to exist sonorously, to be proud of oneself and one's roots. But it also means understanding the origins of the shame and stigma... that weighs on Southern accents, and rejecting its commodification" (2024, 127-128).

An analogous linguistic stigmatisation is present in the Greek context against Albanians. If the division between Northern and Southern Italy is long-held, being connected to the country's Unification in the mid-nineteenth century (Dickie 1999; Moe 2006), the Greek and Albanian conflicts are similarly longstanding (Heraclides and Kromidha 2024). Noticeably, Greek hostility has intensified in recent years and especially since the mass migrations in the 1990s after the fall of the Albanian socialist regime (Ndoci 2023, 4). As noticed by Gabriella Lazaridis and Eugenia Wickens, "evidence shows that Greeks have negative attitudes towards the Albanian workers, perceiving them as 'cunning,' 'primitive,' and above all 'untrustworthy,' a source of danger and threat" (1999, 648). Overall, Albanian migrants are "seen as problematic and have acquired a negative image" (Lazaridis and Wickens 1999, 633). Similarly, Rexhina Ndoci highlights that there is an "emotional and psychological toll that stigma has on ethnic and racial groups in Greece seen as non-local" (2023, 19).

Reporting on the linguistic aspect of this discrimination, Ndoci argues that the creation of Albanian variations of the Standard Modern Greek tends to result in the stigmatisation of "the talkers who produce them to a large extent" (Ndoci 2021, 910). Furthermore, she contends that

> Albanian Greek features give rise to standard language ideologies and the stigmatization of Albanians. Talkers who produce such features are perceived as more Albanian and rural, are associated with aggressiveness, and dissociated from likeability. (Ndoci 2021, 911)

Hence, Albanian Greek varieties are perceived less favourably by Greek native speakers following an analogous pattern of the discrimination of Southern dialects in Italy.

In this context, Banushi's use of Albanian in *Goodbye, Lindita* is a particularly powerful move. Dimitris Papanikolaou highlights the use of Albanian in the context of a play like Banushi's, which is built around silence, saying that:

> The snatches of songs and the few phrases in Albanian do not expose (or at least do not *only* expose) the banning, essentially, of a language and a culture from the Greek public sphere for thirty-odd years, but are shared like fragments of poetry, inviting you to reassemble them as a language of memory and coexistence. (2024, 15)

By sidelining Greek and by favouring a language that has been long stigmatised, Banushi crafts an alternative soundscape.

Hence, Dante's use of Palermitan dialect on an Italian stage and Banushi's inclusion of Albanian laments and TV programmes on a Greek stage challenge the discrimination of both linguistic varieties. Furthermore, through their work, they both portray the South as a place of generative knowledges beyond strict divisions (Cassano 2012).[12] In the words by Maria Boletsi and Papanikolaou, they replicate the gestures of postcolonial and decolonial thinkers that see "the South as generating multiple modes of 'worlding' that open up alternative spatiotemporal entanglements and modes of knowing, being and relating to others: modes that resist the extractivist (neo-)colonial structures of capitalist modernity" (2022, 132). In this way, Dante and Banushi follow the incitement of De Martino by turning to subaltern positionalities, cultures, and embodiments. Furthermore, they exemplify the demartinian practice by challenging forms of dehistoricisation on their stage through languages that are anchored in the present and in current social dynamics, by turning the South of Europe into a place of world-building and experimentation.

Conclusion

Partaking in the wakes staged by Emma Dante and Mario Banushi, this article investigated the plays *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita* through the lens of Ernesto De

[12] In this case, the term 'South' is used expansively adopting the definition by Boaventura de Sousa Santos: "The global South is thus not a geographical concept... It is a South that also exists in the global North, in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalised populations, such as undocumented immigrants, the unemployed, ethnic or religious minorities, and victims of sexism, homophobia and racism" (Cassano 2012, 51).

Martino's work, in particular through *Morte e pianto rituale*. It followed the historical dimension of funeral laments delineated by De Martino, first spotlighting the gestures present in ancient laments and then focusing on the Christian imagery.

In this way, the article first argued that the bodily movements that De Martino marked as connected to a mourning crisis, to the risk of losing one's own presence due to grief, are staged by Dante and Banushi through acts of self-harm and through the return of the dead. Afterwards, it investigated the non-linguistic and the linguistic soundscapes created by Dante and Banushi. Initially, it scrutinised the traditional and new forms of lament present in the two plays, arguing that they create a way to contrast the dehistoricisation theorised by De Martino. Then, the article contended that both *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita*, while they do present Christian elements, foreground a syncretic approach to funeral laments, as exemplified by two embodiments of the *Mater dolorosa*. Finally, it was argued that the dialectal and accented sounds staged by Dante and Banushi promote Southern epistemologies and the social dimension of the lament, grounding their works in the present.

While this article focused on *Vita mia* and *Goodbye, Lindita*, other works by Dante and Banushi could have been investigated, such as *mPalermu* (2001) and *Taverna Miresia – Mario, Bella, Anastasia* (2023). Similarly, other Souths and other regions from the Mediterranean area could have been included. This critical open-endedness testifies for the relevance that De Martino's works still have today. *Morte e pianto rituale*, but also *Sud e magia* and *La terra del rimorso* invite us to look at the margins, at the relics, moving beyond the hegemonic, and generating new knowledges.

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