ONE

Crossing the Atlantic to Meet the Nation: The Emigration Ship in Mignonette's Songs and Crialese's *Nuovomondo*

> The voyage was a nightmare with moments of strange brilliance.
>
> —PASCAL D'ANGELO

The topic of voyages and ships is explored in this first chapter through visual and oral materials in which the emigrants' regional affiliations espouse an in-progress national formation project during transnational travels to "America," at once a real and imaginary place. Songs made popular by the "Queen of the Emigrants," the diva Gilda Mignonette, who mixed a traditional Neapolitan repertoire with dramatic songs on emigration and colonial anthems, are read next to Emanuele Crialese's film *Nuovomondo* (*Golden Door* 2006), which foregrounds the role of the ship for the leaving, traveling, and arriving migrants at the turn of the century. In these texts, the pre-occupied space under discussion is the ship, a floating social microcosm in which national fractures and international dreams coexist on a simultaneously dividing and uniting ocean. The preoccupation over the condition of the emigrants that the ship hosts prompts in these authors different reactions, in turn defining different perceptions and figurations of emigration and consequently of nation formation.

These oral and filmic texts allow us to respectively consider the representation of the historical migrant voyages produced at the time of the voyages themselves and those developed in our times, roughly one century later, when other boats and other immigrants are at the heart of the collective consciousness. Many other texts could have been chosen instead of Mignonette's songs to offer images and tales of ships authored by Italians transplanted in the United States in the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s, notably Pascal D'Angelo's 1924 autobiography *Son of Italy* (see Chapter 4 of his book), or the letters and memoirs of the emigrants themselves (see, for example, the Second Part of Tommaso

Bordonaro's 1991 *La spartenza*, about a 1947 voyage to America).[1] Yet, the success of Mignonette's songs and the specific cultural milieu they mirrored, coupled with the surprisingly marginal role she still has in the literature on Italian emigration, prompted me to explore her songs, and in particular some rare ones on the migrant voyage. Crialese's film does not have any direct antecedent, and certainly not in the realm of contemporary Italian cinema, with the closing scene of Amelio's film *Lamerica* constituting a possible exception.[2] Films such as the silent *L'emigrante* (The Emigrant) by Febo Mari (1915) or *Passaporto rosso* (Red Passport) by Guido Brignone (1936) focused on emigration to South America and moved the action to the "New World" primarily. By contrast, Giuseppe Tornatore's *La leggenda del pianista sull'oceano* (The Legend of 1900, 1998) is exclusively centered on the ship, an unanchored space where worldwide immigration and travel stories cross the life of the rootless protagonist, literally born on the ocean.[3] Silent filmmaker Paradisi devoted some intense scenes to the voyage in his 1916 *Dagli Appennini alle Ande* (an adaptation of De Amicis's short story): They focus on a largely isolated protagonist and adopt an oneiric register that psychologizes the voyage rather than documenting it. *Nuovomondo* thus arguably constitutes the only comprehensive view of Italian emigration to the United States (or the "New World," in general) on screen, and the only one in which the voyage is investigated so closely, along with the material milieu and impalpable dreams that drove emigrants abroad.

The representation of the ship, and by extension of the migrant as a floating identity, produces differing results in Mignonette's songs and Crialese's film, which mostly reflect their different approaches to the mythopoesis of emigration. Both coming from artists whose personal and artistic experiences unraveled in the United States and in Italy, the two representations reveal the degrees to which these cultural productions negotiated and reinvented a collective experience, and in the process created a certain figuration of the nation. Mignonette's songs were the product of a conscious, yet not uncomplicated, alignment with the ideological establishment of the time, while Crialese, assisted by the flexibility of historical distance, freed himself from the canon and spoke for rather than substituting the mythopoesis of the emigrants themselves.

Gilda Mignonette's Postcard Ships: From the New Polis to the New World

> we were facing the water and thinking ten thousand nights
> awaiting a single dawn (Viscusi).[4]

In a very brief but meaningful scene contained in Francesco Rosi's *I magliari* (The cloth sellers), a 1959 film about postwar Italian emigration to Germany, an old man from Naples now living in Hannover is having a solitary bowl of warm milk in a dark room in the company of a tiny cat, while in the background a jukebox plays Gilda Mignonette's "'A Cartulina 'e Napule." In the midst of a crisis for the cloth selling business he and his Italian buddies work for, the old man is in a melancholy reverie. When a co-worker (Mario, played by Renato Salvatori) interrupts him to inquire about their friend Totonno (Alberto Sordi), the old man uses the evergreen myth of Mignonette to displace the conversation

away from contingent problems and to place their immigrant struggles within the more abstract context of nostalgia for home.

> "La senti a questa? Questa quann' veniva in terr' i Brucculin faceva piangere i megliu gangster a tant 'i lacrime. Gilda Mignonette: la conosci?"
>
> "No."
>
> "E chi ci campi affà?"

> "Do you hear her? This one, when she went to Brooklyn, she would have the toughest gangsters melt down in tears. Gilda Mignonette: do you know her?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Why live then?"

The mythic stature of Mignonette is condensed in the incisive last question, whose apparently humorous quality also contains a melodramatic tone. For large numbers of Italian emigrants, whether to the United States or to the many other destinations they reached in the world, Mignonette became the embodiment of home: She healed, while capturing to a high degree, the sense of "homelessness" experienced by the deracinated emigrants of the Italian diaspora. Her music was a success for decades in her native Naples, in her adoptive city of New York, and in all the places that she visited on tour or where her popular 78 rpm recordings were distributed.[5] Mignonette (Naples, 1886–1953),[6] whose real name was Griselda Andreatini, essentially crafted her artistic persona in that complex international space between Italy and the emigrant communities abroad. She began her career in Sicily when her young soprano voice was discovered. Later in Naples, she worked as an actress with writer and performer Raffaele Viviani, whose comedic play *Scalo Marittimo ('Nterr' 'a 'Mmaculatella*, 1918) about the emigrants ready to board the ship at the port of Naples can be considered as one of the ur-sources for many works on emigration, including Crialese's *Nuovomondo*. After a timid start in the comedic genre as a *sciantosa*, a singer at the *cafè chantant*, which mostly revealed her feisty personality and elegant dress style, in 1919 Mignonette was invited to perform some classic songs from Naples for the Lega Italiana Musicale (Italian Musical League) of New York. The association was aimed at fostering both local Italian music production and the circulation of Italian music as part of a program of intellectual and political growth for the "colony," effectively seen as an extension of the nation.[7]

The transnational dimension of Mignonette's career hinged on this concept of Italy beyond its borders, which embraced both the emigrant colonies and the territorial colonies in Africa. Not surprisingly, Mignonette's introduction to the New York scene, where the industry of consumption, leisure, and entertainment was well developed,[8] happened thanks to singer Roberto Ciaramella. Known as "the Christopher Columbus of Neapolitan song," as reported in Sciotti's biography of Mignonette (45), Ciaramella was particularly well known in Tripoli, back then part of the Italian colonies in Africa. That Mignonette owes the first steps of her U.S. success to a figure so entangled with the expanded form of the Italian nation is quite a telling element in the reading of the country's formation vis-à-vis emigration and colonialism that I am proposing in this book. The life and artistic

vicissitudes of Mignonette are equally relevant to understand this scenario of transnational entanglements, which did not simply act as a background to Mignonette's career, but was also indirectly built by the cultural content and political message of her songs and shows.

From the performance for the Lega Italiana Musicale on, Mignonette's regular repertoire was characterized by a set of established songs designed to appeal to the emigrants' nostalgia for home: "Santa Lucia luntana" (Distant St. Lucy),[9] "A canzone 'e Napule" (The song of Naples), "Core napulitan" (Neapolitan heart), "A luna 'e Napule" (The moon of Naples), and "Canzone americana" (American song) are representative of a Naples-centered genre that offered in music "views" of the city and its environs, which the film industry had also introduced.[10] During her visit to New York in 1924, under the sponsorship of Feliciano Acierno (whose son Frank she eventually married), she presented these songs, along with some Neapolitan *sceneggiate*, and added to her list the famous "Mandulinata 'e l'emigrante" (The mandolin piece of the emigrant). Mignonette was immediately successful and her popularity placed her next, and eventually beyond, the star of the Italian immigrants in New York at that time, Teresa De Matienzo. In the mid-1920s she started her back-and-forth traveling between Italy and the United States, recording her pieces both in New York and Naples[11] and presenting shows strongly characterized by both her ability to change several dresses over the course of a show and to mix oral narration and songs.

Even in Italy, Mignonette's success is in part attributable to her emigration-centered songs. Typical compositions include "Nterra all'America" (On American soil), "Figliu nun mannà dollare" (Son, do not send any money), "Te ne si ghiut'America" (You moved to America), with the last two addressing such opposing themes as that of the emigrants' willingness to send remittances home and the emigrants' tendency to keep money stingily to themselves. Her success was sealed in 1928 by a song that, in becoming popular worldwide, turned Mignonette into an international star: "'A cartulina 'e Napule" (Postcard from Naples), which Rosi in his film *I magliari* chooses to feature as profoundly expressive of the emigrants' angst. Known as "the musical manifesto of Italian immigrants in America" (Frasca 44),[12] this song is the most obvious exemplification of the "invention of Naples" that Mignonette and the composers and musicians she worked with had forged in these years. It rested on an iconography that froze the picturesque image of the city both in the emigrants' collective imaginary and in the wider audiences of the countries where Italian communities had been formed.[13] Yet, the strong sentimentalism of the songs of the Neapolitan genre in general did not simply respond to an actual sentiment of nostalgia. Mignonette and several of her contemporary artists actually proposed the "crystallization of a largely metabolized experience" of distance (Durante 118), effectively manufacturing in the transnational space of the diaspora a long-lived "national" tradition of regional matrix by which Naples equals Italy.

Among the numerous songs Mignonette made famous both in Italy and the United States, two in particular focus on the emigrant voyage: "Partenza degli emigranti per l'America" (Departure of the emigrants to America), also known as "Partenza da Napoli" (Departure from Naples), and "La dura traversata" (The tough voyage), both recorded in 1936 in Italy for Phonotype and gathered in one supplement of the Phonotype/Phonoelectro catalogue

along with other two songs: "Rimpatrio dei napoletani" (Repatriation of the Neapolitans) and "Il festoso arrivo" (The joyous arrival).[14] All together, they represent a cycle of songs devoted to the voyage and design a looplike trajectory from departure to the voyage and arrival and then return home. Whereas the titles of the first two songs suggest a strong reference to the ship and the voyage that are the central topic of this chapter, the actual content reveals the sentimental sublimation of the experience characteristic of the genre. The concrete representation of emigration with its sociopolitical causes, material implications and cultural import is obliterated in favor of a hyperconcentration on the feelings connected to the moment of leaving and the resulting sense of nostalgia for home in the process of traveling and arriving.

The first recording, "Partenza degli emigranti per l'America,"[15] opens with a recited part reproducing the good-byes at the port. Next to the cries of the boarding staff, the running thread is that of emotional exchanges from the very outset:

Un bacio, un bacio ancora, mamma, e non piangere	One kiss, one more kiss, mother, oh don't cry!
V'nit, Ciro, bell'e mamma	Come here, Ciro, light of my eyes

The song starts out with a famous first line in a verse that shortly after coalesces singing and being Neapolitan:

Partono 'e bastimente	The ships are leaving
p' 'e terre assaje luntane,	Toward faraway lands,
cantano a buordo, so' napulitane!	People on board are singing: they are Neapolitans!

The environment around the ship could be taken out of a painting: A slice of Naples is still visible, and the moonlight shines on the sea in the gulf; the emotional link between the moonlight and Naples is also established in the following strophes. In alternating between Mignonette's solo voice, that of the chorus, and that of several anonymous characters in recited sections, the song continues to interweave geographical references to the coast of Naples (Posillipo, Marechiaro) with images of amatory exchanges in idyllic scenarios such as a pristine beach along crystalline waters, close to a grotto with fishing boats.

There is no trace here of the financial and physical sacrifices of the emigrants, of the challenges encountered on the way to the port, on the docks or the ship, or of the actual procedures and complications experienced as third-class ship passengers. With a swift metanarrative twist, supported by Mignonette's enchanting voice, the emigrants actually become singers in a song ultimately more concerned with a celebration of the art of singing rather than the documentation or denunciation of the actual conditions experienced by emigrants.[16] In this sense, it is not surprising that the piece consists of a medley of quotations from popular songs, notably "Santa Lucia luntana" (1916), "A Canzona 'e Pusilleco" (1919) and "Torna a Marechiaro" (1922), all written by E. A. Mario, with the last one based on the verses of popular dialect poet Salvatore Di Giacomo. "La partenza" closes with a crescendo of intensity over two verses that could be associated with all themes but that of the emigrant voyage: "If Sunday the weather is good we will go to Marechiaro," a quite improbable scenario for the migrants who had just embarked on a voyage to America that lasted a few weeks.

The central part of the song captures the tone of the composition and by extension the genre:

Se gira 'o munno sano,	One travels around the whole world,
se va a cercà furtuna,	trying to improve one's fate,
ma quanno sponta 'a luna	But when the moon comes out
luntan' a Napule	Away from Naples
nun se po' sta!	One cannot take it!

Regardless of the peregrinations of the emigrants—Mignonette reminded the listeners—a Neapolitan will always look for and essentially see Naples as part of the visual concretization of a dream, a memory, and a desire. Rather than being a space of preoccupation for the migrants over their material situation or occupied with a realistic or fantastically revisited representation of the emigrants' departure as in Crialese's *Nuovomondo*, Mignonette's first part of the voyage is more preoccupied with the panoramic views of Naples from the deck. Even the depiction of emigrants, and in this case Neapolitans, as singers occurs in a sublimated melodramatic context, which removes the emigrants' agency and makes them part of a staged scene. As Franzina explains in his essay "Le canzoni dell'emigrazione," emigration had a soundtrack made up of three clusters of songs: familiar folk songs on various themes that the emigrants entertained themselves with during the travel and relocation experience; folk songs developed by them about the experience itself (emigration songs, strictly speaking); and the songs on that experience that were written by formal composers, performed by professional singers, and circulated through official channels. Mignonette's songs clearly belonged to this last category: As "elite" songs for the masses, they eventually forged a canon.

Unlike *Nuovomondo* which uses Sicilian folk songs to accompany small gestures such as getting ready in the ship's dormitory for the arrival to Ellis Island, or looking out to the sea from the deck in a sort of collective prayer, or giving vent to accumulated grief in a *tarantata* moment punctuated by frantic percussive movements, Mignonette's repertoire includes songs that stem from and reinforce a more canonical genre. Even though the repertoire and the single songs remain strongly linked to the dialect, they define a nonantagonistic, pathos-imbued approach to the vast and complex phenomenon of Italian emigration. The second song under analysis here reflects this same stylization. In "La dura traversata," also known as "In mare doloroso distacco: La burrasca e i napoletani" (A painful separation at sea: The storm and the Neapolitans),[17] the main theme of the song—the storm that makes the voyage so hard—is barely mentioned in the opening recitation and soon turned into an occasion to sing for the traveling Neapolitans. Prompted again by the presence of the moon, the singing this time is addressed to Fortune, a sort of divinity invoked as "bella 'mbriana."[18] The fears and challenges connected to the voyage are translated into a prayer that puts into the hands of fate the future of the emigrants:

Bella 'mbriana scetate po' coro	Bella 'mbriana wake up for this chorus
E cincucientu voci so' una voce	It is five hundred voices into one
Ma 'sta canzun c'a scrittu uno e 'lloro	This song was written by one of them
So cincuciente e portan' una croce	It is five hundred carrying only one cross

Ma state all'aria, è doce	Stay in the open air, it is sweet
Bella 'mbriana scetate po' coro	Bella 'mbriana, wake up for the chorus

While the sense of struggle is articulated in the image of the cross, interestingly opposing a Christian iconography to the initial pagan one, the general atmosphere remains one of a fatalistic wait. Its zenith is reached in the insertion of another anthem of emigration, "Santa Lucia" (or "Partono i Bastimenti," The ships are leaving), which with its Catholic inflection and lyrics in dialect constitutes the epitome of what Franzina has called "a recording market of nostalgia, often victimistic, tear-ridden, and most of all southernized to the nth degree" ("Le canzoni" 560). Not surprisingly, in "La dura traversata," the drive to sing for these emigrants looking for another chance in life is prompted by a glance at the moon and the memory of Naples. In the process, Mignonette once again stitches lyrics from different songs together as part of her typical pattern of recycling for the purpose of easy recognition, especially those verses as famous as the closing ones in the following section of the song:

Santa Lucia[19]	Saint Lucy
Luntan' 'a te	Away from you
quanta malincunia!	Such sorrow!
Se gira 'o munno sano,	One travels around the world,
se va a cerca' furtuna,	trying to improve one's lot,
ma quanno sponta 'a luna	But when the moon comes out
luntan' 'a Napule	Away from Naples
nun se po' sta!	One cannot take it

As "Mamma, Naples, and Saint Lucy" are called for in sobs at the very end of the song, the proposed rhetorics appear strongly anchored to a "Neapolitanized" national discourse that recognizes in the family, the saints and the place of origin the pillars of a collective identity as emigrants. Yet, Mignonette herself did not stand for such values in uncomplicated ways, since her personal and professional choices even reversed the apparent meekness of such rhetoric by defying conventional standards. She was among the first women to wear pants on stage (Sciotti 164), and she cleverly understood the mechanisms of an international entertainment market whose commercial rules she plied to her needs and skills as an artist.[20] Nonetheless, in her songs, it is the glance backward that allows the emigrants to move forward: It points to a paradoxical paradigm that the poet Viscusi turns around in the epigraph of this chapter where dawn at the destination is what propels the voyage. For Mignonette, it is a set of ossified national/local paraphernalia that apparently equips the emigrants for the transnational experience in the form of endurance and fatalism: In her songs, the new polis (Neapolis/Naples) occupies a central role technically overpowering the new world (United States/the Americas).

Painted as an experience of disappointment in Mignonette's "La dura traversata," the arrival to America is already configured as another occasion to "sing nostalgically" and "with a heavy heart" to withstand the difficulties. De Amicis's representation of the emigrants in his well-known book *On Blue Water* (1889) belongs to the same national discourse, albeit developed a few decades earlier, when the impulse to build a national identity was

still animated by a pride of Risorgimento roots and the emigration phenomenon was experiencing its first phase of massive outbound flux. In De Amicis's text, a significant image of singing passengers on the boat coincides with a joyous moment—the crossing over the Equator—but also precedes a section focusing on the less than joyous condition of the destitution of the emigrants, within his typical frame of tearful patriotism. In addressing the migrants as "my ragged brothers, my breadless sisters, sons and fathers of soldiers who fought and will fight for a land that they were not and will not be able to inhabit" (137), De Amicis is nonetheless registering the demographic hemorrhage, its causes and its consequences. A few decades later, Mignonette takes this national discourse to a higher level of formalization within the melodramatic register, as the nation at the height of its Fascist development approaches the imperial enterprise, and soon afterward World War II.

Indeed, it is in the mid-1930s that Mignonette's repertoire began to mix emigration songs with those about the contemporary colonial enterprises. Her collaboration with, among others, Carlo Buti, the pop Caruso of Italy during the Fascist era, solidified this new course for Mignonette: The most successful theme of this period is "Faccetta nera."[21] Written by Giuseppe Micheli as a semi-satirical text on the Abyssinian enterprise, the song was composed by Mario Ruccione in 1935 and made famous by Buti. Considered the anthem of Fascism, and in particular Imperial Fascism, "Faccetta nera" in reality was not supported by the Fascist regime, which approved of it only after several change, meant to obfuscate the Italian defeat at Adua as well as any reference to friendly relationships with the Abyssinians. In presenting the justness of the Italian intervention as part of an anti-slavery operation, the song set the premise for a military operation ostensibly characterized by a civilizing mission. In this scenario, the ship acquires a liberating meaning for the "little black face," that is, the subjugated Abyssinian woman being addressed in the lyrics:

Se tu dall'altipiano guardi il mare	If you look at the sea from the hills
Moretta che sei schiava fra gli schiavi	Cute darky, you are a slave among slaves
Vedrai come in un sogno tante navi	As in a dream you will see many ships
E un tricolore sventolar per te	And a tricolor flag waving for you

The song predicts that the "little black face" will be rescued by Italy, symbolized by the three-colored flag. Infused with an imperialist ethos, the song was one of many written during these years that were added to the more traditional Neapolitan genre and the repertoire of emigrant songs.

This unique convergence between the inventory of emigration songs and colonial/imperial anthems, but most of all, the political quality that Mignonette's art acquired in combining them, are evidence of an Italian identity that through social, military, and cultural movements took shape in the transborder space of the diaspora and colonialism. Mignonette's support of the imperial enterprise in Abyssinia, a historical moment that also prompted tensions in the spaces of the diaspora,[22] reached its pinnacle when she presented herself on stage wrapped in an Italian flag, or dressed as an officer, or set off a background

representing Addis Ababa. While her success continued—she was by now known as "La Carusiana" for her voice, even though her repertoire was not operatic like that of Enrico Caruso—the controversy around her political affiliations grew quickly, and right at the beginning of the war she went back to Italy. Upon her return to the United States in 1941, she found a changed environment: The American stance against Fascism made her into a dangerous presence because of her open support of Mussolini and her resistance against the war bonds campaign in the United States. Framed circumstantially by accusations of fiscal evasion, she defended herself in court by claiming her legitimate Italian patriotism, but in reality her career was derailed up until the Cold War: Her concerts were boycotted and her ability to record hindered. Argentina became her new adoptive country, while she continued to go back to Naples for regular shows.

Her final return to Italy is worth mentioning for the almost surreal twist it gave to Mignonette's life. After an existence dedicated to songs about the difficulties of leaving and returning, and in particular about the unreachable distance of the mythical Gulf of Naples for the emigrants, she died of liver disease on a ship a short distance from the port of Naples in 1953. Naples reduced to a framed postcard next to her cabin's bed reflected the sublimated Naples of her songs. Those who were waiting for her at the port welcomed back her corpse, an eerie materialization of the experiences of disease and death on emigrant ships that she only rarely recorded in her songs. She has since remained the "Carusiana" for the emigrants and the "Queen of Emigrants" for Italians at home (Sciotti 155).

Taken as a whole, her song production, and in particular the production focused on emigration, was impressive. Despite the congealing cultural operation offered and maintained by her lyrics and interpretations, she contributed to a lively entertainment scene that involved emigrants actively and made them objects and subjects of the discourse on emigration both in Italy and abroad, within their ethnic communities as well as in the broader scenarios of the countries they had moved to. The songs about the ship analyzed here provide clear evidence of her calculated distancing from documentary intent and her alignment with an abstract regional image of Italy, which not coincidentally the Fascist regime was supportive of in order to replace the depiction of poor and struggling Italians that damaged the nation's respectability. Other contemporary songs (such as those included in Franzina's studies or the show *L'orda*),[23] or the short plays by actor Eduardo Migliaccio (Farfariello) whose "dialect usage did not reflect pride so much as linguistic reality" (Carnevale 132) offered a wide palette of topics related to the life of transplanted Italians, including criticism of the country of origin and the clash/encounter with the new environment. Mignonette's contamination of Italian and dialect, traditional songs and new popular motives, served instead the purpose of creating what eventually became a long-standing canon for the Italian emigrant/immigrant, which effectively hindered a real investigation into such a fundamental aspect of Italian history and culture as the country's diaspora.

Only decades afterward, under the pressure of the new sociocultural scenario designed by the arrival of immigrants in the 1990s, does Italy revisit its past of emigration and with it the figuration of the migrant ship. The arrivals of boats from the other sides of the Mediterranean bring preoccupation about the impact of immigrants in Italy, but ultimately bring

with them an implicit history of people's movements from and back to Italy. Pre-occupied by the tales of these past voyages, these boats have prompted a cultural production on Italian emigration at large that finds in the film *Nuovomondo* one of its highest expressions, especially for the role played by the ship in it, a space of constant tension between expectations and reality as well as between tradition and modernity.

Realist and Magical Realist Emigration Voyages in Crialese's Nuovomondo

> A whole nation walked out of the middle ages,/slept in the ocean, and awakened in New York in the twentieth century (Viscusi).

Crialese's 2006 film *Nuovomondo* offers instead a unique opportunity to reflect on the conscious questioning of, or the alternative to, the privileged space of the Italian nation. Crialese has fundamentally crafted a transnational film in which the figurative condensation of the diaspora in the microcosm of the transoceanic ship allows him to address the peculiar transnational formation of a country of regions like Italy within a dynamic framework of demographic movements. From his early playful musings while still a student in New York about recent "undocumented" Italian emigration to the United States (*Once We Were Strangers*, 1997),[24] to his nuanced investigations of hyperregional life in the southernmost periphery of Italy, Lampedusa (*Respiro/Grazia's Island*, 2002), Crialese has constantly explored the forms in which the Italian nation collides against its own purportedly homogeneous identity in and outside itself. Yet, it is with *Nuovomondo* that the director embraces the theme of a nation that truly exceeds its own boundaries in the course of over a century of emigration.[25]

By focusing on the story of one family, the Mancusos, *Nuovomondo* recounts on the screen the tragic and yet exhilarating voyage of a group of Italian emigrants across the Atlantic and their arrival at Ellis Island in the early 1900s. Crialese has thus powerfully intervened through the filmic medium in a collective imaginary otherwise devoid of a shared memory of this colossal exodus. A memory that can only function as a paradoxical pillar for Italy, since it created a nation out of regions in the transnational space of emigration.[26] In other words, in following the vicissitudes of the different members of a Sicilian family as they encounter "America" before, during, and after the voyage, *Nuovomondo* traces the complex map of departures, arrivals, and returns that have made Italy into a circularly diasporic place.

The first part of the film is set in Sicily, par excellence a not fully belonging space vis-à-vis the nation not only in geographical terms, as an island, but also historically. On the one hand, Sicily has been a region with a strong separate and at some point separatist culture and, on the other, it represents an area strongly connected to transnational contexts such as the Mediterranean as well as the Atlantic area and in particular the United States.[27] The choice of Sicily as the place of origin and departure of the protagonists is also dictated by the peculiar migration history of the island: The region, along with Veneto and Campania, is among those that contributed the most to the exodus over the decades (Favero 16).[28]

The main characters of the film are members of a closed family comprised of a young, determined, and gentle widower, Salvatore Mancuso, who lives in a small rural village with his two children, Angelo and Pietro—the latter is hearing- and speech-impaired—and his old mother, Fortunata, who functions as the local sorceress, "*la medica*." It is off the clash and overlapping of the disappointments, delusions, and desires of these characters that Crialese spins a tale of reactions to and decisions about the magnetic allure of what provides the title to the film in the Italian version, the "new world." Interestingly, the term is rendered as one word (technically "neworld" in translation), melding adjective and noun so as to create a new term altogether, which epitomizes the encounter of two elements and the creation of something different and novel. Regrettably, not only does the English title *Golden Door* lose this nuance, but it also restricts the semantic sphere of the term to the very arrival (the door) by making explicit reference to the closing line of Emma Lazarus's 1883 poem "The New Colossus," inscribed at the bottom of the Statue of Liberty. The subtlety of Crialese's original title therefore dissolves in English, leaving no trace of the remapping of spaces that his film suggests in each of its three parts. The same way Sicily is profoundly changed by emigration to a new land, the ocean condenses the migrants' desire/fear to arrive in a new place, and Ellis Island/the United States offers a new social model in the immigrants' country.

Set in an astoundingly beautiful and yet hardly generous natural environment for these poor Southern peasants, the early scenes already reveal the narrative and visual style that Crialese adopts throughout the movie. Supported by attentive research in the field of the *questione meridionale* and Italian emigration as part of the background preparation for the film,[29] Crialese resorts to an apparently realist, almost *verista*, rendition. Yet, he intentionally transcends any documentary drive and repeatedly adopts an explosively surrealist mode in some of the most at once beloved and criticized scenes of the movie. It is this switch in register that marks Crialese's distinctive take: He incorporates the literary legacy left by Pirandello's "The Other Son" and Maria Messina's short stories about the dramatic emptiness produced by emigration at the turn of the century, but also sublimates it.[30] Indeed, the very dreamlike atmosphere and symbolic language that the Tavianis used in their adaptation of "The Other Son" for one of the episodes of *Kaos* (1984) is taken by Crialese to another level. He decides to not only indirectly hint at the oneiric world of the emigrants-to-be, but to actually film their dreamscape. After all, this sphere of desire was so powerful in the heads and hearts of the fleeing emigrants that it became visible and tangible; ultimately, it made the emigration adventure possible.

At the beginning of the film, the camera lingers on two black and white postcards sent from the United States bringing news from "*a terra nova*" (the new land, or new world). One depicts a man carrying a gigantic onion on a wooden cart, and the other catches two men picking huge coins from a bush. While the postcards are taken as material evidence of the existence of the "*paese della cuccagna*" (land of Cockaigne, or country of abundance)[31] by the village youth—"these are true things," one of the local young women firmly states—this visualization of unreal abundance makes the old mother, Fortunata, skeptical. She promptly orders the burning of this "evidence" in the attempt of extinguishing the burning desire to leave, which like an epidemic is taking over the locals, including her own

family. But the attempt is in vain. Not only are the postcards not burnt, but her grandson Pietro also takes them to a holy spot on top of the nearby mountains where his father and brother await God's direction on the family's next steps. Salvatore's aspiration to emigrate seeks corroboration. Pietro's unexpected delivery of the postcards is thus interpreted as a proof of divine backing, and Salvatore's desire to leave is further strengthened.

In another famous scene of *Nuovomondo*, Salvatore experiences visions of abundance embodied by mammoth carrots and olives that women and children carry around in the fields. Shortly afterward, in order to protest his mother's refusal to leave for the United States, Salvatore buries himself in the soil, thus "performing" the condition of death that her stubborn position is forcing onto the family. It is a ritualized entombment that he also designs in order to test fate for a second time. Once a rain of coins starts beating down on him as he lies in the soil at night, he takes it as the final, and most concrete, indication that a regeneration is close: The coins of the postcard have materialized on his inert body. The increasing tangibility of these signs (from images to visions and experiences) convinces him of the justness of his resolution to take the family to the United States.

In Crialese's reading, these forms of reification of the desire to join the "*paese della cuccagna*" are necessary to embark on the voyage, which, as actor Vincenzo Amato indicated in an interview,[32] was for the emigrants like a spaceship voyage would be for us today, if we were to consider a massive relocation to another planet. Crialese succeeds in making these magical-realism moments into a reflection of the awe-producing desire for America as the El Dorado and a manifestation of a folk religion where the unseen and the imagined are equally relevant tools for one's understanding of the world. Similarly, contemporary migrants perceive Europe as the New America. In Del Grande's reportage *Mamadou va a morire*, the places of departure in Morocco are dotted by "signs" of today's El Dorado. Soccer T-shirts with player Francesco Totti's name and team number along with Dolce and Gabbana knock offs are the simulacra of a wished-for world which finds its concrete instantiation in the cars driven by returned or visiting emigrants, or in the vacation houses they can now afford to build in the town's new neighborhoods (18–21). The lure of the destination is as powerful across decades and centuries: It simply takes on different forms. The epistemological collapse of what is desired/imagined with what is seen and possibly or reductively taken as a reality accessible to all, is a crucial mechanism in migration experiences and consequently in the stories about them. Whether in the form of reportage or written/filmic text, these stories often focus on this collapse in order to identify the drive that pushes people to leave and to enter an in-between space. Experienced both before the departure as a distancing from reality and reexperienced after the relocation as a condition of bicultural belonging, this in-between space is epitomized by the trip, as the parenthesis between two worlds that embraces both while suspending them.

Crialese convincingly captures this tension in the middle part of his tripartite *Nuovomondo*, placed between the departure from Sicily and the arrival at Ellis Island. He sets this central section on the migrant ship and skillfully shapes it as a space of fear, discovery, and cultural negotiations, all at once. The ship therefore emerges as a quintessential preoccupied space where hyponational and hypernational issues intersect. While studies on ports, ships, corollary activities around the voyage, namely the emigration industry,

have carefully reconstructed the history and cultural impact of the voyage in all its components, as we have seen in the Aperture, it is Crialese's ship that has furnished a visual and "moving" rendition of Italy's early emigration experience to a large (and international) audience. In the obvious absence of a direct memory of the Italian migrant voyage via film footage, this particularly hidden aspect of migration—much more inaccessible than the departure and arrival experiences that are shared by nonmigrants as well on the docks of departure and arrival docks—seems to defy representation. During the emigration era, government inspectors and doctors documented the experience for administrative and law implementation purposes in publications of only limited circulation, while De Amicis's *On Blue Water*, despite being written as an accessible travel diary for a larger readership, never became a popular classic in Italy. Today, Stella's and La Compagnia delle Acque's shows analyzed in the preceding Aperture rely on these materials as well as on the letters of the migrants as a rich source of information, and illustrate the readings and commentary with compelling vintage photographs. Still, it is *Nuovomondo* that, by reworking the legacy of such diverse directors as Chaplin, Kazan, and Amelio (as well as Fellini),[33] has provided a visual kinetic tableau of both the outside and inside of the Italian emigrant ship for the first time and for large distribution. (Interestingly, it took up to 2006 for Italy to reflect on this fundamental theme in such comprehensive and accessible terms.)

The ship first appears in the film in a scene of strong pictorial quality that, by hinging on Crialese's characteristic play between reality and perception, emphasizes the role of the ship as a threshold, a point of connection between the regional space of departure and the transnational space of the ocean. In marking the transition between the first part set in Sicily and the second set on the ocean, the scene masterfully incorporates two intrinsic qualities of the departure of millions and millions of emigrants: the caesura from and the in-builtness into a country whose very identity can ultimately be described only in terms of drifting. A camera placed on the ship films the boarding passengers from above first and then cutting to a bird's-eye shot shows a large crowd of people that the spectator mistakenly takes as the passengers themselves. Suddenly, an almost imperceptible motion slowly creates a separation in the middle of the crowd, dividing it between the leaving passengers, on one side, and the families, friends, and workers staying put at the dock, on the other (Fig. 7). The skillful surprise effect has a visual as well as an epistemological impact: What crowd is actually moving? From where to where? After the eye is initially tricked into creating a whole, which stands metaphorically for the nation, the whole gets split, partially drifts away, as the ship, until then part of the land, parts from it and . . . departs.

The Italian nation—still very young back then, still unable to articulate a homogenous discourse out of its regional fragmentation and only partially completed unification process—leaves and goes abroad traveling through space and time at once, as Viscusi lyrically suggests in the epigraph *(Astoria* 17*)*. The caesura in the film is also marked at the auditory level: The drifting is accompanied by a deep drone, a percussive sound somewhere between a dirge and the slow beating of a melancholy heart. It is the ship's horn that interrupts the face-to-face link between the people on land and those on the ship: The intense whistle turns the emigrants' attention from the shore—a space of preoccupation over survival and social improvement—toward the sky and by extension to the new

Figure 7. Emigrant ship leaving the dock in Sicily. Still from *Nuovomondo*, 2006.

world, functioning as a call to adventure and change (Fig. 8). Perceived by some critics as "a self-defeating act of virtuosity" (Bonsaver), this scene is instead an occasion for the effective artistic intervention of the *auteur*. By challenging realist paradigms and privileging theatrical compositions to fully render the coexistence of various space and time levels, Crialese captures one of the quintessential moments of the migratory experience—the departure—in a solemn yet not bombastic style.

Once the ship is on the water, it functions as a floating social microcosm in which class, linguistic, religious, and gender-based forms of identification are inevitably questioned and partially redefined vis-à-vis the encounter with the people in exodus as well as the new space overseas. Unlike De Amicis, Crialese is not invested on the melodramatic articulation of the national loss implicit in the outbound flow or in a grandiloquent celebration of the emigrant colonies as extensions of the nation,[34] nor does he sublimate the voyage experience into a nostalgic song as Mignonette did. Instead, he is intent on representing the social complexity of the ship and the culture it expresses and produces. As a contact zone, the ship is primarily a space in which identities and affiliations are reshaped and newly forged.

A clear exemplification of this process of renegotiation in *Nuovomondo* is the initial conversation among men coming from different regions and suddenly locating a previously unknown common denominator in both the qualifier "Italian" and the space of the ocean, which, as we have seen in the Aperture was often, even until the postwar era, a first-time discovery for the emigrants—"The sea! That must be what they call the sea!" exclaims Pascal D'Angelo in his 1924 autobiography (55). In the film, as they take hold of their berths in the third-class sleeping area, the Italian men introduce themselves to each other by

Figure 8. Emigrants traveling on transatlantic ship. Still from *Nuovomondo*, 2006.

indicating their village of origin. The resulting web of provenances and dialects prompts Vincenzo's candid, and thus exhilarating, comment: "Who's ever slept with so many foreigners before?" A seemingly knowledgeable man among them observes that they are not foreigners but "all Italians." His claim—effectively an act of invention of the Italian community for that time—corroborates the reading of emigration as an experience that created Italians outside of Italy. In this case, the invention occurs in the hybrid space of the ocean, which Vincenzo within the same conversation calls "Il Grande Luciano." In melding the Sicilian word for "*oceano*" with its article (*lu uciano=luciano*), he forges a new term, Luciano, sounding like the name Lucien (meaning light in Latin). He practically anthropomorphizes the large expanse of water, which still unknown to him acquires the status of a gigantic godlike figure. In traversing it, the ship turns into a nationalizing space, preoccupied by the regional stories of single individuals and communities simultaneously entering a transnational cultural sphere.

By the same token, on the ship traditional gender roles come to a halt vis-à-vis the mysterious presence of Lucy/Luce (another name signifying "light" and thus "change"), the upper-class woman who joins the Mancusos and counteracts/complements the mother figure of Fortunata. Despite the practically unanimous criticism on her insertion into the plot,[35] Lucy clearly embodies the new female paradigm of the learned critical woman foreshadowing the different cultural values that the New World will expose the migrants to. Indeed, her alleged allegiance to her social class dissolves in the hybrid spaces of the ship and the ocean, and cannot remain impermeable to contact. On the contrary, it is so porous that it is finally incorporated into the working-class space in the final scenes where Lucy and Salvatore help each other and fundamentally design a "neworld" of sort.

Rather than the non-space and non-time qualifiers often used to describe Crialese's ship (see Borroni), I argue that it is the excess of space and time that characterizes it. The by-now obsolete Italian term used to refer to the ship—"*bastimento*"—is a word interestingly coming from the same Germanic root for "being" and "building." In other words, edification and movement embodied by the ship and the voyage are parts of the same process. This is why Foucault's suggestive notion of "heterotopia" proves in my view to be much more effective than Marc Augé's non-place,[36] to convey the function of the ship as a laboratory of culture. In his 1983 essay, "Of Other Spaces," Foucault defines heterotopias as concrete utopias in which reality is inverted but in a real rather than an imaginary space, which is instead what usually characterizes utopias. He provides several examples of heterotopias, spaces able to include more than one space (and time) within themselves, and to produce meaning for reality by exclusion, alternation, antithesis, etc. Foucault's taxonomy of these apparently nonproductive yet hyperregulated spaces (old people's homes, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) interestingly culminates in the analysis of the boat, described as the heterotopia par excellence, especially for its ability to contain socioeconomic drives as well as the desires that produce stories and histories. As he writes: "The boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development, but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination" (27).[37]

Nuovomondo's ship is a figuration of Foucault's heterotopic ship, a real place acting as a countersite, in which all real sites of a culture are represented, contested, and inverted, as the scenes about the reconfiguration of national/regional affiliations, gender roles, and class belonging point to. Like all other heterotopias according to Foucault, the ship has "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (24). In *Nuovomondo*'s ship, the deck is used as the village's main street or square to stroll, kill time, eye a woman; sleeping areas are transformed into communal barbershops or dressing rooms; and after a tragedy, the ship becomes a funeral parlor and the ocean a tomb, as depicted in a somber blue-tinted scene on the deck where a woman mourns her dead child and eventually throws it in the water, like Amalia Pasin in the show *L'orda* examined in Aperture I.

The scene in the film that best reflect this kind of reshuffling of paradigms is the storm at sea, which Crialese decided to set within the interiors of the ship as opposed to the natural environment. Tall waves and high winds are therefore left to the imagination and the focus is on the effects that the storm has upon the third-class passengers. The realistic quality of the scene makes room for a staged *chiaroscuro*-imbued choreography of turning and rolling bodies meshing in slow motion into a whole new creature. As distinctions of gender, provenance, work, and even class (with the presence of Lucy) are erased in the course of this dramatic moment, the ship emerges as a heterotopia insofar as it contests the nation by representing it not as a land-bound entity but as a liquid and frail body whose cohesion is thus challenged and redefined.

It is worth noting that Crialese has inflected this reformulated notion of the national not only at the level of the content, but also at the level of the film production. *Nuovo-*

mondo is the result of a border-crossing operation: Coproduced with Italian and French funds, the film counted on the international experience of French cinematographer Agnès Godard who had worked with Peter Greenway as well as Wim Wenders, and that of set and production designer Carlos Conti from Argentina, who was part of the crew of Walter Salles's *Motorcycles Diaries* and Sally Potter's *The Tango Lessons*. Shot partly in Sicily and partly in Argentina (the scenes on the ship and at Ellis Island were filmed in Buenos Aires), *Nuovomondo* gathered an international cast ranging from Italian actors Vincenzo Amato—a Sicilian artist transplanted in New York—and Aurora Quattrocchi to the late Sicilian-American Vincent Schiavelli and French-British Charlotte Gainsbourg. Regardless of this complex border crossing, the film was the official Italian entry at the Oscar Awards, where despite the strong American component of the film, it did not gather the support of the jurors. In the more favorable Italian context, a special prize (a second Silver Lion) was instead created in order to recognize *Nuovomondo* at the Venice Film Festival, a prize that helped its circulation in the United States, aided in part by the official patronage of Martin Scorsese.

At the level of content, as we have seen, Crialese effectively captures the mechanism by which new worlds are envisioned on an island like Sicily, bound to the United States, in the first part, a separating and connecting ocean in the second, and on a liminal nation-forging space like Ellis Island in the third part. If considered as a voyage from one island to another, the film's space is by definition fluid, only partially anchored, open to dispersion as well as access. The section devoted to the process of checking, examining, and evaluating the bodies and minds of the emigrants in order to assess their suitability to another national project, that of the United States, is once again a first time occurrence for the Italian big screen and serves an educational purpose that perhaps went beyond even Crialese's goals. Not even a visit to the Ellis Island Museum, where some of these scenes are re-created in short-play format, can provide such a wide and rich tableau of emotions and practices (physical exams, intelligence tests, couple matching, family separation, and so on).

In the film, Ellis Island is the site where the magical visions of the emigrants about the "*paese della cuccagna*" are intensified by the proximity of it.[38] Yet, simultaneously, a scientific project of human selection supported by medical research denies the enchanted quality of the immigrants' dreams. The country of abundance is only accessible to healthy bodies, healthy minds, and average and above-average IQs. When lectured on this project designed to avoid contaminating American society with diseases and low intelligence, Lucy scornfully says: "What a modern vision!" She casts a serious doubt on the "twentieth century" culture that immigrants were encountering after leaving the Middle Ages behind, to refer to Viscusi's sentence in the epigraph (Lucy's comment further complicates Viscusi's linear, albeit powerful, vision). Her critique of the system is complemented by the Mancusos' replies to the tests: Their inventiveness defies the very goal of these exams (Salvatore builds a house with the pieces of the matching puzzle game), and their answers question the very nature of the abstract queries, which to them sound utterly absurd. This resistance reaches its zenith when old Fortunata refuses to take the so-called intelligence test and indirectly elaborates a powerful critique of the Ellis Island philosophy

through her worldview. With her simple observation, she gets to the heart of the U.S. nationalist project. "What do you want from us . . . folks coming from the Old World?" she calmly but sternly inquires. When told that the officers want to make sure that they are all fit for the New World, she retorts vigorously: "And who are you—Almighty God?—to decide if we are fit or not to enter this land of yours, the outer world?" That comment paradoxically makes her world of healing practices and magic beliefs much more balanced than the one informed by New World science.

A space of preoccupation by definition, for the condensed fears harbored by the emigrants waiting to be given the green light to the United States, Ellis Island appears as another topos of excess: Occupied by the stories, beliefs, and views of individuals coming from all over the world, Ellis Island is a laboratory for the international nation. It is on this small island that people were branded by their national origins in order to become part of a country eventually known as a country of immigrants: It is where Sicilians, Campanians, Piedmontese, and people from other regions were labeled as Italians (either Southern or Northern, according to the distinctions used at that time). It is also where something had to be lost so that something else could be created.

Reduced to silence out of surprise toward and rejection from the New World, Fortunata eventually decides to go back to Sicily. By the time she loses her desire/ability to speak, her grandson Filippo finds his voice, pushed by the need to survive and embrace the adventure. The implicit rebalancing suggests an osmotic transmigration of the voice from one body to another. Even when the decision is to split the family with Fortunata returning home, the last image of the family is one of union and the absence of the actual American world beyond Ellis Island, as in Kazan's 1963 film *America America*, prevents the depiction of the actual separation. In fact, *Nuovomondo* brings together two imaginaries: Subnational (the region) and national (Italian and American) rhetoric and values are ultimately melded in a transnational space. This melding is powerfully conveyed in the conclusive scene of the movie, where the emigrants, now immigrants, literally dissolve into a new space, the "neworld" of the title.

After the Ellis Island verdict, they reemerge in a space at once vast, liquid, rich, and complex: It is the milk river of the "*paese della cuccagna*" that in an early scene Salvatore first imagines ("I don't know how to swim, but I would not mind taking a bath in a milk river") and then in one of his visions briefly experiences with Lucy as they meet and float together in this environment. The gigantic white river, almost an ocean, shown in the final credits is an experimental space in which new forms of "*stare al mondo*" (being in the world) together will have to be tested, starting from the new "light/*luce*" now present in the Mancuso family. This choral film proposes the productive tension between the crowd and the family repeatedly throughout, for instance when the family faces timidly emerge from the crowd on the departing ship; or when their bodies can be spotted in the storm scene. This porous nucleus, distinguishable for its uniqueness and expandable in new directions, reappears in the closing utopia-made-real canvas of the film's conclusion, where the camera slowly zooms out from the close-up-level shots of the family to the vibrant pointillist pattern of a mixed world: the migrants.[39]

It is in this scene that the Italian and the American nations come to coexist, as archaic magical perceptions of culture and modern rational social architectures flow together, or rather fly together—the Mancusos and the migrants around them can be alternately seen as birds flapping their wings in a white sky. By interrogating the birth of a nation (Italian and American) on water, Crialese is simultaneously tackling three topics of crucial importance. First, he is in revolutionary ways suggesting the reading of migrants as emigrants and immigrants at once. He thus does away with reductive views of them as either fleeing or arriving people, two conditions that deprive them of a personal and cultural dimension, as they lose their past from the perspective of the new place or their present from the perspective of their place of origin. In order to counteract the risk of what Algerian sociologist and activist Abdelmalek Sayad has called "the double absence" of the migrant at home and abroad, Crialese opts for "presence" and "representation," if not hyperrepresentation with his magic realism. Second, this indistinct image of people moving in a liquid space is reminiscent of contemporary immigration in the Mediterranean; not only are migrants both emigrants and immigrants, but also countries can be lands of migratory departures and arrivals. With its dynamic interplay between shores and ships, Crialese suggests that the Italian nation is to be read as a circularly diasporic place. Third, he takes a conscious step toward the collective elaboration of a "common history of dreams and tears," called for by Stella in *Odissee* (20), by focusing on the simultaneous tale of mourning and potential regeneration that any emigration entails. Crialese's intent is to form and perform an otherwise unavailable collective memory at the visual level by consciously and inadvertently informing his film with a wide palette of texts ranging from Viviani's play *Scalo Marittimo ('Nterr' 'a 'Mmaculatella)* (1918), to Stieglitz' famous photograph *The Steerage* (1907), Hines's Ellis Island photographs and Gambogi's macchiaioli-style painting "Gli emigranti" (ca. 1895). In his palimpsest-like film, Crialese thus offers the possibility of seeing that experience and hence of "remembering" it in a condensed way, perhaps in a more dynamic and accessible form than a museum could provide.[40] Pre-occupied by several representations of emigration, *Nuovomondo* nonetheless remains an original work for its complexity and scope. Ultimately, it visualizes Gabaccia's intuition that diaspora "made the Italian nation and made it what is—plural, fragile, and debated" (175), fundamentally positing the paradox of finding a "national" trait of cohesion in the transnational dispersion of the nation. In this sense, *Nuovomondo* acts not simply as a cultural antidote against amnesia over a past of emigration, but also as an occasion for an epistemological shift in understanding the porosity of the Italian nation.