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# Italian Identity through Literature and TV: the case of Andrea Camilleri's Commissioner Montalbano

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**Italian Identity through Literature and T.V.: the case of Andrea  
Camilleri's *Commissioner Montalbano***

By

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May 10, 2017

Andrea Camilleri is the one of the most well-known authors Sicily has ever produced, and one of the most popular authors in Italy during the past twenty years. He was born on September 6, 1925 in the small fishing village of Porto Empedocle, on the southern coast of Sicily near Agrigento. Little is known about Camilleri's early years, however, he began university in 1944 but soon dropped out and moved to Rome to be a part of its experimental theatrical community. Until he was nearly 70 years old, Camilleri was a minor historical novelist and a decently-known director of Luigi Pirandello's theatrical works<sup>1</sup>. Until that time, Camilleri was an author in search of a character; that character turned out to be Salvo Montalbano.

Many authors of famous characters sometimes forget the exact moment of inception to their stardom; Camilleri, however, is not one of them. He still recalls vividly when Montalbano was born:

“I know exactly when he arrived. In 1994, I was stuck on a historical novel called *The Brewer of Preston*. I couldn't organize it the way I wanted, I had not found the key to structure it, and then decided that the best solution was to set it aside and write something else. And then I said to myself: what can I write? The way I used to write novels was to start with the very first thing that struck me about a subject. It was not methodical: the first thing I wrote would never be the first chapter, maybe it would become the fourth or fifth

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<sup>1</sup> Luigi Pirandello (1867 – 1936) was an Italian dramatist, novelist, poet and short story writer whose greatest contributions were his plays. He was awarded the 1934 Nobel Prize in Literature for “his almost magical power to turn psychological analysis into good theatre.” Pirandello's works include novels, short stories, and about 40 plays, some of which are written in Sicilian.

chapter. Then I said: but you can write a novel from first to last chapter with a perfect order of logic. I saw the form of the thriller as a cage that does not allow you to escape. And so I began to write the first Montalbano novel – *The Shape of Water*.”

And thus was born the famous Sicilian detective that has won the hearts of so many Italians from every part of the country. Salvo Montalbano is characterized by his stereotypical Sicilian demeanor – cigarette-smoking, highhanded, short-tempered, emotional, and always complaining. He is a charming grump, who likes to eat well and eat alone, and behaves as if it were not for his unique gifts, no crime would ever get solved. He possesses a near-obsessive need to uncover the truth, often times engulfing himself into the case and forgetting about other aspects of his life, such as his long-time and long-distance lover, Livia. His very unique way of living and thinking is what makes the series so interesting. Although stubborn and sometimes offensive, one can't help but to fall in love with Montalbano. Although he can be bullish, there's a certain vulnerability and sophistication about him. Sometimes charming, sometimes enraged, and always complaining, Salvo Montalbano is the one of the most interesting Italian literary characters to have ever been created in contemporary times.

Camilleri's novels have received immense praise and wild success throughout all parts of Italy, and even internationally. The books series began it all in 1994 with *The Shape of the Water*. Camilleri continued the series with over 30 additional novels and short-stories combined, which have sold over 20 million copies internationally. After the success of the books, the series was then adapted into a TV series produced by Italy's

largest broadcasting network, Rai TV. Having first aired in 1999, the series has drawn a record audience of one billion viewers in its 18-year run. Often achieving more than 10 million viewers per episode, *Il Commissario Montalbano* is easily one of the most popular Italian TV programs ever.

An important aspect of both the books and TV show is the presence of a heavy Sicilian influence. The stories are all set in Vigata, a fictional, small Sicilian coastal town, and contain immense amounts of Sicilian dialect. In addition, the different plots are often centered on Sicilian-specific social problems – such as immigration, prostitution, and the mafia.

Although there are many books and TV episodes of the Montalbano series, for my discourse I believe it will be important to focus on a single episode in order to better define the scope and be more specific. For the purpose of this thesis I will be focusing on *The Snack Thief* (*Il ladro di merendine*, 1999). In order to provide some context to the show and its intricacies, the following is a brief summary of the episode.

*The Snack Thief* (*Il ladro di merendine*) is the third novel in Andrea Camilleri's Inspector Montalbano series. Although it was the third in the book series, *The Snack Thief* was the first episode to air in the Rai-produced television series. Investigating two simultaneous murders, enjoying the local cuisine, and hosting a visit by his Genovese girlfriend, in *The Snack Thief*, Salvo Montalbano unravels a web of international plots involving terrorists, the secret services, and a recently-orphaned boy named François.

At the beginning of the episode, two seemingly unrelated homicides in different towns occur almost simultaneously: the stabbing of an elderly man, Mr. Lapecora, in the

elevator of his apartment building, and the shooting of an Italian fishing boat crewman by a Tunisian gunboat. To Montalbano's great relief, the second incident is assigned to the neighboring town and police force of Mazara.

Once Montalbano arrives at the police headquarters of Vigata, he soon receives a phone call from his longtime girlfriend, Livia, who lives in Genoa<sup>2</sup>. She is angry that he has neglected to call her all morning. Not wanting to deal with this situation, Montalbano quickly says he is in a bad mood and hangs up the phone.

Shortly after, the team visits the crime scene of where Mr. Lapecora was stabbed in the elevator. After speaking with the apartment building security guard, Montalbano discovers that when the body had been found on the ground floor, the elevator had been called from the fifth floor, which is strange because the Lapecora's lived on the fourth floor. Salvo then proceeds to interrogate a family on the fifth floor and determines they were the first to see Mr. Lapecora dead, but said nothing. They attempted to lie and say they thought he was drunk, but Montalbano could see through their deceit.

Continuing his interrogations, Montalbano then visits with the recently widowed Mrs. Lapecora. Ironically, the widow does not show any signs of grief or sadness, but rather appears quite calm. Speaking in a heavy Sicilian accent, she claims that she does not suspect who might have killed her husband, but in fact she is sure who did it. She believes that Karima, her husband's lover, is the culprit. Mrs. Lapecora had first been made aware of her husband's affair after receiving multiple anonymous letters, made with letters cut

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<sup>2</sup> Genoa is the capital of the Italian region of Liguria (Northern Italy) and the sixth-largest city in Italy.

from magazines, telling her so. Montalbano and agent Galluzzo then go to inspect Mr. Lapecora's office down the street. They do not find anything other than a strong smelling perfume, but Montalbano orders Galluzzo to stay there in case Karima comes back.

After arriving back home, Salvo receives another call from his girlfriend. Not knowing who is on the other end, Montalbano answers angrily asking who is calling. Upon learning it is only Livia, he immediately calms down and speaks softly. He quickly apologizes for the way he acted earlier and says he loves and misses her.

The following day, Montalbano and his sidekick, Fazio, visit Karima's home. Upon their arrival, an older Tunisian woman comes out of the house and begins yelling at them in Arabic, a language neither of them understand. Detecting that the woman also speaks a little French, Montalbano introduces himself and discovers her name to be Aisha. Once Fazio locates an Arabic interpreter, Montalbano is able to question Aisha further. In Karima's home, he discovers a picture of Karima and her brother and Aisha shows him Karima's a little red bank booklet, hidden under a mattress, connected to an account containing 300 million lira<sup>3</sup>.

After leaving Karima's home, Montalbano drives back to the police headquarters to discover a large commotion in the center of town. Salvo asks the police officer in the center of the mob what everyone is so angry about and he learns that there is a thief stealing all of the other children's lunches and snacks. Unconcerned with this trivial issue, Montalbano directs the officer to continue his investigation and solve the problem.

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<sup>3</sup> The Lira was the official unit of currency in Italy until January 1, 1999, when it was replaced by the Euro. 300 million Lira is the approximate equivalent to €150,000 (or \$165,000 US).

Montalbano then heads back to Mr. Lapecora's office to check up on his agent. After seeing some magazines with cut out letters, Salvo deduces that the anonymous letters sent to the widow Lapecora must have been sent by someone in this office. Suddenly, the phone rings and an elderly woman across the street alerts Montalbano that she can see him through the window and invites him to her home. She tells Montalbano that she can see into Mr. Lapecora's office from her window, and that she was aware of the affair going on between Mr. Lapecora and Karima. She also says that there was another, younger man who would come to the office with Karima, but only at night.

Back at the police headquarters, Montalbano catches Catarella sleeping and asks if there were any calls. Catarella exclaims that there were multiple calls, but none were for him. Salvo calls him an idiot and clarifies that he only cares if there were any calls for him. Moments later, Catarella realizes that there was, in fact, a call for him but he does not know who it was. He incorrectly assumed it was a relative because she called Montalbano by his first name, and she sounded in pain. Montalbano immediately knows it must be Aisha so he rushes over to her home. Aisha was unharmed, as she was staying with a friend in a neighboring town, however, her house was broken into and ransacked.

Hungry after all of the commotion, Montalbano heads to a local restaurant and greets the owner like an old friend. The chef quickly directs his staff, whom Montalbano also knows by name, to bring the detective some food. In the middle of his meal, he remembers to call Livia, who is coming to Sicily that day. She is already at the airport and wants to see her lover, but Montalbano lies and says he has an important meeting he simply cannot miss (eating fried fish).

Later that night, Livia and Montalbano are finally together. While lying in bed the two begin talking about the snack thief in town and Livia believes that it must be a poor or an abandoned boy. Montalbano immediately perks up after remembering that Karima had a small son named François, and therefore it must be him. He quickly gets out of bed and calls his team to set a trap at Karima's house. In the middle of the night, the boy comes back to the house and is captured by the police. Livia is there as well and runs to the scared boy to hug and comfort him. Salvo and Livia take François back to their home and set up a bed for him on the couch. The next morning, Montalbano discovers that the couch is empty and François is gone. After looking around, he finds that François is lying in bed next to Livia.

While Montalbano works, Livia stays with François and looks after him, quickly developing an almost motherly relationship with the boy. He soon tells her how he came to be abandoned on his own. He and his mother were attempting to run away, but a man named Fahrid caught up to them and took her away in his car. François, however, got away and hid for days in the Sicilian countryside. Later while home watching the news, the picture of the recently killed Tunisian man in Mazara pops up on screen and François exclaims that the man is his uncle, Ahmed Moussa.

The following day, Montalbano visits with the detective of Mazara and tells him he believes the two murders in their towns are connected. The Tunisian man who was killed on a boat in Mazara was supposedly named Ben Dhahab, however, Montalbano now knows that it was in fact Ahmed Moussa, Karima's brother. To settle the issue, the two detectives speak with a man who knew Ben Dhahab. He claims that when he called

Dhahab's family to tell them their son is dead, they laughed and said the Ben Dhahab was standing right next to them. When Montalbano asked the man if the name Ahmed Moussa meant anything to him, the man shockingly exclaims that Ahmed Moussa is a wanted Tunisian terrorist. Nobody had connected the dots previously because no one had ever known what Ahmed looked like.

Back at the police station in Vigata, a witness comes forward with the license plate of the car Karima was taken in. Salvo calls in a favor and requests the name of the owner of the car. Unfortunately, he receives a call the next day from the Police Chief stating that the license plate belongs to a member of the Italian Secret Service, and that the name of the owner is confidential. Salvo now knows that the murders are only the tip of the iceberg in a larger government conspiracy. Montalbano believes he has figured out what has happened: Ahmed had Fahrid set up an operations base in Sicily and Fahrid got help from Ahmed's sister, Karima. The two then blackmail Lapecora and use his company as a front for their operations. Ahmed then goes to an important meeting in Italy at sea, under a false name, but it turns out to be a trap to kill him. Salvo also believes that Fahrid was in on it and has most likely killed Karima by now, as she was a witness. To protect François, now a key witness and in imminent danger, Montalbano calls Livia and directs her to say goodbye to the boy and give him to agent Mimi Augello to bring to a safe place. To further protect François, Montalbano has Fazio go around town "looking" for the boy to make people think he has disappeared. Later that night, Salvo has a small fight with a distraught Livia, who is still angry about having François taken from her. She is also angry that they have been together for eight years, yet still have not been married because Salvo keeps making excuses.

The next morning, upon arriving at the police headquarters, Montalbano receives the sad news that Aisha has been murdered. After visiting the crime scene, he goes into Aisha's home and takes the red book of money belonging to Karima. He subsequently takes the book to a local notary and wishes to put the money in a trust fund for François once he turns eighteen. However, the notary informs Montalbano that in order to do so, Karima's death will have to be proven. Later that day, Montalbano also meets with a local news reporter to get a small camera recorder from him, for reasons unknown to the audience. The man shows Montalbano how to use the camera, and shows him where to hide it in his home.

Detective Montalbano, believing that the widow Lapecora murdered her husband, brings her into the station to question her yet again. After telling her that they found her fingerprints on the murder weapon, which is a lie to make her confess, the widow breaks down and confesses to the whole thing. She admits that she did not murder her husband because he was cheating on her, but rather because he was the one who gave Karima the 300 million lira.

Later that night, Montalbano arrives home to meet Colonel Pera, a supposed high-level government agent. It is at this meeting that the agent tells Montalbano everything about the government conspiracy, all while it is being recorded by the hidden camera. The man says everything began two years ago when Tunisian agents approached their government office with an operation to *arrest* Ahmed Moussa, not kill him. Fahrida was working with the Italian Secret Service and convinced the unknowing Ahmed to set up a base in Sicily, use Lapecora's office as a front, and come to Italy to meet with an

international arms dealer. The meeting with the arms dealer was to take place at sea, but was really a set up for the Tunisian coast guard to kill Ahmed. The rest of the story Montalbano figured out himself: Fahrid then decided to continue the operation and get rid of witnesses by killing Lapecora, Karima, and Aisha. Colonel Pera admits that Karima was, in fact, killed. He then proceeds to bribe Montalbano not to say anything, and asks him what his “price” is. Montalbano says he comes cheap and that his only stipulation is that Karima’s body is discovered in a perfectly identifiable state (so that he can prove to the notary that she is dead). The agent says that is not possible, but Montalbano interrupts him and threatens him that their entire conversation has been secretly recorded. Shortly after the agent leaves, Salvo comically discovers that he never actually hit the record button and the conversation was never recorded.

The episode ends with the announcement on the news that the body of a Tunisian woman (Karima) was found, but her son is still missing. The scene then changes to Livia’s home in Genoa as she received a letter from Salvo. The letter is narrated by Montalbano’s voice, and says that he realized that they should adopt François, but in order to do so they have to get married because it would be difficult for an unmarried woman to adopt the boy<sup>4</sup>.

Similar to many American crime dramas, most episodes of *Il Commissario Montalbano* follow a similar outline. In every episode there is a different crime for the protagonist to solve, however Montalbano goes about his investigation in a similar manner

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<sup>4</sup> The theme of an eventual marriage of Salvo Montalbano and Livia recurs in several episodes, but the wedding will never take place.

each time. In addition, the various dramatic side-plots continue throughout the various episodes.

As in my work I intend to connect the reasons of Montalbano's popularity with the larger issue of Italian identity, before diving into the focus question, a little background about the history of Italy is needed. Although technically unified since 1870, Italy has long been a culturally-divided nation. Before its unification into the single Kingdom of Italy, Italy was divided into multiple independent kingdoms. The movement to unite the country into one cultural and political entity was known as the Risorgimento (meaning, "resurgence"). Giuseppe Mazzini<sup>5</sup> and his leading follower, Giuseppe Garibaldi<sup>6</sup>, failed in their attempt to create an Italy united by democracy. Garibaldi, supported by his army of Red Shirts—mostly young Italian democrats who used the 1848 revolutions as an opportunity for democratic uprising—failed in the face of the resurgence of conservative power in Europe. However, it was the aristocratic politician named Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour<sup>7</sup> who finally united Italy under the crown of the Savoy family.

In 1858, Cavour formed an alliance with France that included a pledge of military support against Austria, Italy's major obstacle to unification. After a planned provocation

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<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–72) was a politician, journalist and activist for the unification of Italy. His efforts helped bring about the independent and unified Italy in place of the several separate states, many dominated by foreign powers, that existed until the 19th century.

<sup>6</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–82) was an Italian general, politician and nationalist who played a large role in the history of Italy. He has been called the "Hero of Two Worlds" because of his military enterprises in Brazil, Uruguay and Europe.

<sup>7</sup> Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810–61), was an Italian statesman and a leading figure in the movement toward Italian unification. He was one of the leaders of the Historical Right, and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. After the declaration of a united Kingdom of Italy, Cavour took office as the first Prime Minister of Italy.

of Vienna, Austria declared war against Sardinia in 1859 and was easily defeated by the French army. The peace, signed in November 1859 in Zurich, Switzerland, joined Lombardy, a formerly Austrian province, with Sardinia. In return, France received Savoy and Nice from Italy—a small price to pay for paving the way to unification.

Inspired by Cavour's success against Austria, revolutionary assemblies in the central Italian provinces of Tuscany, Parma, Modena, and Romagna voted in favor of unification with Sardinia in the summer of 1859. In the spring of 1860, Garibaldi came out of his self-imposed exile to lead a revived Red Shirt army, known as *The Thousand*, in southern Italy. By the end of the year, Garibaldi had liberated Sicily and Naples, which together made up the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Cavour, however, worried that Garibaldi, a democrat, would replace the Savoy kingdom, a constitutional monarchy, proposing himself as the unifier of Italy. To put an end to Garibaldi's offensive, Cavour ordered Sardinian troops into the Papal States and the Kingdom of Naples. After securing important victories in these regions, Cavour organized plebiscites, or popular votes, to annex Naples to Sardinia. Garibaldi, outmaneuvered by the experienced realist Cavour, yielded his territories to Cavour in the name of Italian unification. In 1861, Italy was declared a united nation-state under the Sardinian king Victor Immanuel II<sup>8</sup>.

Later, when Prussia defeated Austria in a war in 1866, Italy struck a deal with Berlin to force Vienna to turn over Venetia. In addition, when France lost a war to Prussia in 1870, Victor Immanuel II took over Rome when French troops left. This united the

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<sup>8</sup> Victor Emmanuel II (1820–78) was King of Sardinia from 1849 until 17 March 1861, when he assumed the title King of Italy to become the first king of a united Italy since the 6th century, a title he held until his death in 1878. The Italians gave him the epithet *Father of the Fatherland*.

entire boot of Italy under one crown, and completed the unification of the Italy that is known today.

Although it was one of the greatest political and military achievements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Italian unification failed to unite the people and create a single “Italian” culture. The people of Italy still felt largely connected to their own separate kingdoms. Despite the unity, most Italians still spoke their own dialect, practiced their own customs, and largely did not change their way of life. Although politically unified, Italy has largely remained culturally divided, and still in part remains so to this day.

Most notably, the differences in culture between Northern Italy and Southern Italy are profound. There is often a heavy bias and “cultural rivalry” between these two areas of the country. Southern Italians are often characterized as poor, less educated, close-minded farmers, whereas Northerners are often seen as career-oriented capitalists with little culture. Although stereotypes are not always accurate, these descriptions are not completely false. For many reasons (mostly geographic, climatic, and war-related) the South has traditionally been a farming-centered area. Due to this fact, many Southern Italians tend to be poorer and less educated. The North, however, has long been the industrial and financial hub of Italy. Hence, Northern Italians tend to have more money and education. For example, a vast majority of Italy’s largest and best universities tend to be in Rome and above. In addition to economic differences, Italians from the North and South have substantially different cultures, cuisines, and dialects. These vast economic and cultural differences have produced a sort of “cultural rivalry” between the North and South. This rivalry can even be seen in many regional political parties of Italy, specifically

the “Lega Nord” or Northern League. The Northern League is a combination of many other Northern-city leagues and was founded on a regionalist ideology. Many times, the Northern League has advocated Padanian nationalism<sup>9</sup> and the succession of the North from the rest of Italy. Of course, not all Northerners despise people from the South (and vice-versa), however, there is indeed a bias present. For example, when I studied abroad in Italy, I briefly worked with a woman from the northern city of Brescia<sup>10</sup>. Upon learning that I was of Sicilian heritage, she said “You don’t seem Sicilian, you’re too smart and stylish to be from Sicily!” Although it was said in a joking manner and was not intended to be derogatory, the statement proves that these stereotypes and biases certainly exist in Italy.

A number of questions then arise: if the Montalbano series was written by a Sicilian author, and is heavily focused on Sicilian culture and way of life, why is it so universally loved throughout Italy? If Northern Italians are culturally so uniquely separate from their Southern counterparts, why do they enjoy this Sicilian-influenced novel series and TV program? How is it that these two contradicting facts are both true? Not only is the show enjoyed by all Italians, but it has become one of the most popular TV shows and book series in Italian history. If the regional and cultural separation still exists in Italy, why

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<sup>9</sup> Padanian nationalism is an ideology and a regionalist movement demanding more autonomy, or even independence from Italy, for Padania. Padania is an alternative name for the Po River Valley, a major plain in the north of Italy.

<sup>10</sup> Brescia is a city and municipality in the region of Lombardy in northern Italy. It is situated at the foot of the Alps, a few kilometers from the lakes Garda and Iseo. With a population of 196,480, it is the second largest city in the region and the fourth of northwest Italy.

does a character that is specifically aimed at representing one culture, appeal to all the other diverse cultures and regions of Italy?

Theoretically, the Montalbano series should not be so popular because it is so heavily influenced by Sicilian culture. Similar to why British TV shows are not so popular in the United States, TV shows focusing on Sicily and Sicilian life should not be popular in other parts of Italy. Both Americans and British people speak the same language, however the cultural similarities generally end there. British TV shows are not popular in America most likely because Americans simply cannot connect to the culture. This should be the same case with *Il Commissario Montalbano* in Northern Italy. The TV show is written in Italian, however, the show is set in Sicily and features a heavy Sicilian influence. As previously discussed, Northern Italian culture is tremendously different and separate from Sicilian culture and therefore, Northern Italians theoretically should not be attracted to a show that is so inherently Sicilian.

Even the language of the show is not entirely in pure Italian. In many scenes, the characters often speak in thick Sicilian dialect, which is a completely separate language that most other Italians do not understand. Sicilian dialect is actually more prevalent in the books than in the T.V. shows<sup>11</sup>. Many Italians, in fact, have a difficult time reading the books due to the thick Sicilian language that Camilleri often writes in. Camilleri has even

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<sup>11</sup> The Sicilian terms and phrasal expressions used in the T.V. show's dialogues are recurring, and for this reason TV audiences from all over Italy could get used to them. In their dialogues, for instance, Montalbano and Fazio frequently use the verb '*scantarsi*' for IT '*spaventarsi*' (ENG *to get scared*), '*pititto*' for IT '*appetito*' (ENG *appetite*), or '*saltapiede*' for IT '*inganno*' (ENG *trickery*). Domenico Augello, the Vice-Commissioner, is frequently defined by Montalbano as a '*fimminaro*' for IT '*dongiovanni*' (ENG *womanizer*). The high frequency with which these and other terms are used made them quickly understandable also to those unfamiliar with Sicilian dialect.

admitted that he often writes in a language of his own concoction: “It’s a difficult kind of Italian because it’s very much my own language,” he says. “And it’s even sometimes not very comprehensible for my own Sicilian countrymen... I confess there are also invented words.”

For example, when Montalbano interrogates the family on the fifth floor of Mr. Lapecora’s apartment building, the mother beckons to her daughter by yelling “venni ca,” which translates into “come here” in English. In standard Italian, the phrase is spelled as “vieni qua,” which sounds quite different from the Sicilian pronunciation. The widow Lapecora also speaks in a very thick Sicilian dialect during her interrogation session with Montalbano. She also frequently uses Sicilian words such as “fimmina” (ENG woman, girlfriend) to describe her husband’s lover, Karima.

Not only the language, but many of the themes of the episodes are centered on Sicilian social problems such as immigration, prostitution, and government corruption. In *The Snack Thief*, we are introduced to two of Sicily’s largest issues: immigration and governmental corruption. The episode revolves around Tunisian immigrants, but Sicily’s immigration problem is in fact much larger. Thousands of immigrants from the Middle East and Northern Africa land in Sicily to seek refuge. Although Sicily has long been a country infused with many different cultures, the massive influx of migrants in the recent years has turned into a large problem. In addition to immigration, this episode also shows the ugly side of Sicilian government and politics. Corruption, bribery, and borderline illegal activities are widespread, and they sadly happen also within the Sicilian government.

Additionally, the show is almost exclusively set in Sicily<sup>12</sup>. For the most part, Montalbano and his crew never leave the small, fictional town and surrounding area of Vigata, which is located in the similarly fictional region of Montelusa. Camilleri based Vigata on his own hometown of Porto Empedocle, a small fishing village on the Sicily's south-west coast, while Montelusa is based on Agrigento<sup>13</sup>. Similar to many coastal cities in Italy, Porto Empedocle is a small, sleepy town with few inhabitants who mostly make a living by fishing in the nearby Mediterranean Sea. Towards the beginning of the show, Montalbano makes a joke about fish that only Sicilians would be able to relate to. Jacomuzzi, a forensics agent, exclaims that a fish scale was found on the knife that killed Mr. Lapecora. Montalbano mocks him by saying that he has solved the case with that information. He then sarcastically asks what type of fish it was and exclaims that he won't be able to sleep until he finds out. This is comical because every Sicilian would know that nearly every Sicilian household eats fish daily, and that the fact that a fish scale was found on the murder weapon means very little.

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<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, there are only two scenes shot in Genova Boccadasse, where Livia has her house (a beautiful apartment facing the port). One is indeed in an episode of the prequel series *Il giovane Montalbano* (*Young Montalbano*, six episodes produced in 2015), when the Commissioner reaches his girlfriend house fearing that she is cheating on him, only to find out that she had spent a vacation on the mountains with her mother; the other is in an episode of the regular series, when Montalbano wants to surprise Livia spending a weekend with her, not knowing that she had the same idea, and that by the time he reaches Genova she is waiting for him in Vigata.

<sup>13</sup> Rumors claim that the initial change of the names of the towns was done in order to avoid having to pay any sort of copyrights to the two communalities. But after the immediate success of the T.V. show, both cities were more than happy to have their names associated with Montalbano. As it is well known, tourism in the area has increased exponentially—and continues steadily to these days—as a consequence of Montalbano's popularity.

At the heart of Vigata is Via Roma, where Salvo Montalbano likes to stop at his favorite Caffè Albanese for a coffee and cannolo, freshly baked onsite and filled with sweet ricotta. The town of Vigata is so closely connected to the author's childhood home that in 2003 it was officially renamed to Porto Empedocle Vigata, in honor of the author and his famous character.

As demonstrated, *Il Commissario Montalbano* is replete with Sicilian influences. While its popularity is obvious among native Sicilians, the question remains: why does this character and his stories receive such widespread recognition in other parts of Italy? One answer is predictable: it is because it is a wonderfully written and directed TV show. Crime and mystery shows appeal to everyone, regardless of culture or nationality. For example, the most popular TV shows in the United States have long been centered on crime mysteries. TV shows such as *Law and Order*, *Criminal Minds*, and *Cops*, have achieved immense popularity and have been on air for decades. Rather than a cultural tendency, it appears to be a human tendency to enjoy crime and mystery dramas. The final solution with the revelation—and possible conviction and punishment—of the culprit carries sort of a 'pacifying' function for audiences.

In addition, the characters of the show are extremely well balanced and developed. Each recurring character appears to have a specific narrative purpose, and adds context to the show. Livia is a prime example of this: although she does not physically appear in all the episodes (as already mentioned, she lives in Genoa, in Northern Italy), Montalbano often thinks about her or talks to her over the telephone. Like in many relationships, she often stresses Montalbano and causes him to become angry. However, she also is very kind

and caring and manages to bring out the rarely seen soft-side of Montalbano. Although it may not seem like it, Catarella (a cop doing clerical work in Vigata's Police station) also plays an important role. Represented as a bit of an idiot<sup>14</sup>, he provides comic relief for the show, and will almost always put a smile on the audience's faces whenever he opens his mouth. Again, Inspector Fazio is another character with an important role: whenever Montalbano twists the rules in order to achieve his investigative goals, Fazio is there to remind him what the law prescribes, although this normally does not prevent Montalbano from having things his way.

These characters serve a purpose of adding depth and human emotion to the show so that it is not simply a crime-centered drama. There are comedic elements and elements about love, life, and growing up that appeal to all people regardless of their culture.

Besides the above mentioned more obvious reasons, I believe there is a deeper, more cultural answer as to why Montalbano appeals to all Italians. I believe that many Italians can relate to Montalbano and to the small town of Vigata because they too come from a small town. Italians have more of a connection to their hometown rather than their country as a whole. Typically, if an Italian abroad is asked where they are from, they will usually respond by exclaiming their hometown or region, rather than saying they are 'from

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<sup>14</sup> Agatino Catarella works at the switchboard of the police station of Vigata. His main characteristic is the language he speaks: an intricate mix of Italian and Sicilian dialect, where almost every word in Italian is mispronounced. The same happens with names of people, which Catarella invariably changes in comical ways. But he also has a unique quality: he is a master with computers, and in several episodes Montalbano charges him with the task of cracking into password protected laptops seized on a crime scene. In the only episode in which Montalbano allows Catarella to participate in an action outside the police station, he saves the commissioner's life, shooting and wounding a criminal that was about to kill Montalbano.

Italy.’ Italians have a very deep sense of pride in their hometown that comes from the time in history when Italy was composed of many separate states and kingdoms. Although those political entities were erased after the “unification” of Italy, people still remained attached to their local, native identity rather than the new Italy<sup>15</sup>. I believe that, due to this sentiment, many Italians relate with the Montalbano series because they can relate with Vigata and its small-town feeling. Although Vigata is set in Sicily, it is very similar to many other small towns throughout Italy. There is a small population where everybody knows everybody, it has its own special customs, and the people often speak a unique dialect of Italian. These are elements to which all Italians can relate. Although most Italians are not specifically from Sicily, they do come from a small-town similar to that of Vigata. I believe that this is the root cause of why Salvo Montalbano is a character universally loved across Italy. Your hometown is a big part of what makes you who you are. It remains a piece of you that will never go away. Although Italians are extremely diverse and come from many different places and cultures, they can all connect to *Il Commissario Montalbano*.

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<sup>15</sup> This concept is perfectly expressed in Italian language by the word ‘*campanilismo*’ (lit.: attachment/self-identification with the bell-tower of one’s town, in Italian ‘*campanile*’). Not by chance, one of the most famous shows broadcasted by Italian T.V. in its beginnings was titled *Campanile sera*; each episode consisted of a competition between two towns, one from Northern and one from Southern Italy. The show was broadcasted for over one hundred episodes between 1959 and 1962.