TRANSCULTURALITY IN SICILIAN CRIME FICTION: THE CASE OF CAMILLERI AND PIAZZESE

Barbara Pezzotti

Due to its very nature, crime fiction as a genre lends itself to representing conflicts, asymmetrical relations of power, crisis and violence (Anderson *et al.* 2012). However, a recent and successful wave of crime fiction has increasingly shifted from an orientalised gaze towards the 'foreign' to a transcultural representation of migrant communities that populate the urban landscape. This article concentrates on Andrea Camilleri's *Il cane di terracotta* (1996, translated as *The Terracotta Dog*, 2004) and *Il ladro di merendine* (1996, translated as *The Snack Thief*, 2003), and Santo Piazzese's *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* (1996). It shows that with their reference to a common Mediterranean culture and history (and the concept of homecoming as a counter-narrative for the present anti-immigration rhetoric), these three crime novels shape a transcultural space "hung in the balance between conflict, coexistence, and contaminations" (Cassano 2012, xxxiii) where human beings adapt to each other. Reading these novels through the concept of transculturality as well as Bhabha's "third space" (1994), helps us understand that these novels are representative of a crime fiction that epitomizes the "uprooted geography" (Chambers 2008) of Mediterranean hybridity. Finally, they are a powerful example of the "re-emergence of the Mediterranean as a transnational region" (Ben-Yehoyada 2017).

Parole chiave
Crime Fiction; Transculturality; Migration; Mediterranean Studies; Camilleri.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2035-7141/14562

TRANSCULTURALITY IN SICILIAN CRIME FICTION: THE CASE OF CAMILLERI AND PIAZZESE

Barbara Pezzotti

Introduction

Considering crime fiction as a literary space of inclusion may seem counter-intuitive because, by its very nature, crime fiction lends itself to representing conflicts, asymmetrical relations of power, crisis and violence (Anderson *et al.* 2012). However, a recent and successful wave of international crime fiction has tackled the topic of identity in the face of the growing presence of foreign migrants in the urban environment.

The focus has increasingly shifted from an orientalised gaze towards the 'foreign' to a transcultural representation of migrant communities that populate the urban landscape.

My article concentrates on Andrea Camilleri's *Il cane di terracotta* (1996) and *Il ladro di merendine* (1996), and Santo Piazzese's *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* (1996).
By intersecting Mediterranean studies and crime fiction studies, I argue that with their reference to a common Mediterranean culture and history (and the concept of homecoming as a counter-narrative for the present anti-immigration rhetoric), these crime novels – written by two Sicilian writers and set in Sicily – shape a transcultural space where human beings adapt to each other.

By making use of the concept of *third space* (Bhabha 1994), in this article I argue that they both endorse Braudel's concept of the Mediterranean Sea as a crossroads of cultures and Maalouf's idea of an inclusive Mediterranean identity (1998, 90).
Finally, they are a powerful example of the «re-emergence of the Mediterranean as a transnational region» (Ben-Yehoyada 2017).

Transculturality and Third Space

As Fernand Braudel famously argues, the Mediterranean world is still today an active crossroads of intercultural transmission. Iain Chambers also suggests that the Mediterranean «immediately evokes the movement of peoples, histories and cultures that underlines the continual sense of historical transformation and cultural translation which makes it a site of perpetual transit» (2008, 32). In other words, the Mediterranean is an «uprooted geography» articulated in «diverse currents and complex nodes of both visible and invisible networks», rather than merely following the «horizontal axis of borders, barriers, and allegedly separated unities» (ivi, 68). These arguments bring forward an idea of the Mediterranean as a contemporary, diversified, and transcultural space. This is the opposite of the key mechanism by which the sovereignty of the nation-state is formulated today, which implies the coercive exclusion of the other, such as noncitizens or undocumented migrants.

The idea of Mediterranean transculturality overhauls both the traditional concept of a single, homogeneous culture bound to a specific nation-state and more recent concepts like interculturality and multiculturality, which account for the existence of different cultures but not for their reciprocal influences, ultimately carrying on the idea that each culture is in itself a homogeneous and separate sphere. The tendency towards transculturality does not mean that cultural formations are becoming the same all over the world, as the concept of globalization seems to imply. On the contrary, processes of becoming transcultural suggest a great variety of differentiation. As Ulf Hannerz contends, «the flow of culture between countries and continents may result in another diversity of culture, based more on interconnections than on autonomy» (1992, 266). A close look at space as a dynamic, actively produced arrangement between people, place, and the cultural and social goods environment and its function in literary texts may reveal how transcultural encounters are negotiated in these novels.

According to Homi Bhabha's concept of *hybridity* (1994), cultural dimensions can no longer be understood as being homogeneous or self-contained. For Bhabha, cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic, and meaning is

produced in interstices that shift «theoretical concern away from the monolithic building blocks of culture— nation, race, class, colonizer, colonized—toward a reading of the "in-between" spaces, the spaces in excess of the sum of the parts of social and cultural differences» (ivi, 114). This "in-between space" or *third space* is a metaphorical place of invention and transformational encounters, a dynamic space in which something different, and unexpected, is fashioned. This space directly challenges the validity of authority by creating a shift in power and new, powerful perspectives as «[t]hese "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself» (ivi, 2). In Soja's subsequent formulation, "thirdspace" becomes the physical and socialized space in which people interact. It is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other (1996, 5).

Reading these novels through the concept of transculturality and the lens of Bhabha's *third space* and Soja's *thirdspace*, helps us understand that these novels are representative of a crime fiction that is not merely set in the Mediterranean area, but epitomizes what Chambers defines as the uprooted geography of Mediterranean hybridity, and Maalouf's concept of Mediterranean identity as an inclusive concept that puts together East and West as well as Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions (1998, 90).

A Transcultural Resistance to Racism and Exclusion

Il cane di terracotta, *Il ladro di merendine* and *I delitti* are set before the asylum seekers emergency of 2010, and on the eve of the Berlusconi Government's anti-immigration laws (2002), which, among other things, strengthened deportation rules and made it compulsory for migrants to provide their fingerprints in order to obtain a residence permit. In this period the need for new legislation to regulate the presence of migrants in Italy was already under discussion, and is far from being overcome at present.

These novels are also set in the years when anti-immigration rhetoric was at the centre of the political agenda. Immigrants were perceived as being engaged in criminal activities such as drug-pushing, prostitution, and petty crime (Giustiniani 2003, 78-106; Dal Lago 2004, 25). This situation, which applied especially in large cities, led a part of the population to have intolerant attitudes towards immigrants. This trend was fuelled and exploited by the Northern League party which from an anti-Southern Italy agenda gradually moved to a more successful xenophobic policy. Both Camilleri and Piazzese responded to this political environment with their crime novels.

Apart from being respected crime writers in Italy (and Camilleri also internationally), Camilleri and Piazzese did not refrain from commenting on contemporary political and social issues, such as the issue of migration[1]. Camilleri is considered the most popular contemporary Italian writer in the world, with an estimated 20 million books sold worldwide and translations – in addition to the most common languages – in Greek, Norwegian, and Japanese, among others. Camilleri has shown a strong political stance in regard to immigration and integration since the very start of his Montalbano series which accounts for 28 novels and several collections of short stories. Reference to Mediterranean history and culture are present as early as in *Il cane di terracotta* (1996) and *Il ladro di merendine* (1996) and are subsequently at the centre of the narrative *in Il giro di boa* (2003, *Rounding the Mark*, 2006) and *L'altro capo del filo* (2016; *The Other End of the Line*, 2019), where the Sicilian author tackles the topical issue of the illegal migrant emergency on the Italian coasts[2].

The series mostly takes place in Vigàta, a fictional town in an imaginary province, Montelusa, set within a real geography, the island of Sicily. As I have

[1] Camilleri was particularly vocal in condemning migrantion policies in Italy. In power in 2018 and until 5 September 2019, the leader of the Lega Matteo Salvini, as Interior Minister, inaugurated a policy of closing ports and adopted the immigration-security packages—which included strict measures on immigration and a strong regulatory system to control the search and rescue activities of NGOs. In a 2018 interview, Camilleri commented that Salvini inaugurated such policies because «è un uomo di terra, non conosce il mare» and for this reason he did not show sympathy towards people who crossed the Mediterranean on illegal boats. On that occasion, Camilleri stressed the importance of the "law of the sea" that requires conducting a rescue at sea for people in distress.

[2] In an interesting article, Chiara Mazzucchelli gives an account of the evolution of the theme of migration in Camilleri's series (2018, 161-182).

elsewhere argued, Vigàta is symbolic of an evolving Sicily and Camilleri's language, a mix of standard Italian, Sicilian dialect, and completely invented words, is symbolic of an Italian identity in flux (2012, 139). In *Il cane di terracotta*, the discovery of the bodies of two youngsters in a cave arouses the curiosity of Inspector Montalbano for two reasons: first, because they were murdered fifty years earlier; second, because of the symbolic artefacts found near the corpses, including a terracotta dog. Learning that the bodies were placed sometime around the Allied landing in Sicily and the devastating bombing of the island, Montalbano tries to piece together who the young couple were, why they were killed and why they were ritually buried. In *Il ladro di merendine* the investigation revolves around two cases: in the first an elderly man is stabbed to death in an elevator and his maid, the Tunisian Karima, disappears; and in the second a Tunisian crewman on an Italian fishing trawler is machine-gunned by a Tunisian patrol boat off Sicily's coast. The Inspector's life is endangered when he finds out that these cases are related. Ultimately his investigation unveils government corruption and international intrigue as the crime investigated turns out to be international terrorism and the inquiry involves the Italian and Tunisian governments and their respective police forces and secret services. Santo Piazzese's *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* was published in 1996, the same year as *Il cane di terracotta* and *Il ladro di merendine*. This novel is part of a trilogy that Piazzese set in Palermo which also includes *La doppia vita di M. Laurent* (1998) and *Il soffio della valanga* (2002). In *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia*, Lorenzo La Marca, a biologist who works as a researcher at the University of Palermo, investigates the apparent suicide of Raffaele Montalbani, a university friend and former colleague at the Department of Applied Biochemistry. Through the movements of cosmopolitan dandy La Marca throughout the city, in this novel Piazzese celebrates an alternative Palermo, a chaotic and lively city, full of crowded bars, restaurants and cafés, and a truly transcultural environment.

In spite of the difference in plot and setting, at the core of the three novels analysed in this article there is a transcultural resistance to racism and exclusion. In other words, these works go beyond an acceptance of the *other*, typical of some recent crime fiction (Krajenbrink and Quinn 2009, 1; Anderson *et al.* 2012, 2) by endorsing

the idea of a shared Mediterranean geography and history. This topic is dear to Camilleri who introduced the idea of a common history between Sicily and Tunisia in *Il cane di terracotta*. During his enquiry into the young couple's death, Montalbano meets Master Rahman, a teacher from Tunisia in a real Sicilian place, the seaside village of Mazara del Vallo. The teacher's knowledge of Mazara del Vallo's community is vital for the investigation. In their first meeting, Rahman explains to Montalbano the reasons for the pacific coexistence of Mazarese and Arabs:

> I think we're sort of a historical memory for the Mazarese, almost a genetic fact. We're family. Al-Imam al-Mazari, the founder of the Maghrebin juridical school, was born in Mazara, as was the philologist Ibn al-Birr, who was expelled from the city in 1068 because he liked wine too much. But the basic fact is that the Mazarese are seafaring people. And the man of the sea has a great deal of common sense; he understands what it means to have one's feet on the ground. And speaking of the sea—did you know that the motor trawlers around here have mixed crews, half Sicilians, half Tunisians? (Camilleri 2004, 168)[3]

As we can see from this passage, people from the Maghreb are an integral part of Sicily's historic memory. The sea—which holds the potential to act as a borderline—, resists this role: it is «a site of perpetual transit» (Chambers, 32) and a transcultural place of «coexistence» (Cassano, xxxiii) in which a mixed crew of Sicilians and Tunisians in Sicilian fishing boats work in harmony. However, this pacific coexistence is not only found at sea, but also in the mainland, as we can appreciate from the following extract:

> The Arab quarter was a piece of Tunis that had been picked up and carried, unaltered, to Sicily. The shops were closed because it was Friday, the day of rest, but life in the narrow little streets were still colourful and animated. First Rahman showed Montalbano the large public baths, the social meeting place for Arabs from time immemorial; then he took him to a smoking den, a café with hookahs. They passed by a sort of empty storefront, inside of which an old man with a grave expression sat on the floor, legs folded under him, reading from a book and

[3] «Sa, credo che noi siamo per i mazaresi come una memoria storica, un fatto quasi genetico. Siamo di casa. Al-Imam al-Mazari, il fondatore della scuola giuridica maghrebina, è nato a Mazara, così come il filologo Ibn al-Birr che venne espulso dalla città nel 1068 perché gli piaceva troppo il vino. Il fatto sostanziale è però che i mazaresi sono gente di mare. E l'uomo di mare ha molto buonsenso, capisce cosa significa tenere i piedi per terra. A proposito di mare: lo sa che i motopescherecci di qua hanno equipaggio misto, siciliani e tunisini?» (Camilleri 1996, 223).

> offering commentary. In front of him, sitting the same way, were some twenty boys listening attentively. (ivi, 269)[4]

In this passage Rahman takes Montalbano to a district of Mazara del Vallo inhabited by Tunisian migrants. By visiting some iconic places, such as the spa, the den and the mosque, Montalbano experiences an aspect of Sicily with which he was not familiar. During this experience he does not feel fear or anxiety. The district's streets are described as lively and colourful and migrants' public spaces are normalised by everyday activities, such as the prayer in the mosque. Crossing invisible boundaries, Montalbano experiences a «diversity of culture, based [..] on interconnections (Hannerz 1992, 206). This is an experience «from which *something* begins» (Bhabha 1994, 7); by listening to the *imam* preaching, the Sicilian inspector realises there is a connection between the display of the burial site and surah 18 of the Koran in which a terracotta dog is mentioned. Subsequently, with the help of several experts, Montalbano realizes that Lisetta and Mario were two young lovers killed by Lisetta's father and buried by her cousin Lillo in a ritual mimicking the legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a medieval tale with Greek and Persian origins, and also appearing in the Koran. It is important to highlight that Montalbano's success is due to the active participation in the inquiry of people coming from different cultures and belonging to different religions, such as Farid Rahman and Al Madani, the latter also a Tunisian teacher, and Italian Professor Lovecchio, because the artefacts found in the cave belong to different cultures. In particular, as Professor Lovecchio explains «the jug, which thus belongs to the Christian legend, can only co-exist with the dog, which is a poetic invention of the Koran» (ivi, 280)[5]. At the end of the investigation Montalbano agrees that «sura number eighteen of the Koran, taken by itself, would

[4] «Il quartiere era un pezzo di Tunisi, pigliato e portato paro paro in Sicilia. I negozi erano chiusi perché era venerdì, giornata di riposo, ma la vita, nelle straduzze strette, era lo stesso colorata e vivace. Per prima cosa, Rahman gli fece visitare il grande bagno pubblico, da sempre luogo d'incontri sociali per gli arabi, poi lo guidò a una fumeria, a un caffè con i narghilè. Passarono davanti a una specie di magazzino spoglio, c'era un uomo anziano, l'aria grave, con le gambe ripiegate, che leggeva e commentava un libro, davanti a lui, seduti allo stesso modo, una ventina di ragazzi ascoltava attentamente» (ivi, 223-224).

[5] «il bùmmolo, che appartiene quindi alla leggenda cristiana, può convivere col cane, che appartiene all'invenzione poetica del Corano» (ivi, 232).

have proved a very tough nut to crack. It had to be complemented with the contributions of other cultures» (ivi, 285)[6]. Thus, the solution of a cold case is found when, thanks to the help of experts coming from opposite shores of the sea, Montalbano is finally able to put together elements from Greek, Christian, and Muslim cultures. In other words, the satisfying solution of the case is only possible when Montalbano acknowledges the hybrid nature of Sicilian culture. This satisfying conclusion evokes a past of cultural exchanges between different Mediterranean cultures and religions, embodied in Sicily's topography, culture and food.

The transcultural discourse initiated in *Il cane di terracotta* continues in *Il ladro di merendine*. In this novel the enquiry allows Inspector Montalbano, a proud Sicilian, to interact again with Tunisian characters and to appreciate the hybrid roots of his homeland. The tone is set in the novel when, Montalbano visits a suburb of fictional Montelusa:

> At the time of the Muslim domination of Sicily, when Montelusa was called Kerkent, the Arabs built a district on the outskirts of town, where they lived amongst themselves. When the Muslims later fled in defeat, the Montelusians moved into their homes and the name of the street was Sicilianized into Rabátu. In the second half of the twentieth century, a trememndous landslide swallowed it up. The few houses left standing were damaged and lopsided, remaining upright by absurd feats of equilibrium. When they returned, this time as paupers, teh Arabs moved back into that part of town, replacing the roof tiles with sheet metal and using partitions of heavy cardboard for walls. (Camilleri 2003, 107)[7]

The reference here is to the Arabic domination of Sicily between 831 and 1091 on the one hand, and the first waves of migration from Northern Africa to Italy, on the other, when anti-immigration started to be an issue in the national consciousness. In this passage the narrator pictures Arab immigrants not as foreigners, but as people who simply came back home after hundreds of years. This is a powerful image that

---

[6] «la sura diciotto del Corano, presa a sé stante, avrebbe finito col rappresentare un vero rompicapo. Bisognava completarla con le acquisizioni dovute ad altre culture» (ivi, 236).

[7] «All'èbica dei musulmani in Sicilia, quando Montelusa si chiamava Kerkent, gli arabi avevano fabbricato alla periferia del paisi un quartiere dove stavano tra di loro. Quando i musulmani se n'erano scappati sconfitti, nelle loro case c'erano andati ad abitare i montelusani e il nome del quartiere era stato sicilianizzato in Rabàtu. Nella seconda metà di questo secolo una gigantesca frana l'aveva inghiottito. Le poche case rimaste in piedi erano lesionate, sbilenche, si tenevano in equilibri assurdi. Gli arabi, tornati questa volta in veste di povirazzi, ci avevano ripreso ad abitare, mettendo al posto delle tegole pezzi di lamiera e in luogo delle pareti tramezzi di cartone» (Camilleri 1996, 107).

stands in contrast to the Northern League anti-immigration rhetoric of foreign invasion of those years. In *Il ladro di merendine* the encounters between the detective and various witnesses create thirdspaces between Italian and Tunisian culture and history. This happens when Montalbano interviews Aisha, the Tunisian landlady of Karima. This scene had the potential to represent an asymmetrical relation of power: Montalbano is a police detective and embodies the Italian State, while Aisha is a migrant with a poor knowledge of the Italian language. Yet, all differences between the two are overcome by a common interest in food. The traditional – confrontational and dramatic – interview setting in crime fiction is here turned into an idyllic lunch: Montalbano who proudly only eats Sicilian dishes (and despises, among other things, the northern dish called *cotoletta alla milanese*), enjoys some Tunisian homemade delicacies: « the kebab had a tart, herbal flavor that made it a little more sprightly» (ivi, 80)[8]. For her part, Aisha devours two *cannoli*, the quintessential Sicilian dessert. A crime fiction trope, the interview between the detective and a witness establishes a space «hung in the balance between conflict, coexistence, and contamination» (Cassano 1996, xxxiii). The potential clash is however defused by a common love for Mediterranean food and a desire to share life experience. A Mediterranean table set in the outskirts of Vigàta becomes Soja's thirdspace, that is, a space where new forms of cultural meaning and production blur the limitations of existing boundaries and call into question established categorizations of culture and identity.

During the investigation, Montalbano also meets and befriends François, Karima's child. United by a tragic destiny (Montalbano also lost his mother when he was a child) one night on the beach «[they] started talking, the inspector in Sicilian and the boy in Arabic, and they understood each other perfectly» (ivi, 177) [9]. In *Il ladro di merendine*, the sea, the beach and – metaphorically – the language barrier are boundaries that, using Bhabha's words, become transcultural places «from which *something begins*» (1994, 7). It is not by chance that at the end of the investigation the inspector decides to adopt François. Ultimately, Montalbano crosses borders «both

[8] «i "kebab" avevano un sapore di erba asprigna che li faceva vivaci» (ivi, 75).

[9] «iniziarono a parlare, il commissario in siciliano e François in arabo, capendosi perfettamente» (ivi, 551).

external and internal, figurative and literal» (Pearson and Singer 2009, 11) by embracing a new transcultural identity.

Transculturality is also at the centre of Piazzese's narrative. In his representation of Palermo, Piazzese leaves behind an old image of Palermo as a backward place, prey to the Mafia. In the series, streets, bars and restaurant are full of people day and night. *I delitti*'s protagonist often repeats that Sicily's capital is a metropolis and uses an ironic but affectionate tone to engage with the urban environment. The Palermo lived in by La Marca is the city centre with its maze of alleys, churches and historical buildings and beautiful gardens. Real streets, squares and places of interest are mentioned throughout La Marca's adventures, along with fictional names for the streets where the murders are committed. Following a tradition of Italian crime fiction, the biology researcher is infected by a topographic disease: for example, in *I delitti* thirty-four streets and thirty-three places of interest are cited. Most of the mentioned places of interest present a mix of Arabic, Norman, Byzantine and Baroque architecture, which are symbolic of Sicilian transculturality:

> We sat outside, at one of the tables of the pizzeria, looking with admiration at Martorana Church and the red domes of San Cataldo Church. Just opposite, there was the university hall and San Giuseppe dei Teatini Church; on one side Palace of the Aquile and Santa Caterina Church. The Bellini Theatre was behind us. We were surrounded by monuments a thousand years old. We were pied by history. A big pain in the neck. (my translation)[10]

The account of a leisurely lunch in Palermo's city centre is symbolic of the normal life lived by its inhabitants as opposed to a stereotypical image of Sicily's capital as a dangerous place. The portrayal of old buildings also testifies to a thousand-year history of culture and civilisation. Piazzese often describes Palermo through places and its topography. In this passage, following a typical detective fiction pattern, the main view is at street level, and Piazzese uses the device of asyndeton to give the

[10] «Prendemmo posto all'aperto, a uno dei tavoli della pizzeria, in contemplazione della Chiesa della Martorana e delle cupole rosse di San Cataldo. Di fronte a noi, l'atrio dell'università e la chiesa di San Giuseppe dei Teatini; di lato, Palazzo delle Aquile e la chiesa di Santa Caterina. Il teatro Bellini ci chiudeva alle spalle. Eravamo circondati da mille e passa anni di monumenti. Spiati dai secoli. Una bella rottura di scatole» (Piazzese 1996, 89).

flavour of the city through the description of buildings, squares and streets[11]. Among the places mentioned in the above passage, Chiesa della Martorana is a sacred place where the liturgy according to the Byzantine rite is recited in the ancient Greek and Albanian languages. The Church bears witness to the Eastern religious and artistic culture still present in Sicily today. San Cataldo is a notable example of Arab-Norman architecture. San Giuseppe dei Teatini is considered one of the most outstanding examples of the Sicilian Baroque in Palermo. All the buildings mentioned in the excerpt, and the small area that hosts them, are testimony of Palermo's syncretic architecture. Like Mazara del Vallo's casbah in *Il cane di terracotta*, they are thirdspaces which testify to a millennial history of intermingling cultures and civilisations.

Not only does Piazzese remind the reader of Palermo's architectural richness, but the city is also explicitly associated with the Mediterranean Sea and Africa. For example, talking about the sirocco, the hot wind coming from the desert that blows over the city, La Marca turns his attention to a roaring lion caged nearby in the botanical garden: when the lion roars «the illusion of being in Africa is very strong» (my translation)[12]. This image of Palermo is contrasted with a vision of the North of Italy perceived as "other": talking about his girlfriend Michelle, La Marca says that she has gone to a forensics conference «in the Kingdom of Lombardo-Veneto»(my translation)[13].

Like Camilleri, rather than expressing a familiarity with the North of Italy, Piazzese expresses a feeling of brotherhood with migrants coming from northern Africa:

> This is one of the bases for returning immigrants, that is, people from the Maghreb who came back to the suburbs deserted by their forefathers a thousand years ago. Good people who work hard. They also have a mosque somewhere in an old deconsacrated church given by the

[11] Michel de Certeau identifies two spatial practices as analogous to the linguistic figures of asyndeton and synedoche (1984, 101). The first is the figure of disconnection, undoes continuity and fragments places into separated islands; the second is the figure of displacement where a part is taken to stand for the whole that includes it. In the above passage Piazzese describes a square and a city through its syncretic buildings.

[12] «l'illusione d'Africa è al massimo» (ivi, 13).

[13] «nel Lombardo-Veneto» (ivi, 146).

> Catholic Church and a Casablanca-style café. Sometimes, when the wind blows, you can hear the voice of the imam who calls his congregation in the name of merciful God.[14]

In this passage the old desecrated Catholic church turned into a mosque is also a thirdspace of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. As in Camilleri's novel, in this passage, the narrator does not consider migrants as foreigners, but rather as «returning immigrants» – that is people who after a long absence have finally come back home. They are not *others*, but brothers and sisters who share the same Mediterranean history and culture with Sicilians. Their presence in the city is not threatening, as in much Italian crime fiction, but reassuring, as in Camilleri's books[15]. They are «good people» who make an honest living, and practice peacefully their own religion. This concept is reiterated throughout the series. In the third novel, *Il soffio della valanga*, in which the protagonist is not Lorenzo La Marca, but his friend Inspector Spotorno, the Palermo policeman crosses the Quattro Mandamenti area, in the historic centre, sees a black person in traditional clothing cutting a fellow countryman's hair, and feels happy:

> On the other hand, north-Africans mainly resided in the area at the bottom of Via Maqueda, and were scattered between the mandamento Tribunali and Castellamare. [...] Through a wide-open shutter he saw a black man wearing a white kaftan who was busy giving another black man, also wearing a white kaftan and sitting on a shuttered barber's chair, a haircut. This scene made him feel small pangs of cheerfulness under his skin. (my translation)[16]

This inexplicable feeling that Inspector Spotorno feels under his skin seems a genetic reaction and an automatic, physical response, to something good and familiar. Ultimately, through the detectives' movements in the urban environment and a "living" experience of the urban environment, Piazzese showcases Palermo as a

---

[14] «È una delle basi degli emigrati di ritorno. I maghrebini che rientrano nei quartieri abbandonati dai loro antenati, mille anni fa, più o meno. Brava gente che si guadagna il pane. Da qualche tempo hanno pure una moschea, in una vecchia chiesa sconsacrata, concessa dalla Curia, con annesso caffé in stile Casablanca. Ogni tanto, quando il vento tira dalla parte giusta, arriva la voce dell'imam che invita alla preghiera in nome di Dio clemente e misericordioso» (ivi, 41).

[15] For an analysis of the representation of migrants in Italian crime fiction, see Pezzotti (2012b, 174-186).

[16] «I nordafricani invece si erano concentrati sopra tutto nella zona a valle di via Maqueda, distribuiti tra il mandamento Tribunali e il Castellammare. […] Attraverso l'imposta spalancata di un basso intravide un nero in caftano bianco, intento a tagliare i capelli di un altro nero, anch'egli in caftano bianco, seduto sopra una poltrona da barbiere tutta sconquassata. Quella vista gli infiltrò sotto pelle minuscole stille di un inspiegabile buonumore» (Piazzese 2002, 59).

dynamic city and a truly transcultural site in which Mediterranean culture is cherished and celebrated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these novels are representative of a crime fiction that is not merely set in the Mediterranean area, but epitomizes what Chambers defines as the "uprooted geography" of Mediterranean hybridity. With their novels, Camilleri and Piazzese also expose the anti-immigration rhetoric as a political construction that aims to divert the public's attention from the inability of right-wing governments to solve Italy's economic issues. In spite of being set in the 1990s and exposing the flaws of the Berlusconi government of the time, *Il cane di terracotta*, *Il ladro di merendine* and *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia* are still a powerful political and social manifesto against the renewed xenophobic political climate initiated by the Five Star-Lega government and Salvini's infamous policy of closed ports twenty years after these novels were published; the fractious politics of the Western nation-state; and the current political moment in Europe, which is marked by stasis, borders and exclusion.

Ultimately, their crime novels are a powerful example of the «re-emergence of the Mediterranean as a transnational region» (Ben-Yehoyada 2017): they argue for crime fiction as a space for promoting transculturality and reveal the Mediterranean as an exemplary space of such transcultural exchange.

References

Anderson, Jean, Miranda, Carolina, Pezzotti, Barbara (2012), *Introduction* in Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti (eds.), *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations*, London, Continuum, pp. 1-9.

Ben-Yehoyada, Naor (2017), *The Mediterranean Incarnate: Region Formation between Sicily and Tunisia Since World War II*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1994), *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge.

Braudel, Fernand (1980), *On History*, Chicago, Chicago University Press.

Braudel, Fernand (1998), *Le Mémoires de la Méditerranée: Préhistoire et antiquité*, Paris, Edition de Fallois.

Camilleri, Andrea (1996a), *Il cane di terracotta*, Palermo, Sellerio.

Camilleri, Andrea (2004), *The Terracotta Dog*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli, London, Picador.

Camilleri, Andrea (1996b), *Il ladro di merendine*, Palermo, Sellerio.

Camilleri, Andrea, (2003), *The Snack's Thief*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli, New York, Penguin, 2003.

Chambers, Iain (2008), *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity*, Duke University Press.

Cassano, Franco (2012), *Prologue: Parallels and meridians,* in Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (eds.), *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean*, New York, Fordham University Press, pp. xxxiii-lv.

Certeau, Michel de (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life* [1980], trad. Steven Rendall, California, University of California Press.

Dal Lago, Alessandro (2004), *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Milan, Feltrinelli.

Demontis, Simona (2001), *I colori della letteratura. Un'indagine sul caso Camilleri*, Milano, Rizzoli.

Fiori, Simonetta (2018), *Come italiano, sento di aver fallito*, «La Repubblica», 7 luglio 2018, https://video.repubblica.it/spettacoli-e-cultura/andrea-camilleri--come-italiano-sento-di-aver-fallito/309735/310370 (accessed: 5 Mar. 2020).

Giustiniani, Corrado (2003), *Fratellastri d'Italia*, Milano, Laterza.

Gregoriou, Christiana (2020), *Criminals*, in Janice Allan, Jesper Gulddal, Stewart King and Andrew Pepper (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, New York, Routledge, pp. 168-176.

Hannerz, Ulf (1992), *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*, New York, Columbia University Press.

Krajenbrink, Marieke, Quinn, Kate (eds.) (2009), *Investigating Identities. Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*, Amsterdam, Rodopi.

Maalouf, Amin (1998), *Construire la Mediterranée*, in Michel Le Bris et Jean Claude Izzo (dirs.), *Méditerranée. Une Anthologie*, Paris, Librio, 1998, pp. 89-92.

Mazzucchelli, Chiara (2018), *Roots and Routes: Immigration in Andrea Camilleri's Montalbano Series*, «Italica», vol. 95, n. 2, pp. 161-182.

Mendes, Ana Cristina (2019), *The Liquidscape of Mare Nostrum: Manoel de Oliveira and Bansky's Mediterranean Crossings*, «Continuum», vol. 33, n. 5, pp. 565-579.

Pearson, Nels, Singer, Marc (eds.) (2009), *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World*, Farham, Ashgate.

Pezzotti, Barbara (2012a), *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction: A Bloody Journey*, Madison, Farleigh Dickinson University Press.

Pezzotti, Barbara (2012b), *Who is the Foreigner? The Representation of the Migrant in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations*, in Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti (eds.), *The Foreign in International Crime Fiction: Transcultural Representations*, London, Continuum, pp. 174-186.

Pezzotti, Barbara (2009), *Conversation on a New Sicily: Interview with Andrea Camilleri*, «Storytelling: A Critical Journal of Popular Narrative», vol. 9, pp. 37-52.

Piazzese, Santo (1996), *I delitti di via Medina-Sidonia*, Palermo, Sellerio.

Piazzese, Santo (2002), *Il soffio della valanga*, Palermo, Sellerio.

Soja, Edward (1996), *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Trevitt, Jessica (2014), *Fluid Borders: Translational Readings of Transnational Literature*, «The AALTRA Review: A Journal of Literary Translation», vol. 8, pp. 12-21.

Vizmuller-Zocco, Jana (2001), *I test della (im) popolarità: Il fenomeno Camilleri*, «*Quaderni d'Italianistica*», vol. 22, n. 1, pp. 35-46.

Welsch, Wolfgang (2008), *On the Acquisition and Possession of Commonalities*, in Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff (eds.), *Transcultural English Studies: Theories, Fictions, Realities*, Brill, pp. 3-36.

Biographical note

Barbara Pezzotti is a Lecturer in European Languages at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include crime fiction and popular culture, literary geographies and utopian literature. She has published on Italian, Spanish, New Zealand and Scandinavian crime fiction. She is the author of *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction. A Bloody Journey* (2012*); Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction: An Historical Overview* (2014); and *Investigating Italy's Past through Crime Fiction, Films and TV Series: Murder in the Age of Chaos* (2016).

barbara.pezzotti@monash.edu

How to cite this article

Pezzotti, Barbara (2022), *Transculturality in Sicilian Crime Fiction: The Case of Camilleri and Piazzese*, «Scritture Migranti», edited by Maurizio Ascari, Silvia Baroni, Sara Casoli, n. 15/2021, pp. 64-80.

Copyright Notice