Criminal Calabria: the alignment of crime with constructed Calabrian racial inferiority in the Italian national imaginary.

This paper explores some possible readings of Calabrian identity as it is portrayed across the mainstream Italian media, and indicates where and how Calabrians are situated within a racialised modernity-backwardness paradigm.

Through analysis of Giulio Manfredonia’s film *Qualunquemente* (2011), and an article published in *Cosmopolitan Italia* entitled *12 cose da sapere prima di uscire con un uomo calabrese*’ by Mauro Scali (2016), this paper explores how the rhetoric of the Questione Meridionale is drawn on and broadcast in a way that presents Calabria as extreme in the national imaginary, even within the context of the South. Constructions of this extreme Calabrian marginality are inextricable from the historic conceptualisation and representation of Southerners as both biologically inferior and inherently criminal: the perceived result of Arab and African racial influences. In both these cultural artefacts this racialised rhetoric is subtly employed, aligning regional socio-economic conditions as well as national political scandals and corruption with Calabrian Otherness and backwardness. Considering these cultural artefacts as hegemonic constructions of Calabrian identity, the function these works have in terms of the formation of public opinion is also addressed. The emphasis of Calabria as a racially inferior ‘zona del male’ in the national imaginary will be considered through Foucault’s theory of ‘subjugated knowledge’: the idea that a backwards, criminal Calabria existing in contradistinction to Italian national identity is ‘known’ by the rest of the nation is explored as a political and ideological tool used to reinforce dominant Italian discourse.

Biographical note

I am a second year PhD student at the University of Bristol looking into Calabria’s ideologically constructed marginality in dominant national narratives. My thesis aims to deconstruct the modernity-backwards framework through which Italy, the South, and Calabria have been constructed from northern European and western ideological standpoints in order to analyse the processes through which Calabria’s extreme marginal identity both in Italy and in its transnational context has been formulated. However, the primary concern of my work is to understand how hegemonic misrepresentation and misrecognition of Calabria within dominant national narratives has determined the self-perception and self-representation of Calabrians both in Italy and of the Calabrian diaspora.