

Collecting Neapolitans:

The representation of street sellers in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Naples

Melissa Calaresu (Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge)

Recent literature on the construction of the image of the south in Italy has shown the complexity and strength of stereotypes which persist even today in political debates in Italy and in travel literature and journalism outside of Italy – one need only think of the way in which the recent crisis concerning the collection of rubbish in Naples was reported. The north/south divide is essential to this construction -- whether between northern and southern Europe or between northern and southern Italy – by which Naples and Neapolitans are ‘orientalised’, ‘othered’ or ‘exoticised’. John Davis, in the first workshop of this series, commented that more than enough had been done on the history of the stereotypes of the south and the southern Italian and that the subject had been exhausted but I would have to disagree. The passivity of the Neapolitan subjects in these accounts, the most prominent of which are John Dickie’s *Darkest Italy* and Nelson Moe’s *The View from Vesuvius*, written within three years of each other, is striking. The collecting of the Neapolitan people, who, for many, represented the very essence of *napoletanità*, through images and through descriptions of their activities and lives on the streets, formed the core of this process of stereotyping the southerner as indolent, superstitious, and carefree. This paper will try to reconstruct not so much the early history of the creation of these stereotypes, although it remains incomplete for the period before 1860, but the process by which Neapolitans themselves helped to create and later consume these representations of themselves and which have come to represent their city. An analysis of the representations of street-sellers from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century allows us to uncover the continuities of particular images and their reproduction across a variety of media from engravings and lithographs to *presepi* figures and porcelain which, in turn, become stock characters for photographers and writers at the end of the nineteenth century.