CLLYAE001 - Ya'eesh Collins –
Essay Two – Neorealism

Representing purity, an accurate depiction of an aesthetic social, cultural and political reality is of essence within the Neorealism thematic and cinematic understanding and experience. A visually represented form of a reality which explores the ways in which various cultures is to operate upon a functionally global framework with further juxtapositions between contextually specific societal experience.

The Neorealist films; (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* and (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* represent such a reality, such an authentic experience with full respect toward all its dynamic, fluid and complex nature. With the social, cultural and political juggernaut of globalization, the aftermath of WWII can be seen as a major influence in the ways in which Neorealism is understood. The two films, (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* and (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* act as a meditated representation and response toward the Global South and the Global North. The juxtaposing centrality of the 'child' within (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* and (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* depicts such a reality in which a distinctive outlook is placed upon urban poverty which further emphasizes the ways in which the juggernaut of globalization has directly and indirectly affected the countries situated in the Global North and South. With those in the Global North being the core beneficiaries of a 'first world' reality and that of the Global South being of a 'third world' reality. With the representation of the Global North being an Italian city in which working-class individuals are seen to be repressively marginalized and oppressed at a simultaneous rate. Representing the Global South, the Indian 'third world' is the reality explored in whereby high levels of rural poverty is exhibited. By centralizing the thematic concerns of the 'child' and moral outlook on rural poverty, I am to argue that the children in both of the films, that being (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* and (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* represent the conflicting issues of urban poverty and the conflicting paradigms between the Global North and South. With the positionality of the child in (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* being born into the 'first' world in juxtaposing contrast toward 'third' world born children. Depicted in (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* these children are born into extreme hardship, having to fend for themselves despite the emotional and traumatic experiences in which they go through on a daily basis, my argument will thus encompass the ways in which Neorealist film depicts aesthetically realistic narrations of the abandoned, repressed, marginalized and oppressed within a functionally oppressive global structure of social and economic inequality.

Representing the realities of the Western Italian society and the Eastern Indian society, Neorealism thus utilizes the major thematic concern which is seen to incorporate critically formulated social and cultural "awareness, alongside ennobling representations of society with a clear contemporary relevance (Shiel, 2006, p. 6)". With alignment in representation correlating toward the ideological juggernauts of globalization, colonialism, fascism and the further international standards of cinema, primarily set by the Hollywood industry as the hegemonic ideology of 'Americanization' facilitated global widespread.

Neorealism was to further portray the "particularly overt ideological conflicts within cinema (Shiel, 2006, p. 5)". Emphasizing the various representations of an authentically constructed cinematic reality. Social realism allowed Neorealism to be expressed as such, as an authentic aesthetic mirroring the shared social, cultural and political commonalties in experience across borders.

Neorealism was incredibly unique within the ways it chose to borrow, manipulate and convey conventional film techniques in that it used such to set itself apart from the hegemonic standards set by mainstream cinema. Neorealist film considered and valued cinema for its factual representation and rather "reconstituted reportage (Shiel, 2006, p. 2)" within depiction as the Neorealist aesthetic nature is authentic within its stylistic approach.

Neorealist thematic concern sought after means in which it could represent an authentic and accurate depiction of the lived and experienced realities of "poor and marginalized groups (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 411)". Placing such a folk group at the heart of the Neorealist narrative. Neorealist films would tactically use the "narrative and figurative schemes of the Western Hollywood film to portray the Italian contemporary social and political issues (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 411)" which further perpetuated the on-going tensions within the Italian social class hierarchy whilst the Western mainstream was to be making non-fictional narrated film with the purpose of entertainment. Exploring rather "single-level references (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 60)" within non-fictional narrative as oppose to the Neorealist narrative which sought after the accurate portrayal of 'reality' itself within Italian societies as Neorealist "films make direct reference towards societal social and political events (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 61)" in which working class Italian individuals suffered at the feet of a fascist governing structure, whereby working class Italians suffered from the hierarchical consequences imposed by the fascist ideology which mercilessly promoted earned status, power and orderly class distinctions.

Consequentially, fascism by nature was repressive toward the Italian working-class demographic. Thematic concern for authentic representation was placed upon the working class which was privileged within the Italian Neorealist formula, portraying an intricately authentic representation of the marginalized working class within a fascist regime. Fascism manipulated the ideology of utilitarianism, an ideology deeply rooted within fascist politics in further political alignment with Marxist theory.

Fascist politics focused its power on dividing the Italian nation into two separate populations. An 'us' and 'them' (Stanley, 2018, p. 4)" population. By doing so, the fascist governing body divided the Italian nation into social hierarchies with tensions of conflicting order. Fascism perpetuated the belief in which promoted the "dehumanization of various social classes within a population (Stanley, 2018, p. 4)". Social class groups were divided and organized on the basis of authoritarian power and utilitarian capacity and value, whereby the social class that yielded the most valued utility within the society automatically elevated their social and economic status upon the fascist hierarchy. The fascist ideology measured valued citizenship status by means of their accumulated social, cultural and economic capital. Already suffering the consequences, the working class faced "further propaganda that represented the marginalized members of an out-group as 'lazy' as further means in justifying their placement within the lower quartile within the fascist hierarchy(Stanley, 2018)". Fascism, an anti-individualistic governing regime which selfishly manipulated systematical order and power in bias favour of the valued upper-class.

In understanding Neorealist thematic concern within the 1940's; Neorealism mediated "as an art form of resistance, representing social solidarity, personal struggle, national survival, and the quest for freedom and democracy (Ruberto & Wilson, 2007, p. 207)" amongst the struggling working and rural class Italian citizens.
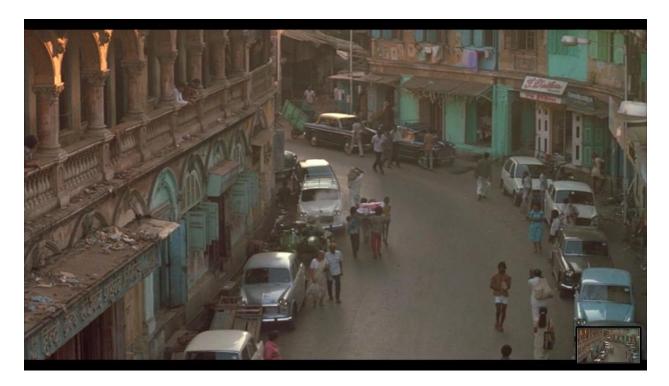
The vernacular approach toward Neorealist narration is situated highly amongst Neorealist cinematic principle whereby intricate focus centers "the characters, the setting, and events of the story in making such recognizable to the viewers whom share commonality with the features of Italian Neorealism, which further explore the reality of these individual experiences outside the cinema (Wagstaff, 2007, p. 42)".

In conclusion, Neorealist thematic concerns were deeply rooted and increasingly utilized throughout Neorealist film. The deliberate usage of casting non-professional actors and actresses as they were substantial in representing the experienced subject matter of narration, with the non-professional cast embodying the actual reality of the working and rural class folk. Neorealist thematic concern further emphasized onset location shooting which accurately represented the Italian and Indian landscape across its vast panes as it is, for the lands of fruits and loins as it was created, and so too magically illustrated through the aesthetic nature of realism as we the audience, sit in feeling with the narration, in understanding and whole-hearted empathy toward these individuals, and the sensitivity nature of their lived experiences. Experiences and stories that indefinitely is to explored more often, as to understand the individual experience of hardship, one peeks their reality through a completely different lens.

The film (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* which was directed by Mira Nair. Nair's indigenous positionality as an Indian woman of colour within the Indian film industry, Nair sought to portray an accurate representation of the children on the streets of Bombay within her film (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)*. With such in mind, Nair purposely placed central emphasis on the realities whereby these children are to have experienced within real time and space. Employing the aesthetic nature of realism, depictions of social and cultural phenomena dictates the Neorealist narrative of the film (*Salaam Bombay! 1988).* The film utilities the thematic concerns of hardship, survival, maturity, struggle and betterment. As Neorealist principle states, the usage of non-professional casts can be seen within (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* as the children occupying the embodied roles of the various street children within the film had in actuality, lived on the streets of India. Using non-professional actors and actresses placed further focus upon the centrality of the Indian street child, utilizing Neorealist principle in that authentic representation is vital as only an actual 'street child' who has in reality, lived and experienced the Indian streets and poverty-stricken lifestyle can thus be their own narrator and protagonist within the films narrative structure. As reality is explored through (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)*, it exemplifies the thematic concerns of actual 'experience' and 'reality' whereby the street children are seen without a home, nor a family, and indefinitely no support structure with little no access to money. As the street children of India embody the smallest fish within the widest, most dense ocean situated in social struggle, the children are situated at the core of the suffering, underprivileged Indian underclass and are often forgotten about. The indigenous Indian land unquestionably suffered the severely implicit consequences of British colonialism whereby notions

of cultural and social imperialism were forcibly placed upon 'third world' countries and as a consequential by-product of the imperial mindset, Indian societies suffered at the hands of the West whom capitalized on third world struggles in extorting the traditional Indian lifestyle and culture for a more modern and contemporized Western lifestyle.

The following chosen scene explores the intimate Neorealist feature, representing the dynamic and fluid nature of Eastern culture and the various ways in which tradition is upheld and respected by all means. Upholding such high respect for authentic story-telling, the films protagonists are seen carrying Chillums dead body through the densely populated Indian streets as they honour his life and death, chanting the mantra 'God is Truth'. Such an authentic and iconic scene within the film juxtaposes the centrality of the child with the deeply rooted thematic concerns which hold substantial subject matter explores and questions various notions of life, death, culture, tradition, maturity and conflicted trauma. With this reality being the reality of the 'street child' as they are to face reddened hardship and struggle growing up on the streets of India without any elderly guidance or support. The children are young in age yet incredibly mature in experience. Contrasting that of the Western child's experience as seen through Bruno in the film, *(Bicycle Thieves, 1948)*.

Psychoanalytical juxtapositions between 'first' and 'third' world children in context of lived experience, the 'third' world street child represents the ways in which the hegemonic ideology of globalization was to be extremely repressive toward 'third world' societies with incredibly favour placed on nurturing 'first world' societies in the West. (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* fuses together the conceptions of both culture and subject matter in authentically representing 'third world' social phenomena. A fusion which uses psychoanalytical concern and can be seen "in representing the complexities of the dialectical phenomena anchored in the films ideological positioning in attempt to

foster acceptance within mainstream culture (Rocchio, 2014, p. 12)" as 'third world' countries suffered consequences of colonialization. Their indigeneity repressed and heavily subordinated, polarized and homogenized to that of the mindset of imperialism.

Neorealist principle utilises the cinematic principle of on-set location shooting whereby studio production ceases to exist within Neorealist setting. Exemplified within (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* as director and producer, Mira Nair sought to depict India as it is, shooting 52 locations within the space of 52 days. By doing so, Nair depicts the mystical Eastern lands in her purest form. Upholding Neorealist elements of Mise-en-scene which utilizes the cinematic technique of natural key lighting as oppose to artificial lighting.

Iconic and symbolic reference within this scene is made toward the Neorealist principle of continuity shooting. The explored scene exemplifies reality for what it is within time and space as the children are seen walking the entire length of the Indian street without any cut takes in between, they are seen entering the scene and they are continuously followed and tracked until they reach the end of the street in which they dissipate around the corner. In such, the cinematic concern of continuity is utilized in respect for time and space. Such cinematography actively refuses the use of montage sequence, which was seen to create a deconstructed, fragmented reality. The authentic depiction of Eastern burial rituals within this scene exemplifies that the Indian burial processes is a highly respected tradition which should not be ignored nor marginalized in order to compensate for mainstream audiences as Nair made it explicitly clear that (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)* was made with Indian audiences in mind and for or the children on the streets of Bombay. India's richest traditions such as the spiritual process of death is understood to be honored and celebrated and yields as much value, if not more than one's lived life thus, deserves the most respectable and most authentic representation within the film. Such cinematic concern representing the séances rooted within Eastern culture further juxtaposes culture and subject matter, emphasized by the principle of aesthetic realism in narration and depiction.

The film (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* follows the experiences of a reality in which a working class Italian father Antonio, is to be followed by his young Italian son Bruno, on their conjoint quest to find Antonio's stolen bicycle. As Neorealist thematic concern emphasizes an authentic narrative line and story plot, the film explores the various thematic concerns situated within the realities of those whom occupy the social positioning of the working-class within the fascist concern. Situated upon economic and social hierarchies, (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* opens with the fascist ideology in mind, juxtaposed by the realities of those in the working class. For Antonio, whom is the protagonist of the film. In order for Antonio to get a job he has to firstly be rich enough to have already purchased a bike and by owning a bike, yielding the utility of convenience in relation to one's mobility and transport. Antonio and his wife are seen pawning their bed-sheets in order for him to buy the bike for the job. Having contributed toward the capitalist society, Antonio's new bike grants him the privileges offered by the job. It is only when Antonio has contributed toward bureaucratic capitalism is he given valued status within the class based labour struggle.

As (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* is an Italian film, set within the Neorealist era; it is of importance in unpacking the ways in which Neorealist cinematic concern was to be guided throughout the film in juxtaposing contrast to that of (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)*. Exploring the social, cultural and politically motivated phenomena between the Global South and Global North and the ways in which the centrality of the young boy in (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)* largely differentiates from that of the centrality of the children within (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948),* these intersected realities represent the pragmatic and

moralized outlook as to how the levels of urban poverty is to be experienced and understood within contrasting realities, that of the 'first' and 'third' world.

Non-professional working class protagonists were to be casted in the film (*Bicycle Thieves, 1948)*, aligning the film with the Neorealist principle of using non-professional casts. In comparison to the location setting in the film (*Salaam Bombay! 1988),* the Indian streets are aesthetically dispositioned, illuminating chaotic cluster, with buildings and homes being piled ontop of one another in confinement, the cars parked on the sides of the street in close proximity of one another, leaving little space for individuals to walk on the pavements. Visually depicting authentic representations between the two juxtaposed environmental settings. The above scene sees Antonio and his son within the Italian city, with the aesthetics of the city being visually pleasing to the eye as there is little to no congestion nor clutter, telephonic lines run along the roofs of the well-maintained buildings, the protagonist's choice of dress is formal, being completely dressed from head to toe. Whereas the children on the streets of India are seen to be dressed in broken ragged clothing without any shoes on their feet. Illuming the juxtaposed realities of what it is to fiend for yourself on the streets within a large metropolis as depicted within (*Salaam Bombay! 1988)*. The films further juxtapose the paradigms of childhood, adulthood and the big city, with each paradigm intersecting with the centrality of the child within the two films.

The chosen scene above aesthetically is geared toward the ideology of fascism as a means of social and cultural criticism employed within Neorealist film, seen as a means of expression within a repressive society whereby the working-class individual was to be constantly suffering from the punctured tensions between established class hierarchies under fascist rule, which further promoted the framework of a definitive classist structure that was to operate upon predisposed notions of earned value and merit.

The symbolic nature of the above scene is that it explores the centrality of the child within the classist structure, representing the privileged, elite child of societies burdens. Juxtaposing between working-class protagonists and the contrasting upper-class family seated next to Antonio and Bruno. Antonio is seen comparing himself toward these individuals whilst further focus is placed upon the child seated next to Bruno. The young boy exemplifies discourteous, bratty mannerisms aimed toward Bruno with the implied narrative being from viewpoint of the upper-class perspective, is that Bruno is to be completely inferior as a middle-class child in comparison to the upper-class brat thriving off elitist ignorance. This moral outlook placed upon working class individuals within the Neorealist era represents the ways in which Neorealist film utilized the notions of social and political criticism within its narrative line in depicting the perpetual nature of their reality which they were to be experiencing as the marginalized and oppressed Italian working-class population.

Bibliography

Rocchio, V. F., 2014. *Cinema of Anxiety : A Psychoanalysis of Italian Neorealism.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Ruberto, L. E. & Wilson, K. M., 2007. *Italian Neorealism & Global Cinema.* Detroit(MI): Wayne State University Press.

Shiel, M., 2006. *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Stanley, J., 2018. *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us & Them.* First ed. New York: Random House LLC.

Wagstaff, C., 2007. *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach.* London: University of Toronto Press.