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Gender in Italian Films During the Transition from the Fascist Regime to the Republic: 1943-1946

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program
at Syracuse University

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Abstract

How was film initially used by Mussolini and the Fascist regime? With the fall of Fascism in 1943, how did filmmakers, who worked under and were sympathetic to the regime, transition? How did Italian filmmakers grapple with the memory of the legacy of Fascism and WWII, while also looking to the future, during the transition from German occupation, which was followed by liberation via American occupation? And of the greatest concern in this essay, how was gender used as the tool for projecting this brand new idea of Italy? In other words, in what ways do gender roles in Italian Cinema of this era help to reveal filmmakers' perception of a newly conceptualized Italy? Finally, in what ways do the roles of children serve to provide contrast to and support for the masculine and feminine characters?

The most intriguing thing discovered via the analyses of these films has been the way that Rossellini and De Sica exonerated Italians from guilt, blame, and association with Fascism via their child characters. Rossellini and De Sica essentially say that the protagonists (Italians) are in some ways infantilized—they are not responsible for what has happened during World War Two, as well as in the wake of Mussolini's fascist regime.

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Introduction

In 1943, the Italian Fascist regime collapsed, and Italy descended into two long years of German occupation and civil war. By April 1945, The Allies and Italian Partisans had rid Italy of both Fascism and Nazism. Two years later, in 1947, the Italian Republic, a new state founded on the principle of Antifascism, was formed. During this period in Italian History, roughly the mid-1940s, what it meant to be Italian, underwent a profound transformation. Filmmakers of this transitional period, the years 1942-1946, grappled with this recent history while, adjusting to yet another period of change in Italy. The experience of attending a film showing at the cinema became more than entertainment in the early 1940s. It was a chance to escape from daily life, a chance to celebrate being Italian, a chance to share a sense of belonging, even if fictional and fleeting. According to Steven Ricci, the Italian cinema “specifically inscribed itself into what can be termed a cultural search for identity.”¹ Before the rise of Fascism, under the monarchy there was no recognizably organized or established film industry of note; under Fascism the industry underwent a large scale infrastructure and technological build up; and, under the influence of the Resistance Movement, creativity and production flourished. The cinema’s liberalization paralleled that of the Italian state. As Italians were increasingly able to grapple openly with their recent history, reshape social and cultural standards, and essentially begin the redefinition of

¹ Ricci, Steven. *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943*. Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

what being Italian would mean in 1943 and the years ahead, the cinematic industry followed suit.

This essay will focus primarily on the cinema's reflection and recasting of the Italian nation's political history during the immediate post war years from 1943 to 1946. Within the framework of this central topic, an attempt will be made to answer the following questions: How was film initially used by Mussolini and the Fascist regime? What did they want to achieve and how did they attempt to achieve their goals? With the fall of Fascism in 1943, how did filmmakers, who worked under and were sympathetic to the regime, transition? How did Italian filmmakers grapple with the memory of the legacy of Fascism and WWII, while also looking to the future, during the transition from German occupation, which was followed by liberation via American occupation? And of the greatest concern in this essay, how was gender used as the tool for projecting this brand new idea of Italy? In other words, in what ways do gender roles in Italian Cinema of this era help to reveal filmmakers' perception of a newly conceptualized Italy? Finally, in what ways do the roles of children serve to provide contrast to and support for the masculine and feminine characters?

Men and children, although quite prevalent in films, are not studied, analyzed, or written about as frequently as women. Ruth Ben-Ghiat is one of the few historians that takes an in depth look at masculinity in Italian films of the early to mid 1900s. In studies of gender in Italian film, discussions of child characters are the most elusive. Male children in particular are used in this

transitional historic and cinematic period to off-set adult masculinity and femininity. According to Sidney Gottlieb's analysis of film, "the virtues of family, motherhood, and fatherhood were colonized and contaminated by the Italian government under Mussolini, who used them as mechanisms of oppression and control; *Open City* redefines and renovates these roles and institutions."² In the film, Pina's son, Marcello, admires his Anti-Fascist, soon-to-be step-father, Francesco, and expresses this through his mischievous efforts (small scale bombs for instance) to assist the Resistance in the fight against the occupying Germans. Francesco and Marcello also share a few tender moments where Marcello is allowed to express his feelings about the chaotic state of Rome while being tucked into bed by Francesco. Rossellini creates this dynamic between these two characters to reaffirm Francesco's role in the family as a father, and as a strong leader of the Resistance, and as a restorer of the virtues of the family. As a secondary character, Marcello thus carries a great burden of symbolism and—in conjunction with his mother—represents the struggles and hopes of these transitional years.

Femininity is also used to counter and re-enforce masculinity, and vice versa. The "Sicily" episode in the film *Paisan*, for example, has a scene that involves a young American MP and a young Italian woman from the local village attempting to communicate. Both are scared, both do not speak the other's language, and they need to work together to achieve their goals. The young woman and the MP counter one another; she with her coy behavior and

² Gottlieb, Sidney. eds. *Roberto Rossellini's Rome Open City*. Fairfield, Connecticut: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

hesitance to initiate conversation and he with his American “simpleton” bluntness and gift for gab. However, together they represent the struggle of their two nations to come together and the awkward courtship required before trust and understanding could be shared. In sum, due to the frequent meshing that occurs with male, female, and child roles in this film and others, it is imperative that all three groups be analyzed for their own merit as well as in comparison to each other as they are inherently related to one another.

The struggle to find a way to cope with the Fascist past was not completely settled by the neorealist filmmakers. The general questions presented in this essay have merit, value, and are relevant because the topic is still being widely discussed by scholars and the Italian people. At present there still exists a great debate regarding how to appropriately pay tribute to these transitional years in the Italian media. According to historian George Talbot, “ Issues of memory and forgetting have been aired now for over a decade in often heated public debate over the resistance, often on the broadcast media, over whether the period 1943-45 should be regarded as a civil war and how it should be commemorated.”³ Modern Italian society still struggles to define itself with respect to this dramatic and chaotic period of its own history. Settling upon an answer is not the aim in this paper; instead, this essay will attempt to provide an understanding of how filmmakers of the early 1940s grappled with how to express the struggles, triumphs and changes Italy and Italians experienced as fascism crumbled and liberalism slowly regained its footing.

³ Talbot, George. *Censorship in Fascist Italy 1922-43*. : Palgrave MacMillian, 2007. pp 3.

De Sica, Rossellini, and their Early Neorealist Films

In this essay I will examine four films that were produced by De Sica and Rossellini in the transitional years between 1943 and 1946. These four films are all considered by modern standards to belong to the neorealist film genre. According to Sergio Pacifici, “as used in cinematographic criticism, [neorealism] has come to mean a representation of reality by certain and almost “traditional” methods (filming on location, the faithful reproduction of customs and traditions, historical accuracy and so forth)”.⁴ Although not the intention or purpose of this essay, it will be made clear that neorealist films did more than simply follow these simple guidelines. In fact, all of the films have similar themes of dealing with the memory of their fascist past, coping with their level of responsibility for the events of World War II, grappling with the presence of foreign occupation by Germany and then the United States, and a projection of the vision of Italy and Italians that the filmmaker sees for the post-fascist, republic era.

The four films analyzed in this essay were chosen for their use of male, female and male child characters. Rossellini’s, *Rome, Open City (Roma, Città Aperta)*, is about the rise of the Resistance movement. An unorthodox family, a priest, and young Roman males are the featured Italian characters. The German Fascists have significant roles in this film as well, providing an opportunity for a compare and contrast analysis with Italian characters. *Paisan* (1946) is made

⁴ Pacifici, Sergio J. "Notes toward a Definition of Neorealism." *Yale French Studies, Art of Cinema* 17 (1956): 44-53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2929117>.

in six loosely connected episodes, by Roberto Rossellini, will be included in this essay for its inclusion of the southern portion of the Italian peninsula. This opens the possibility to discuss issues such as the poverty in the South, urbanization, and racism. Although the film is set up in episodes boasting their own miniature plotlines, the entire film is predominantly about the Italians' struggle with the replacement of one foreign power with another despite the benevolence of the Allied Americans. The third film is titled *The Children are Watching Us*, by Vittorio De Sica, and is about the consequences of adult follies for children. A family disintegrates in front of the audience in a post-war setting. Family and gender roles clash with one another and up against the rapidly changing political and cultural environment surrounding the family. De Sica masterfully juggles themes of adultery, familial identity, and loyalty in this film. The story of a family torn apart is heart-wrenching; the symbolism of this plot line parallels the woes of the Italian nation masterfully. Finally, the fourth film, *Shoeshine (Sciuscia)*, directed by Vittorio De Sica in 1946, is an important film to include for the way it features male children as the main characters. The film comes off as a bit abrasive and peculiar due to the very adult-like child characters, but retains a hold on its audience with its message of hopeful dreams and truthful portrayal of the struggle with poverty that many Italians could relate to in 1946.

The four films discussed were also all mostly well received by their initial Italian audiences. This can be measured in that the steady increase in cinema box office tickets in the late 1930s through the 1940s and into the

1950s included the release of each film. Reception can also be measured in accolades and awards from critics. *Rome, Open City* won “Best Film” at the 1946 Cannes Film Festival⁵ and *Paisan* won a prize in the Venice Film Festival⁶. By the public, *Paisan* was given mixed reviews for being “too Catholic for the Communists and too Communist for the Catholics.”⁷ *The Children Are Watching Us* had a predominantly negative initial reception, in part due to the popular “white telephone” escapist films that were so popular at the time that contrasted with the mood and style of the film⁸. It is truly impossible to know exactly how these films were received upon their maiden debut. Since their debut, the reception and analyses of the plots, characters, and messages in these films have certainly undergone some changes. In this essay, I will be analyzing the intended reception of the film as inferred from clues from the source materials and the clues the films offer up.

Vittorio De Sica

The men who directed the films discussed in this essay lived through fascism and World War One and their personal biographies shaped and influenced the films they produced. Vittorio De Sica was born July 7th, 1901 into a lower middle class family in Frosinone, a province located midway between Rome and Naples. From an early age De Sica showed an interest in

⁵ Hanson, Stephen L. "Roman, Città Aperta ." Film Reference. <http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Ra-Ro/Roma-Citt-Aperta.html> (28 April 2010).

⁶ MacCabe, Colin. "Paisan: More Real than Real." Criterion.com. <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1357-paisan-more-real-than-real> (28 April 2010).

⁷ MacCabe, pp. 1.

⁸ SUNY Albany. "Actor - Become - Auteur: The Neorealist Films of Vittorio De Sica." (28 April 2010).

theater and drama. In 1918, he stepped into the world of acting in his debut supporting role in the film *Il Processo Clemeneau* by Bencivenga.⁹ His experience as an actor naturally segued into a career as a director; he never did completely part from his passion for acting. De Sica started out with a few comedies and then signaled a change in style with the release of *The Children Are Watching Us (I Bambini Ci Guardano)* in 1943.

De Sica collaborated with Cesare Zavattini in the making of *Shoe Shine (Sciusià)* in 1946, which was his first film to gain significant attention in the film industry. With *Shoeshine*, De Sica earned an Oscar as well as a place in the history of cinema.¹⁰ According to Carol Celli, the fact that “Cesare Zavattini was the screenwriter of the great majority of De Sica's films, De Sica's films should be thought of as a collaboration”¹¹ instead of as individual creations. Perhaps this is true, but it should also be noted that collaboration between directors and screenwriters was not, and still is not, uncommon. Critics have also questioned the political implications of De Sica's transition from matinee idol in the 1930s to postwar neorealist legend in the 1940s, something to bear in mind for later in the essay.¹² In the early 1950s De Sica would return to acting, most notably in *Bread, Love and Dreams (Pane, Amore, e Fantasia)*. After a healthy and successful career, at the age of 74, De Sica passed away following a surgery on his lungs while in France.¹³

⁹ Italice. "Biography of Vittorio De Sica."
<http://www.italica.rai.it/eng/cinema/biographies/desica.htm>.

¹⁰ Italice

¹¹ Celli, Carlo. "The Legacy of Mario Camerini in Vittorio De Sica's "The Bicycle Thief" (1948)." *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 4 (2001): 3-17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225867>. pp 14.

¹² Celli, pp 14.

¹³ Italice

Roberto Rossellini

Roberto Gastone Zeffiro Rossellini, born May 8th 1906, was the eldest of four children who all grew up in a “prosperous and loving family, surrounded by servants, material comforts, and intellectual and artistic stimulation—the later especially provided by his father, a designer and builder, resolute liberal (during a time when liberalism was often blamed for the country’s many problems)”¹⁴ Rossellini fell into filmmaking after spending all of his inheritance; a career as a director was never a goal of his. Getting his foot in the door was easy for Rossellini because he had a number of friends already in the field and some experience writing screenplays.¹⁵ His apprenticeship in film took many forms ranging from technical work, such as dubbing films in Italian to assistant directing. His first significant work was helping to write the screen play for *Luciano Serra, pilota* (1938).¹⁶ The next major moment for Rossellini would be the creation and release of *Rome, Open City*, which has been called a “...watershed moment not only in Rossellini’s development as one of the quintessential modern filmmakers, but also in the emergence of a distinctive and reinvigorated postwar cinema in general...”¹⁷ Similar to Vittorio De Sica, Roberto Rossellini owes many thanks to Cesare Zavattini for helping him on the screenplay and boosting him into his place as “the ideologue of film naturalism...committed to a

¹⁴ Gottlieb, pp 2-3

¹⁵ Gottlieb, pp 3

¹⁶ Gottlieb, pp 3

¹⁷ Gottlieb, pp 2

vernacular cinema dealing with the living world”¹⁸ Karen Arnone claims that *Rome, Open City* was Rossellini’s moral stand and break from ideological conformity “after living under Fascist rule for over 20 years and silently abiding by the rhetoric” of Mussolini and his repressive measures.¹⁹

In contrast to Arnone, John Baxter notes collaborations between Fellini and Rossellini as well as Rossellini and Mussolini (Vittorio, Il Duce’s son) and then boldly suggests that even though “Rossellini directed for Vittorio Mussolini he no more believed in Fascism than in the Communism and Catholicism he embraced later. He’d exploited it to build a career”.²⁰ Nevertheless, Rossellini had found a way to skillfully transition from production under the Fascist influence and restrictions to the ‘liberalized’ state which gave way to neorealist cinema. It is interesting to note that he made this transition by appealing to a very human emotion—guilt. In both *Paisan* and *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini was sure to never truly place blame on the Italians for the atrocities of WWII; Italians are always portrayed as the victims, never as the ‘bad guys.’

After the international success of *Rome, Open City* and two years of complete creative freedom, Rossellini chose to push the limits of conventional filmmaking in the making of *Paisan*. As Arnone discovered in her research, “he would place his cameraman in the middle of the main square in a rural town and choose his actors from the inquisitive faces who

¹⁸ Arnone, Karen. "Roberto Rossellini and his Italian Cinema: The Search for Realism ." Univ. of Penn, Center for Italian Studies .

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/italians/resources/Amiciprize/1996/>.

¹⁹ Arnone, pp 1.

²⁰ Baxter, John. *Fellini: Biography*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. pp 69

came to investigate and only finalized the script only after the actors of the episodes met with their foreign counterpart and developed a rapport”.²¹

Rossellini and De Sica were both seemingly in constant search of new ways to express themselves and their films in creative ways that would capture and redirect their fellow Italians.

World War One, Fascism, and the Birth of the Italian Film Industry

Although a detailed discussion of the history of Italy from the start of World War One through the fall of Fascism is beyond the scope of this essay, some background is necessary to understand the analysis and context of the films. In his *History of Modern Italy*, Martin Clark refers to the Great War as one of exhaustion, which Italy entered into after initially pledging neutrality because of the lure of land concessions in Dalmatia—modern day Croatia.²² Troops on all sides were improperly cared for, poorly trained, unprepared, barely armed, and fatigued in all ways humanly possible—Italian soldiers were no exception. Clark notes that in addition to these hardships, troops were deprived of practically all forms of entertainment including the cinema due to strict regulations on military decorum.²³ When films were viewed by troops, they were typically for training purposes or documentaries. The Fascists attempted to utilize national media, and to a lesser extent, cinema, to spread news and images of the war front and to bolster a sense of nationalism and

²¹ Arnone, pp 1.

²² Clark, Martin. *Modern Italy 1871-1995*. 2nd ed. Harlow, Essex, United Kingdom: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999 pp. 190

²³ Clark, pp 187

unity.²⁴ The majority of Italians did not subscribe to this message, as their own individual socio-economic standing had, in most cases, declined drastically. In fact, the only regions to experience any sort of ‘war boom’ were those located in the so-called industrial triangle (where production of arms and steel reigned) of Piedmont, Liguria, and Lombardy.²⁵ The north-central/south divide that began in the final years of the Great War would only be exasperated by the Second World War and will remain an issue for citizens and filmmakers alike to grapple with for years to come.

While there is some general debate as to whether or not Mussolini and his followers ran a truly totalitarian state, it was clear that they sought complete control of all aspects of Italian life. According to Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the Fascists were able to recognize that the “cinema had an extraordinary communicative potential and granted films a central role in their attempts to transform ideologies and lifestyles... and an ideal way to transmit political messages unobtrusively”.²⁶ Mussolini rose to power in 1922 and he immediately began molding and shaping the Italian state to fit his vision. This vision included a great technological buildup of the cinematic industry for transmitting propaganda and political messages. One thousand cinemas opened in Italy in the last three years of the 1930s, and in 1939 alone 86 films were

²⁴ Clark, pp. 200

²⁵ Clark, pp. 193

²⁶ Ricci, pp 30

produced. This was in part a result of the 1938 ban on American films that greatly reducing competition.²⁷

On January 25, 1925, Mussolini gave a speech in Rome in which he declared his dictatorship and proclaimed his vision for Italy, thus ending the period of post-war political scrambling and chaos. Part of his vision included the passing of laws that would limit Italians' visual entertainment privileges. Imported American films, estimated by George Talbot to be 80% of the films projected in Italian cinemas between 1925 and 1930, were heavily taxed.²⁸ The rationale for this taxation was twofold: 1) to subsidize Italian cinemas and film production and 2) to re-enforce the fascist ideology of national solidarity maintaining 'Everything within the State, nothing outside the State, Nothing against the State' as the Fascist motto stated.²⁹

Also in 1938, came the regime's creation of the 'Experimental Centre of Cinematography,' an institution intended to train students in filmmaking and to replace *Cinecittà*—Italy's Hollywood. *Cinecittà* was the largest cinema in Rome, prior to the regime's 'Experimental Centre of Cinematography,' and it showed primarily American films. "Mussolini's famed dictum that cinema was the state's *arma più forte*, literally, its strongest weapon"³⁰ explains why such numerous measures to rid Italy of competition and to increase the potential to rival the American Hollywood were taken.

²⁷ Hibbard, Matthew. *The Media in Italy*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press, 2008. pp 38.

²⁸ Talbot, pp. 145.

²⁹ Clark, pg 242 and 239.

³⁰ Ricci, pp 33.

Very few of the Italian films produced in the 1930s have remained on the public radar, and most are still unknown to even the greatest of Italian film connoisseurs, because they were 1) extremely censored by the fascist regime and thus 2) of poor or low quality, making them undesirable and infrequently copied for posterity. Nonetheless, the film industry even in its infancy was the most popular entertainment in Italy; despite extreme censorship of all films shown in cinemas and the inability to escape official newsreels that had to be shown by law at every performance³¹ When ‘Il Duce’ was removed from power in 1943, the film industry took a turn for the best. Creative expression was no longer closely monitored and the fact that the industry’s infrastructure was already in place helped quite a lot.

Rome, Open City (Roma, Città Aperta)

“Ever since Rome, Open City, I have maintained a conscious, determined endeavor to try to understand the world in which I live, in a spirit of humility and respect for the facts and for history. What was the meaning of Rome, Open City? We were emerging from the tragedy of the war. We had all taken part in it, for we were all its victims. I sought only to picture the essence of things. I had absolutely no interest in telling a romanticized tale along the usual lines of film drama. The actual facts were each more dramatic than any screen cliché.”— Roberto Rossellini, 1960³²

The implied meaning of the title, *Rome, Open City* is twofold. The declaration of a city as an ‘open city’ implied that it is demilitarized. Rome was not a true open city in 1946, although it had been declared one due to the

³¹ Clark, pp 244

³² Walsh, Martin. "Rome, Open City: The Rise to Power of Louis XIV, Re-evaluating Rossellini." *Jump Cut* 15 (1997): 13-15.
<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC15folder/Louis14.html> .

continued German occupation of the city. Rome was also not free of fascism, as the presence of Germans via the occupation meant that fascist men, women, and dogma were still within the city limits. Secondly, the title implies (after a complete viewing of the film) that Rome was better suited to its own values and devices before it became ‘open’ and is now vulnerable to a variety of influences which are grappled with in the film. As Rossellini’s snapshot of the historical moment unfolds in this film, it becomes more and more clear that the title suits the overall mood and message of the film.

In *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini used four women—Pina, Laretta (Pina’s sister), Marina, and Ingrid (a German spy)—to convey three distinct sentiments about the fascist era and his “idea of Italy.”³³ Pina, the lead female role, introduces the audience to Rossellini’s vision of Italy during the anti-fascist movement. Although her on-screen time is cut short when she is shot by a German soldier, her memory continues to pervade much of the film, supporting the argument that she is a central and important character. Pina is a widow; she is pregnant; and she planning to re-marry to Francesco, a Communist anti-fascist, in a few weeks. These three traits are hugely symbolic and were undoubtedly pointedly chosen by Rossellini to make certain statements about Italy in this transitional point in its history.

In her confessional conversation with Don Pietro, the priest who plays a central role in the film, Pina states that she feels like she has “lead a bad life” and “has been doing wrong without meaning to do so” and finally, that she is

³³ Gundle, Stephen. *Bellissima: Feminine Beauty and Idea of Italy*. : Yale University Press, 2007.

“ashamed” of her “condition” while encircling her rounded stomach area with her hand. Pina’s husband, much like the Italian King and Italy, had died but left her with an opportunity for the future via the creation of a new generation. (Italy was governed by a monarchy prior to the rise of the fascist regime.) Pina’s physical transition between her late husband and Francesco parallels the political transition of Italy from King and fascist rule, to an anti-fascist rule. Additionally, Pina is a catholic woman and knows that her pregnant state out of wedlock is a sin, so some of her shame certainly comes from her falling out of line with the deeply ingrained religious and cultural customs of the Catholic Church.

Francesco is a leader of a group that is a part of the anti-fascist movement. The marriage to Francesco is representative of Pina’s desire to legitimize her link to the Resistance underground movement, as well as wanting to give the best she can to her son and unborn child. Francesco is the only person to whom Pina is ever submissive. Alas, Pina (Italy) is only relaxed and subdued in the presence of a strong anti-fascist male.

Generally speaking, the anti-fascists were not a single group of people; rather this term refers to the political parties that emerged after the war all with anti-fascism as the root for their creation. Some were far more radical than others, for example, the contrast between those that considered themselves ‘partisans’ versus ‘communists’. Martin Clark differentiates that “partisans specialized in surprise attacks, in sabotage and blowing up bridges, in seizure of booty and political assassinations” and that their main tool for change was

“...guerilla warfare—rural, local, improvised, and mobile fighting”.³⁴ The partisans were not very organized due to the nature of their rebellion tactics and are considered to have been “a spontaneous popular rising, local rather than national, military rather than political.”³⁵ On the other side of the anti-fascist spectrum were the communists. The Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), PCI, “encouraged strikes, campaigned for higher wages, and threatened employers”.³⁶ Until 1945, the PCI was the major and largest anti-fascist force in Italy. This was due to the party’s organization and their dedication, “to the state and to the interest of the nation rather than the proletariat”.³⁷ Francesco, Pina, and Manfredi were members of the communist anti-fascists. The audience is given clues that support this that include the conflict between church and the atheistic base of communism, the underground newspapers (which were dominated and circulated by the communists), and the tightly organized activities and whereabouts of Francesco and Manfredi.

In stark contrast to Pina are Laretta, Pina’s sister, and Marina, Laretta’s friend. These two characters serve primarily as the physical embodiments of Rossellini’s feelings toward the influence that the Germans are having on his fellow Italians, especially the women. Laretta and Marina are both actresses/stage performers; Rossellini has thus used theater as a symbolic reference to debauchery, loss of the self, deviation from the more desirable origins of Italy. An example of this sentiment comes to life in a

³⁴ Clark, pp. 311

³⁵ Clark, pp. 311

³⁶ Clark, pp. 312

³⁷ Clark, pp. 312

scene in which Laretta's working-class family is openly dismissive of her "work" when she complains one evening about how it tires her. Laretta's own family negatively perceives her chosen career path as superfluous and non-substantive; after all she was only ever home when recovering from her tiresome 'work' or her intoxication. One evening, while at Marina's apartment Laretta says, "Maybe Manfredi is right—we are stupid." This moment of clarity and self-assessment comes to her only while intoxicated. The fact that Rossellini has her frequently intoxicated and flirting with "fritzes" (slang for German soldiers) grounds the correlation of actresses and stage performers and a loss of the self—perhaps her true Italian identity—in exchange for fleeting simple and empty pleasures.

Although a somewhat lesser character, Marina, who is also an actress/ stage performer, has an important role in the demise of the protagonists as well as her own gender. Rossellini used Marina to share his struggle to understand how women descended into such self-serving oblivion. Marina is involved in an ambiguous relationship with a German woman—who is a spy, a fact unbeknownst to her—who supplies her with cocaine when Marina "shares" information about her communist lover Manfredi's whereabouts and anti-fascist work. Marina's two relationships are used by Rossellini to remark upon uncomfortable truths that were a part of the final years under fascism. In one scene this is made expressly clear in the dialogue between Manfredi and Marina. Manfredi confronts Marina about her and Laretta's frequent fraternization with the Germans in bars and the like and Marina retorts to this

criticism. She says, “A girl must live! Poverty frightens me” and goes on how it is difficult for a woman to provide for herself entirely. In Marina’s eyes it becomes clear that men are tools to stability, sustenance, and survival. Manfredi replies to this with, “happiness is not in lovers, apartments and furniture... love for husband, children is only thing that makes life worth bearing” as he exits the room. Family is what holds the Italians together and Marina has utterly failed to discover this as a result of her self-indulgent lifestyle. (This theme becomes a central focus in the analysis of *The Children are Watching Us*).

The character roles that females are cast in for films are important to pay close attention to for two reasons. The first being the expected need for any production to have both male and female characters to foil one another, to interact, and so on. The second reason, which is particularly unique in Italy, is that she will also undoubtedly be presumed to be the director’s representation of Italy. Steven Gundle has written an entire book, *Bellissima*, on how Italian women and feminine beauty have been used for political propaganda and have served “as the bearers of the idea of Italy,”³⁸ throughout the peninsula’s history since the time of Dante and Petrarch right up through the present. The opposite characters of Pina and Marina/Lauretta that Rossellini has given us show two ideas of Italy—and the preferred idea is obvious. Pina’s role as a female deeply involved in the underground movement of resistance and anti-fascism was made a rarity in *Rome, Open City*. Affirmation that Pina is a scarce type of

³⁸ Gundle, pg xxii

woman is evidenced by the fact that the only other women are the floozy and superficial Laretta and Marina.

A child, specifically Pina's son Marcello, affirms that most women are not to be included in the active resistance to the fascist occupation of Rome. In one scene, Marcello, Pina's son, tells a young female neighbor that "Romoletto says women are trouble" when she requests to join in on secret attacks they are planning to launch against the Germans. *Children in Rome, Open City*, as well as other neorealist films, are great reflections and re-enforcements of gender roles. Marcello's reply to the young girls request reinforces the masculine example Francesco has set for him in his early years of development while reinforcing Rossellini's struggle with what was occurring socially with women in Italy. Many Italians became concerned about what the future would hold with socially liberated women. Liberation had to mean liberation for all otherwise the success of the Resistance would be wounded.

Marcello has internalized that his mother, Pina, was a rare exception to the rule that 'women are trouble' as she was taking an active part in resistance activities, and thus presumes that all other women are like the stereotype he has been told of and has observed in Laretta and Marina. Marcello and Romoletto, another young boy who lives in the same apartment complex, are affirmations of the message that anti-fascists were not only masculine in nature, but nurturing to the future generations. Romoletto orchestrates a small scale car bomb for the boys to set off as a way of showing their alliance to the resistance. "I'm proud of you comrades," he says to his group of friends,

mimicking the terms used by adult males in his life. The anti-fascist cause undoubtedly will be carried on by these young boys into the next generation of Resistance anti-fascists.

The male characters in *Roma, Citta Aperta* serve two primary purposes. Men are used by Rossellini to convey, through dialogue and action, the struggle that Italians had with their recent history. Men are also used to illustrate the changes that have taken hold on the peninsula—primarily the changes of the Resistance movement. It is interesting to note that while Rossellini is crafting this image of men and of his film in its entirety, Clark proposes that this period was “portrayed as far more ‘revolutionary’ and far more united than it had been in reality”.³⁹ Clark continues his discussion and highlights the true chaos that was prevalent during the short years of the Resistance as a result of a recent national defeat, popular vendetta, and civil war. Consider the possibility that films such as Rossellini’s, *Rome, Open City*, have played a role in perpetuating misconceptions about the true experience of the Resistance in relation to the assertions Clark has made about this period.

The male characters that Rossellini incorporated contrast and reaffirm roles of the female characters and exert influence upon the children in their underground resistance to fascism. Francesco is a strong anti-fascist male character (who is to be married to Pina) that has brought his family into the world of active resistance to the fascist occupation. In the early segments of the film, the viewer sees Francesco discussing the “winter that must come before the spring” in reference to their need to persevere together through the

³⁹ Clark, pp 316

occupation and to continue with their active resistance. Pina, our representative of Italy, is calmed and reassured by Francesco's strength and encouraged to remain strong by Francesco, thus reinforcing Francesco's own masculinity as he is the only one able to calm the strong-willed Pina. Additionally, Pina is the only woman with whom the anti-fascist male characters ever discuss their activities and troubles—all other Italian women are viewed under the same microscope as Laretta and Marina. After Pina's sudden death, Francesco takes Marcello under his wing and continues to care for him as if he had indeed married Pina and was his father. In one scene, we see Francesco gently kissing Marcello good night before tucking him into bed. While a seemingly simple gesture, this behavior symbolizes the peaceful transfer of values to the next generation, which we know has been internalized in our previous discussion of Romoletto and Marcello.

Don Pietro, a local priest, is another male character who is involved in the underground resistance movement. Don Pietro's character is based upon the real-life priest named Don Giuseppe Morosini.⁴⁰ Don Pietro is an interesting character because he is an active and respected part of two conflicting worlds. He allies himself with the communist anti-fascists who are atheistic. He also runs an all-boys Catholic school. When confronted about this conflict of interest he simply replies, "I believe that he who fights for justice and truth walks in the path of God... My duty is to help those in need". These statements of defense are evidence of Rossellini's own grappling with the need

⁴⁰ Venturi, Lauro. "Roberto Rossellini." *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1949) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1209379> . pp 5.

to support the anti-fascists, but feeling the pull of the Catholic Church, a large part of Italian life, as well as his own, and culture. According to Matthew Hibbard, “postwar Italy witnessed a struggle by Catholics and Communists for Italian hearts and minds... the battle extended into the cultural, economic, social and religious spheres”.⁴¹ By focusing on Don Pietro as a crusader for justice and not quite a full-blown anti-fascist, Rossellini cleverly confronted this paradox. Don Pietro was a character that would be easy for the majority of Italians to accept since he was based on a real person.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for many Italians to accept at this time was their own recent part in creating a few darker chapters for the history books. World War II had just ended when *Rome, Open City* was released in 1945 and Italy, and all of Europe for that matter, was still dealing with the leftover traces of what happened during the war. Ruth Ben-Ghiat asserts that the Italians struggled with their participation in Mussolini’s 20 year reign because they were promised national unity and prestige on the world stage and were not given anything of the sort by the time Mussolini was removed from power. Il Duce’s regime had resulted in German occupation of the peninsula, civil war, and had “fostered a persuasive feeling of victimization that made many Italians reluctant to see themselves as a nation of perpetrators”.⁴²

Additionally, Italy was in a severe economic depression as a result of the postwar aftermath, which only exacerbated feelings of resentment and

⁴¹ Hibbard, pp 19.

⁴² Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. "Liberation: Italian Cinema and The Fascist Past 1945-50." In *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, R.J.B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani, New York City: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999. pp. 83.

denial. According to Ben-Ghiat, neorealist film directors also “contributed to the collective tendency to externalize responsibility for Fascism”.⁴³ This claim holds water when a close look is taken at how Rossellini carefully avoids pointing any fingers back at Italy. Don Pietro, the priest, and thus appropriate lecturer on morality, asks of Pina during a conversation about the German presence in Rome, “Are we sure we don’t deserve this? Have we lived in the way of god? We have much to be forgiven for.” Here Rossellini deals with his own sense of personal responsibility, and the responsibility he felt Italians should accept for the terrors they supported during Mussolini’s regime. This moment of acknowledgement is fleeting. When taken into consideration with other scenes in which the Italians are portrayed as victims, the potency of social responsibility in this scene is lessened. The other male characters in the film only speak of bravery, perseverance, and the resistance movement. By contrast, the German males are used to convey difficult memories and guilt—but from a distance, one dictator removed.

Rossellini gives his male characters the considerable burden of carrying and representing regret and grief over the atrocities of the war. There are two scenes that provide evidence that Rossellini was certainly trying to send messages to his audience in the making of this film. In the first stand alone scene, a pair of German soldiers walks into an inn and announces to the inn keeper that they have brought meat to which he replied, “But I am an inn keeper, not a butcher.” The Germans answer, “We will be the butchers.” The

⁴³ Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. "Liberation: Italian Cinema and The Fascist Past 1945-50." In *Italian Fascism: History, Memory and Representation*, R.J.B. Bosworth and Patrizia Dogliani, New York City: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1999. pp. 84.

inn keeper points them to the back of the inn while saying, “Ah yes, you’re specialists at that!” It is quite obvious by the boldness of the inn keeper’s reply that Rossellini has decided to make the Germans out to be *more* responsible and *more* ruthless than the Italians ever were in the war. The Italians are blameless according to Rossellini in this scene. By including this scene and the next about to be discussed, he has managed to acknowledge involvement as quickly as he passes it off onto the Germans.

In the penultimate scene of the film, a group of German soldiers, high ranking officers, spies, and interrogators are in a lounge discussing their recent capture of Francesco and Manfredi. An unidentified soldier asks the character deemed to be the Commissioner, what will happen if the two men do not talk, as they had been bearing extreme torture without cracking the silence except for their cries of agony? The Commissioner states with fury in his eyes, “If they don’t talk it means that an Italian is worth a German...that would mean that there is no difference between a slave race and a master race...and no reason for this war”. This question and answer dialogue focuses on the Italians as resisters to the German fascist cause and points the finger of judgment (for the audience) directly at the self-righteous German. It also is Rossellini’s way of appealing to his audience as a genuine anti-fascist. Recall the fact that he had worked closely with Vittorio Mussolini prior to the regime’s collapse; he must now constantly atone for this in the way he presents films to his Italian audience. In this scene, the Italians are again victims and are allowed to be guilt free for any involvement in the war. Rossellini presumably felt it best that

Italians first come together, and then they could later atone for their wrongdoing.

Additional judgment comes from within the German camp. Hartford, an obviously more masculine male character in comparison to his other effeminate German counterparts, recalls his experience interrogating the French in the thick of World War One and says, “We Germans simply refuse to realize people want to be free.” From across the silenced room he is accused of being drunk to which he replies with tears building in his eyes, “Yes, every night to forget, but it doesn’t help... We have sown Europe with corpses... from these graves rises a hate... hate everywhere... we’re being consumed by hate... we will all die... without hope... without hope.” The only German that is presented to have any striking masculine traits is also the only German to see their behavior for what it truly is and speaks boldly to those in denial. This brief monologue at the end of the film leaves the audience, Italian or not, with the message that anti-fascism and honesty come from strong and overtly masculine men.

Rome, Open City, falls under the cinematic categorization of ‘neorealist’ for the way it drastically departed from previous Italian film conventions, used non-professional actors, and sought to capture the postwar period in a more honest light, or at least without obvious fascist propaganda. This does not mean that *Rome, Open City*, is not considered a political film. Steven Ricci found in his research that “more frequently than in other countries, a relatively high proportion of Italian films insert themselves into

political topics: the Risorgimento, fascism, the Resistance...⁴⁴ and *Rome, Open City* certainly fits this description. Rossellini used his male, female, and child characters to both capture and project and image—or idea—of Italy in the post war years while grappling with all of the social, economic, and political issues that any filmmaker would have to take into account during the transitional years after the fall of Fascism in Italy. Ricci also states that filmmakers, such as Rossellini, “not only explicitly addressed national political issues, the cinematic institution [including filmmakers] also attempted to assert its role as an agency that could recruit, codify, and circulate the cultural terms for a modern national identity.”⁴⁵ Evidence for this was discussed in each main character; Marcello in his role as the next generation of resistance and separation from fascism, Francesco and Don Pietro in their near infallible strength and stability; and Pina in her successful balancing of her roles as a mother, a wife, and an activist.

Paisan

Paisan, directed by Roberto Rossellini, was released in 1946 following *Rome, Open City*. The film is presented in a series of six episodes, but for the sake of balance and more focused analysis, I will only be discussing the first three in this essay. *Paisan* seeks to revisit the chronology of Italian liberation from a social perspective as evidenced by the themes of poverty, the culture of the South, urbanization, and racism. Simplified to its bare bones, each episode

⁴⁴ Ricci, pp 22

⁴⁵ Ricci, pp 20

of *Paisan* is linked to the next by the common thread of the Italians' struggle with the replacement of one foreign power for another despite American benevolence to the peninsula's cause. Gender roles cannot be summarized similarly simply because new characters are introduced with each new episode. The men, women, and male children gender roles are all very raw and true to moment of 1946 because of the way Rossellini approached the making of this film. He placed "his cameraman in the middle of the main square in a rural town and choose his actors from the inquisitive faces who came to investigate,"⁴⁶ thus giving him the chance to capture the essence of Italians in each location, something that is sometimes lost when employing paid professional actors.

The first episode of the film is the 'Sicily' episode because the film is organized by the stages of the American liberation of the peninsula. In this first episode the audience is immediately introduced to the negative image that many northern Italians—Rossellini was born and bred in the North of Italy—and foreigners had regarding Southern Italians. Rossellini places the burden of representing the fact that there is a social-geographic divide in Italy on the shoulders of American soldiers. Judgment from foreigners is expected and easier to swallow than self-discrimination. An unknown American soldier says to another unknown soldier "This hole isn't much better than the last one we were in" only moments after the narrator finished chronicling the American landing in Sicily from North Africa. Thus, Rossellini has included a prejudiced

⁴⁶ Arnone, pp 1

slight against the Sicilians by barely placing them above the peoples of North Africa.

Stereotyping of the Sicilians continues in the information gathering scene that takes place in the community's church—the safe haven from the German land mines, physically and spiritually. An American G.I. asks the Sicilians, in Italian, if they know which way the Germans retreated, but no one answers. Instead, a woman excited that the foreigner speaks Italian chimes in and asks if he is Italian and about his family's origins. He indulges them and shares that his grandfather was from Gela, a town in Sicily. This response only serves to further encourage a greater digression from his task of gathering information about the Germans' whereabouts. Finally his ranking officer scolds him for the "time wasting" and says to "get a move on." The G.I. replies "I'm sorry, but you just don't speak Italian in a hurry, it takes a long time to talk to these people" implying that a more rudimentary, slow, indirect approach to gaining information is necessary when conversing with Italians. Also, the nature of his dialogue with the Sicilians shows that he is making an attempt to gain their trust by discussing family and his Italian heritage. Americans are portrayed as goal-oriented even when scared of potential danger and out of their own comfort zone. The Italians are simple and require extra effort, something that is only an issue in the Sicily episode of *Paisan*. In this first episode the Americans are portrayed mostly as 'good' and the only 'bad' people of note are the German Fascists.

Although the two cultures are clearly clashing from the start, they need each other. The American soldiers need the Italians to help them through the dangerous terrain and the Italians need the Americans to help them liberate their country from the Germans. Despite communication blunders, the two cultures come together and find a way to meet each other's needs. A young girl from the local village knows the surrounding area well and has discovered a path along the lava canal that is land mine free. She wants to search for her father and brother and can do so while helping the Americans to find a place to set up their headquarters. After literally walking through a mine field together, lead by a woman, the American Officer decides to continue searching for the Germans and to leave "Joe from Jersey" behind with Carmela to secure the headquarters. Thus far, Rossellini has placed a young woman in control of the foreigner's safety and then uses her to paint a fantastical image of Italy that hearkens back to the glory days of Italy, the Renaissance—a time when Italy was wealthy, progressive, and revered by much of the world for its cultural affluence.

Carmela and Joe are left in an old castle tower together. Joe attempts to make conversation with Carmela and the topic of choice is wishing on shooting stars. Joe says "Boy if that star nonsense were true, you people would be the happiest on earth!" and brings the viewer back to the reality that Sicily is war torn and quite desperate for a miracle. However, this does not detract from storybook like images of the two. They are placed in a scene that represents a combination of Italian self-reinforcement of happier, simpler and

paradise-esque times in the nation's, and a scene that will help make the film marketable beyond Italian borders where a predominantly fantastically image of the southern countryside still thrived. In this scene the background shows the audience that Italy has visibly crumbled from the greatness it once knew well before the world wars commenced. According to Stephen Gundle, whose works predominantly focus on feminine beauty and its association with the 'idea of Italy,' "travelers generally viewed the country through the prism of their own reading and experience."⁴⁷ Foreigners had classical works by Dante (Divine Comedy) and Petrarch (Ad Italiam) to preface their experiences in Italy which idealized female beauty and to connect it to an idea of Italy. Rossellini's overly romanticized location and atmosphere, despite the harsh reality of the moment comforts the audience, plays to the foreign expectation of Italy, and allows him to a female gender role in a traditional way so that Carmela can be compared with females, such as Francesca, in episodes to come.

In the final scenes of the Sicily episode, Rossellini introduces an issue that he will revisit in the 'Rome' episode—racism. Joe and Carmela's conversation reaches a point where a meaningful bond is beginning to be formed, so Joe decides to share his family wallet photos. As he does this, he lights and holds the flame on his cigarette lighter, thus giving away his position in the tower and is promptly shot and killed by nearby Germans. Rossellini reminds the audience the Italian audience that the Americans are experiencing

⁴⁷ Gundle, pp xxi

losses in the war for their liberation too.⁴⁸ The Germans then make their way over and find Carmela and the deceased Joe. Immediately the brutish Germans begin making passes at Carmela—something the Americans soldiers did not engage in—asking for wine and if she has a boyfriend. Carmela manages to tell a convincing lie that she will get them water and return. As soon as she is out of sight the Germans begin making remarks about the Americans. One asks, “Do you think we’ll keep pulling back as they advance?” and is answered “No, they’ll run like rabbits, all the way back to Africa...all the way back to the devil”. The Germans are referencing Africa, and Africans, in a severely negative and derogatory way—another taste of racism.

Meanwhile, Carmela had been hiding in a room below the Germans the whole time, with trap door access to the level they were still on. Upset by their distasteful banter and in an act of loyalty to her new found friend and ally, she takes Joe’s rifle, sneaks through the trap door and shoots all of the Germans. The sound of multiple rifle shots being fired gets the attention of the Americans soldiers who return in time to find a tower full of dead bodies, including Joe’s, and Carmela running back to her village. The officer says “Why that dirty little I-Tay.” Carmela is seen by the audience and Americans lying face down on a bed of rocks. Carnage and racism are plentiful for all parties involved in this fight for Italian liberation. This last emotion and image Rossellini leaves the audience with is somber and frustrating—miscommunication resulting in an unnecessary casualties could have been

⁴⁸ Sandler, Art. "Paisan." Webster University, Films Across the Curriculum. <http://www.webster.edu/fatc/paisan.html>.

prevented had the G.I. who spoke Italian had remained behind with Carmela instead of Joe—as the narrator traces the ally’s progression up the peninsula to Naples.

In the ‘Naples’ episode, Rossellini introduces his audience to the two main male characters, a child and an American G.I., that have an encounter in the mess of the city, while continuing the thematic thread of cultural clashes. Briefly, the setting in Naples needs to be discussed because it is a critical part of the overall message and emotions conveyed by Rossellini in this episode. The streets are crowded with amateur performers all yelling for attention from passersby to watch their acts for fast cash. Young children are seen picking up old cigarette butts and smoking the last bits to the nub of the filter. There are piles of garbage that are literally the size of small hills along the streets and in between down-trodden buildings and homes. Naples is chaotic, barely standing, filled with Americans—as the occupiers now, not fighters as in the ‘Sicily’ episode—and there is no shortage of orphaned children roaming the city.

One orphaned child, who remains nameless except for when the American MP calls him “Paisan” which is defined as slang for friend and typically is in reference to a countryman / compatriot⁴⁹ that has been affected quite severely by the war is our main character. He is a boy of approximately 10 years of age and is first seen wandering the streets alone looking to make a quick profit. As the boy is walking in the crowded street he is lucky enough to be informed of a black market purchase of an adult black male. The boy takes

⁴⁹ dictionary.com. "paisan." <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/paisan> (28 March 2010).

the chance to run a scam and pretends to jockey for physical positioning close to the obviously drunken and barely coherent black American MP so that he can barter with other boys and adult males. “Don’t hassle me just because I’m smaller than you!” the young boy says to an unnamed adult male who is the highest bidder for American soldier. Size, and not seniority or adult authority, are even reasons in the young boy’s mind for the adult brushing him off. This child has been surviving on his own for so long that the line between adulthood and childhood are blurred and he groups himself with adults because he had been forced to take life on alone. Italian children: projections for the future or reflection of the moment? Both are arguable, but in this context, Rossellini is first and foremost exonerating the Italians for being pushed around by those brawnier and wealthier than them. Rossellini has also highlighted an unpleasant truth about post-war children and families and has used this ‘adultified’ child to also show the decline of the next generations of Italians as a result of the war—projection of what the future of Italy’s social landscape could look like. A stark reality is presented through this child and the viewer is forced to grapple, as Rossellini must have, with the mixed emotions regarding the shared responsibility of Italians, Germans, and Americans for his fate.

Fast-forwarding to the end of the episode, the audience reencounters the now sober MP the next day while he is patrolling the city. He spots the young boy (who had previously stolen the MP’s boots when he fell into a drunken slumber in the boy’s company), pulls over and demands that the young boy take him to his parents. The boy says that he does not have any

parents. The MP demands to be taken to his house to see his family. The young understands that the MP does not grasp that he is being told the truth to he walks with the MP to a dark ally, cloth draped overhead for cover, spillover trash from the streets sprawled along the ground and populated with women and young children. “I have no home. I have no family,” says the young boy to the MP. The MP, confronted by a reality he probably had only heard about, stands still attempting to process what is before his eyes. He cannot bear the child’s harsh reality of communal suffering in squalid conditions and promptly leaves and drives away without saying a word. Here, Rossellini gives his audience a free space, meaning that here no one is held responsible for these squalid conditions. Victims are the only ones in sight, leaving it up to the viewer to interpret—perhaps even guess—who Rossellini wanted to be held responsible.

The MP’s Italy was one that required assistance gaining political and military stability; social issues were not on the Allied radar. As Clark noted, “as the allied armies advanced, more territory was handed over to the government...Sicily was ‘given’ back”⁵⁰ along with other regions. Clark’s syntax hints that these regions of Italy has somehow gone from being Italian, to Allied property, and back again when the Allied deemed it permissible for the Italian State to have its own lands once again. While the Allies were legally in control, something negative and subtle is implied about the Italian identity of the land and people while under foreign control. The MP did not want the

⁵⁰ Clark, pp. 305

Italy—or the Naples—of extreme social stratification and quickly fled the scene, ‘giving’ *that* Italy back to the young boy.

With the abrupt end to the ‘Naples’ episode, the narrator continues to track the Allied liberation up through the peninsula to Rome. By this time, Rome has been declared an open city and is truly free of all fascist occupiers. In the ‘Rome’ episode of *Paisan*, Rossellini compares and contrasts two ideas of Italy; one of Italy as a simple paradise, the other as a land of jaded, cold interpersonal relationships. Not surprisingly, he does this via the female characters. Not surprisingly, he does this via the female characters. The episode opens with a cloudy memory of the Americans parading through the city, complete with ear to ear smiles, flowers, cheering and music provided by the Italians. It then abruptly jumps to a scene in a crowded bar. Men and women are drinking, flirting, and playing games when two women begin to bicker. One has accused the other of being “a tramp” to which a scorned reply of “you’re stupid and washed out, when the Americans leave you won’t be eating anymore or wearing such fine hats!” was given. The American presence has affected how these women perceive what stability in their lives means. This argument has caused such a raucous that they are escorted out of the bar directly into taxi cabs.

The second woman, later introduced as Francesca, captured the changes that had occurred in the city and within the Roman culture in a single snappy retort. Rome had, with the presence of the American foreign occupiers, slowly changed from a fantastical paradise populated with smiling natives, as was

shown at the start of the episode, to a city filled with jaded women who had chosen to forgo lives of constant struggle for easier lives with less dignity. Recall Stephen Gundle's assertion that women have had the burden of bearing an "idea of Italy"⁵¹ throughout Italian history. These bar women are physical representations of what Rossellini has begun to observe in Italian metropolises. His exaggeration of the extent of the effects that Americans have had on Italian by 1946 is a warning to the audience of the consequences of this direction for the nation.

The scene continues with Francesca outside of her apartment building. She spots a drunken man wandering and asks him for a cigarette to get his attention. Brief small talk ensues and Francesca manages to cajole the unknown man to go with her to her apartment. Once inside her bedroom, she solicits him for sex (as graphically as was permitted in 1940s cinema) and is rejected. The man says "Rome is full of girls like you, now you're all alike...when we first arrived they [women] were all happy and laughing, full of life and beautiful" bringing the audience back to the very first parade scene of the episode. The mystery man continues to reminisce about times past and mentions a girl named Francesca. He says that he met her upon arrival of the parade because she offered him water. The offer of water, true sustenance, was able to vex this man for months and in the present, sex is a "bother" and he wants none of it "Six months went by and I was unable to find her, I even took Italian...just...just so I could say her name properly" said the man. The man's Francesca is the current Francesca, which is made clear by her expressions as

⁵¹ Gundle, pp i.

well as her increasingly specific questioning of the man, Fred. Francesca lets him sleep off the intoxication and she slips him her address and tells him to go there in the next afternoon. When she goes to meet him, she is left alone in the rain. The two never see one another again. Fred, who was seen previously by the audience in the bar, simply crumpled the address when asked by a fellow MP about it. He simply did not believe that the woman he knew still existed—he was correct.

This second half of the 'Rome' episode utilizes the two mutually exclusive, according to Rossellini's perspective and vision, ideas /images of Italy. Francesca was once a part of the happy, paradisiacal Italy. In the climate of economic depression, as well as cultural transition and redefinition, Francesca's purity and natural zeal have been replaced with a taste for vices and a jaded outlook on life. Thus, Italians are simply products of the hand they were dealt, they are not held responsible nor are they ever the 'bad guy' in these first three (and also in the following three) episodes. Francesca, similar to Pina in *Rome, Open City*, has been used to physically embody the filmmaker's idea of Italy. The nation and the State were seduced by American occupiers in this episode and had either forgotten or chosen to overlook the fact that although the Americans, were on a mission for the betterment of the peninsula's political welfare, they were still occupants. Italy still had yet to return to her true, blissful, origins for more than a brief moment in over 20 years.

The Children are Watching Us (I Bambini Ci Guardano)

In the Vittorio De Sica's, *The Children are Watching Us* (1944), a family slowly crumbles before the viewer as a result of a mother's infidelity and disloyalty to her family. This film was released barely a full year after the Second World War ended in Europe. De Sica immediately took on the social issues and standards that are rapidly being renegotiated and changed. *Società*, an Italian resistance newspaper, perfectly captured snapshot of the mood and state of Italy after the war.

“The war had recently ended, and at times none of us can remember what his life was like before. None of us recognizes his own past. It seems incomprehensible to us. Even the Renaissance and the 19th century seem closer than the sad years of yesterday...Our life today is dominated by a sense of stupor and by an instinctive search for a direction.”⁵²

The social fabric of this small Roman family is De Sica's microcosmic representation of some of the social issues that Italy and her people were dealing with in the war's aftermath. De Sica's Roman family composed of Andrea (father), Nina (wife and mother), and Prico (son) all seem to be lost as individuals as well as in relation to one another. They are a sample of the greater population in Italy that was struggling with this 'sense of stupor and search for direction'. Nina is having an extra-marital affair with Roberto; Andrea cannot seem to function without his son and wife under the same roof as him; and Prico is rootless and given no home to call his own until the very last few scenes of the film. To take the quote from *Società* one step further,

⁵² 'Letteratura d'occasione', *Società*, 15 November 1945.

The Children are Watching Us suggests that this stupor is intricately linked in part to struggles with loyalty—loyalty to the family, and by extension to the Italian state.

By the third scene, Nina has already broken two promises to Prico and demonstrated her poor maternal instinct. When Nina tucks Prico into bed she appears to go through motions of the chore and does not kiss Prico good-night, he has to ask her for this token of affection. The next morning Prico wakes to find Andrea, his father, distraught over the fact that his mother has left the family. Nina had promised Prico that she would take him to see the puppets that day as she tucked him into bed. Along with breaking this simple, but undoubtedly meaningful promise to Prico, Nina had also broken the unspoken promise that she will be there for her son as a mother. Nina's departure has also made public her infidelity to Andrea and their broken wedding vows. Nina's absence also throws Andrea into a state of panic over Prico's care. Despite the offer from Agnese, the house maid, to keep an eye on Prico in Nina's absence, Andrea still frets about and finally decides to bring Prico to his Aunt's the next day. Staying with his aunt did not work out due to tensions between Andrea and his sister-in-law, so Prico is then brought to his paternal grandmother's house. This arrangement also did not work out and Prico returned home with Andrea.

The lengthy summary of Prico's bouncing from household to household is included to convey the young boy's fragmented relationship with all of the adult females in his family. Ben-Ghiat states that a great deal of

anxiety in the mid 1940s existed regarding female emancipation , which was gained by women in 1944,“ and fidelity is manifested in representations of men victimized by women collaborators, profiteers and wives gone astray from the pressures of war”.⁵³ The film was released in 1944 by De Sica, just when tensions were both new and high regarding female emancipation. Nina as become the physical embodiment of these anxieties in *The Children are Watching Us* is no surprise.

After his first night home, Prico wakes to find his mother at his bedside. Nina has been granted permission to stay “solamente per lui” (only for him) by Andrea. As a result of Nina’s returned presence Agnese informs both Andrea and Nina at dinner that Prico has finally returned to “a normal weight of 48 kilos, when he left his grandmothers he was down to 42”. Thus, Prico’s physical health is dependant upon the presence of his mother in his life. The health and success of the next generation of Italaian males is heavily dependant upon the presence of a stable mother within a strong family unit.

Nina’s selfishness and disloyalty to her husband and son have affected them emotionally and physically in the same way that fascist sympathizers and supporters were pulling apart the already loosely woven thread of Italian social fabric with their allegiance to the imported German Fascist occupation. Disloyalty is made a large and clear theme from the very beginning of the film through these early scenes. Recall our previous discussion of Steven Gundle’s text, *Bellissima*, regarding women as the bearer’s of an idea of Italy. Here we

⁵³ Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. "Unmaking the Modern Fascist Man." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10, no. 3 (2005): 336-365. pp 338

are given an illustrative example of the way in which women in media have been used to capture and embody political as well as social notions of the Italian state. In even the early postwar years, “Women had the potential to assert their influence more strongly in public life than ever before,”⁵⁴ Gundle notes. Women were visually portrayed in the media as having an increasing role in the establishment of a democratic Italy; in the establishment of a stable state. To what extent female influence was encouraged is not the focus, the fact that women were portrayed to the public through media outlets as a part of the state’s progress is most important. Nina’s lack of participation in the rearing of her son, Prico, and overall disregard for the role that she was expected to play as a wife and mother in her family parallels the role that Gundle discusses regarding Italian women in the mid-1940s. De Sica does not even entertain for a second the plausibility that Andrea had something to do with Nina’s desire for attention via an extra-martial affair. Nina, as the woman, is the sole bearer of maintaining the family unit’s stability, and by symbolic extension the stability of Italy.

The importance of the family unit in its traditional form of mother, father, and child (ren) is undeniably the most common thread throughout *The Children are Watching Us* and the foundation from which De Sica defines his characters and their respective gender roles. Carlo Celli notes in his essay on De Sica’s works that “after the suffering of the war, the family simply was one of the few universally accepted and viable institutions in Italian life.”⁵⁵ Family

⁵⁴ Gundle, pp. 115.

⁵⁵ Celli, pp. 10.

was the one institution that never was challenged by political paradigm shifts. Family as a major part of daily Italian life and national identity has been well-known for centuries. The character of Andrea does everything within his power to repair and maintain his own nuclear family. Throughout the film his belief in loyalty to this social unit, even in a moment of great pain, overrides all other things.

In the scene when he retrieved Prico from his mother's house, there is a heated discussion over Prico's behavior between mother and son. The grandmother finally strikes at Andrea's most vulnerable spot by saying "he's an odd one...takes after his mother" to which Andrea requests that she not speak ill of Nina in Prico's presence. Aghast at this response she challenges him, "You defend her?" and Andrea, simply replies "I married her". Here Andrea has been insulted, his child is being wrongfully scolded by his mother, and he has yet to resolve the issue of who will be the replacement female in Prico's life and *still* he maintains loyalty to a family structure that no longer exists. As a father, and to some extent as a man, Andrea has no idea how to handle life without the guidelines of a family. His masculinity is defined by De Sica in three ways: as a father, as a provider, and as a husband. Nina's departure does more than shake up the family relationships; it nearly renders Andrea a useless parent when alone. Andrea's masculinity has been defined and inextricably linked to his role in his family. According to Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "the study of shifting Italian masculinities as represented in film offers a window on the issues of the transition period, such as the erosion of

trust in private and public life; the need for new ethical and civic codes; the difficulties of rebuilding affective ties within families; and the necessity of models of manhood that would replace the militarized masculinities embraced by the fascist regime.”⁵⁶ Through Andrea, De Sica has done just what Ben-Ghiat discussed. A message that in order for the Italian nation to not crumble in the way this family has, the national health requires families to be loyal within their families and loyal to Italy; through Nina—infidelity to the nation will render chaos and will disrupt the formative years of the next generation.

In addition to infidelity molding the next generation through demonstrative behavior, the theme of betrayal is used by De Sica to compare and contrast male characters and to reaffirm the already established strong family values held by this Roman family. There are two scenes that capture the question of whether or not to betray another are most heart-wrenching and poignant. The first scene occurs when Roberto, Nina’s secret lover, makes an uninvited appearance at the family’s apartment. Roberto essentially lets himself in once he sees that Prico has answered the door and ignores the repeated, “She isn’t home” statements from Prico who has instantly recognized him. Nina overhears this exchange and bursts into the room angrily saying, “don’t do this in front of Prico, have respect for my family” to which Roberto replies in a cool and calculated tone, “io non ho rispetto per nessuno, voglio parlare tu” (I have respect for no one, I want to speak with you). Nina hesitantly and nervously agrees to talk with him and then reassures Prico as she sends him off to another room that Roberto will soon be gone. Here Roberto,

⁵⁶ Ben-Ghiat, "Unmaking the Modern Fascist Man" pp. 338

the only other major male character, has forced Nina to betray her husband and family in their own home by simply being there and cajoling her to entertain his request. Roberto's physical presence alone also breaks and betrays the thin veneer of secrecy that Nina had kept over her infidelity with him.

Betrayal surfaces again in this scene when we over hear Nina and Roberto's discussion quickly escalating into an argument. Roberto, indignant that Nina has apparently 'forgotten' her affection for him, exclaims his feelings of betrayal "You loved me in spite of the child, and now you refuse me?" Nina has now fostered deep feelings of betrayal in the man with whom she betrayed her husband and son. To distinguish that her disloyalty to Roberto is dismissible in comparison to her betrayal of Andrea, which was not, De Sica employs Prico's character. Prico runs into the room at the sound of Roberto's raised voice, shouts "Go away!" and bites his hand and whacks his arm. Roberto shoves Prico off and down to the floor and is remorseless when it is clear that Prico is hurt. Just as Nina undoubtedly was when she first engaged in her extramarital affair with him, Roberto is extremely selfish and wants what he wants and that is his only concern. Andrea, on the other hand, when betrayed by Nina immediately is concerned with Prico's welfare placing him in a vulnerable, self-less light. Thus, a child has been used to help De Sica contrast the two males and to make a statement about which scenario of betrayal within a relationship is acceptable.

The second scene in which the issue of betrayal is important comes after the family has gone on vacation in Alessio and Prico returns home

without his mother. (Andrea had returned early for work and encouraged Nina and Prico to stay and enjoy themselves for a few more days saying to Nina, “You’re happy here and that’s what matters”). Prico was to return with his mother; Prico explained to his father that she remained in the cab “to go shopping” and Andrea instantly knows that she has had another encounter with her lover. Andrea asks Prico about his time in Alessio with his mother without him. Prico says that he was a bad boy because he ran away to go see Andrea in Rome, but he does not share with Andrea the reason why. Welling up with a mix of fury and deep hurt, Andrea asks Prico once again; Prico holds his silent ground. Defeated by Nina’s actions, but wanting to remain strong in front of Prico, Andrea says “I understand” and holds Prico in an embrace. Andrea understands Prico’s desire to keep the façade that his mother had originally created and to not betray the family unit by admitting that there was a major flaw within it. Andrea has been struggling to do just this, for himself, throughout the whole film.

The title of the film is *The Children are Watching Us* and with good reason. From the first scene until the last, Prico is the figure in which all themes, gender role compare and contrasting, and statements about the present state of Italy are placed upon. Prico is constantly observing his parents and the other adult members of his family. By truly capturing a child’s perspective in this film, De Sica sends his audience the message that they cannot hide from their children, and in turn, affect not only each other but the next generation to a great extent. For his young age, Prico has observed and learned about the

world of his parents which turns out to affect his health as well as his emotions. When Andrea finally can no longer handle the thought of inadequate care for Prico in his own broken home, he takes Prico to a Catholic boarding school. It is not entirely surprising that Prico, after some initial protest, takes easily to life among monks and pastors. The church is the only place where he can be given an “affection and a fatherly eye”. De Sica is not known for his religiosity at this point in his filmmaking career, so it is likely that the Church’s role, for De Sica, is less about religion and more representative of the one place Prico, and Italy, can find morality, loyalty, and the makings for a stable family.

The last scene takes place after Prico has been informed of Andrea’s apparent suicide (exactly how Andrea died was not made clear, but the context of the film suggests suicide) and his mother and Agnese have come to console him. Prico arrives with the “father whom he has become very fond of” and walks toward his mother, looks at her, then runs over to Agnese and embraces her while burying his head against her bosom. Agnese says to him “go to your mother” and he does as he is told. He stands in front of her; she says his name barely audibly; Prico turns head away from her with a look of sorrow and disgust and then walks away back to priest. The next generation of Italians, in this case represented by young Prico, cannot function amidst such blatant blasphemy and disregard for a conservative moral code. Prico cannot bear the sight of his mother no can he bring himself to make physical contact—which signifies a loss of emotional connection to her as well—because she blames her

for the loss of his father. To Prico, family and loyalty were everything and his mother's selfish actions robbed him of this experience with blood relatives. Intentional or not, the audience is left with an eerie feeling regarding the prospect of a bleak future for the next generation of Italians should Nina's actions become common place as this final scene concludes.

Shoe Shine (Sciuscià)

A reminder of the general plot, as *Sciuscià* is not as well known to American audiences as the others films discussed. The film opens at a track near Rome where two shoeshine boys, Pasquale, an orphan, and Giuseppe, his younger friend are riding a horse. The pair has been saving to buy a horse of their own to ride. Attilio, Giuseppe's much older brother, and his shady friend offer the boys a chance to make a commission if they agree to deliver and sell black market goods to a fortune-teller. Once the woman has paid, Attilio and his gang suddenly arrive. Pretending to be cops, they payoff the boys to leave without saying another word and then proceed to rob the woman. With a payoff from Attilio, the boys are able to make the final payment on the horse they have been dreaming about and stable him in Trastevere over the river. The fortune-teller woman later identifies Pasquale and Giuseppe as the boys who stole from her apartment. This results in the boys being held at an overcrowded juvenile detention prison, where they are quickly separated. Giuseppe falls under the influence of an older cellmate, Arcangeli. During an interrogation, Pasquale is tricked into betraying Giuseppe's brother to the police. With their trial still in the future, the two friends are driven further apart as they are

forced to struggle to learn how to cope in the harsh environment of the detention center. Produced three years after the fall of Mussolini and the end of World War II for Italy, *Shoeshine* was released during a time that is sometimes referred to as the ‘peak’ of neorealist cinema.

“Dependence on innocent characters and on children in particular seems to be a universal theme in Italian film that persists to this day”⁵⁷ according to Carol Celli, and yet very minimal secondary source material is available on the topic. In Celli’s own writings, he is guilty of bringing up the existence and significance of children as important central characters but does help his audience understand much more. *Shoeshine* has an abrasive feel to it mainly due to the very adult-like child characters that spend most of their time surviving the harsh realities of their prison-like juvenile detention center. Part of the intense grip that *Shoeshine* is able to keep on the audience is a result of the manner in which the harsh realities of the *dopoguerra* (after war) are grappled with by young male child characters. In fact, the prominent use of children in this film is where we see the larger common theme in all of the films heavily relied upon. Generally, children are always viewed as innocent characters, despite their mischievous behavior. What are De Sica and Rossellini saying as filmmakers about Italians by having young protagonists carry the burden of a wartime plotline?

De Sica uses few females throughout the entire film—those that are featured have brief and weak performances. The primary focus of my analysis of themes and gender roles for this film will continue to come back to, and will

⁵⁷ Celli, pp 12

agree with, Ruth Ben-Ghiat's claim that "De Sica's films *Shoeshine* and *Bicycle Thieves* are the best-known explorations of how inadequate, absent, or fascistic fathers (or father figures) compromised future Italian manhood".⁵⁸ Additionally, I will argue that Monique Fong's assertion that De Sica is cautious of taking sides in this film is incorrect; rather, De Sica presents each 'side' as it is, so to speak, and then very obviously holds the adult world responsible for most of the pain, struggle, and general drama that takes place.

One aspect of the aftermath of the war that has not been touched upon yet is that of the American presence in Italy during the 1940s. Here the focus will be upon the influence of the physical presence of American military personnel (MPs) and the national struggle to grapple with the simple fact that Italy had traded one foreign occupying country for another. Americans were occupying the peninsula while liberating it, but were still foreign although mostly benevolent.

The first scene in which this American presence is encountered comes early on when an MP, cropped from the shoulder patch that reads "MP" down to his hand, gives Giuseppe a bar of chocolate. "Eat it, don't sell it" the MP tells the boy, to which Giuseppe replies in Italian, "Think I'm crazy?" followed by a "Thank you!" in English. Giuseppe, a child of approximately 10 years of age, has internalized through observation or experience that there is a great divide between himself and the Americans he sees around Rome. Poverty is only something the MPs are observing, but for the Italians it is something they are living and surviving. Giuseppe's first response is given to the MP in Italian

⁵⁸ Ben-Ghiat, "Unmaking the Modern Fascist Man" pg 339

because he knows that the American will not understand it. The MP does not understand Italian, nor does he understand why Giuseppe would much rather sell it. The exchange is brief, tense, and says more than the audience can process in a single viewing. De Sica has presented an ordinary scenario of kindness and cultural exchange and in doing so, has captured the nationwide struggle to decide just how they feel about American military personnel. The interaction between adult American males and young Italian males is minimal here, but comes up again in the discussion and analysis of *Paisan*. Nonetheless, it is important to note that here Italians have been represented through a helpless child in contrast to a tall, faceless, adult American male.

The other scene that boasts significant inferred commentary on American influence occurs when Giuseppe, Pasquale, Giuseppe's close friend, and Giuseppe's elder brother Attilio acquire stolen American blankets which they are told to sell for a commission. The address they are given turns out to be the home of a female fortune teller. The woman does purchase the black market blankets from Giuseppe and Pasquale and in doing so has made the connection between a desire for American goods and the superfluous, indulgent nature of fortune telling as a profession. Were Italian blankets, a simple good to produce in a still largely agrarian society at this moment in history, inferior to their American counterparts? The answer is most likely 'No,' which automatically signals that the fortune teller's purchase of the American blankets were self indulgent and frivolous as well as an unnecessary risk for her to take.

Shortly after the transaction between the young boys and the fortune-teller, the audience meets all three characters together again, this time at the police station. Accused of robbery the boys were brought in for questioning—in reality it was Giuseppe's elder brother Attilio—and at the mention of the black market exchange between the two parties by and indignant and frustrated Giuseppe, all three are taken into custody. The linkages De Sica draws between American products and the fortune teller suggest that he, too, is unsure of his own feelings about the American occupation of the peninsula. Here, the Italian female fortune teller has become a victim of the American goods; she considers herself blameless as she pleads for the police commissioner's sympathy. The fortune teller pleads with the commissioner not to hold her and says that his wife is a client of hers to which the commissioner replies "My wife is a case of arrested mental development!" Another 'blameless' Italian found in a neorealist film, but the fortune teller was not as lucky as the others we have seen and was held in detention for her crimes.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the commissioner's wife has placed herself in a vulnerable position with a stranger who makes a living by making empty promises to clientele about the ability to unveil their future. The commissioner's wife frequents the fortune teller placing an empty hope for finding truth and information about her future only to return home more upset and less informed. This woman, who we never meet, has embodied the national grappling with the issue of whether or not to trust Americans, or those

who have accepted American influence in their lives. This is not to suggest that Italians were in a constant state of vulnerability, rather, that Italians were wary of anything and anyone who could worsen the social and economic climate they were left with after the fall of Fascism. Extreme poverty, social upheaval and the need for family value and gender role redefinition were left behind with the rubble.

Giuseppe and Pasquale are shoe shine boys because it is the only freelance occupation that is both available to children and offers some semblance of a steady, although meager, income. They are living in extreme poverty and according to Monique Fong, “it is their innocence that creates the story and makes it great”.⁵⁹ Their innocence is also what makes the story tragic. As an audience, constant cognizance of the fact that filmmakers are always sending a message through plot lines and characters is imperative. At the juvenile detention center, Giuseppe and Pasquale are booked, fingerprinted, and asked about their homes; Pasquale is forced to say that he sleeps in an elevator shaft after initially saying that he does not have an address. A few scenes prior Pasquale informed Giuseppe that he cannot sleep in the elevator shaft anymore because he had been caught by the building’s landlord. This scene is in agreement with Fong’s assertion that Pasquale, and orphaned child, “has the dignity and the hardness of a man who must defend himself. Still he remains a child. He judges the grown-up world and condemns it; he is too

⁵⁹ Fong, Monique. "'Shoe-Shine': A Student Film Analysis." *Hollywood Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1949): 17-21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1209380>.

honorable to belong to it”.⁶⁰ Pasquale has found himself in this predicament at the juvenile detention center because of an absence of parents—the reason for this is not shared with the audience by De Sica—and because the adults that have recently come into his life have only contributed to his demise. Fong states that “he children live, love, and die, but it is through the grown-ups that the dramatic conflict arises. Grown-ups arrest them and separate them, judge them and punish them.”⁶¹ This is precisely why Pasquale rejects the adult world, though he is forced to maneuver for survival within it.

Pasquale is not the only protagonist character, or the only orphaned child forced to cope with the difficulties of an adult world riddled with major social and economic issues at an unfairly early age. De Sica presents another young boy from the adult point of view via two exchanges between the director and his assistant at the juvenile detention center. As the director makes his rounds of the newcomers in the holding cells, he is informed of the bed bug infestation, which he shrugs off as an issue of concern. He then points to a boy the following dialogue is exchanged.

Director: “This one?”

Assistant: “Armed Robbery”

Director: “Alone?”

Young boy: “I have three little brothers and a sister, we had no food
and our father is a prisoner in Germany”

Director: “He’ll be complaining soon too.”

⁶⁰ Fong, pp. 21.

⁶¹ Fong, pp. 21.

Immediately following this exchange, another more suggestive one takes place between the two men after the assistant informs the director that parents have been coming to the detention center to complain and request that trials for their boys be sped up. Again, the director and his assistant exchange a few quips with one another regarding this new issue for the center.

Director: “Since 1936 the courts have been jammed and crime has risen 60%”

Assistant: “But they are only boys afterall...”

Director: “Only boys? Pick pockets, robbers ...you mean! We must punish them! This is a prison not a kindergarten... With your ideas you’ll always remain as an assistant around here.”

The director—the adult—is passing judgment on the boys for whom he is now responsible. He completely ignores the bed bug issues, for recognition of it would mean that the center, an adult institution for children who have committed adult crimes, was in some way responsible for contributing to the dismal circumstances of the boys. Monique Fong asserts that De Sica did not take “sides with either of these two worlds. Both are shown as they are. Before these boys, who are cruel, shrewd, violent, and uncompromising, looms the world of grown-ups who have been rendered powerless and indifferent by time and events, by life, dissolute men who are too weak to stand up to anything”.⁶² In my observation, De Sica does not take “sides” and both adult and child worlds are presented “as they are,” but there are clear although mostly subtle statements that he makes about the adult world’s influence on children.

⁶² Fong, pp. 20.

When the anonymous young boy's rationale and the assistant's sympathy are both rejected by the director it is to reject even the notion that the adult world is somehow responsible for the corruption of children.

Furthermore, Giuseppe, Pasquale and their cellmates are made cruel and violent as a means of surviving within the reality of the harsh prison and its internal social hierarchy; a hierarchy that has developed thanks to the adults, particularly the guards, who systematically steal from the boys and pit them against one another. The adults in their experience while at the detention center have hardened the boys even more than they were from trying to simply survive in the external, adult world.

Finally the assertion that adults are "powerless and indifferent" and men are "dissolute...too weak to stand up to anything" by Fong is true, however, this image of adult males given by De Sica contrasta sharply with the child characters he creates, specifically Pasquale. Pasquale a boy of approximately 12 years is strong enough to stand up to the difficulties of Italy's economic depression and even successfully pursues his dream of saving enough money for a horse—which he does purchase with Giuseppe earlier in the film. Why is a child able to muster the strength to survive and not the adults? Is it because the adults helped to create the difficult and depressed world they are now living in and the burden of memory is too much for them to bear, so they simply have given up? Yes, and it is also because adult males are still, as Ben-Ghiat calls it, "'Unlearning' fascist authoritarianism and

militarism”⁶³ while simultaneously redefining their masculinity in the absence of the Fascist dictatorship and the war.

In fact, the failure of not just adult men in the lives of the boys in *Shoe Shine* but the entire family unit can also be linked to the struggle to ‘unlearn’ the fascist way of life. When *Shoe Shine* was released, traditional roles of parents as providers, guides, and protectors were being reestablished after Mussolini’s contamination of these family virtues.⁶⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat’s assertion that De Sica’s film has captured the compromise of future Italian manhood via an exploration of inadequate, absent, or fascistic fathers (or father figures) is evidenced in the failed family and/or father scenes.⁶⁵

Within the first few scenes of the entire film *Shoe Shine* the audience is made aware of the inadequacy of Giuseppe’s family. Giuseppe’s sister approaches him in the street after he’s finished a shine job and asks for his earnings. Giuseppe pulls out a wad of cash from his pocket and rations a portion of it to her to bring back to their parents. This family has been hit hard by the economic depression of the post-war years and the result is that the children have been made equally responsibly for financially providing for the family unit. A young boy of approximately ten years of age is the only male De Sica chose to show working and earning an income for his family. *Shoe Shine* is primarily about Giuseppe and Pasquale, but it is still interesting to note that no other adults, especially males, are conveyed as 1) present 2) providers 3) role models or guides to these juvenile boys. Additionally, it is

⁶³ Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man” pp 339

⁶⁴ Gottlieb, pp 11.

⁶⁵ Ben-Ghiat, “Unmaking the Fascist Man” pp. 339.

also important to note the detail that Giuseppe did not simply hand over his entire earnings to his sister when prompted. This signals to the audience that he has little faith in his family's ability to provide for him, so he must be sure to save some money to meet his own needs—a very adult and responsible behavior for a 10-year old. The complete absence of a father and family has taught Giuseppe that he is the only person he can truly rely on and that has his best interests in mind.

The fact that Giuseppe can not rely on anyone but himself is re-enforced in the scene in which the audience sees a family-like gathering in a trattoria (small traditional style restaurant). An unnamed father figure announces to the waiter that he has indigestion as a man called Walter, whom the audience recognizes as the man that provided Pasquale and Giuseppe with the stolen American blankets, walks in and tells the group that “the boys did not tell.” Barely a moment later, the pseudo father figure announces to the waiter that he feels better and would like steak because he “knew they were good boys.” The scene concludes with his final thought: “We should send them a package; we may need them again once they're out.” Not only has the family been shown to be inadequate by De Sica in previous scenes, but here it is shown to be malicious and conniving, concerned only with pinning for the adult interests versus the collective family's interests.

The unnamed father figure openly expresses his desire to use the boys to cushion his own financial stability. He does not say the boys could be helpful in providing for the family; he does not present a plan to help them; he

does not ever come into the same camera shot with the boys. This man is absent, inadequate, and systematically weakening the next generation of males for Italy while his embodying the crumbling failure that his own generation has become. It is not surprising at all when Giuseppe and Pasquale are seen discussing their predicament in a shared holding cell their first night at the detention center, they speculate upon what kind of experience is ahead of them and reminisce about the horse they bought together—the only thing they miss from the outside. The adult world is thus cast in an unflattering and undesirable light for its continued negative impact on these boys who are simply trying to survive everything that keeps happening to them.

Indeed, for Giuseppe and Pasquale, life is happening *to* them and they have very little say in the direction in which it will go. One might be inclined to say that this is a truth held universally for most children as they are not experienced enough, old enough, or mature enough to handle dictating their own lives and rightly so, but the following also must be considered. Giuseppe and Pasquale were too young to be a part of the war effort of the Fascist regime—their fathers and families were—making the economic depression a circumstance that they are actively trying to ameliorate for themselves, despite having no part in creating the situation; it happened to them as children. Their arrest and subsequent detention at a juvenile detention center happened to them because they were tricked into selling stolen American goods to a woman by Giuseppe's elder brother, Attilio, so that he could stage a police raid and rob the woman for a greater profit for himself. Attilio is a young adult, so is on the

culmination of entering the 'other' world of adults that has brought such great strife to Giuseppe and Pasquale already. Giuseppe and Pasquale were left uninformed of Attilio's master plan but they paid the price because the woman was able to find and recognize them in the streets. Again, life, so to speak, has happened to the two boys while they were simply trying to survive it.

While the boys are surviving physically, emotionally, and socially in the detention center De Sica continues to masterfully introduce characters that reflect his own struggle to grapple with the changing social landscape of Italy. One such character is Giuseppe's attorney, whom he meets with and is told a number of ways to implicate others as a way of saving himself in court the next day, which is followed up by "save the truth for your father confessor." In a twist of obviously intended irony, the corrupt attorney is used to deliver the film's moral judgment of the adult world.⁶⁶ In court during his closing argument he says,

"If these children have become what they are, it is because we have failed to keep them what they are supposed to be...Return these children to their homes, schools, and families because if they are guilty, we are all guilty in pursuing our passions. We've abandoned our children to themselves—always more and more alone".

The message is simple, loud and clear. De Sica's judgment and warning are delivered in one fell swoop, then each boy is given sentences to serve as well as fines and the central plot line is resumed. The "we" that the attorney is

⁶⁶ Fong, pp.17-18

talking about, indirectly for De Sica, is the greater adult Italian population. Fong's claim that the adult world and child worlds are presented as they are in reality without bias falls to the wayside in this moment. The adult world is made responsible for the loss of innocence in the child world and replacing it with hardships that have jaded them into mere survivors. The next generation of Italians has already become less like Italian citizens and more like animalistic, bruttish survivors.

This degeneration to a primal state is evidenced later in the film with the escape scene. Again, De Sica subtly makes his social commentary about the future of the Italian state, and the future of manhood in Italy, via an unknown character. With their recent sentences weighing heavily upon them, Giuseppe, Arcangeli and a few other boys execute their escape. In the frenzy that follows the news that they have successfully made it out of the detention center; a younger boy is trampled to death. The resident doctor is told to write a report—just a brief one—the next day on the death of the boy by the director who is, while the deceased boy's body lies before him in the middle of the infirmary, still consumed with finding the escapees. The doctor replies to the director, "I won't be here tomorrow...I'm afraid of this place—they need someone stronger than me, much stronger than me".

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this essay was to take four early neorealist films and analyze them within their historical context using the various ways gender roles were used, constructed, compared, contrasted, and critiqued by their respective filmmakers as tools for understanding the transition from the fascist regime to the liberated state. As I noted in the introduction, Steven Ricci has stated that the Italian cinema “specifically inscribed itself into what can be termed a cultural search for identity.”⁶⁷ During his 20 years in power, Mussolini sought and attained control over the industry in its infancy as a tool for propaganda. He did so because he was searching for a way to project a façade for an Italian fascist identity. Once the regime fell and Il Duce was removed from power, the extremely restrictive censorship and the required showing of so-called newsreels fell by the wayside. In the wake came forth the neorealist filmmakers including our own Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica. These men searched for cultural identity in their grappling with changing gender roles, in their coping with the economic status of the State, and in their struggle to understand and internalize the memory of recent historical events.

The struggle to find a way to cope with the Fascist past was not completely settled by the neorealist filmmakers. The general questions presented in this essay have merit, value, and are relevant because the topic is still being widely discussed by scholars and the Italian people. At present there still exists a great debate regarding how to appropriately pay tribute to these transitional years in the Italian media. “ Issues of memory and forgetting

⁶⁷ Ricci, Steven. *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922-1943*. Los Angeles And Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. 1-35. Print.

have been aired now for over a decade in often heated public debate over the resistance, often on the broadcast media, over whether the period 1943-45 should be regarded as a civil war and how it should be commemorated”.⁶⁸

Modern Italian society still struggles in defining itself during this dramatic and chaotic period of its own history.

Rossellini and De Sica were both, in my opinion, successful in capturing the struggle; the struggle to survive, to reestablish cultural lines, social and gender boundaries, and the struggle to find an explanation for the past and an answer for what lay ahead. *Paisan* has shown us how Rossellini felt about the liberation of the peninsula a few years after it actually took place. In this film, he used men, women, and children of Italian, American, and German decent to convey cultural clashes, adult-child world boundary lines blurred, and continued the tradition of using female imagery and behavior to express an ‘idea of Italy’. Fast-forward to the film *The Children are Watching Us*, by De Sica and we see a changed Italian backdrop and projections of moral and political consequences for selfish indifference as well as fierce loyalty. De Sica uses a female character, Nina, to warn Italy of the consequences of indifference to internal matters of the State; he uses Prico to show the toll continued indifference and selfishness will take on generations of Italians to come; he uses Andrea to show a desired level of loyalty to the State, represented in film via the family unit, and to assert that even well-meaning loyalty can falter when constantly battling political indifference.

⁶⁸ Talbot, pp. 3.

Alas, the many themes and issues raised in this essay cannot all be fairly summarized in these concluding remarks, so I will leave you with this. Cinema came into its own as an industry, and then as an art, through one of Italy's most tumultuous moments in its history. As is the case with most things deemed "art" the films produced during these transitional years reflected, at least in part, both the reality of the moment and the mood of the general populace about itself and the future. Perhaps the most intriguing thing discovered via the analyses of these four films has been the way that Rossellini and De Sica exonerated Italians from guilt, blame, and association with Fascism via their child characters. Both filmmakers essentially say that the protagonists (Italians) are in some ways infantilized—they are not responsible for what has happened. Perhaps this was necessary in order for De Sica and Rossellini to make a successful transition from working and sympathizing with Mussolini's regime to the liberalized state. If they had taken another course of action, would they have been as successful in the neorealist genre? Rossellini and De Sica's films discussed in this essay have been heralded as masterpieces, deemed cinematic watersheds, and studied by many—it is my humble hope that this analysis has encouraged greater attention to men and children in films, and has shed some additional light on their continued relevance and importance in the quest to understand this complex and dramatic time in Italian history.

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List of Films

Paisan, Roberto Rossellini, 1946

Rome, Open City, Roberto Rosellini, 1945

Shoeshine (Sciuscia), Vittorio De Sica, 1946

The Children are Watching Us, Vittorio De Sica, 1944

Written Summary of Capstone Project

At its very core, this extended essay set out to better understand the transitional period that occurred after the end of Mussolini's regime through the messages, critiques, and warnings filmmakers inserted into their films via gender roles. After learning about the historiography of the moment, a brief discussion of the films and their makers was conducted. With this framework in place, the essay took four neorealist films—two by Roberto Rossellini and two by Vittorio De Sica—and analyzed the different gender roles in each of their respective film and plotline contexts. Perhaps most interesting in this essay was the overall analysis and discussion of the use of male children. In my research and own observation I noticed that few quality sources existed with a focus on this young gender role in neorealist Italian cinema. It was discovered that these male children are used frequently to convey an innocence, to represent the future of Italy, to infantilize and even to show victimization of the Italians.

The methods used to complete this project are fairly straight forward. I, of course, watched all of the films at least once. While watching I listened and watched for significant dialogue, behavior, or important interactions/disputes that were had between main characters and took several notes. In the margins of my notes I would jot down 'search words' that I would later look for in text or online. This was helpful in ridding my research of any dead ends or red herrings, as well as re-refining the general search to some topic that definitely

related to the films. Countless reviews, critiques, and the like were also skimmed to find arguments with which I strongly agreed or disagreed. Secondary sources came to be collected primarily through the 'search words' method, but credit is also due to suggestions from fellow students and my advisor. The film list started at 8 and was narrowed down to five until about February when it was decided that *Ossessione* just would not fit in the direction that I wanted and needed thematically.

While a humble undergraduate thesis / senior honors capstone project, I feel that this essay, and by extension this focus for study, is significant and relevant for several reasons. The one reason that stands out the most is simply that Italians are still struggling to grapple with this chapter of their history. It was a fast and dramatic paradigm shift that shook every part of everyday Italian life. As mentioned in the introduction, the media still openly discusses the debate as to how the years from 1943 to 1946 should be labeled and categorized. This era may be over but the issues it stirred up from the rubble dust are still in the air.