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Contemporary Issues in Cinema: Analysis of *Fruitvale Station* and *Mediterranea*

Art has historically reflected contemporary issues of the time period and life of the artist. Delacroix painted the French Revolution, Millet painted the rural peasant culture, Goya created prints of the Spanish war’s horrors. Like any other art form, films reflect societal and culture issues. In the past few years, two films covering race relations and the role of government and the police force have emerged. *Fruitvale Station,* directed by Ryan Coogler and starring Michael B Jordan, covers the horrible events that occurred on New Years Eve of 2008 in Oakland, CA when Oscar Grant, an unarmed African American man cooperating with police was shot and killed by an officer in front of dozens of onlookers. *Mediterranea*, directed by Jonas Carpignano, is a fictionalized account of two migrants coming from Burkina Faso to Italy’s Cambria region in search of better lives. I argue that *Mediterranea* and *Fruitvale Station* each depict the contemporary issues of race and belonging through the lens of modern technology.

In *Fruitvale* *Station* and *Mediterranea*, the issue of race and the perils of not being born Caucasian in a racist world are portrayed. In Fruitvale Station, racial tensions go hand in hand with the role of the police and government institutions. This is shown visually in the way that the scene in which Oscar is detained by the train contains shots that are filmed from Oscar’s level on the ground—looking up at the very white police officers towering over Oscar and his friends. This shows that the police, and the white men, are in power. The film also shows that despite obviously having been discriminated against by white individuals, Oscar does not hold any prejudices against the whites. This is shown in the supermarket scene where Oscar calls his grandmother to help a young white woman figure out how to fry fish. This ease between races is also shown in the shot near the end of the film, when the white female nurse comforts Oscar’s mother. This shot is important because it shows that although Oscar and his African American family and friends have every right to resent white individuals for unfair and racist treatments, they do not resent them and are, by extension, almost morally superior. The way the white woman put her arm around Oscar’s mother, while compassionate, also shows the inherent privilege that society gives to white individuals over African Americans. This showed privilege because the white woman had elected to work in the hospital (witness blood and sadness) and place her arm around Oscar’s mother, whereas Oscar’s mother had the scenario thrust upon her.

*Mediterranea* also shows racial relations, but in a different way. The film focuses on the tensions between Africa migrants and the native Southern Italians. While the tensions certainly come to a boiling point during the riots that occur towards the film’s end, there are several other points throughout the film where they are made apparent. The boss’ daughter that harasses Ayiva through dumping his oranges over and over again is an example of the mistreatment of the African individuals living in Southern Italy. Like *Fruitvale Station*’s scene at the train station, this scene features shots that are filmed from Ayiva’s perspective on the ground, picking up oranges. This shows the power that even someone as young and silly as the little girl had over Ayiva just because she is a native Italian.

Throughout *Fruitvale Station,* the role of technology is apparent. I am particularly referring to Oscar’s use of his cellular phone. Oscar is constantly texting his girlfriend, friends, mother… and rather than simply show Oscar thumbing away at the keyboard, graphics depicting the text conversations are displayed on the screen. This shows both an aspect of contemporary life and the enormous role that cell phones play in today’s media and policing. The cell phone also can be seen as a bit of foreshadowing—later on in the film Oscar’s death is captured on cell phone cameras by many of the individuals on the train that are watching the events unfold. One particular instance where the power of technology and foreshadowing are displayed is when Oscar and his mother are washing dishes and his mother tells him to take the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). Oscar texts his friends that they should take the BART to and from San Francisco that night for the New Years Eve celebrations. Through actually displaying the text message on screen, the viewer can see the message and therefore the information about the BART has a greater impact.

*Mediterranea* also uses technology to show relationships between different parts of the world, races, and socioeconomic groups. The main use of modern technology is seen through the film’s use of music and devices to play music –mp3 players, headphones, etc. The music of Rhianna is present throughout the film—with S&M playing during a party scene before the women leave to go to “work” and with “We Found Love in a Hopeless Place” playing as Ayiva’s daughter dances over Skype with the mp3 player he sent her. While technology is not a driving force in *Mediterranea*, the presence of music playing technologies is used to demonstrate emotion and the link between different cultures. The scene in which Ayiva skypes his daughter demonstrates the use of two different contemporary technologies –-video chat and mp3 devices. I believe that music and music playing technologies were employed by the director as a device to show that although many of the migrants working in Southern Italy are from a foreign place, they maintain similar interests and are therefore more relatable to the viewer.

Both *Mediterranea* and *Fruitvale Station* portray the relationships between races through the use of modern technological and cultural trends.