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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Fundamentals of Film Studies

Course Code: ENG5CJ301 • Module 3 Notes

Module III: World Cinema

1. The Global Landscape of Contemporary World Cinema

World Cinema transcends Hollywood's commercial hegemony, offering diverse aesthetic vocabularies, regional sociopolitical histories, and deep humanist reflections from across global cultures. Investigating international cinema demands engagement with distinct regional film traditions that confront war, poverty, bureaucracy, and collective memory.

2. Nadine Labaki: *Capernaum* (Lebanon, 2018)

Nadine Labaki's Academy Award-nominated masterpiece *Capernaum* (which translates from Arabic and biblical antiquity to "Chaos") stands as a monumental work of contemporary Lebanese social realism:

- **Premise and Dramatic Core:** Set in the teeming, impoverished slums of Beirut, the film follows Zain (Zain Al Rafeea), a 12-year-old street-smart boy serving a prison sentence for stabbing someone. Zain takes the unprecedented step of suing his neglectful parents in a juvenile courtroom for the crime of bringing him into a world of unmitigated suffering, poverty, and neglect without the means to care for him.
- **Neo-Realist Casting and Aesthetic Authenticity:** Labaki employed non-professional actors whose real-life biographies mirrored their fictional counterparts; Zain Al Rafeea was an undocumented Syrian refugee working odd jobs in Beirut. Labaki's fluid, kinetic handheld cinematography captures the claustrophobic chaos of Beirut streets at child eye-level, generating overwhelming visceral empathy.
- **Themes of Invisible Childhood and Undocumented Lives:** The film exposes the systemic tragedy of undocumented children who possess no birth certificates, legally rendering them non-persons denied education, healthcare, and human dignity. Zain's desperate efforts to protect his beloved 11-year-old sister Sahar from being sold into child marriage, and his subsequent maternal care of baby Yonas (the child of Rahil, an undocumented Ethiopian migrant worker), highlight profound love amidst catastrophic systemic neglect.

3. Ken Loach: *I, Daniel Blake* (United Kingdom, 2016)

Ken Loach, the pre-eminent titan of British social realism, won his second Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival with *I, Daniel Blake* (scripted by Paul Laverty), an incisive indictment of contemporary neoliberal austerity and bureaucratic cruelty:

- **Plot and Working-Class Struggle:** Daniel Blake (Dave Johns), a 59-year-old widowed Newcastle carpenter, suffers a severe heart attack. His cardiologist declares him medically unfit to work. However, the outsourced privatized welfare assessment deems him fit for employment, trapping him in a kafkaesque bureaucratic nightmare where he must apply for jobs he cannot take to receive survival benefits.
- **The Violence of Digital Bureaucracy:** Loach critiques how modern welfare states deploy computerized interfaces and algorithmic red tape as deliberate psychological barriers designed to humiliate, exhaust, and disenfranchise elderly and vulnerable citizens who lack digital literacy.
- **Human Solidarity Amid Dehumanization:** While navigating the welfare office, Daniel befriends Katie (Hayley Squires), a destitute young single mother relocated from London with her two children. In the film's most devastating sequence—set in a local food bank—Katie, overcome by physical hunger,

breaks down and eats baked beans straight from an unheated tin, exposing the hidden reality of modern British food poverty.

- **Daniel's Final Manifesto:** The film culminates in Daniel spray-painting his defiance on the welfare office wall, asserting his absolute human dignity: "I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user... I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more, nothing less."

4. Giuseppe Tornatore: *Cinema Paradiso* (Italy, 1988)

Giuseppe Tornatore's Academy Award-winning *Cinema Paradiso* (*Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*), featuring an iconic musical score by Ennio Morricone, is world cinema's most revered, nostalgic love letter to the communal magic and transformative power of cinema:

- **Narrative Arc & The Magic of Giancaldo:** Spanning three distinct eras of modern Italian history, the film follows Salvatore Di Vita ("Toto"), a prominent Roman film director who receives news of the death of Alfredo (Philippe Noiret), the beloved projectionist of his childhood village in post-war Sicily. Returning to his hometown for Alfredo's funeral, Salvatore confronts decades of forgotten memories, lost loves, and his artistic awakening.
- **The Movie House as Secular Sacred Temple:** The local Cinema Paradiso serves as the beating social and emotional heart of the impoverished Sicilian town. It is a communal space where peasants, intellectuals, lovers, and children gather to escape wartime trauma, collectively experiencing laughter, tears, and wonder before the luminous silver screen.
- **Censorship and Alfredo's Mentorship:** Early sequences depict the local Catholic priest ringing a handbell to censor every on-screen romantic embrace and kiss. Alfredo, the warm, fatherly projectionist, secretly collects these cut celluloid strips. Alfredo acts as Salvatore's spiritual guide, instilling a deep reverence for the cinematic art while selflessly urging him to leave the stifling village to achieve his artistic destiny.
- **The Final Kissing Montage:** The film concludes with one of cinema's most sublime sequences: adult Salvatore watches Alfredo's posthumous gift—a seamless reel splicing together all the passionate, censored kisses excised by the priest decades earlier. This transcendent montage celebrates cinema's triumphant preservation of human love, fleeting beauty, and eternal artistic memory.

Advanced Cinematic Hermeneutics, Apparatus Theory & Visual Dialectics (Extension Phase 1)

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- **The Gendered Gaze & Visual Pleasure:** Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* revolutionized feminist film criticism. Mulvey demonstrates that classical Hollywood cinema is structured around patriarchal visual pleasure, splitting the cinematic gaze into active/male and passive/female. Women on screen function as erotic spectacles (to-be-looked-at-ness), subjecting the female form to voyeuristic objectification and fetishistic scopophilia. Subverting the male gaze requires avant-garde cinematic forms that disrupt narrative illusion.
- **Dialectical Montage vs. Deep-Focus Realism:** A central historical cleavage divides Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory (where meaning arises from the violent collision of two disparate shots) from André Bazin's realist aesthetics. Bazin championed deep focus and the continuous long take (exemplified by Orson Welles and Jean Renoir), arguing that preserving spatial and temporal continuity respects the ambiguity of physical reality and grants spectators perceptual freedom.

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