

I, Elena Nicola

by **Elena Nicola**, a recent LSE Sociology graduate – @elenatheolive

This is not a review, more something akin to the appreciation of a work of art. Last week, on a very rare occasion, I felt a spark of empowerment from modern film. *I, Daniel Blake* – Ken Loach's newest hit blockbuster – was the representation working class people have been waiting years for. So easily forgotten about in Hollywood glamour, the hard-hitting reality of life in the U.K whilst unemployed and seeking support was at the absolute heart of this moving, raw motion picture.



Source: *British Film Institute*

Daniel Blake, a working class man from the North of England, has unfortunately experienced a major heart attack leaving him unable to work and lost for income. Whilst chasing up the bureaucratic ladder of the Job Centre, he encounters a young “lass” and mother of two, Katie. He learns they have been moved from London by the authorities, away from their family and livelihood, to a small house nearby his. Touching on gentrification, social cleansing, issues of gender and more, this film proceeds to truly captivate what is unfortunately a tough modern day life for many Brits experiencing the benefits system. In essence, each of these stratifications deserve their own blog post, but then this would be about 20 pages long. Instead, I'll touch on the message I believe this film was trying to convey and represent. It is one that moved me, and still has me pondering about days after leaving the movie theatre.

Not leaving the cinema feeling like I'd just paid eight pounds to “escape” reality was, in all honesty, different. In fact, to face an issue head on without an over exuberated message of hope and progress was an experience I'd never felt with mainstream cinema. No ideological sugar-coating that hard work gets you a job, no fancy set or props, and essentially, no happy ending. I, like many others enjoy the occasional comedy or sci-fi. I appreciate the entertainment sector for what it is, and congratulate many who have succeeded within it. Yet this particular film made me realise that media production can be so much more than that. We too often seek comfort in movies that distance ourselves as far away from reality as humanly possible, in the hope that they will self-medicate our fears and disbeliefs. Of course, we need to be inspired to encounter change, to grow as humans and to aspire for alternatives in society. Yet on this occasion, after years of Channel 5 poverty porn, extreme right-wing propaganda claiming a working-class “dependency” culture and news articles with quite literally made up statistics, it was time to wipe the slate and set the record. Ken Loach has made a statement that is long overdue. The overall message? That a failed attempt at rationalising individual situations has violently imploded, leaving victims holding on to what they can in order to survive.



Source: The Playlist

Sometimes things do not work out for those who cannot afford the privilege of a medical care that enhances the body's performance, the hearty nutritional food that provides the energy to have a productive day or the connections to find work that pays enough to afford a London flat. The power and strength of those in a tough, hard-hitting situation is an intersectional, imbalanced journey that depends on the individual. Being "Fit for Work" is not a term that can be applied to all. Job Seekers Allowance is not a scheme that provides comfort to everyone who is unemployed. They are not terms that willingly work together or correspond. The hierarchy of the system has ensured a stress attached to the processes in place that do not promise the "National Insurance" that has been paid into by many, some for their whole lives. Too frequently the story goes like this. Sick leave resulting in days off. Days lead to weeks. Rent is not paid. Doctor informs there are major risks in returning to work. Government department emphasises that Employment and Support Allowance is not an option. No work. No pay. No food. Worse health. An out of control situation that fingers cannot just snap away. People do not willingly experience hunger or a cold nights sleep without exhausting their options. Sometimes, those options involve going beyond the limits of legality to provide for themselves and their families. Sometimes, it just doesn't work out.

These people are not numbers, nor are they statistics or cases. They are citizens, now for goodness sake – can we treat them like they are?

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