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Contemporary World Cinema

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The people of America face many problems today. Mental health, government issues, poverty, the list goes on. These problems are shown in various ways in contemporary cinema. While the films might not be American made or about Americans, the general struggles and problems many of them face relate to the problems happening in America today. In the 2014 film, *Two Days, One Night*, directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, the main character Sandra struggles with her mental health while also trying to get her job back. Sandra suffers from severe depression and is hospitalized for this, causing her employer to start a vote among the workers whether to keep her or to get a bonus. Sandra's emotional struggle is extremely similar to stories and problems the American people are facing today. Mental health alone is an extremely important issue that is overlooked in the work place in America as it also is in this film. This kind of struggle is universal and one that people from all countries can relate to in some way. Along with the mental health aspect of this film, the financial aspect is something most Americans can relate to. The workers in the film consider what the bonus will do for them and for some, it would benefit their families and that is more important than losing a coworker. American families struggling financially can

relate to this topic and would struggle themselves when facing a question such as the one posed in this film.

Another film that shows a problem that Americans face was *The Insult*, directed by Ziad Doueiri. In the film a Palestinian refugee and a Lebanese Christian fall into a dispute that eventually becomes a larger and country-wide problem fueled by prejudice. Prejudice and discontent with those who are different from you is a very pressing issue in America today. Americans typically have strong views against those who they view as different from them. Immigrants coming into the United States are labeled and judged based on premonitions held by most Americans. The connections here are clear and shows how much this simple film relates to a problem that many people in many countries face daily. Problems such as messy legal disputes and the worries that the Hanna family and Yasser face can be related to problems American families and individuals go through themselves. While the political climate and culture of Lebanon varies much from that in America, the individual struggles and themes that are shown in this film are some that we can all see to some extent in our own countries.

Again we can see problems that Americans also face in the 2017 film, *I, Daniel Blake*, directed by Ken Loach. In the film a British carpenter suffers from a heart attack, rendering him unable to work. Blake is denied benefits from the government and struggles financially while trying to figure out the appeal process. Along the course of the film he forms a relationship with a single mother who is also struggling. These two

characters alone represent struggles and problems that are occurring daily in the United States. Many Americans find themselves unable to work after health issues and are denied benefits for any number of reasons. The financial struggle and physical struggle that Blake faces is one that many can relate to in the United States. The other character that many Americans can relate their struggle to is Katie. Katie is a struggling, hungry single mother who eventually must rely on prostitution as the only way she can feed her child. The issue of lack of support from the government is one that Americans can clearly relate to. The welfare system that abuses and treats Daniel Blake and Katie poorly is one that many Americans can see happening in their communities and possibly in their own families.

Many contemporary films from around the world touch on the issue of prejudice seen in the country depicted in the film. Ofir Raul Graizer's 2017 film, *The Cakemaker*, shows us the prejudice and judgement of main character Thomas, a German, as he integrates himself in Israel. Many of the Jewish characters he encounters such as Anat's brother in law, Motti, have serious prejudice based on the past of the German people and the Nazis. Motti and many other characters are extremely judgmental and dislike Thomas purely based on his heritage and the past of his people. This issue can be seen in America as we judge others purely based on where they are from, their language, the color of their skin, or any other number of reasons. The unfair nature of this is clear and no one should be judged as a person based on the past of their ancestors or peoples, or any reason. *The Cakemaker* is one example of many ways that people can be judged and that prejudice can be seen all over the world. While this issue of judgement

may not be seen often in America, other types that are similar to this are seen very often in the United States. Quick judgements based on race, gender, heritage or financial standing are ones that the American people see and may even take part in daily.

The similarities to what we've seen in contemporary world cinema and the issues and problems that occur in the United States are a connection into these cultures and people. Allowing Americans to relate and have a sense of understanding to what these peoples in far away countries face daily and ways that we are the all same. People from all over the world face problems like mental health, relational issues, government and finial issues, and many others. These issues we have in common provide a window into these foreign cultures that would be too complex to understand without making these connections.