

Political Implications of Abbas Kiarostami's Cinema

Seyedmohsen Alavipour¹

Received: 5/7/2012

Accepted: 17/3/2014

Abstract

Political Cinema is defined as a "political event", a "biography", or "process". Such a definition is, however, not inclusive enough to cover the films which focus on the normative aspects of politics without necessarily narrating a special political issue. By reviewing Abbas Kiarostami's films, this article attempts to revise the definition of political cinema and propose the notion of *normative political cinema*.

Keywords: Normative Thought; Political Cinema; Friendship; Resistance; Metaphysics of Violence.

1. Assistant Professor at Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (IHCS), Tehran, Iran
m.alavipour@gmail.com

Introduction

Political cinema is supposed to deal with or narrate the whole or part of a politician's life. Therefore, films that are categorized under the genre of political cinema are the ones which revolve around secret political relations, collusion that culminate in a particular event, or even the rise and fall of a politician. From this perspective films such as: *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), *JFK* (1991), *Nixon* (1995), *All the President's Men* (1976), *The Conversation* (1974), *The Pianist* (2002), *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1971) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) are considered as prominent examples of political cinema in the history of filmmaking.

This definition does not include all the films which center on "the political". In other words, this definition of the political cinema inevitably excludes most of the films which have obvious political

significance and implication but do not necessarily engage with particular political figures and events. Mike Wayne starts his book *Political Film: the Dialectics of Third Cinema* (2001: 1) by saying "All films are political, but films are not all political in the same way". The films which he chooses as "political film" have touched on "unequal access to and distribution of material and cultural resources, and the hierarchies of legitimacy and status accorded to those differentials" in one way or the other (ibid).

Some critics believe that political cinema cannot be confined to films which revolve around certain political people and events. From this viewpoint, films that deal with social and political issues, either directly or indirectly can be included in the political genre. This definition broadens the scope of political cinema and, by making it more flexible,

justifies the inclusion of a broader range of films. It also opens the way for author to decide what categories can be included in this framework, and what political cinema is (Sadr: 2006). As a result, we can claim that political cinema might include films that are concerned with presenting the favorable social order and good political order based normative concepts. These concepts can include categories such as “justice”, “freedom”, “right”, “friendship”, and so forth. Films which rely on one or two normative categories to present the “possibility” of favorable social life are among those films which possess the implications and significance of political cinema.

In its narrow definition political cinema includes films which do not conceal their political position; however, there is a broader

definition of this cinematic genre which is noteworthy.¹

For instance, as Falzon has pointed out (2002: 134), by admiring individual undertaking and creating individual heroes who embark on bringing social changes in individual brave attempts, Hollywood cinema is in fact adopting and promoting liberal political thought. Likewise, in some films like those of the prominent Russian filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, there is a propagandist admiration of communist revolution in Russia and the future of the socialist ideal. The same thing is true about other countries' cinemas.

1. In Wikipedia it is pointed out that films that are apparently “apolitical”, and are intended to amuse the audience, have a political function, too (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_Cinema).

This is quite apparent in the film industries of autocratic systems like Nazi Germany and the former Soviet Union. Even in democratic countries, as it can be seen in Hollywood, this medium has an important political function.

In his two-volume book about cinema Gilles Deleuze divides political cinema into two trends: classical political cinema and modern political cinema. In his opinion Alain Resnais and Jean-Marie Straub are “the greatest filmmakers of political cinema in modern political cinema” and Eisenstein, with movies, like *Ivan the Terrible*, represents classical political cinema. He believes that the characteristic that makes the works of Resnais and Straub modern political films is that “they know how to show the people are what is missing, what is not there” (Deleuze, 1989: 215). Nevertheless there is an increasing consciousness in classical political cinema which “means that people already has a virtual existence in process of being actualized... there is a unanimity which calls the different peoples into the same melting-pot from which the future emerges” (ibid: 216). It is also a characteristic

of western cinema which, as a result of secret mechanisms of power and majority rule system, has rarely been the focus of attention (ibid: 217).

Deleuze believes that the issue of modern political cinema is also the issue of the Third World cinema. In his idea the problem that the Third World filmmakers encounter is that “they find themselves “before an illiterate public, swamped by the American, Egyptian and Indian serials and karate films”, and they have to “extract from it the elements of a people who are still missing”. He states:

Sometimes the minority film-maker finds himself in the impasse described by Kafka: the impossibility of not ‘writing’, the impossibility of writing in the dominant language, the impossibility of writing differently (ibid).

The filmmakers in the Third World have to get involved in

something that is completely different from what is the issue in the classical political cinema: not referring to people, who are assumed to be present there in advance, but participating in the creation of a nation (ibid).

This is not the only difference between classical political cinema and modern political cinema, to Deleuze's eyes. There is another big difference which has to do with the relation between the political and the private, and the division between them. As he puts it:

... classical cinema constantly maintained this boundary which marked the correlation of the political and the private, and ... through intermediary of an awareness, passage from one social force to another, from one political position to another... This is no longer the case in modern political cinema, where no boundary survives

to provide a minimum distance or evolution: the private affair merges with the social -or political- immediate (ibid: 218).

This issue will be more noticeable if we examine the relationship between political thought, as a normative knowledge, and cinema. Political thought is a kind of normative episteme which contemplates about *good life* and *favorable socio- political order*. This normative model is a kind of story for presenting human life in which the scenes and roles are determined (Sprigens, 1976:127). Political thought, or as Plamenatz calls it, "the philosophy of life" (Plamenatz 1963:14), is a kind of philosophy which is closely related to political life, that is, a philosophical life and human life (Strauss, 1973:2). It aims at projecting episteme on the political issue, instead of casting doubt on them. Once again the

purpose is to achieve favorable order in society and establishing a good political system (ibid).

Iranian Political Cinema

Iranian cinema is not different, Iranian films either directly deal with political currents and events or have their own special political implications in a different way. As a film critic, Hamid Reza Sadr rejects the idea that political cinema is confined to the narrow definition provided above, and states that:

“For example, *Croesus*” *Treasure* is famous Iranian commercial film. In this film the audience can see the political and social conditions of Iran in the 40s 1960s, like the money which is injected into the economy and those who become millionaires. The way the hero of the film insults the rich, matches the social and political conditions of that time. So you cannot disregard this film. In the

1960s children were the main characters of films, which show the social and political aspects of Iranian society. What I mean is that a film does not have to be political on its surface, as Costa-Gavras’ *Z*, Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* or Emir Kusturica’s *Underground*; a commercial film can also have political aspects¹.”

Based on the same argument Sadr names his book on the history of Iranian cinema *The History of the Iranian Political Cinema* (2006). Basically he does not see “politics” only as handling the affairs of a country, looking after foreign and domestic affairs, improving the people’s affairs or punishing the wrong-doers”. For him “politics is everyday life, it is *every Iranian film*” (Sadr, 2006:15). Throughout his book he regards cinema as a part of the identification trend in Iran—

1. Quoted from an interview with Pourya Didar, at: <http://www.cinemaema.com/NewsArticle5680.html>

Deleuze calls it “the creation of a nation”. Sadr looks for a socio-political problem, intermingled with every Iranian’s life, in the background of every film: films that signify a socio-political condition or situation, even if they deal with the seemingly personal and private relations. Adopting such an approach to cinema opens up a new horizon which will reveal a world of the unknown to author’s thought.

It should be noted that by generalizing the meaning of politics, Sadr includes all the issues related to society in the definition of political cinema and pays no heed to the inner stratifications of politics. However, examining cinema with regard to different aspects of politics offers us different perspectives. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the author aims to examine political potentials of Abbas Kiarostami’s cinema by focusing on “political thought” as a

normative knowledge that attempts to present good political order to society; in addition, it will be analyzed the political implications of Kiarostami’s cinema.

Kiarostami and Normative Cinema

Iranian cinema, as a prominent cinema in the world, has dealt with *political themes* in different ways. In the history of Iranian cinema there are a number of films, such as *The Cow (Gav)*, *Deers (Gavazn-ha)*, *Caesar (Gheisar)*, *Downpour (Ragbar)* etc., which, in the cinematic period leading to the Islamic Revolution have dealt with issues of “power”, “law”, “freedom” and “justice”. However, it was not the mainstream of Iranian cinema then, and the popular cultural industry was predominant in the artistic atmosphere. With the outbreak of the revolution, a generation of filmmakers who were primarily concerned with good socio-political

order and narrating this order in their own particular ways entered the scene (for a detailed account see: Sadr: 2006: 130-166). Kiarostami, who began his career as a director just before the 1979 revolution, but flourished in the post-revolutionary cinematic environment, is a part of this generation.

One of the members of this "generation" was Kiarostami. Although Kiarostami himself avoids any direct engagement with *the political*, he does in his films actually get involved in politics with a normative standpoint, and therefore deems his own cinema to in a certain way be political (see Sadr, 2006: 307). *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Close-Up* (1990), *The Homework* (1989), *Life and Nothing More* (1991), *Under the Olive Trees* (1994), *Taste of Cherry* (1997), and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) are among Kiarostami's successful films which,

by focusing on the social-human relations in a normative form, present the possibility of favorable life for members of society next to each other. In an interview in 1997 (the year he made *The Taste of Cherry*) with *Sight and Sound*, he never admits that his cinema is not political and states that his films are more political than films that are seemingly political:

Any work of art is a political work, but it's not party political. It doesn't approve one party and attack another, and doesn't support one system over another. Our understanding of 'political cinema' is that it should always support one specific political ideology. I think if you look at my films from this point of view, they are definitely not political ... I think that those films which appear non-political, are more political than films known specifically as 'political' films

(Quoted in Sadr, 2006: 236-7).

As Dabashi states, Kiarostami's cinema, either consciously or unconsciously, delves into fundamental assumptions that form the Iranian subject and consequently get engaged in "re-subjecting" it (Dabashi, 2001: 62-3).

A close examination of Kiarostami's films provides new insights which are of great importance in political cinema. Analyzing these subjects can reveal the political implication of Kiarostami's cinema.

Metaphysics of Violence

Many thinkers and social critics have reflected on violence as the means for suppression and political hegemony. This domination includes both the control, manipulation of nature, and domination over nature of humanity (Durst, 1998: 94-5). This finally leads to the negation of human freedom (ibid: 106-9), and

one might find pedagogical system as the main source of cultivating it in the social interactions. By adopting a phenomenological approach to different aspects of the educational structure of the society (both in family and the school institution), Kiarostami intends to present a metaphysical and a cultural image, or in other words "a precultural alternative to reality" (Dabashi, 2001: 63). Through this Kiarostami prepares the way for questioning the human subject and offering an alternative subject.

In *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), the young boy, Ahmad Ahmadpour, is neither rebellious nor submissive, but acts in a peculiar way when in a situation encounters a human problem. He considers himself responsible for finding a way to give his classmate's notebook to him, otherwise he would be punished for what is not his fault.

The Problem is simple and not metaphysical at all, but as Dabashi (2001: 63-4) puts it:

Ahmad [Ahmadpour] is *different* in the strongest sense of the term. ... from his teacher and his petty-dictatorial mandates and rules, from his mother and her numbing insistence for him to do his work, from his grandfather and his idiotic conceptions of etiquette and propriety. ... Ahmad is the Adam of an Eden yet to be created, and even if it is never created Ahmad is already there.

Discipline and domination are presented more prominently in two other films by Kiarostami: *Avaliha* (1984) and *The Homework* (1989). By presenting a group of students who are summoned by the principal because of indiscipline and ignoring order at school, Kiarostami portrays a satiric violent image of the system of domination in Iranian educational

system. At first the students deny any misbehavior, but when they face the threats and pressure by the principal, they admit their misbehavior and confess to it.

In a different way *The Homework* depicts these relations of domination. The film which is made like a documentary rejects purposely in questioning or supporting the educational system. In answering the question of a pedestrian about the subject of the film, Kiarostami simply answers that he himself does not know whether the film will have a story or not; Kiarostami sees himself as the narrator of the events which are related to doing school assignments. Recurrent pictures of the cameraman and the camera which is recording Kiarostami's interview with students, indicates that Kiarostami tries to evade the responsibility of presenting any self-made pictures of reality: it is the

camera which is taking pictures of Kiarostami himself.

Different students, who are interviewed by Kiarostami, depict social characters that cite their social relation with the outside world as the reason for not doing their assignment; they accept the imposed system of domination and consider it legitimate. For instance, the child who blames the mischief of his younger brother as the reason for not doing his homework, the student who lives in his aunt's home because his father is fighting in the Iranian-Iraqi war and therefore he cannot do his schoolwork well, the students who claim to have more interest in school assignment, even more than television cartoons, as well as the way they regard punishments by their parents and their teachers, demonstrate there is a problem with the way school teaches students to assume responsibility in their life.

This satirical, and at the same time disturbing, picture becomes more revealing in Kiarostami's interview with Majid; Majid depends on a supporter to be able to speak. Molayi, who Majid chooses as his supporter, shows no sign of care or support for him, while Majid burst into tears and is lost for words whenever Molayi is absent. Molayi states Majid's problem is the result of the tough environment they have experienced in the past. Because of the punishments at school, Majid is afraid of being punished and is always terrified.

The students who are interviewed generally have no conception of "encouragement," but they have a common conception of "punishment." For them punishment means "being beaten" usually by a belt. This seems not only acceptable but also rightful to them. Only one of them opposes punishment, but he

quickly changes his mind:

Kiarostami: is he doing the right thing [when he punishes you]?

Student: No...who? My father?
Yes sure!

What Kiarostami narrates in *The Homework* (1989) is not merely a depiction of violence in Iranian educational system. He aims to, as Dabashi has put it (2001: 65), “uncover narratively the metaphysics of violence as normatively transubstantiated into matters of ethics, morality, responsibility, and literacy”. Jan Wright (2000: 161) presents a similar account of normalizing and disciplining female students in physical education classes at Australian schools. As she points out in her analysis, in physical education classes:

The open space of the gym or field provides the teacher with the opportunity to constantly monitor the students' behavior. The very

teacher-directed approach of most physical education lessons, marked by the dominance of commands, also indicates the regulatory potential of physical education: teachers determine where the students will move, what they will do and how they will do it. While not all students concur, and many find subtle ways of resisting and engaging in their own forms of regulation and normalization, the structure, organizing and typical interaction patterns of traditional physical education lessons lend themselves to the constant enactment of these techniques of power on the part of the teacher.

Kiarostami tries to present this imposed power on students. In the picture he presents in the morning ceremonies or Fatemiya ceremonies, in spite of teachers' authoritative presence, students keep on behaving mischievously. Here both the

controlling system of disciplinary violence and students' playful resistance are presented. It should be noted that exposing metaphysics of violence can culminate in an alternative metaphysics; but Kiarostami disregards any kind of metaphysics and opens the door to an alternative condition. An alternative way that points out is of the parent of one of the students who is attending the school in the film, while he is enrolling his child for the next school year.

This person who has visited many countries in the world, unlike other parents who are generally illiterate or from lower classes of society, opposes giving students a lot of homework and suggests that the students "resist" it. This scene is the only part in which Kiarostami does not lead the interview as the interviewer. In fact, this man participates in the conversation and

expresses his ideas without being asked to. In this scene Kiarostami just "listens" to the man, which indicates his tacit agreement with the man's ideas. This is the idea of "resistance," which can be traced in other films by Kiarostami.

Resistance

Resistance is regarded as a norm in Kiarostami's films. But unlike what is defined as open struggle or rebellion against the reality, he believes that resistance is a kind of disregard for the dominant and an attempt to offer and establish a favorable alternative situation: a situation that is in agreement with Dabashi's "resubjection".

Resistance is given a high status in political thought. "Ethics of resistance" is a norm that Michel Foucault suggests for the good order of society and it revolves around rejecting the widespread definition

of human as a modern subject and offering new forms of subjectivity. According to Foucault (1983: 216):

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. ...The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual form of the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.

Therefore the ethics of resistance is an obligation "to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of ... [a] kind of political 'double blind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structure" (Ibid: 215).

Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, *Under the Olive Trees* and *Where Is the Friend's Home?* are among the films which reflect "ethics of resistance." Kiarostami wrote the screen play for Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon*, which can be included in this category. In this film we see a little girl who is happily heading out to buy a red fish for Haftsin, but she loses the money out of carelessness. She makes a great attempt to find the money and asks all the passersby for help and finally finds it. Here in the film the money is her lost identity which is eventually regained through determination, innocence and people's empathy and cooperation (Sadr, 2006:230); in the course of regaining identity there is no need to turn to grand metaphysical narratives.

Taste of Cherry and *Under the Olive Trees* present the ethics of

resistance in some ways. In *Taste of Cherry* a man has made up his mind to commit suicide and is trying to find someone who would bury him after his death. No reason for his decision is given and the events of the story do not encourage the audience to judge his decision. So, mere passivity, or disagreement with this action (like the villager who runs away) or advice based on grand narratives (like the clergyman who turns to verses for Quran and Hadith to discourage him from killing himself) are useless. What makes him change his mind is the account of a man who sees the “deliciousness” of a “cherry” a good reason for continuing life. At first this man does not oppose his decision and even promises to help him with that; but by disregarding the metaphysical grandness of the act (taking one’s own life), this man discredits it.

Under the Olive Trees is the story of young man who disregards social classes and proposes marriage to a girl whose mother, father and even grandmother disagree with their marriage. He simplistically questions the social hierarchy and classification. He believes that the literate should marry the illiterate, the rich should marry the poor and those who have a house should marry those who don’t “because if couples who both have houses marry each other, they will have two houses! What should they do with two houses? Should they put their heads in one house and stretch their feet into the other one? This wouldn’t be right.” He even suggests that the death of the girl’s parents in the 1990 earthquake in Roudbar was the result of their rejection of his marriage proposal explaining, “If they had said yes, they might have not suffered this fate; this earthquake was God’s punishment!” He talks

directly to the girl (contrary to the accepted and dominant norms of society) and she accepts his proposal making for a happy ending.

The use of ethics of resistance is most prominent in Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?* Ahmad Ahmadpour, who throughout the film tries to find his friend's house, neither disobeys his mother nor rebels against her. He simply tells the "truth" to his mother, asks for her help and wants her sympathy, but when he finds it useless, he takes action on his own, which makes his grandfather consider "beating" children a constant necessity. He meets many people while he is searching for his friend's house, but never forgets his moral duty, that is giving the notebook to his friend. Contrary to what Manouchehr Yari believes (2001 [1380]: 61), none of Ahmad's meetings can be omitted from the film without doing some

harm to the story, because each encounter is essential in strengthening "ethics of resistance in Ahmad Ahmadpour. Without having dinner, Ahmadpour stays up late to do his friend's homework, and by putting a flower inside the notebook, he shows us the alternative way of a decent life; a way that passes through the normative path of "friendship."

Friendship, Ethics of Care, Love

Kiarostami's trio "Kooker" or "Rostamabad" includes three films which are either filmed in Rostamabad, a far-off village in the north of Iran, or are concerned with this village. This trio includes, *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1991) and *Under the Olive Trees* (1994). These movies have been acclaimed by critics in international film festivals and have played a great role in familiarizing

the world with Iranian cinema.

“Friendship” is a fundamental norm which Kiarostami tries to present and promote in his films. This norm has been regarded since the classical period as “the greatest good of states and the preservative of them against revolutions (Aristotle, 1885: 1262b). Eric Fromm has also considered Love as what can be constitutive for a "Sane Society":

Love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the center of their existence, hence if each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence. Only in this "central experience" is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together (Fromm, 1957: 80).

This notion of love has been the

center of Kiarostami’s socio-political vision. In his interview with Guardian he talks about his concern with establishing friendships among characters in his film:

I greet my neighbors every morning. This is what I want to portray in my films: love and friendship among people... by making films I aim to create sympathy among people who have nothing in common. This is my real definition of art. Art’s only mission is to make people closer to each other.

He adopts the same approach in *Life and Nothing More*. In this film the members of the crew that made *Where is the Friend’s Home?* Are looking for Ahmad Ahmadpour, the young actor of *Where is the Friend’s Home?* Ahmad’s village has been devastated by the after the severe 1990 earthquake in the north of Iran. Although the extensive damage

caused by the earthquake has brought about a chaotic situation, the group does not abandon their attempt to learn what has happened to Ahmadpour. In other words, concern for the Other continues to exist and this provide hopes, or in the hero of the film's words, "at least this house is sound, too; this is also a clarifying." Search for hidden beauty after the earthquake paints a different picture in Kiarostami's mind, a picture that is integrated into the film *life and nothing more*. Encountering and talking to someone who is going to buy a toilet seat, meeting the man who is setting up a television antenna by the road to watch the World Cup football games, which are at a crucial stage, and most interestingly, talking to a young man who in spite of losing may of his family, married his fiancé and started a new life one day after the earthquake, reveals the hidden aspect of the disaster, which is full of life

and promises happiness and a rosy future.

In *Under the Olive Trees*, Kiarostami's trio comes to maturity and introduces "love" as a legitimate basis on which society can be founded. The theme of this film is the filming of a scene from *Life and Nothing More*, where a character of the film is talking to the young man who has married just one day after the earthquake. What had been shown as real in the previous film has now become a cinematic story which is depicted by the actors, a satire that crosses the boundaries between film and reality. Therefore, as the film can present an unreal picture of reality, it can also present a realistic picture of fiction. Hussein, an illiterate young man from the lower class who has worked since he was 11 to make a living, wants to marry Tahereh who is literate and from the upper class. He is informed

about her parents' disagreement with the marriage before the earthquake. The earthquake changes the situation completely. Now people are all equal in "poverty" and the society needs to be reconstructed. Unlike the common trend of society in which the relationships are defined based on class relations, the society can be founded on a completely different basis. The norm Kiarostami introduces is "love", a fundamental norm on which the new society can be established. A basis which solely relies on the "human being", excluding embellishments such as literacy, money and house that do not affect it. Eventually Hussein finds a way to talk to Tahereh about "the center of their existence", the only center which according to Erich Fromm can provide the basis for founding a healthy society based on love.

Conclusion

Political cinema can be a normative episteme which offers good life and favorable political order; however, it does not mean that it is isolated or disconnected from other human episteme in presenting it. Each episteme can carry normative implications, either intentionally or unintentionally and therefore can contribute to political philosophy on its own course. Cinema, Abbas Kiarostami's cinema in our case, is noted as one of the favorable positions for expressing favorable political norms differently.

However, it is not claimed that Kiarostami's cinema is a kind of political philosophy. We need to note that this cinema presents various political implications and hence not only is it a political cinema, but also it can be regarded as a normative political cinema.

As an artist who is aware of tangible everyday issues of human life and avoids getting involved with superficial elements, Kiarostami deals with the deeper layers of socio-political life. He scrutinizes different layers of distribution of power in society, and through criticizing the ‘metaphysics of violence’ in the educational system, and consequently the social system of Iran, he encourages a kind of “resistance” which can manifest itself in the form of childish naughtiness. This resistance can create a different situation, and it can promise a society with different bases and principles. This different situation is founded on norms like “friendship”, “concern for the other” and “love”, which only through their realization we can expect to live in a healthy society, A society which revolves around the “admiration of life”, although it continuously faces

the “anxiety of death”, as the most certain event in life. This life is possible not through domination over others but through friendship and love.

References

Latin Sources:

- [1] Aristotle, (1885), *Politics*, Trans. By B. Jwett, Oxford, Oxford University Press: London.
- [2] Dabashi, Hamid, (2001), *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*, London & New York: Verso Publication.
- [3] Deleuze, Gilles (1989), *Cinema 2*, Translated into English By Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- [4] Durst, David C. (1998). Heidegger on the problem of metaphysics and violence. *Heidegger studies*, 14, S. 93-110.
- [5] Falzon, Christopher (2002), *Philosophy Goes To The Movies: An introduction to philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge.

- [6] Foucault, Michel (1983), The Subject and Power, in: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd Ed.), by: H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, pp. 208-229, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- [7] Fromm, Erich (1957), *The Art of Loving*, London, George Allen & Unwin.
- [8] Plamenatz, John (1963), *Man and Society*, London: Longman.
- [9] Sprigens, Thomas (1976), *Understanding Political Theory*, New York: St. Martin Press.
- [10] Strauss, Leo (1973), *What Is Political Philosophy*, New York: The Free press.
- [11] Wayne, Mike (2001), *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, London: Pluto Press.
- [12] Wright, Jan (2000), Disciplining the Body: Power, Knowledge, and Subjectivity in a Physical Education, in: *Culture & Text: Discourse and Methodology in Social Research and Cultural Studies*, ed. By: C. Poynton and A. Lee, pp. 152-170, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.

Persian Sources:

- [13] Yari, M. (2001 [1380]). Construction of Iranian Story-telling and Allegories and their Influence on Kiarostami's Cinema, in: *Ham-Konesh-e Zaban Va Honar (Language and art interaction)*. Tehran: Sooreh Mehr Press.

دلالت‌های سیاسی سینمای عباس کیارستمی

سیدمحسن علوی پور^۱

تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۲/۱۲/۲۶

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۱/۴/۱۵

معمولا سینمای سیاسی را سینمایی می‌دانند که به یکی از امور مشخصا سیاسی - واقعه، زندگینامه، و یا فرایند سیاسی- پردازد. در حالی که به نظر می‌رسد این تعریف نه جامع و نه مانع است و در شمولیت بر فیلم‌هایی که سوبه‌های هنجاری - سیاسی دارند اما ضرورتا مسئله‌ای سیاسی را روایت نمی‌کنند ناتوان است. از این رو لازم است با بازاندیشی در این تعریف، مولفه‌های سینمای سیاسی هنجاری را شناسایی و معرفی کرد. مقاله حاضر با هدف انجام چنین کاری، به کاوش در وجوه هنجاری سیاسی آثار عباس کیارستمی سینماگر مشهور ایرانی می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: اندیشه هنجاری، سینمای سیاسی، دوستی، مقاومت، متافیزیک خشونت

. استادیار پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی تهران، ایران.

Political Implications of Abbas Kiarostami's Cinema

Seyedmohsen Alavipour¹

Received: 5/7/2012

Accepted: 17/3/2014

Abstract

Political Cinema is defined as a "political event", a "biography", or "process". Such a definition is, however, not inclusive enough to cover the films which focus on the normative aspects of politics without necessarily narrating a special political issue. By reviewing Abbas Kiarostami's films, this article attempts to revise the definition of political cinema and propose the notion of *normative political cinema*.

Keywords: Normative Thought; Political Cinema; Friendship; Resistance; Metaphysics of Violence.

1. Assistant Professor at Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (IHCS), Tehran, Iran
m.alavipour@gmail.com

Introduction

Political cinema is supposed to deal with or narrate the whole or part of a politician's life. Therefore, films that are categorized under the genre of political cinema are the ones which revolve around secret political relations, collusion that culminate in a particular event, or even the rise and fall of a politician. From this perspective films such as: *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), *JFK* (1991), *Nixon* (1995), *All the President's Men* (1976), *The Conversation* (1974), *The Pianist* (2002), *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1971) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) are considered as prominent examples of political cinema in the history of filmmaking.

This definition does not include all the films which center on "the political". In other words, this definition of the political cinema inevitably excludes most of the films which have obvious political

significance and implication but do not necessarily engage with particular political figures and events. Mike Wayne starts his book *Political Film: the Dialectics of Third Cinema* (2001: 1) by saying "All films are political, but films are not all political in the same way". The films which he chooses as "political film" have touched on "unequal access to and distribution of material and cultural resources, and the hierarchies of legitimacy and status accorded to those differentials" in one way or the other (ibid).

Some critics believe that political cinema cannot be confined to films which revolve around certain political people and events. From this viewpoint, films that deal with social and political issues, either directly or indirectly can be included in the political genre. This definition broadens the scope of political cinema and, by making it more flexible,

justifies the inclusion of a broader range of films. It also opens the way for author to decide what categories can be included in this framework, and what political cinema is (Sadr: 2006). As a result, we can claim that political cinema might include films that are concerned with presenting the favorable social order and good political order based normative concepts. These concepts can include categories such as “justice”, “freedom”, “right”, “friendship”, and so forth. Films which rely on one or two normative categories to present the “possibility” of favorable social life are among those films which possess the implications and significance of political cinema.

In its narrow definition political cinema includes films which do not conceal their political position; however, there is a broader

definition of this cinematic genre which is noteworthy.¹

For instance, as Falzon has pointed out (2002: 134), by admiring individual undertaking and creating individual heroes who embark on bringing social changes in individual brave attempts, Hollywood cinema is in fact adopting and promoting liberal political thought. Likewise, in some films like those of the prominent Russian filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, there is a propagandist admiration of communist revolution in Russia and the future of the socialist ideal. The same thing is true about other countries' cinemas.

1. In Wikipedia it is pointed out that films that are apparently “apolitical”, and are intended to amuse the audience, have a political function, too (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_Cinema).

This is quite apparent in the film industries of autocratic systems like Nazi Germany and the former Soviet Union. Even in democratic countries, as it can be seen in Hollywood, this medium has an important political function.

In his two-volume book about cinema Gilles Deleuze divides political cinema into two trends: classical political cinema and modern political cinema. In his opinion Alain Resnais and Jean-Marie Straub are “the greatest filmmakers of political cinema in modern political cinema” and Eisenstein, with movies, like *Ivan the Terrible*, represents classical political cinema. He believes that the characteristic that makes the works of Resnais and Straub modern political films is that “they know how to show the people are what is missing, what is not there” (Deleuze, 1989: 215). Nevertheless there is an increasing consciousness in classical political cinema which “means that people already has a virtual existence in process of being actualized... there is a unanimity which calls the different peoples into the same melting-pot from which the future emerges” (ibid: 216). It is also a characteristic

of western cinema which, as a result of secret mechanisms of power and majority rule system, has rarely been the focus of attention (ibid: 217).

Deleuze believes that the issue of modern political cinema is also the issue of the Third World cinema. In his idea the problem that the Third World filmmakers encounter is that “they find themselves “before an illiterate public, swamped by the American, Egyptian and Indian serials and karate films”, and they have to “extract from it the elements of a people who are still missing”. He states:

Sometimes the minority film-maker finds himself in the impasse described by Kafka: the impossibility of not ‘writing’, the impossibility of writing in the dominant language, the impossibility of writing differently (ibid).

The filmmakers in the Third World have to get involved in

something that is completely different from what is the issue in the classical political cinema: not referring to people, who are assumed to be present there in advance, but participating in the creation of a nation (ibid).

This is not the only difference between classical political cinema and modern political cinema, to Deleuze's eyes. There is another big difference which has to do with the relation between the political and the private, and the division between them. As he puts it:

... classical cinema constantly maintained this boundary which marked the correlation of the political and the private, and ... through intermediary of an awareness, passage from one social force to another, from one political position to another... This is no longer the case in modern political cinema, where no boundary survives

to provide a minimum distance or evolution: the private affair merges with the social -or political- immediate (ibid: 218).

This issue will be more noticeable if we examine the relationship between political thought, as a normative knowledge, and cinema. Political thought is a kind of normative episteme which contemplates about *good life* and *favorable socio- political order*. This normative model is a kind of story for presenting human life in which the scenes and roles are determined (Sprigens, 1976:127). Political thought, or as Plamenatz calls it, "the philosophy of life" (Plamenatz 1963:14), is a kind of philosophy which is closely related to political life, that is, a philosophical life and human life (Strauss, 1973:2). It aims at projecting episteme on the political issue, instead of casting doubt on them. Once again the

purpose is to achieve favorable order in society and establishing a good political system (ibid).

Iranian Political Cinema

Iranian cinema is not different, Iranian films either directly deal with political currents and events or have their own special political implications in a different way. As a film critic, Hamid Reza Sadr rejects the idea that political cinema is confined to the narrow definition provided above, and states that:

“For example, *Croesus*” *Treasure* is famous Iranian commercial film. In this film the audience can see the political and social conditions of Iran in the 40s 1960s, like the money which is injected into the economy and those who become millionaires. The way the hero of the film insults the rich, matches the social and political conditions of that time. So you cannot disregard this film. In the

1960s children were the main characters of films, which show the social and political aspects of Iranian society. What I mean is that a film does not have to be political on its surface, as Costa-Gavras’ *Z*, Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* or Emir Kusturica’s *Underground*; a commercial film can also have political aspects¹.”

Based on the same argument Sadr names his book on the history of Iranian cinema *The History of the Iranian Political Cinema* (2006). Basically he does not see “politics” only as handling the affairs of a country, looking after foreign and domestic affairs, improving the people’s affairs or punishing the wrong-doers”. For him “politics is everyday life, it is *every Iranian film*” (Sadr, 2006:15). Throughout his book he regards cinema as a part of the identification trend in Iran—

1. Quoted from an interview with Pourya Didar, at: <http://www.cinemaema.com/NewsArticle5680.html>

Deleuze calls it “the creation of a nation”. Sadr looks for a socio-political problem, intermingled with every Iranian’s life, in the background of every film: films that signify a socio-political condition or situation, even if they deal with the seemingly personal and private relations. Adopting such an approach to cinema opens up a new horizon which will reveal a world of the unknown to author’s thought.

It should be noted that by generalizing the meaning of politics, Sadr includes all the issues related to society in the definition of political cinema and pays no heed to the inner stratifications of politics. However, examining cinema with regard to different aspects of politics offers us different perspectives. As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the author aims to examine political potentials of Abbas Kiarostami’s cinema by focusing on “political thought” as a

normative knowledge that attempts to present good political order to society; in addition, it will be analyzed the political implications of Kiarostami’s cinema.

Kiarostami and Normative Cinema

Iranian cinema, as a prominent cinema in the world, has dealt with *political themes* in different ways. In the history of Iranian cinema there are a number of films, such as *The Cow (Gav)*, *Deers (Gavazn-ha)*, *Caesar (Gheisar)*, *Downpour (Ragbar)* etc., which, in the cinematic period leading to the Islamic Revolution have dealt with issues of “power”, “law”, “freedom” and “justice”. However, it was not the mainstream of Iranian cinema then, and the popular cultural industry was predominant in the artistic atmosphere. With the outbreak of the revolution, a generation of filmmakers who were primarily concerned with good socio-political

order and narrating this order in their own particular ways entered the scene (for a detailed account see: Sadr: 2006: 130-166). Kiarostami, who began his career as a director just before the 1979 revolution, but flourished in the post-revolutionary cinematic environment, is a part of this generation.

One of the members of this "generation" was Kiarostami. Although Kiarostami himself avoids any direct engagement with *the political*, he does in his films actually get involved in politics with a normative standpoint, and therefore deems his own cinema to in a certain way be political (see Sadr, 2006: 307). *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Close-Up* (1990), *The Homework* (1989), *Life and Nothing More* (1991), *Under the Olive Trees* (1994), *Taste of Cherry* (1997), and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) are among Kiarostami's successful films which,

by focusing on the social-human relations in a normative form, present the possibility of favorable life for members of society next to each other. In an interview in 1997 (the year he made *The Taste of Cherry*) with *Sight and Sound*, he never admits that his cinema is not political and states that his films are more political than films that are seemingly political:

Any work of art is a political work, but it's not party political. It doesn't approve one party and attack another, and doesn't support one system over another. Our understanding of 'political cinema' is that it should always support one specific political ideology. I think if you look at my films from this point of view, they are definitely not political ... I think that those films which appear non-political, are more political than films known specifically as 'political' films

(Quoted in Sadr, 2006: 236-7).

As Dabashi states, Kiarostami's cinema, either consciously or unconsciously, delves into fundamental assumptions that form the Iranian subject and consequently get engaged in "re-subjecting" it (Dabashi, 2001: 62-3).

A close examination of Kiarostami's films provides new insights which are of great importance in political cinema. Analyzing these subjects can reveal the political implication of Kiarostami's cinema.

Metaphysics of Violence

Many thinkers and social critics have reflected on violence as the means for suppression and political hegemony. This domination includes both the control, manipulation of nature, and domination over nature of humanity (Durst, 1998: 94-5). This finally leads to the negation of human freedom (ibid: 106-9), and

one might find pedagogical system as the main source of cultivating it in the social interactions. By adopting a phenomenological approach to different aspects of the educational structure of the society (both in family and the school institution), Kiarostami intends to present a metaphysical and a cultural image, or in other words "a precultural alternative to reality" (Dabashi, 2001: 63). Through this Kiarostami prepares the way for questioning the human subject and offering an alternative subject.

In *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), the young boy, Ahmad Ahmadpour, is neither rebellious nor submissive, but acts in a peculiar way when in a situation encounters a human problem. He considers himself responsible for finding a way to give his classmate's notebook to him, otherwise he would be punished for what is not his fault.

The Problem is simple and not metaphysical at all, but as Dabashi (2001: 63-4) puts it:

Ahmad [Ahmadpour] is *different* in the strongest sense of the term. ... from his teacher and his petty-dictatorial mandates and rules, from his mother and her numbing insistence for him to do his work, from his grandfather and his idiotic conceptions of etiquette and propriety. ... Ahmad is the Adam of an Eden yet to be created, and even if it is never created Ahmad is already there.

Discipline and domination are presented more prominently in two other films by Kiarostami: *Avaliha* (1984) and *The Homework* (1989). By presenting a group of students who are summoned by the principal because of indiscipline and ignoring order at school, Kiarostami portrays a satiric violent image of the system of domination in Iranian educational

system. At first the students deny any misbehavior, but when they face the threats and pressure by the principal, they admit their misbehavior and confess to it.

In a different way *The Homework* depicts these relations of domination. The film which is made like a documentary rejects purposely in questioning or supporting the educational system. In answering the question of a pedestrian about the subject of the film, Kiarostami simply answers that he himself does not know whether the film will have a story or not; Kiarostami sees himself as the narrator of the events which are related to doing school assignments. Recurrent pictures of the cameraman and the camera which is recording Kiarostami's interview with students, indicates that Kiarostami tries to evade the responsibility of presenting any self-made pictures of reality: it is the

camera which is taking pictures of Kiarostami himself.

Different students, who are interviewed by Kiarostami, depict social characters that cite their social relation with the outside world as the reason for not doing their assignment; they accept the imposed system of domination and consider it legitimate. For instance, the child who blames the mischief of his younger brother as the reason for not doing his homework, the student who lives in his aunt's home because his father is fighting in the Iranian-Iraqi war and therefore he cannot do his schoolwork well, the students who claim to have more interest in school assignment, even more than television cartoons, as well as the way they regard punishments by their parents and their teachers, demonstrate there is a problem with the way school teaches students to assume responsibility in their life.

This satirical, and at the same time disturbing, picture becomes more revealing in Kiarostami's interview with Majid; Majid depends on a supporter to be able to speak. Molayi, who Majid chooses as his supporter, shows no sign of care or support for him, while Majid burst into tears and is lost for words whenever Molayi is absent. Molayi states Majid's problem is the result of the tough environment they have experienced in the past. Because of the punishments at school, Majid is afraid of being punished and is always terrified.

The students who are interviewed generally have no conception of "encouragement," but they have a common conception of "punishment." For them punishment means "being beaten" usually by a belt. This seems not only acceptable but also rightful to them. Only one of them opposes punishment, but he

quickly changes his mind:

Kiarostami: is he doing the right thing [when he punishes you]?

Student: No...who? My father?
Yes sure!

What Kiarostami narrates in *The Homework* (1989) is not merely a depiction of violence in Iranian educational system. He aims to, as Dabashi has put it (2001: 65), “uncover narratively the metaphysics of violence as normatively transubstantiated into matters of ethics, morality, responsibility, and literacy”. Jan Wright (2000: 161) presents a similar account of normalizing and disciplining female students in physical education classes at Australian schools. As she points out in her analysis, in physical education classes:

The open space of the gym or field provides the teacher with the opportunity to constantly monitor the students' behavior. The very

teacher-directed approach of most physical education lessons, marked by the dominance of commands, also indicates the regulatory potential of physical education: teachers determine where the students will move, what they will do and how they will do it. While not all students concur, and many find subtle ways of resisting and engaging in their own forms of regulation and normalization, the structure, organizing and typical interaction patterns of traditional physical education lessons lend themselves to the constant enactment of these techniques of power on the part of the teacher.

Kiarostami tries to present this imposed power on students. In the picture he presents in the morning ceremonies or Fatemiya ceremonies, in spite of teachers' authoritative presence, students keep on behaving mischievously. Here both the

controlling system of disciplinary violence and students' playful resistance are presented. It should be noted that exposing metaphysics of violence can culminate in an alternative metaphysics; but Kiarostami disregards any kind of metaphysics and opens the door to an alternative condition. An alternative way that points out is of the parent of one of the students who is attending the school in the film, while he is enrolling his child for the next school year.

This person who has visited many countries in the world, unlike other parents who are generally illiterate or from lower classes of society, opposes giving students a lot of homework and suggests that the students "resist" it. This scene is the only part in which Kiarostami does not lead the interview as the interviewer. In fact, this man participates in the conversation and

expresses his ideas without being asked to. In this scene Kiarostami just "listens" to the man, which indicates his tacit agreement with the man's ideas. This is the idea of "resistance," which can be traced in other films by Kiarostami.

Resistance

Resistance is regarded as a norm in Kiarostami's films. But unlike what is defined as open struggle or rebellion against the reality, he believes that resistance is a kind of disregard for the dominant and an attempt to offer and establish a favorable alternative situation: a situation that is in agreement with Dabashi's "resubjection".

Resistance is given a high status in political thought. "Ethics of resistance" is a norm that Michel Foucault suggests for the good order of society and it revolves around rejecting the widespread definition

of human as a modern subject and offering new forms of subjectivity. According to Foucault (1983: 216):

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. ...The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual form of the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.

Therefore the ethics of resistance is an obligation "to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of ... [a] kind of political 'double blind', which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structure" (Ibid: 215).

Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, *Under the Olive Trees* and *Where Is the Friend's Home?* are among the films which reflect "ethics of resistance." Kiarostami wrote the screen play for Jafar Panahi's *The White Balloon*, which can be included in this category. In this film we see a little girl who is happily heading out to buy a red fish for Haftsin, but she loses the money out of carelessness. She makes a great attempt to find the money and asks all the passersby for help and finally finds it. Here in the film the money is her lost identity which is eventually regained through determination, innocence and people's empathy and cooperation (Sadr, 2006:230); in the course of regaining identity there is no need to turn to grand metaphysical narratives.

Taste of Cherry and *Under the Olive Trees* present the ethics of

resistance in some ways. In *Taste of Cherry* a man has made up his mind to commit suicide and is trying to find someone who would bury him after his death. No reason for his decision is given and the events of the story do not encourage the audience to judge his decision. So, mere passivity, or disagreement with this action (like the villager who runs away) or advice based on grand narratives (like the clergyman who turns to verses for Quran and Hadith to discourage him from killing himself) are useless. What makes him change his mind is the account of a man who sees the “deliciousness” of a “cherry” a good reason for continuing life. At first this man does not oppose his decision and even promises to help him with that; but by disregarding the metaphysical grandness of the act (taking one’s own life), this man discredits it.

Under the Olive Trees is the story of young man who disregards social classes and proposes marriage to a girl whose mother, father and even grandmother disagree with their marriage. He simplistically questions the social hierarchy and classification. He believes that the literate should marry the illiterate, the rich should marry the poor and those who have a house should marry those who don’t “because if couples who both have houses marry each other, they will have two houses! What should they do with two houses? Should they put their heads in one house and stretch their feet into the other one? This wouldn’t be right.” He even suggests that the death of the girl’s parents in the 1990 earthquake in Roudbar was the result of their rejection of his marriage proposal explaining, “If they had said yes, they might have not suffered this fate; this earthquake was God’s punishment!” He talks

directly to the girl (contrary to the accepted and dominant norms of society) and she accepts his proposal making for a happy ending.

The use of ethics of resistance is most prominent in Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?* Ahmad Ahmadpour, who throughout the film tries to find his friend's house, neither disobeys his mother nor rebels against her. He simply tells the "truth" to his mother, asks for her help and wants her sympathy, but when he finds it useless, he takes action on his own, which makes his grandfather consider "beating" children a constant necessity. He meets many people while he is searching for his friend's house, but never forgets his moral duty, that is giving the notebook to his friend. Contrary to what Manouchehr Yari believes (2001 [1380]: 61), none of Ahmad's meetings can be omitted from the film without doing some

harm to the story, because each encounter is essential in strengthening "ethics of resistance in Ahmad Ahmadpour. Without having dinner, Ahmadpour stays up late to do his friend's homework, and by putting a flower inside the notebook, he shows us the alternative way of a decent life; a way that passes through the normative path of "friendship."

Friendship, Ethics of Care, Love

Kiarostami's trio "Kooker" or "Rostamabad" includes three films which are either filmed in Rostamabad, a far-off village in the north of Iran, or are concerned with this village. This trio includes, *Where is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1991) and *Under the Olive Trees* (1994). These movies have been acclaimed by critics in international film festivals and have played a great role in familiarizing

the world with Iranian cinema.

“Friendship” is a fundamental norm which Kiarostami tries to present and promote in his films. This norm has been regarded since the classical period as “the greatest good of states and the preservative of them against revolutions (Aristotle, 1885: 1262b). Eric Fromm has also considered Love as what can be constitutive for a "Sane Society":

Love is possible only if two persons communicate with each other from the center of their existence, hence if each one of them experiences himself from the center of his existence. Only in this "central experience" is human reality, only here is aliveness, only here is the basis for love. Love, experienced thus, is a constant challenge; it is not a resting place, but a moving, growing, working together (Fromm, 1957: 80).

This notion of love has been the

center of Kiarostami’s socio-political vision. In his interview with Guardian he talks about his concern with establishing friendships among characters in his film:

I greet my neighbors every morning. This is what I want to portray in my films: love and friendship among people... by making films I aim to create sympathy among people who have nothing in common. This is my real definition of art. Art’s only mission is to make people closer to each other.

He adopts the same approach in *Life and Nothing More*. In this film the members of the crew that made *Where is the Friend’s Home?* Are looking for Ahmad Ahmadpour, the young actor of *Where is the Friend’s Home?* Ahmad’s village has been devastated by the after the severe 1990 earthquake in the north of Iran. Although the extensive damage

caused by the earthquake has brought about a chaotic situation, the group does not abandon their attempt to learn what has happened to Ahmadpour. In other words, concern for the Other continues to exist and this provide hopes, or in the hero of the film's words, "at least this house is sound, too; this is also a clarifying." Search for hidden beauty after the earthquake paints a different picture in Kiarostami's mind, a picture that is integrated into the film *life and nothing more*. Encountering and talking to someone who is going to buy a toilet seat, meeting the man who is setting up a television antenna by the road to watch the World Cup football games, which are at a crucial stage, and most interestingly, talking to a young man who in spite of losing may of his family, married his fiancé and started a new life one day after the earthquake, reveals the hidden aspect of the disaster, which is full of life

and promises happiness and a rosy future.

In *Under the Olive Trees*, Kiarostami's trio comes to maturity and introduces "love" as a legitimate basis on which society can be founded. The theme of this film is the filming of a scene from *Life and Nothing More*, where a character of the film is talking to the young man who has married just one day after the earthquake. What had been shown as real in the previous film has now become a cinematic story which is depicted by the actors, a satire that crosses the boundaries between film and reality. Therefore, as the film can present an unreal picture of reality, it can also present a realistic picture of fiction. Hussein, an illiterate young man from the lower class who has worked since he was 11 to make a living, wants to marry Tahereh who is literate and from the upper class. He is informed

about her parents' disagreement with the marriage before the earthquake. The earthquake changes the situation completely. Now people are all equal in "poverty" and the society needs to be reconstructed. Unlike the common trend of society in which the relationships are defined based on class relations, the society can be founded on a completely different basis. The norm Kiarostami introduces is "love", a fundamental norm on which the new society can be established. A basis which solely relies on the "human being", excluding embellishments such as literacy, money and house that do not affect it. Eventually Hussein finds a way to talk to Tahereh about "the center of their existence", the only center which according to Erich Fromm can provide the basis for founding a healthy society based on love.

Conclusion

Political cinema can be a normative episteme which offers good life and favorable political order; however, it does not mean that it is isolated or disconnected from other human episteme in presenting it. Each episteme can carry normative implications, either intentionally or unintentionally and therefore can contribute to political philosophy on its own course. Cinema, Abbas Kiarostami's cinema in our case, is noted as one of the favorable positions for expressing favorable political norms differently.

However, it is not claimed that Kiarostami's cinema is a kind of political philosophy. We need to note that this cinema presents various political implications and hence not only is it a political cinema, but also it can be regarded as a normative political cinema.

As an artist who is aware of tangible everyday issues of human life and avoids getting involved with superficial elements, Kiarostami deals with the deeper layers of socio-political life. He scrutinizes different layers of distribution of power in society, and through criticizing the ‘metaphysics of violence’ in the educational system, and consequently the social system of Iran, he encourages a kind of “resistance” which can manifest itself in the form of childish naughtiness. This resistance can create a different situation, and it can promise a society with different bases and principles. This different situation is founded on norms like “friendship”, “concern for the other” and “love”, which only through their realization we can expect to live in a healthy society, A society which revolves around the “admiration of life”, although it continuously faces

the “anxiety of death”, as the most certain event in life. This life is possible not through domination over others but through friendship and love.

References

Latin Sources:

- [1] Aristotle, (1885), *Politics*, Trans. By B. Jwett, Oxford, Oxford University Press: London.
- [2] Dabashi, Hamid, (2001), *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*, London & New York: Verso Publication.
- [3] Deleuze, Gilles (1989), *Cinema 2*, Translated into English By Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.
- [4] Durst, David C. (1998). Heidegger on the problem of metaphysics and violence. *Heidegger studies*, 14, S. 93-110.
- [5] Falzon, Christopher (2002), *Philosophy Goes To The Movies: An introduction to philosophy*, London and New York: Routledge.

- [6] Foucault, Michel (1983), The Subject and Power, in: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd Ed.), by: H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, pp. 208-229, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- [7] Fromm, Erich (1957), *The Art of Loving*, London, George Allen & Unwin.
- [8] Plamenatz, John (1963), *Man and Society*, London: Longman.
- [9] Sprigens, Thomas (1976), *Understanding Political Theory*, New York: St. Martin Press.
- [10] Strauss, Leo (1973), *What Is Political Philosophy*, New York: The Free press.
- [11] Wayne, Mike (2001), *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema*, London: Pluto Press.
- [12] Wright, Jan (2000), Disciplining the Body: Power, Knowledge, and Subjectivity in a Physical Education, in: *Culture & Text: Discourse and Methodology in Social Research and Cultural Studies*, ed. By: C. Poynton and A. Lee, pp. 152-170, Sydney, Allen & Unwin.
- Persian Sources:**
- [13] Yari, M. (2001 [1380]). Construction of Iranian Story-telling and Allegories and their Influence on Kiarostami's Cinema, in: Ham-Konesh-e Zaban Va Honar (*Language and art interaction*). Tehran: Sooreh Mehr Press.

دلالت‌های سیاسی سینمای عباس کیارستمی

سیدمحسن علوی پور^۱

تاریخ پذیرش: ۹۲/۱۲/۲۶

تاریخ دریافت: ۹۱/۴/۱۵

معمولا سینمای سیاسی را سینمایی می‌دانند که به یکی از امور مشخصا سیاسی - واقعه، زندگینامه، و یا فرایند سیاسی- پردازد. در حالی که به نظر می‌رسد این تعریف نه جامع و نه مانع است و در شمولیت بر فیلم‌هایی که سویه‌های هنجاری - سیاسی دارند اما ضرورتا مسئله‌ای سیاسی را روایت نمی‌کنند ناتوان است. از این رو لازم است با بازاندیشی در این تعریف، مولفه‌های سینمای سیاسی هنجاری را شناسایی و معرفی کرد. مقاله حاضر با هدف انجام چنین کاری، به کاوش در وجوه هنجاری سیاسی آثار عباس کیارستمی سینماگر مشهور ایرانی می‌پردازد.

واژگان کلیدی: اندیشه هنجاری، سینمای سیاسی، دوستی، مقاومت، متافیزیک خشونت

. استادیار پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی تهران، ایران.