

6 films from Iran that should be seen by workers in the US and around the world

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In late March 2012, when Iran was under threat of attack by the Obama administration, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a perspective on the Iranian film *A Separation*, directed by Asghar Farhadi. One month earlier, the movie had won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, becoming the first Iranian film to win the honor.

The WSWS perspective asked:

And will a war, in the name of “the American people,” based on one transparent falsehood or another, soon be launched against Iran? Will deadly US bombs and missiles shortly be raining down on the streets, buildings and human beings we see in *A Separation*?

We added that US imperialism and its allies

are planning to destroy Iran as a regional power, a task requiring the punishment of its population with the most lethal weaponry ever developed. Americans and Europeans should be seeing this film [*A Separation*] ... Mass opposition must build to the threat of war with Iran. Everything must be done to stop this crime being prepared before people’s eyes.

That sentiment is more true now than ever. The US and international working class must put a stop to the imperialist war against Iran before millions are killed and a major civilization is destroyed.

The WSWS has written, extensively and over a long period, about many of the remarkable films from Iran that were made in the aftermath of the mass 1979 revolution against the hated CIA-backed regime of the Shah. Notwithstanding the fact that what emerged from the revolution in the end was a clerical-led bourgeois nationalist regime, an Islamic Republic, Iranian filmmakers created some of the most intelligent and humane works in the 1980s and 1990s, and beyond.

And whatever the subsequent political evolution or confusion of their makers, such films as *Salaam Cinema*, *The White Balloon*, *The Mirror*, *Offside*, *A Time for Drunken Horses*, *The Apple*, *The Blue-Veiled* and *Under the City’s Skin* remain valuable, humane works.

Here we will simply point to the works of two Iranian directors, one earlier in this period and one more recent, Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016) and Farhadi (born 1972).

While this is by no means a comprehensive list, here are six films by

Kiarostami and Farhadi that should be seen by audiences in the US and around the world, with links to WSWS reviews, and information about how to watch them online in 2026. These films provide some insight into the problems of Iranian society and help transform the Iranian “devils” and “terrorists” into humans very much like ourselves.

Three films by Abbas Kiarostami

In a 2016 obituary, WSWS arts editor David Walsh wrote that Abbas Kiarostami “was perhaps the most important filmmaker in the world” from 1987-1997.

Walsh continued:

At a time of general intellectual renunciationism and movement to the right within global “left” artistic circles, Kiarostami was one of the few filmmakers who maintained a concern for the problems of the young, the poor and the oppressed and, moreover, addressed those problems in an artistically fresh and innovative fashion. He was a member of a significant trend in Iranian cinema, inspired by the mass revolutionary potential of the 1979 events.

Walsh interviewed Kiarostami for the first time in Toronto in September 1994. This is from their conversation:

Walsh: You are choosing to make films about ordinary people, poor people. That itself is quite rare today.

Kiarostami: I get my material from around me. When I leave my house in the morning, those are the people I come into contact with. In my entire life I’ve never met a star, somebody I’ve seen on the screen. And I believe that any artist finds his material from what’s around him. Human beings and their problems are the most important raw material for any film.

Close-up (1990)

Is there any other film quite like *Close-up*? As Walsh explains in a 2002 WSWS comment on *Close-up*:

Kiarostami was inspired to make the film when he came across a news item about a young man, Hossein Sabzian, who passed himself off to an upper middle class family in Tehran as the well-known film director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Sabzian gained the family's confidence and convinced its various members that he wanted to make a film with their participation. After his exposure and arrest, Sabzian was accused of setting the family up for a burglary.

Kiarostami's film is an extraordinary mix of documentary and fiction. He won permission to interview Sabzian in prison and to film his trial. But, most remarkably, he was also able to convince all the participants to reenact the encounters between the impostor and the family members. The family gets to star in a film after all, and so does Sabzian!

Close-up can be seen on Wikimedia Commons with English, Spanish, French and Italian subtitles.

In the second part of a trilogy about northern Iran, *Life, and Nothing More*, a father—supposedly the director of Kiarostami's own *Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987)—and his young son set out from Tehran in the aftermath of an actual earthquake that killed over 50,000 people to find the two boys who starred in the earlier film. *Life, and Nothing More* records the pair's encounters with various survivors, many of whom have lost entire families.

Many of Kiarostami's central concerns at the time find expression in the extended final shot of *Life, and Nothing More*, which needs to be seen to be adequately appreciated. This is how Walsh described it in a review for the *International Workers Bulletin (IWB)*, a predecessor to the WSWWS, in 1995:

The camera takes this in [from a distance]: A dirt road zigzags up a steep hillside. A man with a heavy object on his shoulder makes his way along the road. Two kids are on top of the hill [who may or may not be the boys the father and son are looking for]. The father and son attempt to make it up in their car. Their first attempt fails. The driver allows the car to roll back, out of the frame, in order to get a 'running start' for another attempt. The second time the car successfully meets the challenge, passing the man with the heavy load who gestures for them to stop and give him a lift. But if they stop beside him, they'll never make it all the way up. When the driver reaches a level spot, he waits for the man. Then they head toward the summit where the two kids are visible.

Life, and Nothing More is available on YouTube and Amazon Prime Video.

Through the Olive Trees (1994)

Here's Walsh again, from a 1994 *IWB* review of *Through the Olive Trees*, perhaps Kiarostami's most astonishing work, posted on the WSWWS in 2001:

The story is both simple and complex: A film crew is in a village in northern Iran which has been destroyed by an earthquake. Much

of the population lives by the highway in makeshift housing. Apparently the government is unwilling or unable to relieve their suffering. The name of the film the crew is shooting is *And Life Goes On...* — in actuality the name of Kiarostami's previous film set in the same village.

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The treatment of social difference and the weight of longstanding traditions, the careful but unequivocal protest against the conditions of life, the simplicity of the narrative and dialogue, the clarity of the acting—this is the stuff of classical filmmaking. One is in the presence of an extraordinary talent.

Through the Olive Trees is widely available, including on Youtube.

Three films by Asghar Farhadi

David Walsh wrote in the above-mentioned WSWWS perspective on *A Separation*:

A Separation provides one of the few glimpses that Americans and others in the West will have into the reality of Iranian life. The film is direct and honest, unlike most products of the US movie industry.

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A Separation reveals to the viewer a complex and highly cultured society, where daily life, to be blunt, often proceeds along more civilized lines than in the US at present.

A Separation is widely available, including on Youtube and Netflix.

Tom Carter wrote in a February 2017 WSWWS review of *The Salesman*,

The film is remarkable and rich, the kind of experience you turn over in your mind for days afterwards, discovering new facets that reflect new themes or ideas. Above all, the film affirms the essential humanity of every person—even and especially the "villain"—and exposes the emptiness and absurdity of revenge-taking.

In the midst of a campaign by the American government to whip up bigotry and prejudice against Iranians—as well as war threats against that nation of more than 80 million people—such a film is most welcome.

The Salesman can be seen on Amazon Prime Video.

Joanne Laurier wrote in a February 2022 WSWWS review of *A Hero*:

Farhadi looks at the tribulations of Iranian society's victims. Although not the poorest of the poor, the film's characters are caught in the vice grip of near impossible circumstances, despite their best intentions. They work mightily to overcome the intractable obstacles. At every step, the viewer senses that life holds few rewards for the hard-pressed, including the dour creditor Bahram. No amount of effort, Herculean or otherwise, is sufficient. The innumerable Rahims are being poured into the very

bottom of society—debtor's prison.

A Hero can be seen on Amazon Prime Video.

These films, among other things, are an antidote to the savage, manic propaganda of the Trump-Hegseth cabal.



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