

The award-winning *A Separation* and the humanity of the Iranian people

David Walsh
30 March 2012

It is not often we devote a perspective to a film, or any art work. However, the combination of the context in which it appears and its own merits makes *A Separation*, by Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi, worth acknowledging in this manner. It is a film with a good deal to say, and the present situation gives the work a special poignancy and relevance.

The United States government and military-intelligence apparatus, in complicity with the Israeli regime and allies in Europe, is relentlessly driving toward military action against Iran. The pretext is the Iranian nuclear program.

Such a war would mean unspeakable suffering for the Iranian population and the people of the region. It would have potentially calamitous global consequences as well, including for Israelis, Americans and Europeans.

With machinelike regularity, President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Leon Panetta make unsubstantiated claims about Iranian nuclear ambitions as though we had not experienced countless US government and mass media lies about Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” in the run-up to the invasion of March 2003.

Will the world repeat this horrific experience in Iran, on an even more devastating scale?

Americans are bombarded almost daily with reports of Iran’s evil-doing: its “threats” against the US and Israel, its support for terrorism, its aggressive geopolitical ambitions. The Iranian people themselves, except when it serves propaganda purposes, i.e., in relation to the upper-middle-class Green opposition movement, are presented as alien, hostile, virtually subhuman creatures, driven by religious fanaticism and irrational hatred of Americans.

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. The critic for the

New Republic was obliged to admit that American films on the same general subject matter “are airy, pretty and affluent” compared with Farhadi’s work.

The central problems in *A Separation* are deeply human, and thoroughly believable. A middle-class couple in Tehran is on the verge of breaking up. The wife, Simin, wants to leave Iran and take her daughter with her. Her husband, Nader, feels obliged to stay and continue caring for his Alzheimer’s-stricken father. When Simin tells Nader that his father doesn’t even know him any more, he replies, “But I know he is my father.”

When his wife leaves to stay with her mother, Nader hires a devoutly religious, working class woman, Razieh, to look after his father. Razieh is pregnant. Her hot-headed husband, Hodjat, is out of work and creditors are hounding him. Forced by her condition to leave Nader’s apartment during the course of the day and visit a doctor, she ties the demented elderly man to his bed. On coming home, Nader is enraged by his father’s condition. An altercation occurs when Razieh returns, and Nader throws her out of the house. The next thing we know, she is in the hospital, having miscarried. She and her husband accuse him of causing the death of the baby, by pushing her down a flight of stairs.

As the story unfolds, the almost unbearable pressures bearing down on every character, including the children, make themselves felt. Changing what must be changed, the drama could be set in countless other locations, including many US cities and towns.

A Separation is a realistic, hardly flattering portrait of Iran, a society beset by intense contradictions. The film is frank about all sections of the population. At the same time, each of the central figures is fairly and sympathetically treated, even the judge who has to rule on the conflicting claims. The individual degrees of guilt or innocence fade into the background, as the ultimate responsibility for the tragedy clearly lies with the

profound social and economic tensions. In the end, as elsewhere, the more affluent couple retain the upper hand.

The performances are superb in *A Separation*, a film virtually without a false note. Farhadi's film stands in the best, intensely humane tradition of Iranian cinema in recent decades, along with Abbas Kiarostami's *Where is the Friend's Home?*, *Close-Up* and *Through the Olive Trees*, and Jafar Panahi's *The White Ballon* and *The Mirror*, and numerous others.

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.

This is a country with a long, terrible history of foreign oppression. In 1953, the US and Britain organized a coup against a democratically elected government and installed the torture regime of the Shah, which brutalized the Iranian people and defended the interests of Western oil companies until its overthrow in 1979.

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*? Will the criminal cabal made up of Obama, Cameron, Sarkozy and Netanyahu have its way? It is almost impossible to conceive of. But it is the harsh reality. Even without a full-scale war, life in Iran is being strangled by economic sanctions and other measures, which no doubt help account for the pressures depicted in *A Separation*.

And why? So the US, and the jackals who follow in its wake, can have greater access to the energy supplies of the Middle East and shove out of their way a regime they consider an obstacle.

The American media is busy misrepresenting the situation and indoctrinating the population. On March 28, for example, the *New York Times*, whose editors already have the blood of innumerable Iraqis on their hands, ran another piece behind whose writing and publication one feels the thuggish presence of intelligence agencies. It is hard to tell in a given instance because the *Times* operates as a propaganda arm of the Pentagon and CIA more or less on "automatic pilot."

The March 28 article chronicles the close relationship between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak as they plot war against Iran. "For Mr. Netanyahu," we learn, "an Iranian nuclear weapon would be the 21st-century equivalent of the Nazi war machine and the Spanish Inquisition." Historical

ignorance and moral depravity here ally themselves with neo-colonial arrogance.

That Israel is the only power in the region already armed with nuclear weapons and has pursued aggressive and murderous policies against the Palestinians and other Arab peoples for decades are not facts troubling the *Times* reporter.

Will an attack on Iran produce a "catastrophe"? Through its presentation of the views of Netanyahu and Barak, the *Times* dismisses the notion. The warmongering Israeli leaders contend "that given a choice between an Iran with nuclear weapons ... and the consequences of an attack on Iran before it can go nuclear, the latter is far preferable. There will be a counterattack, they say; people will lose their lives and property will be destroyed. But they say it is the lesser of two evils." If Iran counterattacks, the US, of course, will invoke its obligation to come to the "defense" of Israel and launch its own military assault.

What cold-blooded criminals all these people are, in the Obama administration and Congress, the Israeli state and the US media!

A relatively small number of people in the US have seen *A Separation*, some hundreds of thousands. Another one million or so have seen the film in France, far fewer in the UK. The governments of these countries 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. Accepting the Academy Award, Farhadi offered the award to the Iranian people, a people, he said, who "respect all cultures and civilizations and despise hostility and resentment." 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.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact