The Myth of Bastoor and the Children of Iranian Independent Cinema

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The littlest hero of Ferdowsi’s epic poem Shahnameh (The Book of Kings, c.977-1010 CE) is Bastoor, the 7-year-old son of Zarir, the brother of King Goshtasb, who saves Iranian identity in a moment of crisis. The story starts when Iranians accept the Zoroastrian religion; they are threatened by the Huns, whose king is Arjasb. Goshtasb, in order to defend his people against the enemy, gathers his troops and calls on the great Pahlavan warrior Zarir.1 The Huns kill Zarir with the help of a sorcerer named Biderafsh.

The Iranian troops, losing their Pahlavan lose courage. Goshtasb calls for the bravest warriors of his army to avenge Zarir, but nobody except his son Bastoor asks to go to war. Goshtasb does not allow the child to go to the battlefield, because he is too young and he does not want to lose him as he did his father. Bastoor secretly enters the battlefield, approaches the lifeless
body of his father and takes leave of him, returning to the king. Bastoor is saved from the enemy. The king allows him this time to return to the battlefield. The Huns try to harm Bastoor through the magic of Biderafsh, who returns to the field riding Zarir’s horse in search of the child. The horse recognizes Bastoor and brings Biderafsh to him. The spirit of Zarir inspires the child to shoot an arrow with the bow. Bastoor kills the sorcerer. The Iranians, seeing the courage and intelligence of the child, return to war, this time to the aid of Esfandyar, the son of Goshtasb. The Iranians overcome the enemy and save their badge of identity.

Bastoor was neither the first nor the last wise child in Iranian literature. The history of a child possessing supernatural wisdom was introduced into Persian mythology perhaps by Zarathushtra himself, who laughed at birth in the presence of the seven evil witches. Zarathushtra’s laughter at birth is interpreted as proof of his awareness and knowledge of his own purity, which instills fear in the envoys of evil. Like Zarathushtra and Bastoor, many other wise children are found in Iranian literature, who after an initiation period, enter the adult world and save it from the irrational forces of evil, which may reign over a society where any manifestation of the symbiosis between reason and innocence is suffocated. Childhood, then, in an ideal sense, is endowed by a divine instinctive reason, which guides the individual to the path of good. This pure reason, differently from the logic of profit, is deeply damaging to the domain of evil. The Persian mythology in this sense does not differ from any other mythologies of the world: the main narrative consists of the confrontation between the knowledge of good (an intuitive reason, divine and constructive) and the science of evil (demonic science, self-centred and destructive). Good overcomes evil, and sometimes the conquering hero is a child (Bahrami 1998: 15). In this sense, the wisdom of Bastoor, a natural innocence gifted by non-beneficial logic, is very similar to the brightness of children of Iranian cinema who find a simple solution to exit the sophisticated labyrinth built by forces of nature and modernity. But some questions arise here: does the myth of Bastoor structure the wandering children of Iranian cinema? Is there any homology between the idea of the union of childhood innocence and supernatural wisdom, and the errant child of movies who has to face the chaotic adult world? Why did children appear in the centre of the diegesis of important Iranian films during the 1980s and 1990s? To whom were those films aimed: to children or to adults? And finally, do they contain any metaphor that comes from Iranian literature?

Looking for the first child-centred movies in Iranian cinema we have to come back to the last decade before the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 when there arises a number of films pointing to a social concern with childhood and education. In a clear antagonistic position against the main commercial cinema, those films put the presence of children at the centre of the argument. Such
examples are especially abundant in the filmography of young directors who started their careers collaborating with the Centre for Intellectual Development for Children and Young Adults (CIDCYA). Aiming to create pedagogical-educational productions for children and young adults, the non-profit CIDCYA at its starting point before the revolution ‘never seriously tried to screen its films to regular audiences, and was criticized for its elitist orientation and intellectualism’ (Sadr 2002: 230). Therefore, it turned into a perfect platform for carrying out the sort of independent movies directed by young film-makers like Abbas Kiarostami and Bahram Beyzaei. By the mid-1970s, the distinctive features of CIDCYA productions were created: ‘innocent and hard-working children to convey symbolically certain apparently abstract ideas in a realistic way’ (Sadr 2002: 231). The austere aesthetic of CIDCYA movies was created from an intellectual point of view which opposed the adult-centred popular cinema with its dominant scenes of singing, dancing and violence. A lonesome child frequented those films, one who had to resolve - through his own smartness- sophisticated problems, which were after all a result of sociocultural struggles. The spectators could ‘see the reactions of adult characters through a child’s eyes’ (Sadr 2002: 231); besides, they experienced children’s logic as opposed to adult thought patterns.

The children of Iranian cinema after the revolution were transported to international movie theatres thanks to the success of films they starred in at festivals. Gradually, in the late 1990s, they even turned into a remarkable ‘brand’ for Iranian cinema. The Kiarostami film-making school had high success at international festivals; the first Iranian film nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Film was Majid Majidi’s Children of Heaven (Bacheha-ye Aseman, 1997). At the same time, the children of Iranian cinema in the 1980s paved the way for avoiding a new censorship, which was created very soon after the establishment of the revolutionary government.

Moving from the 1970s to the late 1990s, I will analyse the image of childhood in Iranian cinema, looking at its social context and its cultural roots within Persian mythology and literature. In this context, the hypothesis is that the myth of the wise child, which appears in some ancient texts, structures the errant child’s presence in modern texts and particularly in the work of some Iranian film-makers. In this regard, the series of obstacles which the wise child of Persian literature had to overcome, in some way, are the same problems faced by the errant child of Iranian cinema. The movies and themes have been selected - both in literature and cinema - in accordance with the paradigm defined above, in order to find the structural relationship they establish, on the one hand to archetypical myth, and on the other hand, to the social context.

Wise child, the result of a crisis of identity
The wise Bastoor can help us interpret a possible infrastructure of the myth of the errant child in Iranian cinema through the structuralist methodology proposed by Claude Levi-Strauss (1978: 8–9). We can of course find some order in the apparent disorder of all stories of child-centred Iranian cinema. But the structuralist methodology establishes the horizons of a trans-historical space, creating a gap for sociopolitical context. To identify the cultural code of these images, there is no other remedy except to look at how the reconstructed modern myths communicate with their historical context. The myth of Bastoor exists behind many children of Iranian literature and movies, but it does not always structure the plots in the same way. Some authors work with the myth consciously in a logically controlled way while the myth appears in some other works by pure intuition. Bahram Beyzaei (Gukasian 1992: 29) declares that his job as a writer and film-maker is to fragment the myths and rebuild them again from the new perspective of his own generation. This is not the case of Abbas Kiarostami who conceives the plot without any direct influences. The wise-child myth appears in many different ways in Iranian cultural products, but in spite of all the disparities in form and structure, there is a common element which links all wise children: they appear in a moment of identity crisis. The wise child is a perfect antagonist of the logic of profit and the political ideologies of patriarchal powers. At the same time, in a clear opposition to the victim-child of the melodrama genre, the errant child somehow challenges the dominant social groups who control the economic-political system. In other words, the wise child has a symbiotic relationship to censorship and thought control. In this sense there are not many differences from Bastoor to Ahmad of Where Is My Friend’s House? (Khane-ye dust kojast, 1987), Bashu of Beyzaei’s Bashu the Little Stranger (Bashu gharibe-ye kuchak, 1986) or Mina of The White Balloon (Badkonake Sefid, 1995).

In search of this reconstructed iconography, we look for the image of the child that appears in Iranian culture at a time of sociopolitical crisis in the 1970s, when the modern treatment of the myth of the wise child offers a representation of social circumstances in a microcosmic space. The first image of childhood in Iranian cinema appears with the foundation of the film department of the CIDCYA in 1969, where some of the young directors of the movement later called ‘sinema-ye motefavet’ or ‘alternative cinema’ started their opera prima: Beyzaei’s The Moustachioed Uncle (Amu sibilu, 1970) and
Kiarostami’s *Bread and Alley (Nan va kucheh*, 1970) inaugurated this space that from the beginning had the objective to produce different films for children and adolescents. The children of *The Moustachioed Uncle* find a way to reach agreement with a portly, moustachioed man in order to continue playing football in the open field in front of his house. Whereas the short film by Beyzaei was a sign of its author’s concern about underlying cultural violence against children, *Bread and Alley* was a perfect topographical drawing of the myth of the wise child: the only way to answer the threat of the wild dog lurking in the way of the child protagonist, who returns home with bread in hand, is to use his intelligence.

**Call to rebellion**

The cinematography centre of CIDCYA had been created in order to fill the gap of movies for children in Iranian cinema in the late 1960s (Omid 1997: 1027). In that moment, the studio system of Iranian cinema did not allow the production of any films except the profitable genre of the ‘tough guy/dancer girl’ film (Naficy 2011: 310). The children of CIDCYA’s movies found a way to express themselves within an alternative independent cinema. The government’s economic support of CIDCYA allowed the creators to develop a type of cinema with a particular chance of conserving a kind of independence. The dominant aim of the directors who collaborated with CIDCYA, as well as other young directors of alternative cinema, was to create low-budget movies, following the Italian neo-realism formula. Hence, unprofessional actors, outdoor locations, small cooperative filming teams, and a documentary-fictional style picturing marginalized and excluded people and their personal-social struggles, shaped the spirit of filmmaking within the new alternative system. CIDCYA’s productions were never distributed before 1979’s revolution, as their dominant aim was to create educational films for internal projections exclusively for members. These factors allowed a freedom that was enjoyed by directors working for the centre, among whom Kiarostami was the most privileged as he was an employee and the person in charge of the filmmaking centre of CIDCYA.

No surprise that *The Traveler (Mosafer*, 1974), the first feature film of Abbas Kiarostami, was not similar to any commercial films of that time. It was an attempt to attend to the dark side of the educational system in which social segregation was being carried out. The hero of the film is Ghasem, a rebellious young man obsessed with football. Social pressure - from his mother and the school director and even his own classmates - results in an uncontrollable desire to break the law and travel to the capital to watch a football game advertised in a sports magazine. One of the few signs of modernity in the small town where he lives is photos of football players in the press kiosk, offering a powerful imagery of the city. The elders express their powerlessness to control the child.
The balance of the traditional system of the town has been upset by the arrival of the images of the capital’s players and, in the words of Alberto Elena (2002: 36), these have turned Ghasem into a ‘real rebel, someone who does not fit the stifling universe around him and does not accept defeat’. Ghasem projects the image of the father on the character of a footballer, whom he wishes to see in person at a game held in the capital. The child’s initiatory journey and lack of advice from any ‘masters’ – due to his absolute loneliness in the adult world – developed in parallel to all the author’s lucid plays with absurdity, to make an icon of Ghasem, representing the social order of his environment, which is riddled with the dominant ideology. Ghasem explores his small town, looking for money, but has to get it through theft, looting and cheating. He arrives in the capital, where the same laws of money, obedience and control are dominant.

His desire is not fulfilled. He falls asleep outside the stadium waiting for the start of the game and having a nightmare meanwhile, and wakes up moments after the end of the football match. What completes Ghasem’s shattered joy in the stadium is the nightmare of a harsh punishment awaiting him when he returns to the province. *The Traveler* is based on the antithesis of the mythical structure of the wise child, and therefore warns of a latent social crisis of identity in a moment of social contact with the icons of modernity. While the enforced modernization policies had alienated the capital from the province, the desire to reach the centre – which had a huge imaginary support – meant following a path which was marked by the absurd and chaotic system of social segregation. Behind the very structure of the welfare state which is capable of producing football as a perfect sign of modernity there exists a terrifying gap between the classes and especially between the province and the capital. Although Ghasem uses all his ingenuity to leave behind the real barriers that prevent him from fulfilling his desire, he faces the nightmare of a severe punishment instead of his pleasurable transgression of the law of the father. In other words, in an educational system which is obsessed more with control than with self-education, the child’s initial trip makes him part of the same system against which he has rebelled. Above all, this is a sign of chaos. If Bastoor converts chaos to cosmic order by transgressing the law of elders and at the same time by learning from his father’s spirit, Ghasem in his father’s absence, on the contrary, does not reach the false image of Father (football player); furthermore, he enters the prohibited zone and reveals the chaotic circumstances.
Kiarostami and Beyzaei were the first cinematographic architects of educational space as a microcosmic sign of the social institution where children’s contact with the system crystallizes the social effects of the ideological state apparatus. In this context, in these early works structured around the myth of the wise child, the space outside school is the scene of the errant child’s decision to test his own individuality after his brush with social rules. In another work of Bahram Beyzaei, *The Travel (Safar, 1972)*, two boys cross a city in search of one of their parents. The city turns into a terrifying labyrinth. The rules of play outside school are in absolute opposition to the moralizing messages inside. This contrast, on a symbolic level, is indicative of a chaotic social infrastructure, which the official version tries to cover with a veneer of modernizing ideology. The initiatory journey of children crossing the city in search of a real identity ends in another failure. Beyzaei (Gukasian 1992: 73) indicates that the children of *The Travel* are heirs of an historic terror and are primarily victims of their environment. Their only achievement is the transgression of the law like the myth of Bastoor, but they do not become victorious like him. Throughout history, the Iranian people have produced myths and rituals ‘to free themselves from their fears’ (Beyzaei, in Amiri 2009: 39), but in *The Travel* the mythical treatment is different: the author fragments the myth to confront spectators with their own terrors.

Within CIDCYAS’s productions of the 1970s, we find Amir Naderi’s *Harmonica (Saz dahani, 1974)* a brilliant piece based metaphorically on the following circumstances: a children’s playground on the coast of the Persian Gulf is thrown out of balance with the arrival of a harmonica which becomes an
instrument of segregation and control by the child who owns it. The desire of all the children to play the harmonica gives an uncontrollable power to Abdolu, who asks for money in exchange for a few seconds of play on the instrument. This spreads the seeds of crime among children, and especially Amiru, the protagonist whose family’s extreme poverty does not allow him to enjoy the new toy. The end of the film is another cinematic vision of the social context of the 1970s in Iran: Amiru steals the harmonica and throws it into the sea so that it does not belong to anyone and rids himself of the temptation of having it. A few years later, the Iranian revolution did the same with the signs of shahian modernization, taking the opposite approach to the troubled historical context and restoring religion as the new ideological state apparatus.

**Enthusiasm of victory**

After the 1979 revolution child figures proliferated in Iranian movies. The golden age of tough guy/dancer girl films was over when a new control code was established in the film industry. Apart from the ideological issues, the main problem of the new censors was the sexual tension in the scenes performed by adult characters, especially young women. In other words, the best trick for box office success in the film industry in Pahlavi II’s era was banned. In the days immediately following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, women’s image was completely blurred on the screens of Iranian cinema, and middle-aged actors or children and adolescents replaced the centre stage (Naficy 2000). The revolution had changed the system of social values, and especially as an objective, it had the ideal of rebuilding the strength of the Islamic traditions which had long been marginalized by Pahlavi’s modernizing policy. Thus, in a country whose social field was marked by cultural differences from the time of the entrance of modernity, women returned to the centre of social conflicts (Dabashi 1998). In this sense, children found a perfect chance to occupy the diegetic centre of postrevolution movies. An asexual, ideology-free figure like a little boy who wishes to simply search for his friend’s house for example, would be the adequate way at that period to save the movie system from a total collapse. There was not apparently any jeopardy in showing the epic of the little boy on the screen. They had something in common with revolutionaries: after all, they had been oppressed also by the system during the shah’s era.

In this context of change and metamorphosis of social values, children appeared in the first films produced by CIDCYA in the beginning fervour of the revolution of 1979. Regarding this, we must point to Dariush Mehrjui’s work *The School that We Went To* (*Madreseh-i ke miraftim*, 1980) as the starting-point for the presence of children in post-revolutionary cinema. The film was a perfect mirror of the social circumstances of revolutionary Iran: in a boys’ school, the tyranny and injustice of the headmaster leads the students to rebel. The trigger for the revolt is criticism by children in the school newspaper and the banning
of the same by the headmaster, who adopts violence as the only means of control in the school. The article criticized the discriminatory treatment that students suffer in two different areas of the school: ‘In the front yard apparently all is peace and kindness, while in the backyard the deal turns to violence and abuse.’ At the end of the film, after the revolution by the children, the headmaster and his followers have to leave. As noted by the critic Jabbar Azin (1990: 36), despite the apparent changes, ‘the college continued to have two patios and the director was still invisible to public view’.

*The Chorus (Hamsarayan, 1982)* was the first reaction of Kiarostami to the revolutionary period and was based on his obsession with the fate of children outside the circle of protection (state college, family home), where they have to decide for themselves to resolve the problems that reflect the structures of a society in crisis. While men are working on the street, the grandfather turns off his hearing aid to take refuge in silence from the sound of tapping. Once they get home after school, the granddaughters face a closed door and the grandfather living in his silent world does not hear the sound of the ringing bell. The film depicts in the most beautiful way possible the generational conflict and the enthusiasm of victory: gradually, all the schoolgirls form a chorus that cries ‘Open the door, grandfather!’

This same enthusiasm for the victory of minors in the hostile environment outside home and school is repeated in the first collaboration of Amir Naderi with CIDCYA after the revolution. *The Runner (Davandeh, 1985)* tells the story of the orphan child Amiru who lives on the streets and can win a race with
unfair rules, thanks to his perseverance and self-determination. Amiru wanders among empty spaces, demolished buildings, abandoned ships in the middle of a dry desert and an industrial grey harbour with its maltreated faces of transient workers to find a way to escape from his destiny. ‘His dream seems more existential than foolish or tragic’ (Nichols 1994: 23). He soon discovers that his only refuge may be the school, where he starts to learn the alphabet. When he wins the absurd race to achieve a piece of ice as a prize which is put in front of fire, he enthusiastically recites the alphabet he has just learned, from the first letter to the last, in one breath. The perseverance of a homeless boy, who overcomes the obstacles with his own natural and innocent wisdom, is a perfect allegory of Iranian people during the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran, who had to ‘fight both their fate and their oppressors’ (Naficy 1995: 558). The same lonely child appears in the film of Bahram Beyzaei, Bashu the Little Stranger, who lost his entire family in the war and has to leave his homeland and seek refuge in the fields of the north, with the family of Nayi Jan, a peasant woman who has to look after the house and her two children alone in the absence of her husband, who is at the war front. The only direct means of communication between Bashu and the village children, who reject him, is a Persian book which says: ‘We are all in the same land, we are all children of Iran.’ Bashu finds a maternal refuge in the peaceful green northern lands, hundreds of kilometres away from his homeland tortured by war. His surviving strategies clarify the absurdity of adults’ logic of war and intolerance.

Moments of reflection

Despite the prolific presence of the child in relation to educational space in Iranian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s, we should recognize that the turning point was Abbas Kiarostami’s film of 1987, which better confirms the structure of an errant child based on the myth of the wise child: Where Is My Friend’s House? The journey of Ahmad, the little boy who left home in search of his friend Mohammadreza in the neighbouring village in order to return his homework notebook to prevent his unjust punishment of being expelled, becomes a heroic odyssey in that we witness the anguish of children in the suffocating scene of homework review in class, as they are confronted with the violent discipline of the teacher.
In Ahmad’s house, the father’s absence suggests that we are facing another Kiarostamian reading of the myth of Bastoor. All paths of communication between the elders of the house (the mother and grandmother) will soon be closing, as they consider it absurd that he return the notebook to a friend, instead of doing his homework or buying bread. Ahmad unlike Ghasem in The Traveler is a diligent student, but his expressing his wish in front of the elders has the same result. Ahmad, like the archetypal Bastoor, does not have permission to leave the circle of protection marked by paternal laws. There is no way to transmit to Ahmad’s family the seriousness of the situation of his friend Mohammadreza, if tomorrow he returns to the class without having done the homework in his own notebook. The laws of the house, like the school rules, require the child to be absolutely obedient. Ahmad acts on his own initiative and rebels, leaving his home to go to his friend’s house, which he only knows is in the neighbouring village of Poshteh. The road taken by Ahmad to the house of his friend is a poetic universe constructed by the Iranian cultural archetypes that Kiarostami deconstructs in his own way. Ahmad’s epic journey is not his outdoor exploits, facing enemies of the country like Bastoor looking for a trace of his father, but his willingness to seek an unknown road, in the absolute absence of his father, and despite various obstacles which are prepared by the elders, among whom is his own grandfather. The end of the epic is marked by the failure of Ahmad to find his friend’s home and Kiarostami’s obsession with transgression of the paternal law: Ahmad does his friend’s homework, and so avoids his being punished by the schoolteacher. The only character on the road who very kindly tries to help Ahmad, showing him the way, is an old carpenter, in whom some critics have seen the image of the Sufi master Pir (Ishaghpour 2000: 71). Apart from the mystical interpretations of the old carpenter, there is something clear and it is that he is the only person who finally knows where Mohammadreza’s house is; but in a mysterious way, he does not pass the knowledge immediately to Ahmad, who looks at him impatiently, listening to the long speech of his nostalgic memories of his lost art. The advice of the old carpenter is not as certainly functional as is the spirit of Father for Bastoor. Ahmad does not understand what he means by not giving him the address. After all, as Alberto Elena (2002: 105) pointed out, the carpenter’s help really does not work as it has darkened and it is too late for a little boy like Ahmad to look for his friend’s house. He has to find another solution on his own.

The carpenter is the last link with the conservatives of an artistic tradition of building wooden windows, which are built with great difficulty, only to be sold later to a corpulent intermediary at an unfair price. The film ends with the image of a flower pressed between the pages of Ahmad’s book, the gift of the master carpenter, which for Talebinejad (1995: 74) expresses a deep nostalgia for a happy and prosperous past, marked in the present by a crisis of identity and contempt for a cultural heritage of which the carpenter represents the last guardian. But there could be another concept behind this; the frustrated
relation between Ahmad and the old carpenter is a reflection of the historical moment in which the nationalistic points of view cannot really help a new generation to find the correct way. The impasse of adult ideology has aroused a Bastoorian wisdom, which transgresses the paternal law in order to find the path in a new and different way.

The transgressing of paternal rules is clearer in Kiarostami’s next feature film *Homework* (*Mashgh-e shab*, 1989), an eyewitness to the unconscious behaviour of children in a primary school. The theme of the film is the temptation of an author who contemplates the mechanism of children’s unyielding desire to break the law. As spectators, during the interviews carried out by Kiarostami himself in a school, we are confronted with the lies and contradictions that even the youngest use to muddle through and which serves as a self-defence mechanism (Elena 2002: 86). The terror that the students show comes from an intransigent education system that, as in the previous period, gives more importance to propagating its own ideology than education per se. For instance, we witness Kiarostami’s effective filming style, his deleting of the voice of the film, as a religious celebration is being simultaneously held in the school yard. Meanwhile, as the powerful speakers intone a sad religious prayer, the children are playing silently in queues, cleverly disobeying the demanding rules of the school authorities.

Although after *Homework* Kiarostami leaves the educational space, the image of the child out of school and home, the stark contrast to their family and environment, never completely disappears in his films. Yet the effect of the image of an errant child lasted throughout the 1990s, after the international recognition of Kiarostami in international festivals, and became an unmistakable signal of the originality of Iranian cinema to filmgoers worldwide. The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of films built around the structure of what we call the myth of the wise child. The different stories were adapted to the structure of myth and gradually left an exclusive role for little boys. Jafar Panahi’s debut *The White Balloon* and his second film *The Mirror* (*Ayeneh*, 1997) comprise the stories of two girls. The two works contribute to the maturity of the iconic examples of the children of Iranian cinema of the 1990s. *The Mirror* was a reflection on the self-mechanisms of the recording of films, through narrative fragmentation into two different levels. In a postmodern game, the author uses the image of the errant child as an intertextual reference to present spectators with a moral challenge: as we follow the child protagonist of the film, with her wandering in the chaotic city in search of her home, the film tells us that everything has been a scene from a film that was being filmed by a team. The story does not end here, as the young actor rebelled against team orders, transgressing the rules of the creators of her character, and kept wandering in protest. The film is a film within a film and the camera accompanies the girl on the chaotic streets of the city.
By the late 1990s, the formula seemed to have been exhausted, and gradually the child icon was transformed into adolescents and young people, especially women with an urban background, although children do not disappear entirely and sometimes act as a reference for the iconography constructed above. It is worth mentioning the work of another Iranian director concerning the structure of myth who has had great success on the international scene: Majid Majidi. His film *Baran* (2001) features the wise child as an Afghan teenage girl who finds a way out of family poverty by dressing as a boy and working as a construction labourer.

**Conclusion**

In a clear antagonism with the victim-child of melodrama, the wise child of Iranian cinema is a result of reactions against the adult characters of the dominant movie genres as well as to the censorship and production control system. We have observed the evolution of this icon in Iranian cinema over twenty years, during which we can detect three phases: rebellion, enthusiasm and reflection. The wise-child myth somehow exists in the background of all the examples in this article which is somehow a representation of an unconscious reaction of Iranian culture to the identity crisis caused by the social contact with modernity. The school offered a perfect microcosmic space to the directors to highlight social problems. In this regard, the wise child becomes an errant girl or boy in search of their own identity beyond the circle of family protection and the protection of the state. The child is the only figure that can overcome the ideological state apparatus, and its particular logic becomes representative of the ontological status of the people. In these examples, each director has his own particular reading of the myth. Whereas Beyzaei fragments the myth to rebuild it later, Abbas Kiarostami sometimes deconstructs the myth structure in a postmodern framework. In this sense and in comparison with the myth of Bastoor it should be noted that in *The Traveler* as in *Where Is My Friend's House?*, child protagonists like Bastoor transgress the paternalistic state law, but do not reach their goal. The modern myth of the wise child is the same as the old myth who breaks the law, reaching the inaccessible-to-eiders target with no help from the family or any other protective circle but with the help of their own smartness. The first signs of crisis, which modern myth should confront, is that there are no more teachings of the wise master. The old mythological wise child, after saving the people’s identity, of which his father was the guardian, finally returns to the family circle and receives protection as the prize. Conversely, there is no return to the circle for the errant children of Kiarostami, Beyzaei, Naderi, Panahi and others, given that the circle is in a deep identity crisis and cannot deliver the promised protection.
Contributor’s details


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**Endnote**

1. In Persian culture, Pahlavan is a merciful hero, who has passed the initiation process, and become most powerful in terms of ethical beliefs and athletic techniques.


3. Rethinking Iranian cinema, Hamid Naficy observes ‘tough guy’ films as one of the domineering film genres of Iranian commercial cinema before the revolution. The genre, nevertheless, had a powerful feminine component as well: the dancer girl, who in a voyeuristic gaze-play, interacted with the tough guy.