Cinema addressing of Machiavellian theory between creativity and threatening social values

-A case study of the movie "The Dark Knight"

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Abstract

This research paper revolves around studying the mechanism of cinematic language dealing with Machiavellian thinking and the way in which the ideas of this theory are conveyed to the viewing audience, and then look at how the recipients deal with it to study the repercussions on societal values as well as societal security. For this purpose, The Dark Knight movie was chosen as an intentional sample, the case study as a method and the analytical observation as a research tool. Where the focus will be on the cinematic discourse of the film from a technical point of view as well as the manifestations that would establish ideas and behaviours that are hostile to values and moral standards, which may threaten mass culture and stability at the individual and collective levels.

Keywords: Cinema; Machiavellian theory; Creativity; Social values.

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1- Introduction

Cinema as a cognitive medium is concerned with discussing topics of various intellectual dimensions; the issues addressed range from easy to difficult, and may sometimes reach high degrees of complexity, as can be inferred through the embodiment of the cinema lens of philosophical issues as well as trying to bring them closer to the minds of viewers instead of just theoretical explanation, and here specifically the cognitive value in this sense, we find that cinematic works are one of the elements influencing the visions and perceptions of society members of reality What they live in, by mimicking what they receive from the screen, which emphasizes the attractive artistic character that is unique to cinema, but at the same time poses ethical dilemmas in which this cultural industry may fall, especially when it touches on what is contrary to societal norms.

Among the films that have become iconic in embodying the contradictory values within a single society, we find the dark Knight through the character of the Joker; the latter has become the subject of widespread controversy by the masses.

Also, the follower of the script and events of the film concludes that he has quoted most of his ideas and dramatic philosophy from Machiavellian principles.

On this basis, the main question of the research topic is as follows:

How did Machiavelli's thinking manifest itself artistically and socially through The Dark Knight movie?

On this main question, the following sub-questions arise:

- What are the manifestations of creativity in The Dark Knight movie?
- What are the manifestations of the emergence of the ideas that underpin Machiavelli in The Dark Knight movie?
- What kind of values does The Dark Knight movie promote?
- How does The Dark Knight movie view society?
- What were the contexts and events following the screening of The Dark Knight movie?
-To what extent has The Dark Knight movie been able to change the perception of reality for audiences?

2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to achieve a number of objectives, the most important of which are:

- Understand the mechanism by which cinema presents the concept of values and its relationship to societal security.
- Showing the extent of the impact of cinema on the perception of reality and the viewers' view of community construction.

- Comparison between the cinema's presentation of Machiavellian philosophy and the degree of its assimilation by the recipients.

3. Importance of the study

The importance of this study is that it presents research variables that fall within different scientific disciplines, which are reflected in the cinematic embodiment of Machiavellian philosophical ideas and view of society from an artistic point of view, and linking it to the method of public reception of it, and then identifying the effects of reality, especially the issue of societal security, which makes the study provide an addition due to the lack of this type of scientific research that is built in the same thematic context.

4. Concepts of the study

Defining terms and concepts is one of the basic and important elements in any scientific study, as it gives the research a systematic dimension, and this step removes a lot of confusion and ambiguity that may surround the study, due to the possibility of multiple meanings of the same term.

4.1- Cinema: Cinema is defined as an art that removes barriers and boundaries between the art of speech and plastic art, that is, the film controls both form and time at the same time, as the Spanish art historian "Lopez" defined cinematic art as the film is the art of time that is within the framework of form.[1]

4.2- Philosophy: It is a word derived in its origin from the Greek and means the love of wisdom, as it is called the knowledge of the facts of things to choose what is the most suitable, philosophy is characterized by qualities of unity, comprehensiveness, depth in interpretation and reasoning, to reach the extreme causes and first principles.[2]

4.3- Values: They are the ideals, customs as well as patterns of social behavior of a particular society, that is, they have an influential consideration in the society in which they are located.[3]

4.4- Society: According to Lalande's Philosophical Encyclopedia, it means a human group represented in the family, tribe, present, nation...) As a distinct reality, the idea of society remains abstract, and the broader meaning of society is a group of individuals with organized relationships and mutual interests or services.[4]

5. Study Methodology
5.1- Method

The choice of the method is tantamount to determining the right path that the scientific study will pursue, starting from determining the title to the results, as the curricula are numerous and their tools vary, so it is necessary for the

scientific researcher to comply with the steps and rules of the method that he will choose to study, so as not to fall into errors that disturb the results reached. On this basis, we relied in this study on one of the appropriate approaches to the subject and the problem studied, which is the case study method.

The case study method that is defined as often the case study is the design of a qualitative study, which is also prevalent in quantitative research, the situation may be an individual, group, community, country, circle, event, subset of population, state or city, when designing a case study, the case we choose becomes the basis for exploring the aspect(s) that we want to know more about comprehensively and in depth, where a specific case or cases are studied Carefully defined.[5]

5.2- Tool

In general, the main role of the tool in science is to allow researchers to verify or follow up on findings based on uniform metrics.

On this basis, the researcher relied on analytical observation as a tool for study, since it corresponds to the nature of qualitative research.

Observation is a means of data collection; it attempts to examine cases to determine the standard, that is, what can be predicted again under the same conditions, "observation" can take many forms, and depending on the type of information requested, people can be interviewed, questionnaires distributed, visual records issued, and sounds recorded.[6]

6. The relationship between cinema and societal values
6.1- The camera as a mean of communication

Films represent a common reference center, as they analyze values, ethical issues, general and philosophical questions, in a distinctive way, which often have aesthetic appeal, in addition to being entertaining in many ways, which makes them emotionally, intellectually, and mentally influential.[7]

The camera resembles the human eye, it distances us from tangible objects and then makes us realize them, and this is in the form of images and projections that differ from each other, and can be reproduced several times. Thus the abstraction imposes itself, as there is the abstraction of the philosopher who moves away from the world until he settles on a philosophical point of view, and there is also the abstraction of the painter of the subject of his drawing, and the reader's abstraction of the book, which is the same thing that we find in cinema.[8] Even the cinematic viewer firmly believes that he is free but in fact he is not free, because he subconsciously submits to the ideas put forward in the film, and

is persuaded by the intentional and systematic use of the movements and angles of the camera.

Each film has its own philosophy, through which the film's itinerary and vision of existence and things are clear, the character's feeling of fragmentation of time, defeat, monologues, dismantling language, transcending place, and issues, such as salvation, desire, fear of the future, and death, are life vocabulary for philosophical issues in which thinking starts from meditation and madness to expressions of the sacred and identification with the other, and the philosophy of narration is similar to any other philosophy, for this we see that some movies and novels are various sciences in which the philosophical is sometimes manifested Being historical or in terms of being a civilization, or a myth, philosopher critics have made the narrative corpus a repository for asking questions, their theories and ideas about the ego, identity and time.[9]

On this basis, cinema appears as a tool for presenting, discussing and explaining philosophical ideas to the audience, through the filmed scenes and the speeches that make up the film. Thus philosophical theses and theories are received through the screen.

6.2- Film and Society

To understand how films relate to society, it is necessary to consider the dominant public opinion; narrative films that were popular in Hollywood supported social oppression, and sometimes denied its existence, but in contrast, film philosophers focused on providing detailed interpretations of films and showing that they criticize many social practices and institutions, for example, dealing with class and race are among the social arenas in which films create societal consciousness and make decisive interventions.[10]

The relationship between arts and values is evident in the fact that freedom is what represents the basic value of any work of art, as "Etienne Soriot" asserts that there is no need to free art from moral commandments, this is because the moral convictions of the artist will not be lost during his relationship with art.

It is undeniable that film production is affected by the surrounding societal environment, as society is an essential and effective element that often shows the imprint it leaves on the narrative of cinematic films, and this is manifested through values that reflect the prevailing culture in a society.

 But on the other hand, cinema can be a tool of resistance, challenge and correction of the wrong values that prevail in societies, here cinema can be considered a means of criticism.

7. Machiavelli's theory

7.1- The concept of Machiavellianism

The term is attributed to the Italian philosopher and thinker Nicholas Machiavelli, who worked in setting the principles of political science. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Machiavelli is an adjective that means: "Using intelligence, but often dishonest ways, by deceiving people and thus gaining power or control."[11]

The Oxford Dictionary defines Machiavellian as "using smart plans to achieve what you want, without people realizing what you're doing."[12]

7.2- The most important principles and ideas of Machiavellian theory

Machiavelli asserts that the ruler must act as necessary and only if he wishes to maintain power and influence, on this basis he should always be prepared to act immorally, and should exclude compassion and humanity because they may turn against him later, which is the essence of having the reins of power and controlling others, because reality includes many immoral people.[13]

It is understood from this that Machiavelli's philosophy rejects all moral principles and values if they conflict with personal benefit, thus can be considered an intellectual starting point for pragmatism, which is based on utility only, and in the same context, Machiavelli's philosophy appears as a basic reference for authoritarian and dictatorial rule, which allows the use of all legitimate and illegitimate ways to stay in power, whether in previous periods of time or in the present time.

7.3- Machiavelli's view of the values of society

Machiavelli ignores moral considerations and considers force to be an end in itself, Machiavelli advocates the principle that the end justifies the means, things such as humanity or brutality, justice or its denial, shame or honor should not be considered, and encourages the practice of lying, deception, hypocrisy and cunning, in addition to de-emotionalization, and in this sense the ruler is feared by the members of his society.[14]

Machiavelli believes that staying in office depends more on the ability to display cruelty in an appropriate way, because it is the good commission of cruelty that enables the desired results to be obtained later, while wrongdoing atrocities increases the number of enemies without the possibility of eliminating them.[15]

Accordingly, it can be said that Machiavellian philosophy encourages the transgression of the authority of law and morality in order to achieve personal interests, but does not put any considerations for moral principles or values because it sees them as an obstacle to reaching goals, and emphasizes the need to exercise power and influence in the harshest ways, so that there is no possibility of failure or loss.

8. Practical study
8.1. The Dark Knight (2008)
The film, directed by Christopher Nolan, deals with the story of the superhero Batman, who symbolizes goodness and the defense of principles, as he stands in the face of the forms of crime and corruption that prevail in Gotham City, and here a conflict occurs with his traditional enemy "The Joker", played by actor "Laith Heidegger", as the latter appears as a troubled, indifferent character, who does not recognize the rule of law or morality at all.

Centred around robbery, murder and kidnapping, the film highlights the contradictory relationships and different visions of the concept of values within a single society.

Figure 1. The dark knight movie poster

8.2- The film's view of community building

It is clear through the script and events of the film that it is based on the principle of value conflict within contemporary society, specifically between the forces of good and evil, and then declares that victory is in favor of bad people, as the observation of the cinematic discourse confirmed by the character of the Joker is reflected in proving that humans are innately bad, and that no matter how they claim virtue, at the first test their masks will fall and return to their nature based on hypocrisy, betrayal, treachery, lying, which is exactly what corresponds to the Machiavellian philosophical proposition about humans, which can Projecting it on the social experiment carried out by the Joker when he divided the hostages into two groups; any group of them can protect themselves by blowing up the ship in which the other group is located, as at first everyone pretended not to want to pollute his hands, but soon some of them showed determination to kill others in order to save themselves, but in the end everyone is saved.

8.3- The value dimension of the film language

The value concept of the film is derived through its dramatic plot, which is based on the fact that cunning plans and abuse of influence, as well as the adoption of the initiative to abuse as a defensive mechanism, is the most effective way to survive in a society that is characterized by a brutal and ruthless character, which the Joker confirmed by achieving everything he desires from plunging the city into corruption and crimes, and then running out of any punishment, in addition to showing people with higher values as weak people, most of whom have lost the principles that were desperate to defend For example, the plaintiff "Dent", who was fighting the crime in the end, lost his fiancée Rachel and his face was disfigured during one of the confrontations. At the end the Joker convinced him to avenge those who harmed him, and that his defense of security and peace had been in vain, then "Dent" turned into a murderer, and he was doomed to death.

Batman, on the other hand, was content to lose his reputation in order to exonerate his colleague "Dent", representing the ideal and incorruptible morals, as he attached all the charges to himself so that the inhabitants of the city would not lose their faith in goodness and virtue, and their positive and optimistic outlook towards "Dent", whom they respected and appreciated.

In many of its scenes, the Machiavellian principle of "the end justifies the means" was achieved by the Machiavellian principle of cold-blooded revenge, but the mass murder of innocents for no reason. The Joker, with the aim of achieving his goal of revealing the identity of Batman, kills a person every day until Batman acquiesces to him, and on one occasion the Joker burned a pile of money in order to prove that money is not the end but just a means to achieve more deadly ends, the film he relied on linguistic quotation to affirm pragmatic principles based on utility without regard to the aspect of virtues, through the phrase "if you are good at doing something, do not offer it for free", which is consistent with Machiavelli's thesis that the individual interest is put before the public interest.

One of the most important sayings that are mentioned in the scenes of the film is the saying repeated by the Joker: "The only rational way to live is not to abide by the rules" and thus we find that the narrative discourse of the film is based on the denial of the existence of values in the first place, and the constant questioning of moral standards and ideals, which is embodied in the saying "their morals are just a bad joke that they will drop at the first problem."

Hence the complete exclusion of humanity or compassion for others for the Joker, which Machiavelli advocates in order to achieve influence and complete control over government and the extension of influence, which we often find in

the Joker's constant obsession with controlling Gotham City and bringing it under his grip.

8.4- The iconography of the Joker character

Despite the negative meaning symbolized by the Joker, so that it can be logically inferred through the heinous behaviours he performs in this role, at the same time his performance and embodiment of this character is unique and distinct in terms of artistic cinema, and here the aesthetic characteristic is associated with cinema whenever it is close to embodying reality and touching its merits, no matter how harsh and ugly, which is exactly what the Joker expressed, who appears to the receiving audiences as a distinctive character, who has high self-confidence, and on whom His actions that tend to everything that is outcast, but he only pronounces judgment that corresponds to life experiences, this matter has been addressed cinematically through the strange colours that the Joker puts on his face, in order to make him terrifying at the same time mysterious and difficult to detect his intentions, the ideas put forward by the Joker in part are close to the right, such as acknowledging the fact that there is evil in this world, and the claim of some people virtue in order to beautify their image and fake appearance in front of others, as well as that Circumstances contribute significantly to shaping the individual's personality and determining what it is, as well as its relationship with society and the mechanism it looks like.

8.5- Crimes inspired by The Dark Knight movie

After the screening of the film "The Dark Knight", many were inspired by his ideas, and even applied the same approach he adopts, based on the melancholic view of others and the need to get rid of them, according to newspapers and websites.

According to one of the British sites, a fourteen-year-old girl has cut her friend's lips on the sides with a knife and stated that the character of the Joker is what motivated her to do so as a simulation of the film, in the same year a Belgian man dressed as the Joker killed two infants in the nursery and a woman taking care of them, as well as stabbing twelve other people.[16]

In 2009, a student in Ireland burned his school wearing a Joker uniform and stated in the investigation that the reason for burning the school was that it was run by hypocrites and he did not like the way they dealt with his friends, in addition to many crimes that were directly related to the character of the Joker.[17]

8.6- Public interaction with the film through social media discourse

Through the analysis of many popular posts on social networking sites, the concept of empathy emerges among some users about the Joker personality,

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which often seems to be admired, and this is represented in pages on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest ... And others, bearing the name of the Joker, the sayings and wisdom of the Joker, the sad Joker... Etc. This can be explained by the public fascination with the cinematic formation of this character and the mechanism of directing it in an exciting form, so that it was closer to the tragedy of reality rather than cinematic fantasy, and from this point of view, we find the receiving audiences looking at the Joker as a symbol and voice expressing pain and harsh human experiences, which raises many questions about what existence is.

The inference of this is the spread of quotes from the film accompanied by music that varies according to the context of the meaning, sometimes the Joker is presented as a character who is proud of the evil impulses within him and provides explanations about the reasons behind it. Often the Joker is portrayed as a victim of excess kindness and forgiveness... And other creations of users, who sometimes alter the script of the film in order to glorify their film character, which they consider a source of inspiration, and an incentive for self-realization to re-rise after the collapse and face all forms of oppression, whether social, political or even psychological.

What is noticeable on this type of publications is the tyranny of the melancholic vision towards the ego and the other, most of which encourage revenge, violence, isolationism, hatred of society, rejection of tolerance, and an excessive sense of self-inflation that may reach the point of narcissism or obsession.

9. Conclusions

From what has already been discussed in the study, it is clear that the emergence of Machiavellian philosophy in the plot of The Dark Knight expressed the ability of cinema to transform philosophical theories into an embodied work of art by expressing the evil impulses in the human self, and even more, as the film in turn discussed the conflict and contradiction between different ideologies by proposing the moral ideal accompanying the nihilism of Machiavellian philosophy, as the latter was embodied in the character of the Joker, who was chosen by the audience as an inspiring and expressive character. About its reality more, without paying attention to the ideal part that the film's narrative tried to convey in parallel, which was reflected in reality, whether through the actual adoption of beliefs and behaviours within the societal system, which may fall into the circle of immorality due to identification with what cinema broadcasts in the long term, which poses pivotal problems related to societal security and threatening its controls and foundations due to simulation and imitation resulting from the lack of clarity of the bound between reality and fiction.

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Footnotes

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