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Mediatization of Ta'zīyeh or Passion Play in Local and Global Context

In this paper I juxtapose two productions: First, *shabe dahom* (the tenth day – a reference to ten day of mourning in Muharram), which is a melodramatic TV production of an Iranian story about the demise of a political era and its connection to *Ta'zīyeh*, passion play. Second, a *Ta'zīyeh* production, as a live performance at the Lincoln Center in New York City, performed by an Iranian traditional theatre troupe as part of a cross-cultural festival. Through the juxtaposition of these two productions, I will discuss the visual Islamic codes in both contexts. I will argue that there are different levels of mediatization of Islamic codes in different media (film and performance).

Ta'zīyeh is rooted in the story of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein, the third imam, revered by Shiites. It is the reenactment of the events of Imam Hossein's martyrdom, which took place in Karbala (within the current borders of Iraq). The Karbala Paradigm emerges as the meta-event that embodies Shia' senses of mourning, sacrifice, solidarity, and redemption. In post-revolutionary Iran, the role that *Ta'zīyeh* plays as a popular form of public ritual and theater performed regularly throughout the country during the traditional month of mourning, Muharram, has only increased.

One main characteristic of *Ta'zīyeh* is its *Trauerspielen* structure, in which, following Walter Benjamin's description of 17th century European theatre, audiences and performers are connected through interactive feedback of emotions and responses. *Ta'zīyeh* in this sense has always been very local, not only in that there have been great variations and insertions of local elements into the performances, but also in terms of the cast who mostly consist of locally rooted individuals whose roles are often handed down through the family.

Further, in Benjamin's analysis of the *Trauerspielen* theatre, the audience and context provide clues to a critical understanding of the plays. This theatre is to be understood in the public sphere as a form of public lamentation and memorabilia of grief. My question considers what happens when this becomes de-localized, performed as a spectacle for a totally different audience, and yet an audience bringing its own (potential) lamentation of a communal tragedy? In this context, how can we read the visual codes?

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| 2000-2002 | Post Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, <i>Harvard University</i> . |
| 1999 | Ph.D. Anthropology, <i>Rice University</i> . Dissertation title: <i>Technoscientific Identities: Muslims and the Culture of Curiosity</i> . |
| 1994-2000 | Visiting scholar, <i>Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)</i> . |
| 1988 | B.A. Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley. |