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## Original Research Article

# Mobile Ta'zīeh in the City Scene: Semiotic Study of Mobility in Ziaber Ta'zīeh

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** Mobile Ta'zīeh is regarded as one of the kinds of traditional Iranian theatre in which the scenes are performed not in a permanent place, but on a certain path. The present study aims to investigate how the discourse of Ta'zīeh is formed in connection with the displacement of spatial boundaries and how this displacement emerges as a process that turns Ta'zīeh into a performance with transformative function. In the current article, the interaction between the discourse of Ziaber Mobile Ta'zīeh (case study) and the discourse of the city is studied. Also, the effects of performing Ta'zīeh on the urban areas of Ziaber are investigated semiotically.

**Research objectives:** The main purpose of this article is to identify the semiotic aspects of mobility in the Ta'zīeh and its function in the transformation of urban places and spaces.

**Research method:** The present article has been conducted through a qualitative method based on the Paris school semiotics. The research approach is derived from post-Greimasian tradition and is the result of the transition from structuralist and classical semiotics to semiotics based on "body", "perception" and "presence" with a phenomenological background.

**Conclusion:** The course of Ta'zīeh Ziaber is formed by joining the three main locations of this city (cemetery, the main street, and house of Ayatollah Ziaberi). By examining the mobile nature of this Ta'zīeh, it becomes clear how the mentioned places became narrative and move away from their previous functions and roles so that this cause transforms of places, spaces and also the transcendence of the city during the performance of Ta'zīeh.

**Keywords:** *Mobile Ta'zīeh, Semiotics of Place and Space, City Discourse, Transcendence, Traditional Iranian Theatre.*

## Introduction and problem statement

In Eastern theatre, the discourse of place has always been debated, and Ta'zīeh, as a ritual-oriental theatre, can be looked upon from this viewpoint. The

word Ta'zīeh is defined as grieving, mourning, and commemorating the memory of the deceased loved ones; but in the terminology of performing arts, Ta'zīeh is a kind of traditional and religious play of Shiites and Iranians, which mostly illustrates the

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battle of Karbala, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (AS) and the sufferings that befell his family. Ta'ziyeh plays do not necessarily require a special stage or place to perform (Khaki, 2005, 167). During the years of transformation and evolution of Ta'ziyeh, this play has been performed in different places such as mosques, private houses, squares, bazaars, caravanserais, etc., and these places have been turned into places for performing Ta'ziyeh by using temporary arrangements. In addition to the above-mentioned places, which were generally temporary, fixed playhouses, or in other words, theaters that were specifically used to perform rituals and Ta'ziyeh were constructed in Iran in the first decade of the 19th century (Peterson, 1988, 109), among which "Tekyeh Dolat" gained an exceptional reputation. This playhouse was built by the order of Nasser al-Din Shah<sup>1</sup> which seated about twenty thousand people and hosted the largest and most glorious Ta'ziyehs of the era (Beyzai, 2012, 124). These places were generally reserved for fixed Ta'ziyeh, and there was another form of performance called "Mobile Ta'ziyeh", of which only a handful remained.

This style of performance is not limited to mobile Ta'ziyeh, and cities throughout the history of theatre have always provided ample venues for religious performances, and have even become a form of playhouse (Carlson, 1989, 17). Cities have also hosted events such as the Carnival, which were welcomed and participated by people (McCaw, 2015, 52). In such city-based ceremonies or performances, people play a significant role in shaping and setting up the performances in a way that basically the main square of the city is owned by all (Bakhtin, 2018, 270-271).

The present study aims at investigating how the discourse of Ta'ziyeh is formed in connection with the displacement of the spatial boundaries of the city and how this displacement emerges as a process that turns Ta'ziyeh into a performance with transformative function. This feature shifts the conditions for the formation of meaning from a fixed state to a fluid state, and by placing the audience within a continuous system, simultaneously brings the flow of production

and reception of "meaning" to the flow of "expectation of meaning". The main purpose of this article is to identify the semiotic aspects of mobility in Ta'ziyeh and its impact on the transformation of urban places and spaces. The authors seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) How do the Ta'ziyeh's mobility and its narrative function lead to the transformation of urban places and spaces?
- 2) What is the interaction between the discourse of Ta'ziyeh and the discourse of Ziaber city?
- 3) How can mobility in the Ta'ziyeh transcend the city?

### Research method

The present article has been conducted through a qualitative method based on the Paris school semiotics methodology. The research approach is derived from post-Greimasian tradition and the result of the transition from structuralist and classical semiotics to semiotics based on "body", "perception" and "presence" with a phenomenological background which transforms the expression of meaning in discourse into a living flow. Based on the commitment to the phenomenological presence of the sign, the sign can no longer be considered as something influenced by a mechanically constructive logical system; rather, signs and meaning are thought to be a fluid and dynamic process that even finds the opportunity for adopting new roles (Shairi & Vafaei, 2010, 5-6).

It should also be noted that the Ta'ziyeh discussed in this article was performed on 29 September 2018 (10 Muharram 1440 AH) in Ziaber city of Gilan province and researchers studied it through ethnography. The data collection tools of this research also included notetaking, using library resources and observation of Ta'ziyeh's performance.

### The study background

Given the fact that extensive studies have been conducted on Ta'ziyeh so far and on the other hand, applying semiotic models has been the basis for many types of research in the field of literature and art; in the literature review, only works that are directly related to

the subject of “the stage, place, and space in various forms Ta’ziyeh” are investigated.

Peter J. Chelkowski (1991) is one of the scholars who has played an important role in introducing Ta’ziyeh to the world. In the article “When neither time is time nor place is a place”, he discussed the places of Ta’ziyeh and the mechanism of performance. Chelkowski also explained the role of some of the spatial signs in Ta’ziyeh, such as stage decorations, objects in the place, and so on. According to him, the Ta’ziyeh ceremony is basically held in a timeless time and a nowhere location (Hossain, 1995, 116).

M.R Khaki (2005) is one of the researchers who has dealt with the subject of place in Ta’ziyeh. By reviewing the concepts of the stage in the Western theater model, he sought to answer the question of whether traditional Iranian plays require a special stage/place for performance. He argued that the place of performance in Ta’ziyeh, as it is proposed in the Western theater, does not have a specific framework, and each accessible area transforms into a stage for Ta’ziyeh.

In a part of the book called “Ta’ziyeh and Ashura Rituals” written by M. Mirshokraei (2009), studies have been done about performing Ta’ziyeh in Gilan province. Due to the lack of a specific place to perform Ta’ziyeh, Mirshokraei believed that performances in north of Iran (Gilan) are divided into several parts and each part of it is performed in one location called Tekyeh. For this reason, the spectators move with the performers to watch the rest of the Ta’ziyeh in the next place.

A book published by Brill Publications examines the function of the city and public spaces such as bazaars, coffee houses, and inns in the rituals of Muharram. Through looking at cultural studies in the Safavid era, this book looks at how the gap between the state and society opens the way for the formation of basic public spaces and theatrical atmosphere (Rahimi, 2012).

Space Semiotics of a Ta’ziyeh” is one of the articles in which researchers have studied the functions of spatial signs of Ta’ziyeh based on Pierce’s classification. This study tried to recognize and understand the meanings of the signs in the body of Ta’ziyeh and finally concluded that the signs in Ta’ziyeh, rather than being based on

interpretation, have a meta-semiotic aspect (Soheili & Mohajerpour, 2016).

In a related article, A.H Nedaei (2015) has looked at the concept of sacred time and place in various styles and arts inspired by the Ashura event, and the art of Ta’ziyeh is a major part of the analysis in the article. By presenting a mythical analysis and paying attention to the concepts of good and evil, he has pointed out the intermingling of time and place as an important feature of Ashura rituals and arts.

“An Investigation of the Mutual Structural and Formal Influences of the Body of Arak’s Roofed Bazaar on the Formation of Mobile Ta’zieh in Arak”, is the title of one of the articles on mobile Ta’ziyeh. This article deals with the formation of the mobile Ta’ziyeh in Arak as well as the relationship between the Bazaar (enclosed marketplace) and Ta’ziyeh. The researchers of this article concluded that mobile Ta’ziyeh creates changes in components such as screenplay, narration timing, and character placement in order so as to display Ta’ziyeh sequentially to the people present in the Bazaar (Samiei, Zeinedin & Aleyasin, 2017).

Although the article “Street theater and its relationship with urban Spaces” does not directly address the issue of place in the Ta’ziyeh, it has expressed some considerable points regarding the intersection of the city and drama theatre (Sarsangi, 2015). Also, the researcher of this article, in his book “Theatrical environment & actor-audience relationship in religious dramas” intends to study the effect of different physical environments on the drama and the relationship between the performer and the audience in Ta’ziyeh (Sarsangi, 2013).

In the end, it should be noted that the current research shows that no research has so far been carried out about the study of the semiotic mobility in mobile Ta’ziyeh and its relationship with the discourse of the city through the approach and questions raised here.

## Theoretical framework

In this section, the concept of “icon and hyper-icon” is reviewed from the perspective of Charles Sanders Pierce, and then the relationship between “narration

and the city” is explained. In the following, through a typological study of places (Based on the different semiotic-semantic systems they create), an attempt is made to examine the discourse functions of places and their impact on the process of meaning.

#### • **Icon and hyper-icon**

In conventional definitions, an icon is considered as a sign that resembles the item it is referring to. One of the neglected points about the concept of the icon is that the icon essentially has a process function and should not be limited to its resemblance to its reference. “The icon can have an existentialist presence and go through the path of development and transcendence” (Shairi, 2013, 198). In other words, the icon is not only in the service of the object as its indisputable reference and can go through icon development and move away from its original function according to the position and context of the discourse.

The importance of the icon is because of its own characteristics, and it does not just need the likeness of objects. “An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence” (Short, 2007, 215). Pierce, one of the founders of the concept of the icon, has previously pointed out that the existence of the icon does not depend on the existence of the object. In this regard, he mentions a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line (Pierce, 1931-1935, 531). Therefore, the icon can exist in the absence of an object and is even able to develop and evolve. In this situation, the icon becomes a “hyper-icon” and can appear beyond what is expected of it (Shairi, 2013, 200).

#### • **Narration and the city**

According to the semiotics viewpoint, the concept of “text” can be manifested in different forms, and considering the city as a text is one of its drawbacks. Roland Barthes is one of the semioticians who consider the city and the urban structure as a text; that gains meaning based on the relationships between its sign’s components (Barthes, 1997, 158-172). City elements are like meaningful and interpretable signs

that form more or less extensive semantic networks (Fakouhi, 2019, 33) and these networks generally can form city narratives.

Texts are mostly narratable, and the city as a text is no exception and can experience different narrative situations or reflect it directly and indirectly. Narration in the city structure and architecture is like a process to arrange and shape the space. “If events require space to take place and occupy space (and become space), the narration, in the simplest definition of which is the process of bringing different events together, is the process of organizing different spaces together” (Karimzadeh, Etesam, Foroutan & Dolati, 2018,100).

#### • **Typology of place**

##### - **Topic, Paratopic, Utopic place**

According to the classification and definition proposed by Algirdas Greimas and Joseph Courtés, the topic place is where the initial predicament for the narrative occurs (Hendrix, Slusser & Rabkin, 2011, 136). A Paratopic place is a place where the flow of narrative shifts and also, paratopic is that in which the preparatory or qualifying tests take place (Greimas & Courtés, 1982, 226). In Cinderella, the house where she acquires a new dress can be considered paratopic (Martin & Ringham, 2006, 141). The utopic place is also the place where the meaning and, in other words, the satisfaction of the narrator are expressed, I e., the place where the subject ultimately finds what he is looking for. In the Cinderella example, the quest to go to the ball, the ballroom constitutes a utopic place (ibid., 202).

##### - **Host / guest place**

The host place is defined as the physical permanent location of the city that has become a place of habit. This place is a place of everyday routine life where our daily actions take place. However, the guest place is not an everyday place rather, it comes to the host place at a special time and on a particular occasion. The guest place is fluid and carries the flow of meaning. In fact, when the guest place sits on the host place, it adds a layer to the host place, and in this way, spatial boundaries are shifted. This change adds a semantic extension to the everyday place. Also, the arrival of the guests changes the rhythm of the city. Accordingly, the rhythm of the

city, in addition to directing human activities, also affects the formation of urban environments (Rochow & Stahl, 2017, 126).

#### - Network place

In an article Eric Landowski (2010) examined network spaces/places. He argued that these places can also be called Manipulatoire. In the network places, subjects are closely related to each other while keeping their own distance. Relying on the concept of “no-break”, these places can persuade subjects and try to transfer values from one place to another (Babak Moein, 2019, 66). network places are separated from each other at regular intervals and occasionally they are changed into two opposing points in order to transfer something from one to another.

#### - Narrative place

The narrative place was once a place and had a reference point. But now it is a place where the principle of semiotization has happened (Shairi, 2013, 104). These places were already the place of reference and possessed their well-known forms. However, due to new discourse conditions or narrations that have been added to them, they have been rejuvenated and have found new semantic features. For example, a house-garden or a house-museum are examples of such places.

#### - Spiral place

Spiral places form under the actor’s gaze and can collapse after a while. These places can be called the result of the actor’s alliance with the world. These places astonish the actor, and thus he follows their path in astonishment. The spiral place can be considered as the place of conflict and challenge of the “body”. A body that is present in the flow of things without sitting alone and perceives the world intuitively, directly, and internally (Babak Moein, 2019, 63).

The spectator is either stunned by the spiral places or participates in the forming and giving meaning to such places. In other words, participatory spiral places are places with aesthetic and emotional values that the actor has advanced in creating these

values with the place (Shairi, 2013, 228). In this way, the subject in these place experiences “being” and “common poetic action” with others or with other things (Babak Moein, 2019, 63).

#### - Transcendental place

Transcendence is defined as moving beyond or outside the immanence of the body (Anderson, 2009, 28). When spiral places are placed at the semantic peak and cause complete separation from the objective place and the continuation of the feeling of place and the continuation of its presence in the actor’s thought or imagination, we can say the place has transcended (Shairi, 2013, 230). These places are the place of ascension, the place between two infinities, and a place without beginning and end (Babak Moein, 2019, 64).

Transcendental places may not have all material and static stability, and the actor walks through their presence and absence. The presence of the actor in the physical place and at the same time his presence beyond the place (space) is a transcendental presence. Landowski considers this state, in which we are “present” both physically and metaphorically, to be the place of “Etre -là (being-there)” (ibid., 66).

### Examining the Semiotics of mobility in the Ta’ziyeh of Ziaber

In a linear narration, the route of Ta’ziyeh Ziaber is created by the joining of three locations (the cemetery, the main street, and the house of Ayatollah Ziaberi). Mircea Eliade, one of the most important contemporary theologians, believed that holy places are always formed in connection with a center (Eliade, 2010, 347). however, here the extensiveness of the movement of Ziaber Ta’ziyeh indicates a kind of decentralization, and it can be claimed that Ta’ziyeh itself creates a mobile sacred centrality. The following Fig. 1 shows the locations and direction of movement of the Ta’ziyeh group in the Ziaber.

Before examining the semiotic analysis of these three locations, it should be noted that the issue of place arrangements in Eastern plays has always been debatable. Oriental plays do not limit themselves to the stage and complete their narration by creating space in



Fig. 1. The main locations of the city for the performance of Ziaber's mobile Ta'ziyeh. Source: authors archive.

the minds of the audience. In most types of Oriental drama, the stage and the place of the play are prepared to be changed. This is why oriental plays are so minimal in their setting the stages. From the Ta'ziyehs of Iran to the Kathakali of India and Noh Japan, the stages are generally empty. The stage is empty because the Oriental stage is constantly changing and moving. The Oriental stage is a platform and the goal is to let the audience start their journey with the play. In these plays, the place of the theatre is always overshadowed by narrations that create new places and spaces inside themselves, and these places and spaces appear one after the other on the stage and in the minds of the performers and audience. Thus, the location of the scene in the Oriental play is constantly accepting new meaning and qualitative features that are formed, destroyed and reshaped by successive narrations. As an Oriental play, the mobile Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber is no exception to this, and the discourse of "Mobile Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber" challenges the issue of place even in its title. Accordingly, the three main locations of Ziaber mobile Ta'ziyeh will be examined<sup>2</sup>.

• **The beginning of the performance; cemetery**  
Ziaber Ta'ziyeh begins from the cemetery. In this Ta'ziyeh, the city cemetery is a topic place. This location itself is a controversial place/space. First of all, it should be examined whether this cemetery is a kind of place or space?

From a semiotic point of view, space is like a vast, integrated, and continuous stretch. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the contemporary philosopher and phenomenologist, considers space as a context that indicates our existence and position in the universe (Ansari, 2014, 66). The relationship between space and place can be expressed in such a way that whenever space is cut in and this cut creates boundaries with definite or even indistinct borders, spatial multiplicity occurs and distinguishable places are created (Shairi, 2013, 236). Also, from Merleau-Ponty's point of view, a place is more of a structure than anything else; a network of communication that expresses specific aspects of human consciousness and experience (Partovi, 2015, 74).

The real owners of the cemetery are people who do not exist physically and in other words, are abstract. The cemetery has the characteristics of silence that is felt in its atmosphere; It negates the material dimension of life and thus directs the viewer's beyond matter and the world. These features are reminiscent of a space (not a place). On the other hand, the cemetery preserves its other features as a place for burying the dead and the presence of those still alive. Therefore, the narration of this Ta'ziyeh is based on the context of "place-no place" or "space-no space" from the very beginning. In order to clarify the presented analysis, Figs. 2 & 3 in the appendix depict the perspective of this cemetery.

When the Ta'ziyeh group comes out from inside the building (Hosseinieh) to the cemetery, the spatial features of the cemetery present new signs. The silence is broken and the transition from space to place begins. What convert a space to a place is a unique feature, event, or incident which is happening giving it some value (Ansari, 2014, 72), and here the cemetery space welcomes the performance of Ta'ziyeh as an event. The departure of the performance from Hosseinieh also

acts as a kind of historical return of the followers and enemies of Imam Hussein (AS) to the world and forms a status between “living and not-living” in the cemetery atmosphere.

In addition to its role as a place for preparing performance group, Hosseinieh also has a wider semiotic-phenomenological function. All the spectators outside the building are waiting for the performers to leave and for the play to begin, and this is where the building faces a semiotic transcendence and takes on the role of non-existence and the afterlife, from which the martyrs and the dead (the good and evil) are now supposed to emerge and perform a play. Here this building has both a practical and an abstract role simultaneously. All the performers of the play and all the tools and equipment of the funeral (coffins, booths, tents, and flags, etc.) are inside this building. As the doors of the building open, the performance begins. This moment is the moment of encountering and connecting two types of existence and the intersection of two places. The performers bring several guest places with them (Karbala, Medina, etc.) into the place designated for the audience or the host place (Ziaber). The intersection of the guest and the host places requires a mediator, so a speaker in the cemetery holds a microphone and introduces the performers coming out of the building to the audience. This is their way of announcing the arrival of the Ta'ziyeh in the city, a play that, with its mobility, paints the places and spaces of the city with its narration.

The turning of the icon into a hyper-icon can clearly be seen in the transformation of the cemetery into a new place related to the Karbala incident. In this case, the cemetery, in addition to retaining its iconic feature and functions as a cemetery; also implies a place and space related to battle of Karbala. Now the sign (cemetery icon) expands away from its inner and outer object and moves to the realm of metaphor.

As the performers leave the Hosseinieh building, for the first time the audience (subject) witness a set of signs including characters, horses, and tools such as helmets and swords, tents, etc., which have no do not belong to the present and remind them of Imam Hussein (AS) and a certain period of history.



Fig. 2. The audience outside the Hosseinieh are waiting for the Ta'ziyeh performers to leave the building. Source: authors archive.



Fig. 3. Waiting for the Ta'ziyeh in the cemetery. Source: authors archive.

Facing the enemies of Imam Hussein (AS), on the other hand, also fosters a sense of disgust and hatred that people feel towards them. As spectators are suddenly confronted so many signs, they feel a compressed or contracted presence of signs, which shatters the graveyard under the gaze of the spectators and takes them away from that place and time and to a new time and place (the Battle of Karbala). According to Eric Landowski, it seems that a special place is formed which has an added value due to new signs (originating from the building) (Shairi, 2013, 227). The surprise caused by facing the set of signs turns the cemetery into a spiral place that astonishes the spectators and they follow the signs, events and the path of these new moments with astonishment. The spiral places can collapse after a while, and as the performers leave the building, the spirals will soon break down and the spectator will feel his presence in the cemetery more.

The order in which individuals and groups leave the building is based on the historical order of events in Karbala. The first group includes Imam's caravan that goes from Medina to Mecca and then to Karbala. The

second group is the companions of the Imam who are supposed to play the battle scenes of Karbala, and the third group is the prisoners of battle who are taken to Damascus. Three events in three different places and times are supposed to be performed in the Ziaber city. These three groups follow each other. Each group represents an event, and each event consists of several small theatrical scenes. Because the audience is standing still, these scenes are performed several times during the performance. The repetition of scenes, along with other visual and musical elements that occur as the narration of Ta'ziyeh spread out through the city, changes the rhythm of the city for hours. The city is now experiencing the emergence of new places and spaces influenced by this rhythm and in a different beat than the past.

#### • **Middle of the performance; the main street of the city**

The main street of the city is the place where the majority of the Taziye is performed, and it is a paratopic place where most of the narration takes place. This street, as a place of continuity and network that connects different parts of the city, also assumes the function of persuasion and induction. By the presence of the Ta'ziyeh group in the city (as something valuable that did not exist before), persuades the spectators and a large group of people to accompany the Ta'ziyeh and follow it on the street. This street also plays another important semiotic-semantic role, and it can be said that as a host place, it welcomes several guest places. For example, part of the street is the route from Medina to Mecca, and other parts are the location of Karbala, also another part is the route from Karbala to Damascus. In fact, these places are invited to the city and add semiotic-semantic extensions to it.

Simultaneous performance of street scenes affects the function of the city as a place by new semiotic-semantic circumstances. From this moment on, even cars are not allowed to move on this street, and the main function of the street is taken away from it, and its metaphorical aspect becomes the most important of all. Hence, another aspect of the process function

of the icon and its upgrade to a hyper-icon becomes significant. Although the street icon must apparently be similar in appearance to today's city and street, it goes beyond the apparent resemblance to the object and goes through a transformation. In other words, the production and creation of a new meaning that emerges due to the narration of mobile Ta'ziyeh in Ziaber's street opens the way for the development of the icon and as a result, another hyper-icon emerges in the street, which is now manifested differently from its previous form. Of course, this development is also accompanied by a sensory-perceptual process felt by the spectator, which will be discussed further in this article.

As pointed out earlier, in this Ta'ziyeh, a scene is performed several times along the way. With each stop and start of a scene, the audience experiences relocation. This constant change of places and this return to different places binds the spectators with the mobile narration of the Ta'ziyeh and surrounds them in a spiral place; therefore, the mise-en-scene of some scenes of this Ta'ziyeh, even visually, is reminiscent of a spiral situation. Movafeq-khan and Mokhalef-khan (The protagonist and antagonist), who are both riding horses, rotate around each other in a hypothetical circular scene surrounded by spectators, or the protagonist is placed in the center of the circle, and then the antagonist is rotating around him and riding a horse. Therefore, a spiral form is created in each scene both physically and semantically. This form is performed over and over again in different scenes with the spectators themselves. According to Sarsangi (2013, 22), the participation of the spectator in the performance is the main goal of the religious play, and basically, the spectators, along with the performers, play an important role in creating the forms of Ziber's mobile Ta'ziyeh. The spectators follow Ta'ziyeh without any boundaries and fence, and even directly, they become the actors of Ta'ziyeh. In the appendix, Figs. 4 & 5 shows some of the selected moments of the presence and participation of the people in performing the Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber.

The role of audiences in shaping the place discourse is important (Fontanille, 1989, 56). This can be seen quite well during the mobile Ta'ziyeh because the stage environment is practically formed by the physical presence of the spectators. Therefore, they also play a part in creating the places along with the performers and they contribute to the creation of the aesthetic and emotional values of these places. In fact, the process of meaning production is created by the physical presence and appearance of all actors (performers and spectators) in interaction with place and time. With the spread of the narration of Ta'ziyeh in the main streets of the city and with the continuous performance of scenes whose mise-en-scene is based on rotation, the spiral place reaches its peak of meaning and all the actors enter the transcendental place. Now the place has become a space, and the place of the street is not the only place present in the consciousness of the spectators and even the performers. In this case, the performers and the spectators moved between the place of the street and space which has been created. This is the place of action-emotion, and a feature of many oriental plays. In other words, the scene and the transcendental place are not in the same line but rather oppose each other. Performers and spectators are constantly aware of the place of the play, but at the same time, they are present in the transcendental place. This simultaneous presence, which has led to the simultaneous emergence of the guest place, the host place, and the formation of the place of "being-there", indicates the transformation of the places of the city through the dispersion of the Ta'ziyeh narration in them.

The main tools of narration are not words and poems, which are sometimes not audible. The insignificance of words stems from the fact that the spectators are in a position between space and place, and in this situation, the perception of the play is done not through cognitive powers but rather through the "presence" of the spectators. The play engages the "Self" of the audience and that "self" finds its way into a place of space and abstraction. According to Chelkowski (1991, 220), the spectators of Ta'ziyeh are present both in the place of



Fig.4. Participation and presence of spectators to assist in performing the mobile Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber. Source: authors archive<sup>3</sup>.



Fig.5. Participation of spectators in mobile Ta'ziyeh and following it on the main street of the city. Source: authors archive.

Ta'ziyeh and in the desert of Karbala, and at the same time in the present and in the past.

#### • End of the performance; Ayatollah Ziaberi's house (and the houses of the city residents)

Ta'ziyeh ends at the personal house of the late cleric of the city, which is decorated in the form of Ibn Ziad's Dar al-Emara's. The performer playing the role of Ibn Ziad (Ashqia) sits on the porch and watches all the Ta'ziyeh groups arriving at his courtyard (the yard of the house). The last scenes of the play are performed there and all the spectators gather in the courtyard of this house. In the final part of the play, the antagonist and protagonist finally get off their horses and fight their last battle on the ground in a fixed place. Then they go to the backyard and spectators cannot see them anymore. The play that started from nonexistence (cemetery) also ends with nonexistence (backyard). In the interval between the two nonexistence, the spectators experience a presence in a transcendent place and space, which then disappears. However, this disappearance of the place is physical, and in the minds of all actors, this memory has been strengthened more than before.

The last scene of the play is related to the conversation between Shemar (Ashqia) and Ibn Ziad. Shemar describes the situation on the platform in front of the porch. In the last sentences, according to the principles of the Ta'ziyeh, he distances himself from his role and reads out loud: "Neither I am Shemar nor this place is Karbala here, we only mean to create so much crying" This verse in a way expresses the approach of this Ta'ziyeh towards the issue of place. In the first hemistich, the place is denied (this is not Karbala), and in the second scene, the purpose of the play is stated, which is to create a kind of space (a performance full of mourning and crying). In addition to this spatial denial, the famous phrase "every day is the day of Ashura and every land is Karbala" is heard in the ceremonies and performance related to the event of Ashura, the expression results and the reproduction of the place and atmosphere of Karbala in the present. It can be argued that this phrase in Ta'ziyeh acts as a motto that the Ta'ziyeh group can rely on to turn any place into a place related to the event of Karbala and create a transcendental experience for the spectators. In this regard, J. Sattari (2015, 99) considers Ashura as a moment that may be renewed and repeated at any age and time.

The emergence of icon to hyper-icon development and the transformation of place in the house of Ayatollah Ziaberi can also be seen, and now, according to the narration of mobile Ta'ziyeh, there is a semiotic rupture in this house. In fact, the house finds a semantic role due to the new narration (Ibn Ziad's court), and the spectator is confronted with a new and old "narrative place" that he did not face before performing the Ta'ziyeh and the mentioned building was known as the house of Ayatollah Ziaberi and one of the national monuments of Iran. In fact, this building had once been upgraded to a national monument with architectural features of the Qajar period (1789-1925), but now, due to the performance of Ta'ziyeh, a new semiotization process appears again in the place of Ayatollah Ziaberi's house and the historical building of Ziaber



Fig.6. House of Ayatollah Ziaberi. Source: authors archive.

has a new theatrical role. It can be said that in Ziaber Ta'ziyeh, houses, like other urban places, become part of the narration, and their role changes. Fig. 6 illustrates the new role of the mentioned historical house during the performance of Ta'ziyeh.

The extent of the mobile Ta'ziyeh's indicates that the narration completely penetrates the fabric of the city, and this flow continues even when the mobile Ta'ziyeh finishes. According to an old tradition in Ziaber, after the Ta'ziyeh, the people's houses are opened and each family distributes the votive food giving to as much as they can. In this case, a semiotic-semantic extension occurs; The houses those their everyday role as a living place of the inhabitants and, as a part of the general space built in the city and they take on the role of food-distributing centers and in a way, the role of a spiritual and divine kitchen. Therefore, the transcendental state is not interrupted by the end of the performance. Rather, by extending to the houses of the city, the "vow" turns into a symbol for honoring and respecting the narrations that have been narrated, which in turn promotes the semiotic value of the houses. Eventually, the city of Ziaber becomes a utopic place and the "waiting for meaning" is over and the meaning finally bears fruit, which is a satisfactory end to the quest of all the actors (performers and spectators) of this performance.

## Conclusion

The discourse of place is thought-provoking in many Oriental theatres, as these always seek to break away from the stage. The mobile Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber is not an exception to this feature and the mobile

and systematic form of this Ta'ziyeh and its direct connection with the city make the issue of the place important in various aspects.

The narration of Ziaber mobile Ta'ziyeh begins and ends in three locations of the city (cemetery, main street, and the house of Ayatollah Ziaberi, respectively). Each of these places, after going through the performance of Ta'ziyeh, is narrated differently from the other. In this article, after examining the process of this encounter, it was found that the places in the city of Ziaber distance themselves from their previous practical, functional, and habitual characteristics and undergo some type of transformation. Also, in this article, the transformation of urban icons to hyper-icons and their separation from the context of their former discourse was examined as another current that emerged from the expansion of the narration of Ta'ziyeh in the city.

By embracing the narration of Ta'ziyeh and iconic development, the places in Ziaber city have taken on the characteristics of the spiral, narrative, and transcendental places from the semiotic point of view. Eventually, the city has become a place with utopic features. In the meantime, it seems that the mobility in the Ta'ziyeh of Ziaber is the most important factor in the transcendence of places and spaces of the city; Because this mobility and fluidity of places open the way for the abstraction, and through this, Ta'ziyeh narrates its story between place and space, host and guest place and between the spectators and performers. This is a situation in which all actors (performers and spectators) participate. In Ziaber's mobile Ta'ziyeh, the spectators, like the performers, play a key role in constructing the place and space of Ta'ziyeh, and their physical presence, profoundly helps to advance the Ta'ziyeh, which is evidence of the interaction between the city discourse and the Ta'ziyeh discourse.

## Endnotes

1. Iranian Qajar king (1831-1896).
2. In order to familiarize many of the readers who may not be familiar enough with Ta'ziyeh; It is also necessary to mention that the line-up of the characters in the Ta'ziyeh is divided into two parts, "protagonists (Oliya) and antagonists (Ashqia)" and by two color signs "green (Oliya) and red (Ashqia)". The Oliya include Imam Hussein (AS), Ahl al-Bayt and his loyal companions who are martyred by Ashqia. In Ta'ziyeh, the performer playing the role of the Oliya is called "Movafeq-Khan" and the performer of the role of Ashqia is called the "Mokhalef-khan".

3. The figures of this article were photographed by Mrs. Mohadese Mahfouzi.

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