

Fahimeh Najmi

## Relations between Theatre and Power: The Iranian Quarterly *Faslnameh Teatr* (1977—)

The quarterly journal *Faslnameh Teatr* has been published in the Iranian capital of Tehran since 1977, although with some interruptions. In a country where, since the Islamic Revolution, systematic efforts have been made to erase any trace of past monarchies, the continued publication of this journal proves to be an extremely rare, if not unique, occurrence. Of course, the prominence of the *Ta'zieh* ritual gives imposing visibility to the current dominant ideology within Iranian society, and the journal is effective in propagating the desired vision of the ruling Shi'ite power. The journal, then, since its very inception, has been intertwined with the affairs of power and has been consistently used as a tool in the hands of the agents of cultural politics in Iran. It has become the mirror of the country's highly ideological cultural policy and, as a result, studying it provides knowledge of the fluctuations of culture in general, and of the theatre in particular, in Iran. Fahimeh Najmi is the author of *Le Théâtre, l'Iran, et l'Occident* (L'Harmattan, 2018) and of articles in *Alternatives théâtrales* and *Registres*. Deprived of work in Iran after five years of teaching, including in the Faculty of Art and Architecture of Tarbiat Modares University (TMU) in Tehran, she now lectures and researches in France. She holds a doctorate in Theatre Studies from the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris.

**Key terms:** *Ta'zieh*, Shiraz Arts Festival, cultural policy, religion, sacred theatre, Squat Theatre.

IN THE SUMMER of 1976, when the International Symposium on *Ta'zieh* was held in Shiraz as part of the Festival of the Arts, the Kingdom of Persia had no specialized journal to publish its proceedings. Thus the Iranians had to be patient and wait until 1988 to be able finally to read the collection of its articles in their language.<sup>1</sup> The English version was created shortly after, in 1979, in partnership with Soroush publishing house, which was affiliated with the National Iranian Radio and Television Organization.<sup>2</sup> But the absence of a regular publication, although in itself problematic for Tehran, which already had two faculties offering theatrical training, was not the only reason for this procrastination.<sup>3</sup>

The subject in itself remained contentious: How can one, under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, justify to the population the organization of such an association created to study a practice that had been prohibited for years by his father Reza Shah?<sup>4</sup> It was necessary to launch, strategically, a rehabilitation project

for the *Ta'zieh* phenomenon, which had found support in the cultural policy of the Pahlavi dynasty: that is, in terms of the revitalization of the country's indigenous arts and the stimulation of the development of theatre in it.

However, another event occurred, now during the eleventh edition of the Arts Festival in 1977, and it precipitated a desperate refuge in 'traditional values'. This was the performance of *Pig, Child, Fire!* by Squat Theatre, in which a rape scene was shown, right there in the middle of the street in a working-class district of Shiraz, near a mosque, and during the month of Ramadan. The show, considered by many observers to be the true starting point of the Islamic Revolution, sealed the fate of the Shiraz Arts Festival. And, in the midst of a deeply chaotic climate, the idea of a project to recreate a theatre inspired from Iranian dramatic tradition was born, drawing, in particular, from the *Ta'zieh*<sup>5</sup> – recently brought to light by the major western director Peter Brook – as a means of circumventing the

criticisms which had become more vociferous and virulent everywhere.<sup>6</sup>

### A Journal Born out of Confusion

The *Faslnameh Teatr* project had started a few years before, but it stalled so much that in the autumn of 1977, on the occasion of the publication of its first issue, a major question was raised: 'In your opinion, is it possible to create some kind of "Iranian theatre" from the religious ceremony of the *Ta'zieh*, or the traditional *Rouhozi* show?' Farrokh Ghaffari (1921–2006), the director of the Symposium on *Ta'ziyeh* who was also known as a film critic and director, replied: 'Yes, it is quite possible, but I don't know how it will be done or how it should be done.'<sup>7</sup> At the time, nobody seems to have thought about the *necessity* of having this kind of theatre, especially when many practitioners had been arrested for publishing 'depressing literature' or for having participated in performances of plays such as *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky.<sup>8</sup> That kind of question was not in the spirit of the times nor of the spirit of the organizers of the Arts Festival, in particular. It therefore linked in with the cultural policy of the Pahlavi, who were the ones to have taken action, moreover, at a time of growing discontent in the streets, by launching the publication of *Faslnameh Teatr* (Figure 1).

The Pahlavi took special care to have the first editorial written by a figure of traditional theatre, Ali Nassirian (b. 1935), an actor without any formal training or university education. He defines an editorial approach based on six main elements, all theoretically related to the theatre, and very ambitious for the time:

Studies on the roots and history of the theatre, but also of dramatic literature; studies of the social and cultural aspect of the theatre through sociological and statistical research.

Studies on oriental theatre and introduction to the sources and forms of theatre in Asian countries.

Translation and creation of texts on western theatre (for one part, the presentation of theatre personalities: authors, directors, and scenographers and their work; also, full translations of essential writings offering theoretical and scientific explanations

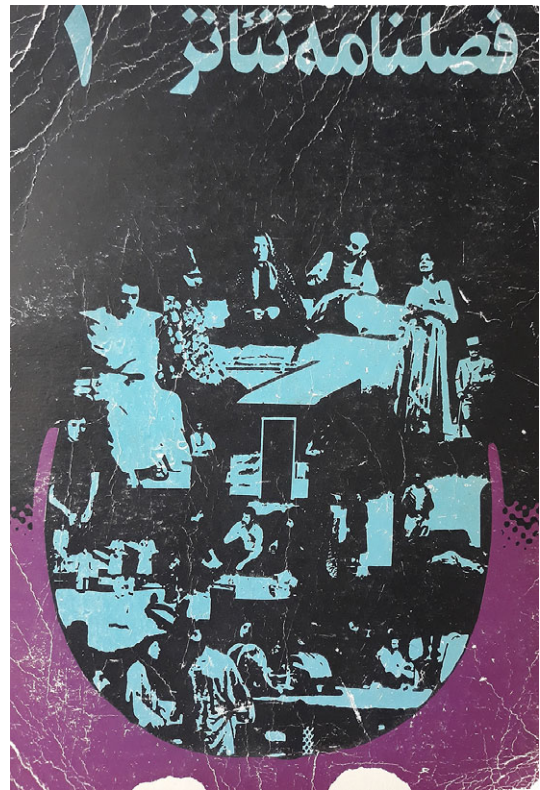


Figure 1. Cover of the first issue of *Faslnameh Teatr*, 1977. Photo: Fahimeh Najmi.

of acting techniques, staging, scenography, lighting, and make-up).

Opinions of experts and specialists in cultural and artistic questions on the theatre.

Reviews of shows and theatre books published during the theatrical season, along with news about the theatrical community worldwide, so as to broaden the scope.

Full publication of an Iranian theatre play, or a translation of a non-Iranian dramatic work.<sup>9</sup>

When released in the autumn of 1977, the first issue contained a screenplay written by Bahram Beyzai (b. 1938), an eminent researcher of the theatre traditions of Iran and the Far East, who remained suspicious of the journal and never wrote any original article for it.<sup>10</sup> Apart from this screenplay, and in the absence of qualified researchers, journalists appointed by the National Iranian Radio and Television Organization provided the contents of the first

five issues' reports on the various theatre festivals in Iran, interviews with practitioners, especially in the field of traditional performances, and a variety of translations of foreign writings in order to bring forward a certain idea of theatrical diversity. These subjects included 'Television Plays',<sup>11</sup> 'Radio Theatre: An Auditory Theatre',<sup>12</sup> 'Jean Genet',<sup>13</sup> 'Staging of Peter Handke's Plays',<sup>14</sup> 'Arab Theatre',<sup>15</sup> 'Black Theatre',<sup>16</sup> and 'Karagöz' (Figure 2).<sup>17</sup>

Some articles, such as those by Mayel Baktash (1935–1998), went beyond the promotional framework for performances presented in the then-defunct Shiraz Arts Festival. Baktash, in his best writing, attempted to extract a certain theatrical aesthetic specific to the *Ta'zieh* by detaching it from its religious substance. According to him, 'the creation of a role, its embodied presence in the middle of a crowd, and its relation to a theatrical event' in traditional performances is an evolution that occurred after the appearance of particular social contexts and the intervention of cultural factors in these performances. For example, he notes how, in the founding texts of the *Ta'zieh* such as that of *Rawdat al-Shuhadā* (*Rowzat-o-Shohadā*),<sup>18</sup> crying is introduced as a new emotional element in the flow of the narration and as the price to be paid by the spectators to participate in the event.<sup>19</sup>

### A Journal Restored to Create Confusion

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 interrupted this late rescue operation and, although the editors of the journal took care to put on the cover of

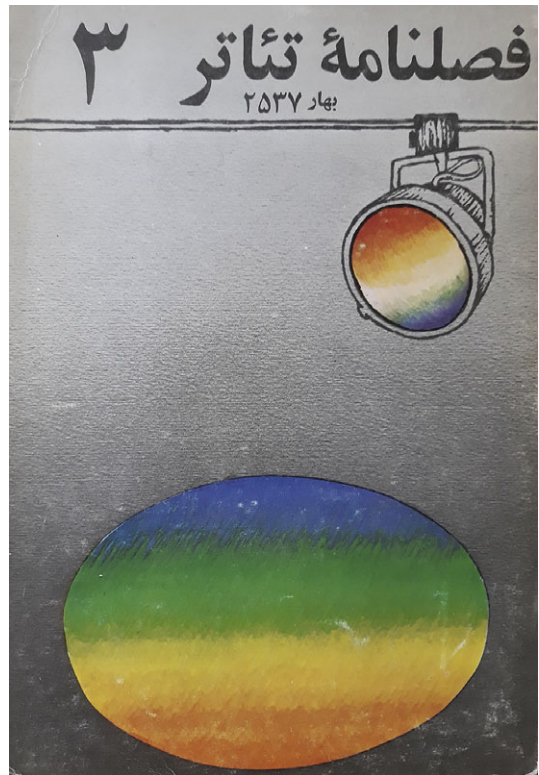


Figure 2. Cover of Issue No. 3 of *Faslnameh Teatr*, 1978. Photo: Fahimeh Najmi.

the last issue the date of the Jalali calendar (or Persian calendar) instead of the imperial calendar, which had appeared on the cover of preceding issues, *Faslnameh* did not escape an interruption of several years during which the newly established Islamic Republic was to clean up the Iranian theatrical community as part of the cultural revolution. This community

### *Pig, Child, Fire!* What Happened

*Pig, Child, Fire!*, an in situ performance largely created in Rotterdam, was the first programme presented in the USA by the expatriate Hungarians of Squat Theatre. Originally the group formed in 1969 as Kassak Theatre at the Kassak Culture House in Budapest. In 1972, according to Theodore Shank, when the company did its first completely new work, *The Skanzen Killers*, the group's licence to perform was withdrawn on the grounds that it was 'obscene' and 'apt to be misinterpreted from a political point of view'. Being unable to give more performances in public, they began performing in the fifth-floor apartment of some of its members and became the Kassak Apartment Theatre. During the next four years, they also performed in a disused country chapel, a sand pit, and on an island. In the autumn of 1973, the group attended the Open Theatre Festival in Wrocław in Poland, without an invitation and performed in a college. Throughout the year they had been under increasing pressure from the authorities, and when they returned to Budapest from Poland the passports of three members were withdrawn because during their trip abroad they had failed 'to behave as

Hungarian citizens'. They were denied 'every sort of travel' until 31 December 1977. Nevertheless, the group succeeded in leaving Hungary in January 1976. After a stay in France and then in Holland, they settled in the USA. In the West, they took the name Squat because it suggested new settlement, and performed in a building of New York's 256 West 23rd Street that offered them a storefront to perform in, and three more floors in which to live from 1977 to 1983.<sup>20</sup>

Also, *Pig, Child, Fire!* was a storefront performance and it was played everywhere in a shop. The wall in front of the spectators installed inside the building was the glass which permitted 'spectators' both inside and outside to view each other through the glass. In Shiraz, this 'most avant-garde play of the moment' was staged in a store window on a busy street located in a traditional working-class area without a theatre. Which means the *shirazi*, simple residents or passers-by, could attend the parts played in the street and also see what was happening inside without any kind of theatrical knowledge. None of the reports of the journalists present at the performances given in Shiraz allowed even a partial reconstruction. However, one of them admitted that what they saw was almost identical with the performances given in Nancy.<sup>21</sup> All this contradicts the relatively recent affirmation of an Iranian researcher who claims that *Pig, Child, Fire!*, shown in Iran, had originally been performed in Budapest in 1975.<sup>22</sup> Still according to Shank, the performance consisted of five parts: (1) Stavrogin's Confessions: Dostoevsky's *The Devils*; (2) *Nous Sommes les Mannequins*; (3) Dinner (sometimes, as in Baltimore, parts 2 and 3 were combined); (4) Letter to André Breton by Antonin Artaud, February 1947; (5) The Last One. In Shank's descriptions, we can also find highly problematic scenes for a society such as Iran. For instance, in part 2, 'a man stands on the table, drops his pants, kneels down, and sticks the gun in his anus'.<sup>23</sup> And the organizers of the Shiraz Arts Festival could not have known, because Iranian journalists like Jamshid Chalangi implicitly admitted in their reports from the Nancy Festival that they were unable to describe certain scenes.<sup>24</sup> The Shiraz Arts Festival nonetheless chose to programme it. Anyway, in what can be seen as 'an orchestrated version', some claimed that 'the religious extremists' had misinterpreted a scene in which a rape scene was played out 'symbolically', by a man and a woman 'fully clothed throughout'.<sup>25</sup>

This version was severely undermined by the words of Anthony Parsons, British Ambassador to Iran from 1974 to 1979, himself very critical of the Shiraz Arts Festival, who states in his memoirs that an eyewitness told him a 'rape was performed in full (no pretence) on a woman whose shirt is torn by a man either naked or with bare legs (I forgot which)'. After which came the 'anus' scene.<sup>26</sup> These scenes were played on the street. Public reactions were immediate: the show was still going on when a brick smashed the shop window and landed right before the feet of the spectators seated inside.<sup>27</sup> However, the performances carried on, according to the critic Iraj Zohari, who says he attended three times.<sup>28</sup> In response, the Imams of Shiraz decided to refrain from attending mosques and performing congregational prayers, and it was only after 'appropriate actions by the authorities' that they agreed to reverse their decision.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, supported by their counterparts in Isfahan, they called for the Shiraz Festival to be stopped, starting the following year. The pro-government newspapers attacked the spectacle for 'showing sexual acts on the street'. One of these journalists, Maryam Kharazmi, writing for the newspaper *Kayhan*, was even assaulted by Arby Ovanessian (b. 1942), Iranian director of Armenian origin, and one of the main programmers of the festival, following her questions about this show. Ovanessian, apparently very upset by the criticism of this show, emptied a bottle of 7-Up on the journalist's head before being arrested for trying to choke her.<sup>30</sup>

Numerous reports from the SAVAK, the Intelligence and Security Organization of the Country, clearly demonstrate the political dimension of the event. In these reports, SAVAK agents describe the performance of the show as 'an unintentional error' and attempt to place the onus on the organizers of the Arts festival.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, they recognize that the involvement of Farah Diba in the organization of this festival – described by foreign journalists as 'her big toy'<sup>32</sup> – significantly reduced their room for manoeuvre in calming the protests. It was an adequate reading of the situation. Since Ayatollah Khomeini, who violently denounced 'obscenities at the Shiraz Arts Festival' in an incendiary speech, seized the opportunity – in a more than favourable context caused by the rise of religious sentiment meticulously described by Anthony Parsons – to attack Mohammad Reza Shah for being solely responsible for these 'obscenities' because 'nothing can be done without his endorsement'. And he concluded that 'if all the people objected together, if they all stood up for the Islamic laws and spoke out, then such events would never occur'.<sup>33</sup> This was a call that would be strongly heard, giving unstoppable momentum to the protests.

was subjected to endless and constant pressure as people were deprived of jobs, liable to arbitrary detention and even to execution. Many playwrights, directors, actresses, and actors opted for exile, or simply put an end to their existence.<sup>34</sup> Once the theatrical milieu had been purified of ‘elements useless for the realization of the Islamic Revolution’s objectives’, the government felt the necessity to put forward a theatre of its own.<sup>35</sup>

*Faslnameh Teatr* resurfaced at that very time with the aim of theorizing, propagating, and, in a sense, justifying this theatre (Figure 3). The restoration of this already established framework proved to be an advantage that could not be overlooked; even the former editorial manager, Lalah Taghian, was kept, along with her husband, the former senior official of the cultural administration of the Pahlavi, Jalal Sattari (1931–2021). But there was no question of continuing on the previous path. The central premise behind the contents had changed in nature:

instead of giving birth to a theatre originating from traditional Iranian shows, these ritual performances were now described as Iranian theatre par excellence whose contemporary side would be the ‘Sacred Defence Theatre’, focused exclusively on the war imposed on Iran by Iraq (1980–88).<sup>36</sup>

In his brief editorial, Ali Montazeri (b. 1958) – then the Head of the Performing Arts Centre of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance – was careful not to make any allusions to the royal vestiges of the review. At a time when revolutionary dogmas were prevalent, he confined himself to emphasizing the importance of research in order to make theatre a ‘serious’ business’. A biomedical analysis technician by training, Montazeri developed his definition of ‘theatre research’, drawing from various Persian encyclopedic dictionaries:

Inquiry, investigation;  
Scientific studies and research;  
Search; Research.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 3.** Cover of Issue No. 18–19 of *Faslnameh Teatr*, 1999. Photo: Fahimeh Najmi.

Concretely, from the imprecision (not to say the nonsense) of a framework thus defined resulted articles based solely on the collection of data, without any analysis or in-depth interpretation, devoted primarily to traditional shows and, of course, to the *Ta'zieh*. Many of these articles, many of them foreign translations, were carefully unearthed from the writings of western orientalists in line with the editorial policy of the journal. Jalal Sattari in person was particularly committed to the task.<sup>38</sup> Some other ‘articles’ were internally generated, although the process employed is hardly different. For example, the ‘article’ by Nadereh Badi’i on a collection of *Ta'zieh* played in Tekyeh Dowlat is a mere reproduction of poorly photographed pages from a manuscript, and does not even provide a transcription in legible writing.<sup>39</sup>

Badi’i himself does not hide his desire to make such poor material available to potential future researchers.<sup>40</sup> It did not matter to him that some of these texts did not even include the names of authors – texts that were exact replicas of a few pages of books published for the Shiraz Arts Festival and never reissued; cited were merely anonymous generalities

such as 'the producers of *Ta'zieh* and *Tekyeh* in Tehran'<sup>41</sup> or '*Ta'zieh* performers and *Tekyeh* in Shiraz'.<sup>42</sup> What counted most in publishing of this kind was to cover the ground at all costs; to give the illusion of a theatre with a very widespread Shi'ite character, even in the provinces where the Sunni population is not negligible, such as that of Hormozgan.<sup>43</sup>

However, the intended scope of an article titled 'Stone Striking', which merely enumerated sources already noted in the English summary of the text, was of another nature.<sup>44</sup> In this article, the mourning ceremony of Imam Hossein, which involved striking two stones, or two pieces of wood, or even cymbals, to punctuate and accentuate the songs during religious processions, was raised to the level of a fundamental part of 'Iranian theatre'.<sup>45</sup> In this type of article, other than on the *Ta'zieh* itself,<sup>46</sup> different parts of the Imam Hossein mourning ceremony were isolated in order to 'theorize' them later as a 'dramatic system' in its own right, or just a 'theatre', 'a dramatic form in itself'. The '*Rowzeh khāni*',<sup>47</sup> in other words the reading of the *Rawḍat al-Shuhadā* written by Mulla Hossein Wā'ez Kāshefi (already quoted) on the martyrdom of Imam Hossein and the Karbala events, together with the *āeen-e sineh-zani* (the ritual of 'chest beating'),<sup>48</sup> are interpreted from a similar point of view. These works, intended to contribute to the studies of the 'origins of theatre in Iran', aimed, above all, to demonstrate that 'this art (in Iran) is rooted in religion'.<sup>49</sup>

In this way, *Faslnameh's* new category of articles was created in order to prove why the *Ta'zieh*, and therefore a large part of 'Iranian theatre', was assigned to the domain of the 'sacred'. 'The *shabih khāni* (*ta'zieh*) is a religious art,' writes a certain Mohammad Hossein Naserbakht. According to him, 'religious art is an art issued from religion; an art that possesses an equally religious form and appearance, an art that is the historical result of man's affinity with absolute truth; this art is an art formed directly alongside the rites of religion'.<sup>50</sup> Then 'a re-reading of the hero of the *Ta'zieh*' takes place to prove that the hero of the 'Iranian drama', in other words the *Ta'zieh*, is 'a religious element' whose lineage goes back to Karbala and the Ashura events.<sup>51</sup>

He also does his best to demonstrate that the epic register in Persian culture is basically the same as that of Iranian religion.<sup>52</sup>

Once the 'religious dimension of the Iranian theatre' is proven, the deciphering of a religious theatre follows. To this end, it is argued that the relationship between religion and theatre is expressed in real and indubitable relationships. Milad Akbarnejad declares:

The real and organic relationship between religion and theatre means that all members of the theatre are religious and adhere to religious faith and behaviour. And without any artifice or obligation, they try to ensure that the components of their theatre do not contradict the concepts and rules of the Sharia. . . . But from another point of view, the legal relationship between religion and theatre leads to the search for religious theatre solutions as a fundamental thing. In other words, the question is, what solutions has religion incorporated into the theatre to express its intentions, or how can the rules of the theatre be fundamentally religious in their principle?<sup>53</sup>

In 'Religious Drama and the Role of the Audience', *Faslnameh* examined the modality by which the audience makes a religious interpretation of a performance.<sup>54</sup> It surmised that the religious nature of a play was determined by the critic or the spectator, and not by the author, the director, or the producer. It asserted that verisimilitude becomes the main issue of artistic works. As for the spectator, in order to adhere to a sacred spectacle, this spectator must believe that what he sees finds its root in reality.<sup>55</sup> Thus, at least part of the sacred spectacle must be based on sacred texts, and the lives of prophets and saints. According to the author of the article in question, such knowledge helps the viewer to believe in the unusual and amazing events of this type of show.<sup>56</sup>

However, the denomination of 'religious theatre' is nevertheless not unanimous, and Fahimeh Sayahian attempts to demonstrate that these new expressions – defined as religious theatre, religious cinema, and meaningful art – are a product of a world that wants to present human phenomena in colourful packaging, whereas neither theatre, nor cinema, nor art, nor life is anything other than religion.<sup>57</sup> In

order to prove her hypothesis that theatre and religion are similar phenomena, Sayahian refers to the fact that, in the Qur'ān, Allah swears by the pen.<sup>58</sup> She deduces that each of these systems, theatre and religion, communicates with people and their audiences through linguistic tools.<sup>59</sup> Their similar narrative structure emerged for the development of the thinking human being,<sup>60</sup> the latter being a trait shared by them as well. According to her, as in religion, the narratives of the 'major' works of world drama withdraw from evil to lead human beings towards good. She therefore concludes that, like religion, the works of Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Genet 'aspire to guide and educate human beings': such plays are immortal for this very reason.<sup>61</sup> In its first inventory of the 'Theatre of the Revolution', *Faslnameh* carefully

classifies the plays resulting from this ideology, indicating that the work of foreign playwrights – Shakespeare, Strindberg, O'Neill, Molière, Chekhov, and Gatti, all of them published or reissued after the fateful year 1979 – are 'representative' of Iranian dramatic work.<sup>62</sup> The project of co-option had come full circle.

### ***Faslnameh*: A Theatre Journal Devoid of Theatre**

Admittedly, the longevity of this journal for internal use is above all due to its active participation in the development of a strongly ideological view of theatre, which also gives it the status of a reference for all Iranian 'theatre studies'. It is now directed by a panel of university academic staff who also act as a

#### **Sacred Defence Theatre. What the Journal Suggested**

The journal is slow to deal with the movement Sacred Defence Theatre concretely. It is treated as a 'given fact' without any effort made to discuss it in theoretical terms or define it. The publication is not the only one to behave in this way. According to the authors of a so-called 'study' published in *Faslnameh*, 'Sacred Defence Theatre and Criticism Review', between 1980 (the year of the first performance of Sacred Defence Theatre in Tehran) and 2001, not a single show of this type had been reviewed in any of the specialized journals published in the Iranian capital. As a result of their studies, these authors, hoping to remedy obviously widespread indifference, advocated 'the necessity of planning for the development of theatre performance criticism as a lever to measure the improvement of the quality of this theatre'.<sup>63</sup> However, Seyed Maysam Motahari, who describes Sacred Defence Theatre as an art movement with popular roots appearing after the Islamic Revolution, recognizes in his article that writing more on this subject does not necessarily improve quality and that 'the level of artistic quality and scientific research' in this field is quite problematic.<sup>64</sup>

*Faslnameh* then opted to find inspiration elsewhere. It advocated the use of the entire 'resistance literature as an important and influential branch of Persian literature' which deserved, according to these authors, 'considerable attention to preserve the culture and literature of the ancient land of Iran. This type of literature, which includes many distinguished contemporary works, in addition to its literary and cultural richness, will influence the members of society, especially the young generation, to protect their homeland as much as possible.'<sup>65</sup> Thus an article in its entirety, 'Poetry of War' by Qaisar Aminpour (1959–2007), is devoted to deciphering 'the use of symbols and displays such as tulips, air-raid alarms, stars, night, and death as the features that can be used for dramatic effect'. The contributors to this article stress that 'the ideological thoughts of the poet' (described as a popular poet, a war-damaged person, a revolutionary poet) and 'his familiarity with moral and social obligations' were the main factors in choosing this poem. The contributors also say that they want to 'provide backgrounds in order for the people and theatre enthusiasts to become acquainted with children's concerns during wartime'.<sup>66</sup>

Reclaiming' works unrelated to the dominant philosophy of Sacred Defence Theatre was on the agenda. Take, for instance, *Kalāt Claimed* by Bahram Beyzai, written in 1982 during the Iran–Iraq war. The play is about 'death which comes cheap in the battle' and turns around the disputes of two generals in the Mongol conquest of Khwarezmia over the accession of Kalāt.<sup>67</sup> The casualties of these confrontations are described as 'victims of a groundless war, triggered by the rivalries of two stubborn contenders'.<sup>68</sup> Despite the strong position articulated in this statement, the review described the moral of the play as advocating that defence not be limited to men but also be extended to women so as to encourage a sense of patriotism.<sup>69</sup> Such blatant distortion, which further reveals the inadequacy of the theoretical basis of this so-called 'art movement', is increasingly used to denounce the loss of 'fundamental values' during the wartime of the 2000s.

reading committee. It should be noted that, in recent years, the journal has seen the flowering of many articles taken from Master's dissertations and sent to the journal by directors of research posing as their lead authors in order to accumulate the points necessary for advancement on the academic ladder. The fact of swearing allegiance to the system, through their contribution to 'theorization', gives the academics multiple titles. They are directors, organizers, selectors and members of the jury of many festivals, notably the Fajr International Theatre Festival. They also take turns to serve as members of the Art and Architecture Commission of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. They are responsible for the Performance Evaluation and Supervision Council of the Performing Arts Centre. They are in charge of censorship during various stages of production and presentation of each show; members of the Artistic Policy Councils of various theatre centres; members of Planning Committees for the artistic study programmes, particularly in schools and universities; senior experts in theatre in the Foundation for the Preservation of Sacred Defence Values; organizers of various conferences and scientific seminars on the Theatre of Sacred Defence or the Theatre of Resistance, and so on.<sup>70</sup> This multiple control ensures their almost complete monopoly of the theatre environment, putting anyone wishing to make any attempt in this area at their mercy. Published from the start in royal format, its few photos in poor quality, and modestly avoiding images of women or any controversial image, *Faslnameh Teatr* is now, thanks to international sanctions, an online publication, openly advocating a return to the morals of the Middle Ages.<sup>71</sup> It echoes the official speech of a ruling regime that has given itself the mission of bringing people into paradise.<sup>72</sup>

## Notes and References

An abridged version of this article was first presented in French at the International Conference 'Theatre in Journals (1870–2000): Periodicals as Material and Resources for Theatre Historiography', hosted by the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice in June 2022. I would like to give my special thanks to François Rémond for contributing to the English translation of my text and warm thanks to Céline

Candiard for meticulously proofreading it. In the following notes, the English titles of articles in *Faslnameh* published after the Revolution are taken from the translations provided in the journal's abstracts.

1. *Ta'zieh: Indigenous Avant-garde Art of Iran [Ta'zieh: honar-e boumi-ye pishrow-e Iran]*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, trans. Davud Hatami (Tehran: Elmi va farhangi, 1367/1988).

2. *Ta'zieh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* [International symposium on *Ta'zieh*, 20–25 August 1976, Shiraz Festival of Arts, Shiraz, Iran/proceedings], ed. Peter J. Chelkowski (New York: New York University Press: Soroush Press, 1979).

3. On theatre training and the advent of theatre as an academic discipline in Iran, see Fahimeh Najmi, 'La Vitalité du théâtre universitaire à Téhéran', *Alternatives théâtrales*, Brussels, No. 132 (2017).

4. According to researcher Enayatollah Shahidi, *Ta'zieh* was banned around 1932–3. See *Ta'zieh and Ta'zieh-khāni in Tehran: A Research on the Shi'a Indigenous Drama of Ta'zieh from the Beginning to the End of Qajar Era [Ta'zieh va ta'zieh khāni az āghāz tā pāyān-e دوره-ye Ghaādār dar Tehran]* (Tehran: Daftar-e pajouheshhāy-e farhangi, 1380/2001), p. 206.

5. Iranian traditional performances, all performed by men and cited many times in this article, can be broadly classified into four categories: *Naaqqali* (storytelling); *Rouhozi* (or *taghliā* – comedy shows based on improvisation); *Kheymeh shab bāzi* (puppet show); and of course *Shabih gardāni* or *Shabih khāni*, better known under the name *Ta'zieh*, which is at the very heart of this text. The *Ta'zieh* is, in principle, a show based on stories and traditions relating to the life of the family of the Prophet of Islam and, in particular, to the events and disasters that affected Imam Hossein and his lineage in Karbala in the year 61 of the Hegira. Its inception is located at the time of the Buyid dynasty (the fourth century of the Hegira), following the development and improvement of the ritual and traditions concerning religious mourning in Iran. Furthermore, it may have drawn its source from the rites of certain pre-Islamic collective ceremonies and traditions. In any case, along with the formalization of Shi'ism in the Safavid era in the sixteenth century of the Christian era, *Ta'zieh* actually entered the public sphere. With Shi'ism and the development of the *Ta'zieh*, the Iranians then supported the members of the Prophet's family in the face of the Caliphs and Sunni supporters of the Caliphate. This traditional religious spectacle is thus performed every year, especially during the first ten days of the month of *Muharram*; Fahimeh Najmi, "'À cause des morts, on a trouvé refuge au cimetière": Le *Ta'zieh* dans la littérature de fiction iranienne', *Revue Registres*, Paris, No. 19 (2016), p. 115.

6. Parviz Mamnoon, 'Peter Brook Stands Up for the *Ta'zieh*: It's Like Despising Shakespeare . . .' [Defā'e Peter Brook az *Ta'zieh*: engār Shakespeare rā tahghir konim . . .], *Āyandegān* daily newspaper, Tehran, No. 740 (1349/1970), p. 6.

7. Laleh Taghian, 'Interview with Farrokh Ghaffari about *Ta'zieh* and *Rouhozi*' [Goft-o-gou bā Farrokh Ghaffari darbāreh-ye *Ta'zieh* va *Rouhozi*], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1 (2636 [1356]/1977), p. 67.

8. Amongst the detainees, we can cite the playwright and short story writer Gholamhossein Saedi (1936–1985) who, in 1974, after several short arrests, was taken prisoner by the SAVAK for publishing depressing literature, and spent a year in solitary confinement in Evin Prison. The same goes for novelist Mahmoud Dowlatabadi



(b. 1940), who during those years was also active as a theatre actor. He was arrested and sent to the Qasr Prison in Tehran. His arrest, which took place on the evening of the penultimate performance of *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky, in which he played a part, followed his performance in *Incident at Vichy* by Arthur Miller. Playing in these plays was then considered as proof that he was a 'leftist'. See Fahimeh Najmi, *Le Théâtre, l'Iran et l'Occident* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018), p. 94, 96.

9. Ali Nassirian, 'Introduction' [Sarāghāz], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1 (2536 [1356]/1977), p. 4–5.

10. Bahram Beyzai, 'Talhak and others' [Talhak va digarān], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1, (2636 [1356]/1977), p. 86–114.

11. Worthington Miner, 'Television Plays' [Teatr-e televizioni], trans. Hassan Fayad, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1(2536 [1356]/1978), p. 89–98.

12. John Gassner, 'Radio Theatre: An Auditory Theatre' [Teatr-e radio'i; teatri shenidari], trans. Hassan Fayad, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 3 (2537 [1357]/1978), p. 153–8.

13. Geneviève Serreau, 'Jean Genet', trans. Shahla Shariatmadari, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 3 (2537 [1357]/1978), p. 58–73.

14. Claus Peymann, 'Staging of Peter Handke's Plays' [Kārgardāni-ye namāyesh nāmehhā-ye Peter Handke], trans. Parviz Shafa, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 2 (2536 [1356]/1978), p. 66–76.

15. Rashid Ben Sheneb, 'Arab Theatre' [Teatr-e arab], trans. Abdollah Tavakol, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 2 (2536 [1356]/1978), p. 46–58.

16. Frank Jutran, 'Black Theatre' [Teatr-e siāhān], trans. Abdollah Tavakol, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 5 (1357/1978), p. 66–93.

17. Matin And, 'Karagöz', trans. Mahshid Kabiri, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 3 (2537 [1357]/1978), p. 96–106.

18. Or 'Garden of the Martyrs'; book written by Mulla Hossein Wa'ez Kashefi (1436–1504).

19. Mayel Baktash, 'Time for Theatricality and the Emergence of the Role in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries of the Hegira' [Hengāmeh-ye namāyeshgara'i va padidār-e naghsh dar gharnhāy-e 9 va 10 hejri], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 2 (2536 [1356]/1978), p. 24.

20. Information about Squat Theatre and *Pig, Child, Fire!* is taken from Theodore Shank, 'Squat's "Pig, Child, Fire!"', *The Drama Review* [TDR], XXI, No. 3 (1977), p. 95–100.

21. Iraj Zohari, 'Theatre in the 11th Arts Festival-2' [Teatr dar jashn-e honar-e yazdahom], *Tamāshā* weekly newspaper, Tehran, No. 330 (2536 [1356]/1977), p. 19.

22. Mahasti Afshar, 'Festival of Arts Shiraz-Persepolis; Or, you better believe in as many as six impossible things before breakfast', New York Asia Society, Symposium: The Shiraz Arts Festival (2013), <<https://asiasociety.org/new-york/symposium-shiraz-arts-festival>>, accessed 24 July 2022.

23. Shank, 'Squat's "Pig, Child, Fire!"', p. 98.

24. Jamshid Chalangi, 'Latest Report from Nancy Festival; A Curious Traveller in a Sleepy City' [Ākharin gozāresh az jashnvāreh Nancy; mosāferi konjkāv dar shahr-e bekhāb rafteh], *Rastākhez* daily newspaper, Tehran, No. 643 (2536 [1356]/1977), p. 7.

25. Iraj Zohari, *Memories and Beings* [Yādāh va boudhā] (Tehran: Moin, 1382/2003), p. 211.

26. Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall; Iran 1974–1979* [Gorur va soghout], trans. Manouchehr Rastin (Tehran: Haftah, 1963/1984), p. 91.

27. According to Iranian journalist Masoud Behnoud, 'A Thousand Stories with Masoud Behnoud: An Oral Narrative of Iran's Contemporary History' [video file], YouTube, 17 July 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YxdwxgqCWsQ>>, accessed 27 July 2022.

28. Zohari, 'Theatre in the 11th Arts Festival-2', p. 19.

29. 'Sheikh Bahaeddin Mahalati', SAVAK Report No. 11h/12042, 31 August 1977, *Shiraz Arts Festival according to SAVAK documents* [Jashn-e hoar-e Shiraz beh revāyat-e asnād-e SAVAK] (Tehran: Markaz-e asnād-e tārikhi-ye vezārat-e etelā'āt, 1381/2002), p. 388–90.

30. See the reproduction of the newspaper pieces by Parviz Jahed, 'Ups and Downs of Shiraz Arts Festival' [Farāz-o-foroud-e jashn-e honar-e Shiraz], per.euronews.com (2015), <<https://per.euronews.com/2015/10/10/shiraz-art-festival-celebration-in-london>>, accessed 27 July 2022.

31. 'Some of the Shiraz Arts Festival Programmes and Clergy Dissatisfaction' [Ba'zi az barnāmehhā-ye jashn-e honar-e Shiraz va nārezāe-ye rohānioun], SAVAK Report No. 11h20/14110, 21 September 1977; *Shiraz Arts Festival according to SAVAK documents*, p. 398.

32. Reinhard Beuth, 'Shahbanu's Big Toy' [Bāziche-ye bozorg-e Shahbanou], *Neue Hannoversche* (1977), quoted in full in *Shiraz Arts Festival according to SAVAK documents*, p. 380–2.

33. Imam Khomeini, 'Warning to the Clerics of Najaf District about Wrong Understandings of the Rules of Islam' [Hoshdār beh rohānioun-e Najaf nesbat beh bardāshthāy-e ghalat az ahkām-e eslam], speech dating from 28 September 1977, in Najaf, emam.com, <<http://emam.com/-/hgh5ZF>>, accessed 27 July 2022.

34. Among others, the poet, playwright, and director Said Soltanpour (1940–1981) was arrested on his wedding night on 16 April 1981 and executed two months later; and the playwright, director, and translator Abbas Nalbandian (1947–1989) who, after several arrests, killed himself in 1989. In addition, the director Naser Rahmani Nejad (b. 1939), playwright Mohsen Yalfani (b. 1943), actor and director Parviz Sayyad (b. 1939), actress Farzaneh Taidi (1945–2020), actress Susan Taslimi (b. 1950), playwright and researcher Gholamhossein Saedi (1936–1985), actor and playwright Bijan Mofid (1935–1984), and playwright and director Ashurbanipal Babella (1945–2011), to name but a few, are part of the long list of artists and theatre practitioners pushed into exile.

35. Actress Farzaneh Taidi, who, after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, was officially employed by the Department of Theatre Programmes of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, claims to have been fired in 1980 by Hassan Habibi from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. In the official decree of the ministry, it was written that 'to advance the objectives of the Islamic Revolution, you are in excess of need, and it is obvious that from this date, all your rights and benefits will be suspended' (according to farzanehtaidi.com, now unavailable).

36. 'Ta'zieh can now be performed as a re-enactment of the events of the Islamic Revolution and a description of the martyrdom of its great personalities,' has even argued a certain Abolqassem Saghafi, *Ta'zieh* expert and 'director', in an interview on the art of *Ta'zieh* and the difference in its performance under the Pahlavi regime and the present time (Abolqassem Saghafi, *Keyhan* daily newspaper, Tehran (21 October 1982), quoted in Laleh Taghian and Jamshid Kianfar, 'Bibliography of *Ta'zieh*', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 13 (1370/1991), p. 279).

37. Ali Montazeri, 'It is a green leaf . . .', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1 (1367/1988), p. 1.
38. On the subject of traditional Iranian shows, Sattari translated the following texts, among others: Alexandre Chodzko, 'Persian Theatre', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 9–10 (1369/1990), p. 103–20; Comte de Gobineau, 'Theatre in Iran', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 11–12 (1369/1990–1), p. 163–204; Charles Virolleaud, 'Ta'zieh', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 16 (1370/1991), p. 119–28; and Jacob M. Landau, 'Initiation and Ta'zieh', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 16 (1370/1991), p. 129–44.
39. *Tekyeh* means (fixed) locations dedicated to performances of the *Ta'zieh*. As for the famous *Tekyeh Dowlat* or Governmental *Tekyeh*, 'it was built by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (1831–1896) close to Golestan Palace in Tehran. Some say that the builders of the *Tekyeh Dowlat* were inspired by the architecture of the Royal Albert Hall, which should have been well known since the buildings were built at about the same time (1867–71 in the case of the Albert Hall, and 1867–72/3 for the *Tekyeh Dowlat*). The fact remains that the Qadjar sovereign attributed this room to the sumptuous representations of the *Ta'zieh*'; Fahimeh Najmi, 'Le Théâtre et l'identité nationale en Iran (sous le règne des Pahlavi)', doctoral thesis (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, 2014), p. 19–20.
40. Nadereh Badi'i, 'Act of *Ta'zieh* in *Tekyeh Dowlat*', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 2–3 (1367/1988), p. 70.
41. 'Producers of *Ta'zieh* and *Tekyeh* in Tehran', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 14 (1370/1991), p. 273–81.
42. 'The List of *Ta'zieh* performers and *Tekyeh* in Shiraz', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 14 (1370/1991), p. 285–9.
43. Javad Zolfaqari, '*Ta'zieh* in Hormozgan', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 1 (1367/1988), p. 53–69.
44. Soheil Khodaparasti, 'Abstract', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 18–19 (1378/1999), p. 305.
45. Mohammad Hossein Rajaei, 'Stone Striking', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 18–19 (1378/1999), p. 189–206.
46. Farah Yeganeh, '*Ta'zieh* as Theatrical Event', trans. Reza Parchizadeh, *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 176–87.
47. Jahanshir Yarahmadi, '*Rowzeh Khāni*: Passion Narratives of Shia Imams, as a Theatrical System', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 170–5.
48. Jahanshir Yarahmadi and Mehdi Nasiri, 'Study of the Structural and Content Elements of the Ritual of Chest Beating as a Theatre', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 79 (1398/2020), p. 116–29.
49. Yarahmadi, '*Rowzeh Khāni*', p. 170.
50. Mohammad Hossein Naserbakht, '*Shabih Khāni*: The Holy Drama' [Shabih khāni; namāyesh-e moqadas], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 20–1 (1378/1999–2000), p. 157.
51. Seyed Mostafa Mokhtabad, 'Interpretation of the Hero's Ancestral Root in *Ta'zieh*', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 49 (1391/2012), p. 181.
52. Farhad Mohandespour, 'Epic Narrative: Narrative of Iranian Religion', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 150–9.
53. Milad Akbarnejad, 'An Introduction to the Theatre of Religion as a Possible Combination', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 52–3 (1392/2013), p. 33–4.
54. Abolfazl Horri, 'Religious Drama and the Role of Audience', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 79.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
57. Fahimeh Sayahian, 'Similarities between Religion and Theatre', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 98.
58. 'Nūn. By the pen and what everyone writes!' (Qur'ān, Surah Al-Qalam, verse 1).
59. Sayahian, 'Similarities between Religion and Theatre', p. 101.
60. According to Sayahian, 'Thought comes out of examples. Each of the examples in the scriptures also arises within a story. And stories in religion are stories that all reflect the same idea: "achieving virtue".' She then refers to the 'narratives' of Joseph and the Israelites in Surah Yusuf and Surah Al-Isra from the Qur'ān (Sayahian, 'Similarities between Religion and Theatre', p. 102).
61. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
62. 'Bibliography of the Theatre of the Revolution' [Ketābshenāsi-ye teatr-e enqelāb], *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 2–3 (1367/1988), p. 292–304.
63. Seyed Maysam Motahari and Majid Sarsangi, 'The Survey Research in Sacred Defence Theatre and Criticism Review in Tehran after the Islamic Revolution', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 52–3 (1392/2013), p. 121.
64. Seyed Maysam Motahari, 'The Documentary Study on the Sacred Defence Theatre Research in the Iran Theatre Magazine (between 1984 and 2009)', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 46 (1390/2011), p. 166.
65. Armaghan Behdarvand, Seyed Ahmad Hosseini Kazerouni, and Seyed Jafar Hamidi, 'Review of the Playful Features in "Poetry of War" of Qaisar Aminpour', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 69 (1396/2017), p. 103.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 101–2.
67. Bahram Beyzai, *Kalāt Claimed* [Fathnameh Kalāt] (Tehran: Damavand, 1362/1983), p. 151.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
69. Simin Meshkati and Mohammad Jafar Yusefian Kenari, 'A Comparative Study of the Dramatic Effects of Iranian Identity in Last Decades Plays of Iran (1980–2010)', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 65 (1395/2016), p. 73.
70. The changes in sensibilities inside Iran and the restrictions imposed outside the country have made it so that a part of this faculty's members assumes its revolutionary activities less and less and, consequently, their résumés are strongly modified. As an example, we can cite Farhad Mohandespour and Rahmat Amini, both of whom served for some time as responsible for the Performance Evaluation and Supervision Council of the Performing Arts Centre. On their current résumés, we find no trace of this activity. To reconstruct part of their professional background, it is necessary, among other things, to refer to general information sites. For the résumés, see <<https://profile.ut.ac.ir/~rahmatamini/courses> [https://www.modares.ac.ir/pro/academic\\_staff/mohandes](https://www.modares.ac.ir/pro/academic_staff/mohandes)>, accessed 30 July 2022. On appointments, see 'Farhad Mohandaspour Became the Head of the Performance Evaluation and Supervision Council of the Performing Arts Centre' [Farhad Mohandaspour rais-e shorā-ye nezārat va arzeshyābi-ye markaz-e honarhā-ye namāyeshi shod], *isna.ir*, Tehran (2004), <<https://www.isna.ir/news/8303-07755/>>, accessed 30 July 2022; 'Rahmat Amini Became the Head of the Performance Evaluation and Supervision Council of Theatre' [Rahmat Amini sarparast-e arzeshyābi va nezārat bar namāyesh shod], *tasnimnews.com*, Tehran (2016), <<https://tn.ai/1052810>>, accessed 30 July 2022.

71. Hassan Bayanloo, 'Allegory and Codification in Religious Drama', *Faslnameh Teatr*, Tehran, No. 41 (1387/2008), p. 41, 47.

72. 'Chairman of the Political Council of Imams for Friday Prayer: We Must Arrange for People to Enter

Paradise' [Rais-e shorāy-e siāsatgozari-ye a'emeh-ye jom'eh: bāyad moghadamāt-e voroud-e mardom rā beh behesht farāham konim], entekhab.ir, Tehran (1398/2019), <<https://www.entekhab.ir/0027ss>>, accessed 30 May 2022.