COURTYARD HOUSING:

A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Courtyard Housing: A Comparative Study

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis adopts a multi-dimensional ethnographic perspective to examine courtyard houses, a particular house type from Tabriz, Iran. My research investigates the interplay between spatial contexts and socio-cultural performances in this built environment. In particular, my thesis addresses two major cultural issues in relation to this architectural form. First, the research investigates the interrelation between architecture and belief. Examining the spaces and their functions in the house, I explore how aspects of Iranians' everyday lives are affected by the practice of Islam and how this influence is reflected in the spatial organization of houses and in the performances of residents within their houses. Second, and the most significant aspect of my research is to investigate the interplay between spatial arrangement and gendered experiences. Gender roles and relations are constructed, experienced and controlled within the spatial context of a dwelling. My research consequently aims to investigate the role of domestic architecture in articulating gendered relations. The courtyard house contributes to the confinement of women and their relegation to the domestic sphere. However, women do not always conform to the enforced gender roles and relations. My thesis shows how by controlling and mediating interior space, women resist and subvert the existing gender norms--though in a limited way.

Figures

x

*All photographs are taken by the author except where otherwise noted.

Tables

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is a study of courtyard houses, a particular traditional house type from my hometown, Tabriz, Iran. The interest to do this research project was inspired by a combination of my fascination with material culture studies and my background in architecture. In conducting this research, I went back to my hometown to search for buildings from my childhood memories.

It is a pleasant sunny winter morning and I am walking in an old neighbourhood in Tabriz in the pursuit of a very old memory. It has been many years now since the last time I have walked in this neighbourhood. I turn from the avenue to an alley. It is ten in the morning and the men have already set out for work. Once in awhile, a woman passes by with a shopping basket in hand, but overall it is very quiet here.

The aura of place suddenly changes when I reach a spacious, roofed space in the center of the neighbourhood. This is the Bazar-che (the historical local marketplace), the heart of the neighbourhood, with the bakery on one corner, the grocery store on the other and the local mosque attached to its side. But it has changed a lot since the last time I was here. All the places that used to be local shops have become either storage spaces or blacksmith shops or other industrial businesses. A masculine sensibility dominates the space; it does not look anything like the vibrant space that it used to be.

Memories come back to me: the days when we loved this market as kids—a place where we could look at the knick knacks in the shops for hours. I pass from that market

place and again it becomes quiet when I walk into the residential part of the neighbourhood. I feel I am very close to the place for which I am searching. I am looking for a house, one that I remember from the past. I have no address; there was no house number present when I used to visit this dwelling. Instead, I must follow the traces of my old memories of the place.

I turn down the first narrow alley I reach, but it does not seem familiar at all. I try the next and the next, but no luck. Everything has changed around here since I left fifteen years ago. Here and there, some of the old houses have survived, but they are not in good shape. Others are partially demolished, or have been replaced by the multi-story modern apartments. It is already noon and my quest has failed. Still, I have been drowned in memories. I lost track of time. I only realize the time when the voice of Athan (recitation to call for daily prayer) arises from the local mosque for the noon prayer. I pass by the mosque, men rush toward the ornate front door for the communal noon prayer; women enter through the back door. I have to give up for the day; I may give it another try later, but it seems that the house does not exist anymore.

What was so special about this particular house that drew me to it after all these years? I have a personal attachment to this house, since I visited it only occasionally when I was young. It was nothing like the houses that I was raised in--being born in a middle class and less traditional family, I have never had the intimate experience of living in the traditional neighbourhoods with their spacious courtyard houses. The mysterious and pleasant experience of being in a courtyard for me was limited to the once-a-year New Year's Day visits my family made to an elderly aunt's house. Her house was located at

the very end of a narrow, winding alley in a traditional neighbourhood. Car access was limited because of the very narrow passages. We had to park on the street and walk all the way down to the house in the new shoes which were bought for the New Year, the ones that always hurt our feet. Complaining about the long walk, I followed my parents, not caring how we arrived at the house or how we navigated the many intersections of the neighbourhood. Finally, we would get to the door. The narrow, low, two-leaf door of the aunt's house was open all the time; we entered the house after a quick knock and passed from a narrow, dark passage to a spacious courtyard. The Iranian New Year starts on the first day of spring. After a long, harsh winter, the courtyard was unkempt with its ungroomed grape vines growing wildly. The aunt's courtyard was crowded by all kinds of pets: chickens, ducks, pigeons and cats.

Everything about this house was different from what I was used to as a child; the objects, the people and the space all seemed to be from another world. We passed from that unearthly courtyard to the interior of the house. Passing from a narrow hall we entered the aunt's living room where she sat on a cushion beside the Samavar setting. The smell of oil dominated the cold, misty room because of the constant boiling of the kettle on the oil heater in the center of the room. This strong scent permanently embedded in my memories of the aunt's courtyard. We sat on the vibrant colored carpets and blankets spread all around the room (in a particular way to delineate the sitting spots on the floor), leaning on the cushions arranged by the walls. She then would pour the tea from the Samavar and would offer us stale cookies, candies and other snacks which she kept in a chest in the corner of the room. This aunt (I never understood whose aunt she was) had

her own traditions. She insisted that we take all of the food that she offered, including those cookies which we never liked. This house and what occurred there all seemed enchanting for me as a child. The vivid picture of this house, its aura and its memories are always with me after all these years.

Why Tabriz Courtyards?

Apart from their place in my childhood memories, other reasons make Tabriz courtyards an appealing choice for the case study of my thesis research. The courtyard houses of Tabriz have intrigued me since I was doing my B. A. in architecture in Azad University of Tabriz. Being in my hometown, I was familiar with the architectural patterns and traditions of the region. I visited and documented many houses as part of my studies in architecture and also during my professional life after school. However, I never had the experience of living in a courtyard house. I was born and raised in Tabriz. Although I left the city for school when I was young, the memories and the experiences I shared with the people there are always with me.

In addition to my personal attachment to the place, other reasons also contribute in this choice of location as the focus of my research. Due to the frequent natural disasters in the area, earthquakes in particular, Tabriz has been totally destroyed and rebuilt several times throughout its history. These incidents have led to the demolition of most of its majestic, monumental architecture which has always been the focus of Iranian vernacular architecture studies. Thus, while Iranian houses from cities like Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd and Kashan which still contain the magnificent, ornate architecture have been widely studied by vernacular architecture scholars (Memarian 1993, Pirnia 2008; 1990, Mazumdar and

Mazumdar 1997), the Tabriz buildings have been overlooked. Disregarding this area limited the development of literature on the subject, leaving a gap in the research of Iranian vernacular architecture. In order to fill this gap, my research focuses on Tabriz houses even if they may lack the aesthetics of the world-famous Persian architecture.

Tabriz is a mountainous and cold city in the North West area of Iran. It is the fourth largest city of Iran and is known for its devout religious inhabitants. The cold winters and the mild summers make the city the summer destination of tourists from all over the country. With 2,500,000 residents (based on the 2006 census), Tabriz is one of the most populated cities in Iran.

Based on the recent archaeological excavations, civilization in Tabriz dates back to the first millennium BC[1]. According to the *Cambridge History of Iran*, the current Tabriz was founded in third or fourth millennium AD and more probably seventh century (Fisher and Boyle 1968, 14). In the Middle Ages, Tabriz had a population of 1.2 million people according to the historical accounts of travelers and historians such as Marco Polo (1854). It was one of the most important centers of commerce of the world and a crucial component in the trade route between west and east. According to similar historical reports, there were as many as 200,000 houses in Tabriz at the time. The Tabriz houses are commented on in the accounts of contemporary travelers as well (Pope 1965, 242).

In addition to the devastating earthquakes (the most disastrous one took place in 1779 and totally destroyed the city[2]), Tabriz has been involved in many wars because of its

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[1] (http://www.eachto.ir/farsi/content/view/521/381/ *Iron Age excavation site's museum* [in Farsi])

[2] The encyclopaedia of Tabriz [In Farsi], page 63. Accessed on line at http://www.eachto.org/tabriz-ma/

geo-political position, and was destroyed by invaders. The language spoken in Tabriz is Turkic, not the official language of the country: Farsi. This difference sets the people of Tabriz as a minority, compared to the dominant culture. The cultural differences between the minority of Tabriz and the dominant culture have resulted in several social conflicts over the years. Because of major losses in such incidents as invasions and natural disasters, the city could not restore its previous status any more.

The long architectural history of the city was also decimated by these incidents. However, the buildings constructed after the huge earthquake (in 1779), are standing and are still in use. Most of the surviving buildings in the old parts of the city, including the houses, date back to the recent Qajar dynasty period (1785 to 1925) which is considered as the time when the magnificent Iranian traditional architecture faded. Around this period, a major shift in architectural traditions occurred due to the emergence of a general western bias in the culture. Iranian architecture was affected by western styles and tradition in this period. As Pirnia (1990, 154) argues, although many ornate buildings were constructed during this period, the magnificent architecture of the past was never restored in Iran. The courtyards of Tabriz, with reference to the past architecture, have been built between late eighteenth and the early twentieth century. However, most of the surviving houses have undergone changes in both appearance and function throughout their life span.

Courtyard House: The Generic Characteristics

The term courtyard refers to the enclosed complexes containing a central yard with living spaces arranged around it. This spatial arrangement is called *courtyard, courtyard*

type or *courtyard form* by different vernacular architecture studies. Throughout this thesis these three terms will be used interchangeably to refer to this particular enclosed spatial arrangement.

Recent excavations in the Ghazvin region of Iran confirm that the courtyard form has existed for more than 6000 years in Iran (Pirnia 1990, 153). The courtyards have been one of the important architectural features in both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods of Iran. The enclosed pattern, as the fundamental concept of Iranian architecture, has been practiced in residences as well as palaces, Bazaars (market places) and mosques. This broad use in various buildings demonstrates the endurance of the courtyard as a desired form in Iranian architecture, as Memarian and Brown (2003) argue. Persepolis is one of the ancient surviving examples of the courtyard (Pirnia 1990, 24) in a non-residential building. Although dilapidated, the spatial arrangement of Persepolis palace has been re-constructed by archaeologists affirming that the buildings were constructed around the central courtyards.

The courtyard type as a spatial organizational idea is employed in both urban residential buildings and rural farmsteads. The enclosed nature of the structure of a courtyard makes it a desirable form for a wide range of purposes including fortification and defence, protection against harsh weather conditions, distancing private spaces from those of the public, and privacy. Climate is one of the primary underlying factors in the choice of courtyards. The courtyard, as an "earthly paradise" (Leherman 1980) in hot and harsh weather conditions provides physical comfort for the dwellers in addition to fulfilling their cultural expectations (Memarian 2003). Although the form is largely

employed in desert regions, as my fieldwork in a cold, mountainous weather condition proves, the employment of this form is not exclusive to desert climate conditions.

Defensibility of the courtyard type residence is the other universal appeal of this spatial arrangement. This function of courtyard types make them desirable for a wide range of people from primitive tribes (Oliver 1975) to the colonizers (Graham 1986; Deagan 1986; St. George 1990), as well as social, political and religious minorities (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997a).

While the courtyard forms of different regions have particular features determined by the architectural tradition of the region, they more or less share a set of generic characteristics. They are generally complexes with several rooms and living spaces arranged around a central yard (Figure 1). Based on the needs, purposes, means and the construction traditions of the dwellers, the rooms may be constructed in one, two, three or four sides surrounding the courtyard. The building may be attached to the exterior walls of the courtyard or detached from them and situated in the central position to the courtyard.
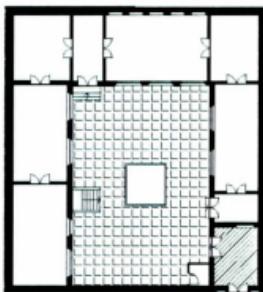
Figure 1: Floor Plan of a typical courtyard house.

The number of courtyards also varies based on the cultural factors and spatial requirements of the dwellers. Urban residences may have multiple courtyards to provide social segregation of dwellers in terms of insider/outsider, owner/servant or male/female. Since rural courtyard types are used for purposes more than residency, such as food production, animal housing and accommodating agricultural equipment, the multi-courtyard farmsteads and rural courtyards allow for the separation of the residential section from the other sections. The courtyard, in general, is the focal point of the building and the center of most of its activities.

The structures are mostly one or two story, surrounded by high walls with few or no openings to the outside and where all the rooms face the courtyard. In other words, the design of the courtyard house is intended for distancing the inhabitants from the outside world and restricting the interaction between the inside and outside. As Fletcher (1995) argues, the courtyard form is a common feature of early urban communities which because of its isolated quality distanced the household from the outside world. Restricting the interaction between inside and outside, the courtyard type reduced the stress of living in a densely populated settlement for its dwellers (135). This function of courtyards continued to attract a vast majority of people around the world and throughout the history to fulfill various purposes. While Muslims embraced the courtyard form to shelter their female relatives within its walls, the Spanish and English colonizers used the form to distance their family and property from the natives' hostilities (Graham 1986; Deagan 1986; St. George 1990).

Objective of the Research

The essential goal of this thesis is to search for meaning in the built environment; "ordering, manipulating and building …. [of which] corresponds to patterns of seeing and understanding of a cultural group" (Erzen 2002, 57). This research looks at courtyard houses, a certain type of residential building in Iran from a multi-dimensional ethnographic perspective. The vernacular architecture of these houses is inextricably tied to cultural values, beliefs and the social structure of the region as well as the surrounding environment. The cities in general and the house arrangements in particular can be regarded as collective artifacts of the people who occupied them as well as a representation of the society and the values to which the people subscribed (Petruccioli 2004, 19).

Houses as artifacts, "provide the tangible evidence of the everyday past" and the patterns discovered in their form and function "reveal the hidden attitudes underlying our world" (Bronner 1986, 219). They both contain and define the enactment of everyday concerns. Houses and their contained objects "symbolize the intricate internal ways in which people materially order their lives" (Herman 1987, 238). They are the signifiers that communicate the order (and conflict) of urban life (Herman 2005, 2). Amos Rapoport (1976), in the introductory chapter of the cross-cultural study of *The Mutual Interaction of People and Their Built Environment,* argues that since vernacular houses are built in the forms largely accepted by a community, they establish a close link with culture (25) and become a symbolic representation of self and larger community (Herman 2005, 5). Houses also provide an appropriate behavioural setting for inhabitants to conduct in

accordance with the shared cultural norms and values. This connection is more marked in Islamic cities because of particular Islamic requirements of social life such as restrictions in cross-gender interaction. Moreover, architectural features contribute to the survival and preservation of a group's cultural identity and values. As Erzen (2002) suggests, the spatial organization corresponds to the orientations of a society towards the various aspects of life and its relationship to the surrounding world (57). Thus, houses provide a site of negotiation and communication of multi-layered interpretive possibilities for both dwellers and observers.

This thesis considers Iranian courtyard houses and the way their space is used in order to better understand why people behave in particular ways within a set spatial context. An ethnographic study of these houses must consider the various ways in which people interact with their living spaces as well as the architectural ideas behind these spaces. Buildings in and of themselves are concrete, passive objects. They gain their profound meaning through interacting with the people who use them. In *Theorizing Heritage*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) cites Raymond Williams (1958) who remarks: "a culture can never be reduced to its artifacts while it is being lived" (343). She argues that in presenting a cultural form, what is significant is the restoration of the links and relationships to actual people, communities and circumstances in which the artifacts are acquired. Likewise, in studying the courtyard house as a cultural form, I do not aim to focus on a form-oriented, object-centered study of vernacular architecture with emphasis on buildings detached from their contexts. Nor do I aim to take a romanticized approach to the vernacular buildings to illustrate how they were magnificent and efficient. Rather,

influenced by the North American, folkloristic studies of vernacular architecture— such as Gerald Pocius' study of Calvert, Newfoundland (1991)— by observing everyday life in the courtyard houses as it is lived in the present time, I try to investigate the mutual relationship of house form to major cultural issues such as belief and gender.

Methodological and Theoretical Approaches

The aim of this research is to investigate the interrelationship of vernacular architecture and culture in an Iranian context, a subject area that has been inadequately covered. The goal of the research is to address the symbolic, cultural and ideological assumptions behind the design, construction and function of the courtyard house. As Petruccioli (2004) comments, a residential building type is an expression of a culture (14). Henry Glassie (1999) also suggests that studying these built worlds enables us to understand the stories of the people who had a relationship with them. Consequently, this research, following the folkloristic traditions of Henry Glassie, Bernard Herman, Gerald Pocius and others, aims to shift the focus of study from the form of building to the function and to the use of space. The research tries to investigate life experiences in the context of the house rather than merely exploring the forms and styles of houses.

Although the main goal of this research is the close examination of the Iranian courtyard type, it also includes a comparative study of courtyard houses from different parts of the world. This historical and geographical study of such examples helps to broaden the perspective of the research and to set the foundation for an in-depth study of Iranian courtyards.

Iranian vernacular architecture has been studied largely by scholars of architectural history who have explored the styles and aesthetic aspects and elements of houses with less interest in observing and interpreting how these spaces were used (Ghzelbash, and Aboziya 1984; Memarian 1993; Pirnia 1990). This study extends previous work by combining the methods of both fieldwork and object-centered research, a method suggested by Pocius (1991) in his study of Calvert, Newfoundland, as an alternative approach for material culture research. He suggests that the combination of these methods enables the researcher to study living culture alongside objects (Pocius 1991, 11). Living culture is constructed in the spatial context. Space also gains its meanings from the objects and people it contains. Thus, this research looks at living space, objects (the arrangement patterns) and people to address the social interactions that are constructed in such contexts.

This study employs a combination of visual and verbal methods for studying domestic spaces. The findings are based on both observations in the houses studied and stories people told about their living spaces in the past and present. This research examines the domestic spaces through the eyes of the dwellers, and is mainly based on the life experiences and interactions of people with their living spaces. In addition to interviewing people, the fieldwork for this research, conducted in two periods during the Christmas holidays of 2011 and the spring of 2012, included measurements of the building, drawings, field notes and the photographing of the buildings. (Detailed information about the fieldwork, choice of houses etc. will be discussed in the second chapter.)

My main approach to the selected houses is influenced by Amos Rapaport's methodological framework outlined in the introductory chapter to *The* Mutual *Interaction of People and Their Built Environment*. He suggests eight major areas of concern for ethnographical study of man-environment relations at a general level: the form of settlement; the use of form; the various ways of interpreting the organization of space; how the spaces are defined in the house e.g. private/public; how family structures and gender roles are reflected and related to the spatial organization; issues of privacy and social interaction; the values of the group which are considered; how processes of cultural changes are reflected (Rapoport 1976, 12-17).

As cultures change as a result of exposure to modernization, individual values undergo change as well. Consequently, people modify their existing living spaces. As Carter and Cromely (2005) observe, these alterations and remodelling are part of any architectural history (28). Henry Glassie (1975) has widely addressed the links between cultural changes and shifts in architectural styles and traditions in his study of folk housing in Middle Virginia. Although the concern of this research is not the stylistic modifications of architecture over time, such changes are considered in terms of use of space. As Pocius (1991) in his study of Calvert houses observed: "people live in the old houses not in old ways" (199), but rather by adapting the architectural spaces to their constantly changing needs. The study of changes along with continuity in architectural traditions provides a broader perspective for the study of vernacular architecture. This is a point that is usually overlooked by architectural studies of Iranian houses. From an ethnographic approach, my research investigates how people adapt and adjust their

existing living spaces to respond to the requirements of their current (modern) life and how these minor changes in the living spaces communicate the profound meanings with the observer.

Literature Review

The courtyard house form has been examined by vernacular architecture scholars around the world. However, the study of vernacular architecture in the Iranian context is usually considered from a historical-architectural perspective (Pope 1965; 1971; Ghzelbash, and Aboziya 1984; Kheirabadi 2000; Memarian 1993; Petrucsioli and Pirani 2002; Pirnia 1990; Soltanzade 1994).

From a broader approach to material culture and vernacular architecture, this research is guided by texts by Glassie (1999; 2000), Carter and Cromley (2005) and Rapoport (1976). In his remarkable work, *Vernacular Architecture*, Henry Glassie (2000), addresses the key principles in studying and analysing vernacular architecture by providing examples from the United States, as well as Europe and Asia. Carter and Cromley's (2005) publication, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* also provides a significant introductory guide to vernacular architecture studies. In *The Mutual Interactions of People and Their Built Environment* the authors introduce the useful methodological frameworks for the study of built environment in relation to people (Rapoport 1976).

The relationship of house forms and culture has been studied by Rapoport (1969), Oliver (1975; 2006) and Low and Chambers (1989). In his introductory study of vernacular architecture, Amos Rapoport (1969) investigates the influence of cultural

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issues in house form in primitive settlements. Likewise, Paul Oliver (1975) *in Shelter, Sign and Symbol,* explores the ways that beliefs and values of people are reflected in the vernacular architectural forms. In his cross-cultural work, *Built to Meet Needs*, Oliver (2006) addresses the social and cultural factors which contribute to the evolution of vernacular forms of architecture.

Other studies specifically discuss Iranian house types. The general characteristics of Iranian courtyard houses have been well documented by Memarian (1993) and Pirnia (1990). In examining the diffusion patterns of courtyard housing, the works of Edwards et al (2004) and Oliver (1997) are significant. In the cross-cultural study *Courtyard Housing, Past, Present & Future*, edited by Edwards et al (2004), the authors provide a wide range of examples of courtyards from all over the world though the main focus is on Middle Eastern types.

A number of researchers have suggested climate as the main reason for the appearance of courtyard housing in Iran, but such an explanation ignores the socio-cultural factors that have affected the form of traditional houses (Ramezani and Hamidi 2010). Further, as Petruccioli (2004) observes, since the regions which share the same building type are not necessarily located in the same geographic zone, climate cannot be an underlying factor in the emergence of the house type in a region.

The socio-cultural factors that contribute to shaping the courtyard form are examined by Memarian and Brown (2004). They suggest that the appearance of different typologies of houses in the same climate region proves the impact of cultural factors in shaping the design of the buildings. In addition, few studies have examined different aspects of

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architecture in relation to climate and religion (Bonine 1979; Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997). Examining pre-Islam buildings, Haji Ghassemi (1999) argues that such characteristics of Iranian houses are not merely manifestations of a religious philosophy of privacy. Instead, he suggests that they reflect Iranian culture and the sense of privacy which is emphasized by Islamic rules. Memarian and Brown (2003) examined the impact of climate and religious ideology on the spatial and formal organization of houses through a comparison of two historic Iranian cities: Yazd and Shiraz. They suggest that the importance placed on climate or religion may differ according to local conditions and traditions.

Gendered spaces and the influence of spatial arrangement in gendered experiences are examined by Spain (1992), Ardener (1981), and Cromely and Carter (1995). Daphne Spain (1992), in *Gendered Spaces*, studies gender performance in various contexts of residential, education and work. She concludes that gendered space hinders the access women have to knowledge used by men leading to the lower status of women in a society. In *Women and Space, Ground Rules and Social Maps*, edited by Ardener (1981), the authors provide a rich ethnographic study from different geographical contexts including Iran to discuss the ways women perceive and experience space. A few significant studies on the spatial dimensions of women's lives in Muslim societies have been conducted (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997; 1999). However, the studies that focus on women's lives in private spaces are scarce.

The concern of most if not all of the existing research in the Iranian context is the examination of form and style of architecture. North American scholars, however, have

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moved far beyond the form in their inquiries. Influenced by such shifts in vernacular architecture scholarship, this thesis extends previous work by turning the perspective from form to function. By approaching these buildings from an ethnographic perspective, this thesis investigates the lifestyles of the people, especially women, who live in such houses, exploring the interplay of social, cultural and religious considerations in shaping these houses and their functions.

Contents of the Forthcoming Chapters

This thesis consists of two major parts: One is mainly based on library research and is a comparative study of courtyard types in different parts of the world. This is meant to provide a broad historical and geographic background to the subject. The other part considers Iranian courtyards and is mainly based on my fieldwork.

Moving from this introductory chapter, the second chapter will discuss Tabriz courtyard houses, their generic characteristics, spatial organization and architectural features. My concern with Tabriz courtyards is not their historical origins or the evolution of their forms; rather, I focus on the present function and use of space of these houses by their current dwellers. This chapter, examining the Tabriz courtyards, tries to answer the following questions: 1) what are the common characteristics of Tabriz courtyard houses? 2) What are the main spaces inside the houses? 3) How are the spaces being used by dwellers? The selected and documented houses for the study are also introduced in this chapter along with their social history and spatial arrangement. In addition, this chapter will cover the context through which the houses were collected, the challenges of surveying the houses and the difficulties I encountered trying to gain access to the houses.

The third chapter employs a comparative study approach to the courtyard as a spatial organizational form. Based on a historical and geographical survey, this chapter aims to explore locations outside the Middle East where this type of housing is also common, making a direct comparison between these types and those common in the Middle East. In addition, this chapter will investigate how various types of courtyard houses relate to each other and how they differ according to the culture and traditions of the place. Although the courtyard form is a universal type of housing, appearance of similar architectural forms may have different meanings in different societies (Westgate 2007, 241). Consequently, an investigation of the precise social origins or possible antecedents of courtyard forms in various parts of the world cannot be possible. However, through a comparative perspective, this chapter will discuss how similarities of courtyard forms in different regions of the world do not necessarily represent similar values and beliefs of the occupants. Rather, people from different areas with different means and purposes take the original form and adjust it to work for their own needs and values.

The major areas of concern for the research in the Middle East include courtyards of Syria, Turkey and Jordan. However, the research briefly looks at the courtyards of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Libya as well. Beyond the Middle East, the research will look at: ancient Greek courtyard arrangements (Westgate 2007; Lavas 1986); English courtyards (St. George 1990), Spanish colonial courtyards (Deagan 1986; Graham 1986; Wilson 1991), courtyards of China (Spencer 1947, Ma 2010) and Indian courtyards (Bryden 2004; Randhawa 1999).

Since domestic architecture is a result of combination of practical needs and symbolic ideas, the fourth chapter of this thesis is aimed at investigating the interrelationship between architecture and belief. Examining the spaces and their functions in the house, this chapter raises the following questions: 1) What is the relationship between the practice of Islam and the form of courtyard housing in Iran? 2) What aspects of Iranians' everyday lives are affected by religion? 3) How is this influence reflected in the spatial organization of the houses and in the performances of residents within the houses? 4) How are issues of privacy defined and observed in houses?

In the fifth chapter, the research employs a gender analysis approach to examine the relationship between spatial arrangement and gendered experiences. Gender roles and relations are constructed, experienced and controlled in the spatial context of a dwelling. Such domestic relations become representative of the ideals about relationships in the outside world (Spain 1992, 8). Thus, this chapter considers courtyard houses and people's interaction with them to explore the hidden negotiation of power within a family in Iranian culture. The interaction between genders is restricted in Islam where it is problematic for a woman to share a private space with men to whom she is not related (Khatib-Chahidi 1981). This chapter consequently aims to investigate the role of domestic architecture in articulating social rank accorded to gender. This study tries to recognize how Islamic gender segregation affects the design and function of vernacular residential spaces. The courtyard house, no doubt, contributes to confinement of women and their relegation to the domestic sphere. However, women do not always conform to the enforced gender roles and relations. By controlling and mediating the interior space,

women resist and subvert the existing gender norms--though in a limited way. Therefore, this chapter raises the following questions in relation to architecture and gender: 1) How are gender roles and relations defined in the spatial context of courtyard houses? 2) How does the patriarchal order of the culture affect the spatial organization of the house and how does it restrict women? 3) What is the role of domestic arrangements in shaping and/or enforcing the accepted gender roles? 3) How do women conform to or resist and subvert their expected roles through controlling the domestic space? Thus, this chapter tries to explore social structures, cultural patterns and gender identities which are constructed and performed in a specific spatial context.

So far, the reasons for selection of the subject of this thesis and the major areas of concern of the research have been outlined. Belief and gender are the two main issues which this thesis deals with. Drawing evidence from the documented and studied courtyards, the research will investigate how such major cultural issues are articulated in Tabriz houses. Apart from my fascination with my hometown's architecture, the need for this research emerged because of the inadequate coverage of the subject by other researchers. Compared to more majestic buildings such as mosques and palaces, houses have been the focus of very few inquiries in Iran. Tabriz houses, in particular have been largely overlooked because of their often plain appearances. Courtyard houses are among those urban house types which are increasingly threatened by the influx of Western style architecture. Courtyard houses also are disappearing because of the influence of the population growth and the increasing price of land which demand development of compact, apartment-style housing. However, my research demonstrates that the

traditional house types, including the courtyard one, respond to people's needs in an effective way whereas the modern architecture is incapable of satisfying such needs.

To undertake this research I leave the modern parts of Tabriz and make a trip to the old, traditional neighbourhoods in the central parts of the city in the search of the surviving courtyard houses. The following chapter explains the adventures of this quest and the outcomes of this journey.

Chapter 2

Tabriz Courtyard Houses

The Quest for the Courtyard Houses in Tabriz

In studying vernacular architecture, various field methods may be selected by researchers. Carter and Cromely (2005) suggest that before starting actual fieldwork, the researcher needs to spend time to get familiar with the place and people under investigation. Others such as Pocius (1991) start their fieldwork by stepping into an unknown community. The fieldwork method I pursued falls neither into the former category nor the latter. Since Tabriz is my hometown, I was not considered as an outsider. However, on a smaller scale, I was not familiar with the lifestyle and traditions of these old parts of the city I selected to study. Having this ambivalent feeling, I started walking around the neighbourhoods and looking around.

In searching the houses, my first concern was what is considered as vernacular architecture and what is not? Does the notion of vernacular architecture have to do more with age of the building or its builder and creator or what? Scholars such as Amos Rapoport draw a clear distinction between *monumental buildings* or "those [that] belong to the grand design tradition" and *vernacular architecture*. He concludes that the former is consciously designed for impressing where the latter is "the direct and unself-conscious translation into physical form of a culture, its needs and values as well as the desires, dreams and passions of a people" (Rapoport 1969, 2). Henry Glassie (2000), rejecting the existence of such clear distinction, suggests that the study of vernacular architecture is "an approach to the whole of the built world" (20). He argues that the buildings are called

vernacular because "they embody values alien to those cherished in the academy" (20). In Glassie's words, calling a building *vernacular* "highlights the cultural and contingent nature of all buildings" (21) and "marks [their] transition from the unknown to known" (20). Gerald Pocius, acknowledging Glassie's ideas, suggests that the concept of vernacular architecture is more connected to locality and regionality. In his words, vernacular architecture is one that "has substantial input from the particular community" (Pocius 1991, 198).

Rapoport's argument may be applicable in the case of indigenous communities or other housing traditions where building skills and knowledge are more or less achievable by the majority of people. However, Iranian buildings, in general, have never been constructed by non-architects. Since the complicated construction methods of Iranian buildings demand great skills and knowledge, people always had to assign architects to build their houses. The Iranian traditional architect never went to architectural schools or were involved in other official learning processes. Rather, the architectural skills were handed down from master to apprentice. Thus, the builder cannot be the indicator of the vernacular architecture. As Glassie (2000) suggests, vernacular architecture depends on direct connections among people: supplier and consumer, architect and client who "simultaneously shape cities, social orders and economic arrangement" (31). Iranian traditional architects lived in close relations with people and shared the same values and worldviews with them. They were completely aware of the people's needs and their desires. Thus, no matter whether the house is touched by a "conscious thinker" (architect)

or is developed by "unconscious folk", it still embodies the cultural values of people (Pocius 1991).

The process of choosing the houses for this research project started with walking through the neighbourhoods and visual inspections of the area. As Carter and Cromley (2005) suggest: "knowing which buildings to document intensively derives from knowing well the whole." They suggest that in studying vernacular architecture, and to choose the right examples, one needs to examine a large number of the buildings and then to pick the most representative ones to study in-depth (19). The most representative buildings according to them are those samples which contain all or the most of the essential elements of a particular architecture (19). However, since courtyard houses are hidden behind the high walls and are not readily identifiable from the outside, and, on the other hand, the access to the interior of the private spaces is problematic, I had to be more careful and narrow down the number of the houses under investigation while keeping the samples representative. Sometimes, a relatively limited number of buildings, well selected, well recorded and analyzed can be more useful than a large number of examples (Chappell 1986).

The general visual survey phase of the study, even if limited, enabled me to set the actual scope and boundaries of my research based on the realities of the community under investigation. Since the primary case-study of my thesis is a relatively large city rather than a small community, and to make the study manageable, I needed to define the exact geographical and chronological boundaries for my research. However, I intended to look at various samples of the courtyard house type, big and little, rich and poor to see how

they work together within the social and cultural environment in which they are found. Although the buildings of upper class, often high-styled architectural artifacts, cannot be representative of the common building traditions of a community, they represent the widely held attitudes toward various issues of a community (Carter and Cromely 2005, 23). To find the houses from all the ranges and classes, it was necessary to look for them in different parts of the city because the rich houses are usually located in places far from the common ones. Since the concern of my research is the contemporary function of the houses rather than form, style and the historical origins of the houses, I did not limit my samples to a particular historical period. However, most of the selected houses are under 150 years old though they have been frequently renovated or remodelled. The floor plans of some other houses are reconstructed from the memories of elderly people who remembered the houses that they were raised in.

Conducting fieldwork in my hometown, the city that I was born and raised in, I was hoping to find more connections and face fewer challenges in finding the houses, accessing owners and interviewing people. However, my fieldwork experience demonstrates that this is not always the case. Houses, as private spaces, are not readily accessible for research purposes. People become even more sensitive and less open when approached by an interviewer's recording equipment and cameras. I originally hoped to interview both men and women in order to better understand their behaviours and interactions. However, as a female researcher in a traditional neighbourhood, I could convince only three men to be interviewed.

Access to the interior of the houses and establishing relations with the owners was the biggest challenge of this research. I started my fieldwork by walking in my target neighbourhoods and knocking on doors and explaining what I was doing. However, after several attempts and no success I realized that this method was a failure. One of the problems in building a relationship of trust with owners was the government's attitude towards these old houses. The government currently forces people to sell their old houses to them either to protect, rebuild or remodel in order to make wider passages. People of traditional neighbourhoods have long fought against the forces of modernization.

Modernization and car-based mobility demanded wide, straight thoroughfares through the traditional neighbourhoods. Such wide streets, neglecting the original and organic life of a neighbourhood, divide them and destroy the integrity of spaces within them (Lewcock 2002, 46). Such unthoughtful urban planning also has disastrous effect on people's everyday lives, their living spaces and their functions. However, the lack of suitable thoroughfare and parking spaces for vehicles are problematic for contemporary lifestyle. It is inevitable for the living spaces to be accessible by car for either convenience or safety. Regardless of all these changes, the traditional way of life is very resilient and is preferred by many of the inhabitants of traditional neighbourhoods. Even if maintaining such houses is very expensive (as one of my documented houses costs $20,000 a year to be properly maintained), people do not like to leave their beloved houses and try to escape from the government agents who encourage and force them to do so. As a result of this context, people confused me with the agents of the government and refused to allow me into their homes.

The first few days of my fieldwork were a total failure. I needed to change my approach and method. One of the greatest advantages of the old and traditional neighbourhoods for my work is the strong trust network among neighbours. The courtyards reside in the particular cultural landscape of traditional neighbourhoods. The mosque and the corner store are the two main public spaces of each neighbourhood and the center of news of the locality. The mosque, in particular, works as a community center. It is open for all people all the time. Since the people of such neighbourhoods are very religious people who come to the mosque on an everyday basis to participate in the communal prayer, they have day-to-day contact with their neighbours. These daily gatherings were great opportunities for me to get acquainted with the people of the locality in a public context and develop a network of people who know me as an outsider. However, as a first step, I needed a person who is trusted by all the people.

During the search for such person, I recognized that, in addition to the mosque, the corner store is, in a way, the heart of the neighbourhood and the center for exchange of news of the community. The owner of this store, Karim, is an elderly man who is from the same locality and knows every detail about each and every person of the neighbourhood. Meeting Karim was a gift for my research and my greatest success in establishing relationship with the other people. Karim, is a man in his mid-sixties and a very kind and enthusiastic person. He is also very sensitive about his job. He expects all the neighbours to buy their needed groceries only from him and not from any other store. He would be offended if he noticed people approaching with their grocery sacks in their

hand. Thus, the people would hide their groceries (if shopped from another store) passing his store.

Karim was the one who guided me to the houses and connected me with the owners. He loved his new job as a guide and was very excited to find new houses for me to visit. Every day, he had few houses for us to go and discuss with the owners. Not long after, walking in the neighbourhood, people invited me to see their houses. However, some people were very sensitive and very hard to approach. Since I promised them the photos of their houses, more and more people called and asked me to go and see their houses and take their photos. However, unfortunately, my time was limited and I could document only eight of those houses. Some of my results in this thesis are the product of repeated visits; others are derived from an in-depth single visit. Some of the houses I chose to study are well preserved in their original form; others are abandoned without any maintenance. However, even the badly-maintained houses allowed the inspection of the construction features hidden under the exterior finish layers.

After accessing the interiors, the next challenge was how to interact with people so as to encourage them to share their experiences. Since I intended to build my research upon the people's accounts on their living spaces, I needed to make them share their stories. I knew that the traditional residents of these houses are very sensitive about strangers. They are not able to tolerate different attitudes and looks from strangers. As a result, I had to wear the traditional black clothing which is common for Iranian women. However, I had a big challenge with myself to figure out if this is a morally proper practice or not. I had my doubts to present myself different from who I really was. However, performing

without violating local conventions of propriety was my only opportunity to establish a relationship of trust, especially with women. Being like one of themselves helped me to get closer to them and convince them to be more comfortable and open with me and share.

In addition, since documenting the buildings was very time-consuming work, I had to ask some friends to help me in drawings and measuring. I tried this method in the first two houses. I asked a friend to help me measure and draw. However, after a while I decided that this method makes the interviewees very uncomfortable. The informants could not concentrate on the interview while some other outsider was present.   In addition, I recognized that the house owners felt somehow threatened when we were two. As a result, I decided to undertake all the work by myself no matter how long it took.   I found this method very helpful. We walked around the house with the informant while my recorder was on. We chatted and I asked questions about the spaces of the house here and there while I was drawing or taking the photos. The conversations were around the history of family and the spatial history of the house, remodelling, and space-specific activities.   I realized that, in this method people were very comfortable, and most of the time they forget about the recorder. I found them talking to me more like they were having a casual chat with a friend. Although this method of conversation in motion had a negative impact on the quality of recordings, it still was more useful.

Encouraging men to share their stories was also challenging. Men were hardly accessible for a female researcher to interview. In the traditional male culture, men must avoid speaking directly to a woman. Men left the house immediately when I arrived and I

had very little opportunity to interview the men. Even the few men I could convince to interview intentionally or subconsciously refused to share their intimate feelings and experiences. Since the interview is not an avenue to direct experience (Hurdley 2006, 729) and the knowledge derived from it is co-constructed in an interaction between researcher and informants (Holstein and Gubrium 1995), even the few interviews with men were influenced by my own gender status as a woman. However, the three men I interviewed eventually were relatively comfortable and I was able to convince them to share their stories with me. Ironically, a man who was very eager to talk but could not accept the idea of talking to me directly was sitting in the other room while I was interviewing his wife. He could not help himself not to mention points about the house and constantly reminded his wife to tell this and that, but he never came out of the room.

The second round of my fieldwork was conducted in the spring of 2012. I decided to concentrate on the already documented houses in the first round of my fieldwork. Thus, I had very few challenges in the second fieldtrip. People already knew me and they easily let me in their houses and shared with me. Unfortunately, two of the eight houses were not accessible anymore. A house owner, an elderly single woman passed away in July 2011 a few months after I first visited her and her house was not accessible. The Mahdavi family, the owner of one of the houses I studied, who very much liked to re-build their house, could arrange for it during the last year and the house was knocked down and the construction of a new five-story apartment was started in its place.

A summary of the documented houses is presented in the table below (Table 1) to provide an overview of the houses and their main features.

Table 1: A summary of the documented houses

#	Documenting Date	Building Date	Residents	Preservation Type	Ownership	Height	Layout
1	2011-01-06,07	1868	Mahdavis	Divided to two	Original	2	
2	2010-12-18	+50	Madine Kafshduz	Renovated	Second-hand	1	
3	2010-12-19,22	+100	Nikukheslat	Renovated	Second-hand	1	
4	2011-01-12	+150	Mirzade	Original	Original	2	
5	2011-01-09,12	+150	Khoie	Original	Abandoned	1.5	
6	2011-01-05	+150	Sattarkhan	Renovated	CHO[3]	1	
7	2010-12-15	+100	Laya Sekhavat	Original	Original	2	
8	2011-01-13	+200	Reza	Demolished	-	1	

Houses, Their Spatial Context and Their Spaces

This section which aims to introduce the studied houses and is largely based on the findings of my fieldwork is organized in three sub-sections. First, I will discuss the Tabriz traditional neighbourhoods as the spatial contexts which contain the courtyard houses. Then, I will introduce the eight documented houses, their spatial layout and their oral history. Finally, and based on the findings from the case-studies, I will discuss the general forms and functions of spaces in the courtyard houses of Tabriz.

1. The Neighbourhoods

To make better sense of Iranian courtyard houses, it is necessary to situate them in the spatial context in which they are located within the urban fabric. The neighbourhoods in old Iranian cities often formed around a local religious institution such as a mosque or shrines of popular saints (Figure 2). The old neighbourhoods were named based on the shared characteristics of their occupants, such as their dominant occupation (Pirnia 1990, 3). Examples include the basket makers' neighbourhood and the silk traders' neighbourhood in Tabriz.
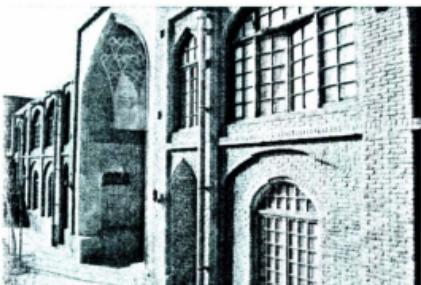
Figure 2: The local mosque of Saman neighborhood in Tabriz

The neighbourhoods were relatively autonomous complexes containing all public facilities, such as *Ab-Anbar* (public water reservoir), a public bath, administration offices, a school and a variety of stores including the craft-workshops. The shared facilities brought people into various and multi-layered interactions in the creation of a neighbourhood network. Performing daily activities in such social and spatial contexts allowed people face-to-face interaction on a daily basis. Accessing water for daily consumption was one of the occasions which brought people into day-to-day contact. Open water channels frequently run through the houses. However, water distribution in the city was based on the location of the house and the social status of the owner of the house. Water became available in some courtyards but the lower-class houses did not enjoy such access. If a house contained a water resource and the family was generous enough, then the house turned to a place that the neighbours now and then could drop by to wash or use the water. Such occasions provided an enjoyable time for women who gathered and chatted while doing their daily activities.

Massive neighbourhoods might have their own *Bazaar-cheh*, literally meaning little market in their center (Figures 3-7). *Bazaar-cheh* allowed dwellers to obtain their required commodities without going beyond the neighbourhood. However, *Bazaar-cheh* only contained a limited number of stores such as a bakery, butcher, grocery and herb shop, and people needed to go to the main *Bazzar* (market) for rest of their shopping.

Figure 3: The entrance to a Bazar-che, Tabriz, Iran.
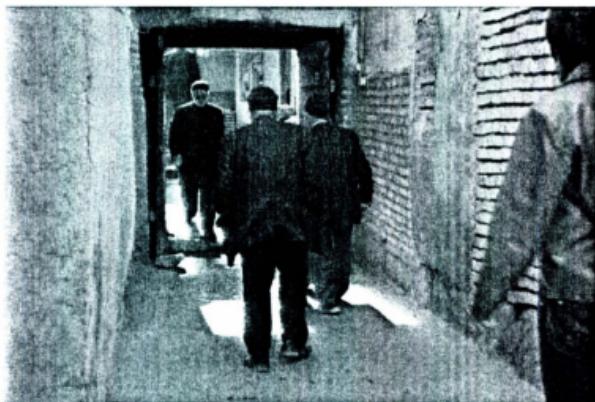
Figure 4: A passage leading from the neighborhood into the bazaar-che
Photo Credit: Yoones A. Sekhavat
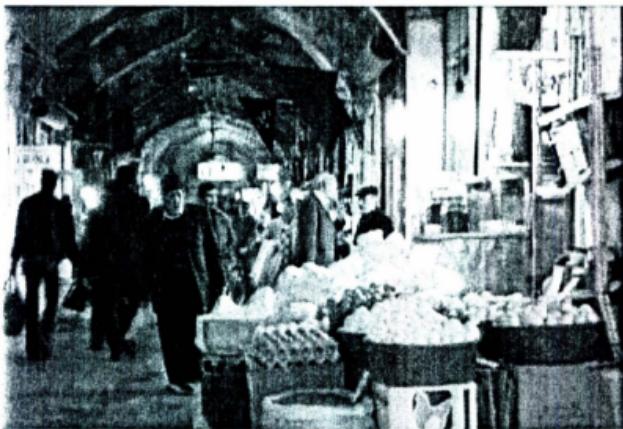
Figure 5: A bazaar-che, Tabriz, Iran
Photo Credit: Yoones A. Sekhavat
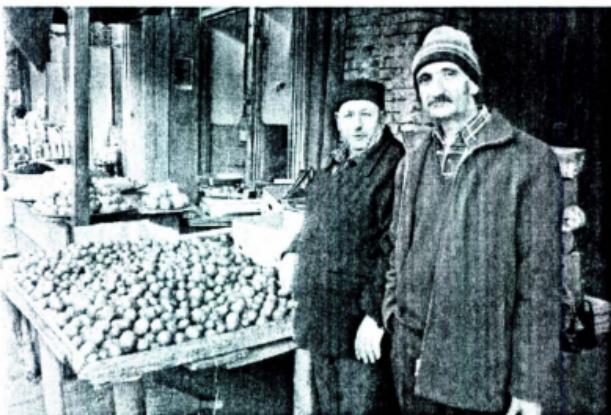
Figure 6: Shopkeepers in front of their stores in the bazaar-che.
Photo Credit: Yoones A. Sekhavat
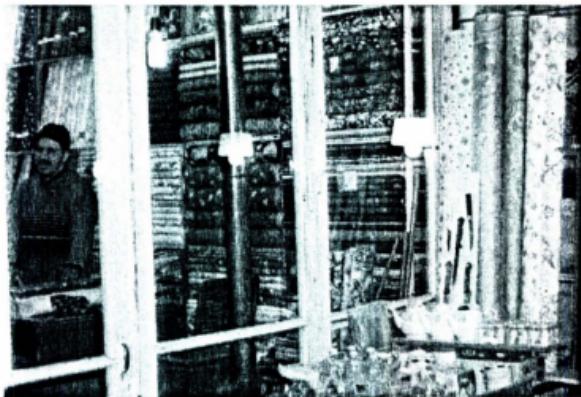
Figure 7: A cloth shop in the bazaar-che.
Photo Credit: Yoones A. Sekhavat

The need for inward focused designs in both residential and public buildings encouraged the use of this form. Observation of Islamic laws and the necessity to defend against frequent foreign invasions are among those reasons. The neighbourhoods in old Iranian cities are composed of narrow winding avenues called *koocheh*, limited on both sides with high adobe or brick walls (Figure 8-9). These intricate alleys connect the tightly knit residential neighbourhood together and to the public areas in the center of neighbourhoods such as the market and the local mosque (Figure 10). *Koochehs* are often roofed at various intervals in the desert climate regions where they provide the comfort of shaded passages for pedestrians in hot summers. However, Tabriz's old neighbourhoods are very rarely roofed because of the cold weather conditions. The roofed areas of Tabriz alleys in such rare cases served for defence purposes in the past, including protecting the neighbourhood from the entrance of soldiers on horse in time of invasions.
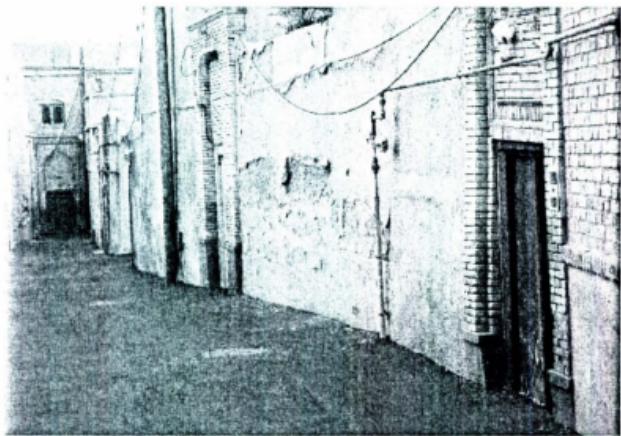
Figure 8: A Kooche in the residential parts of neighborhood, Tabriz, Iran.
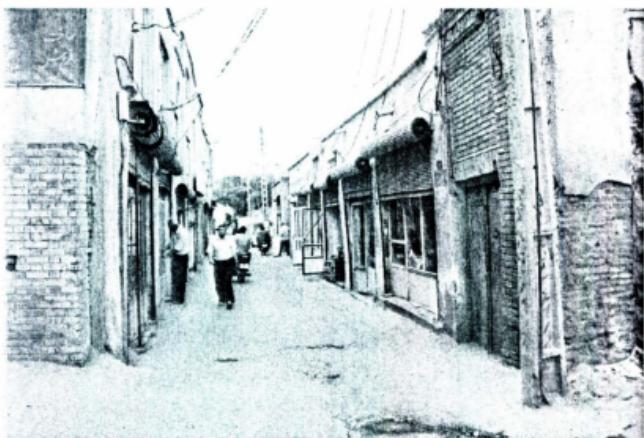
Figure 9: A Kooche in the business parts of the neighborhood, Tabriz, Iran.

■ Commercials
□ Residential
▨ Main road
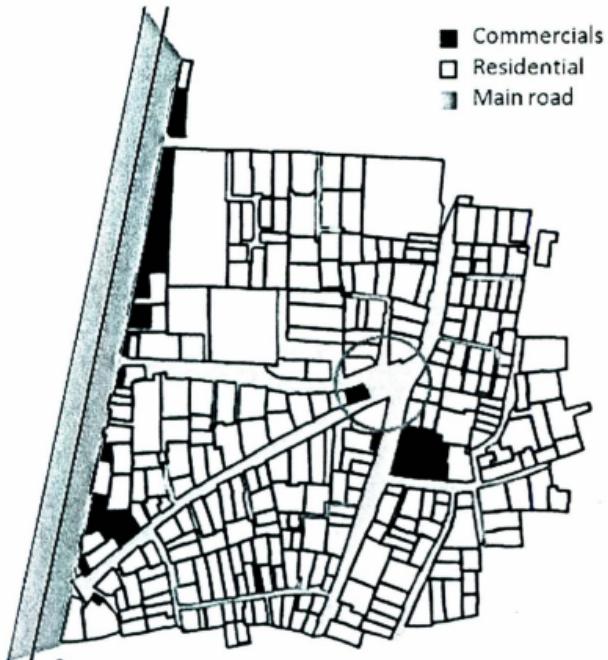
Figure 10: Hierarchy of access in a neighborhood (the circle shows the main neighborhood center), Tabriz, Iran.

The hierarchical nature of access in the compact structure of the neighbourhood protected the residential areas from unexpected intrusions. That is, one cannot reach a house by chance or unintentionally. To reach the residential buildings, one should turn

from the main street to a rather narrow avenue with long and high unbroken walls on either side. The entrances to the residences are located in separate narrow alleys off the avenue (Figure 11). The residences in such neighbourhoods are frequently of the courtyard type surrounded by high, thick walls.
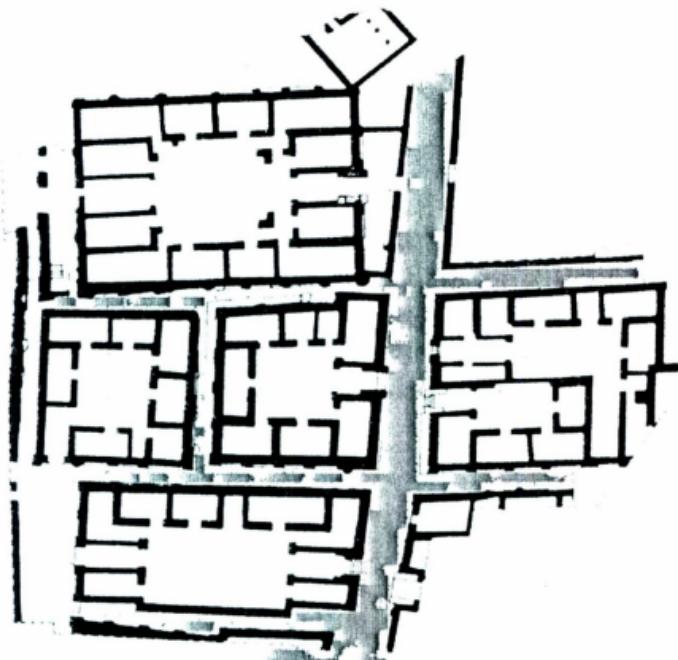
Figure 11: Positioning of courtyard houses in a typical neighborhood.
After Memarian (1993) Page 74.

2. The Houses

Now that the spatial contexts of Tabriz traditional neighbourhoods have been discussed, courtyard houses can be better understood within this broader context. This section introduces the eight houses which are documented as the case studies of this research and provides the details about them.

Mahdavi House

This house was originally constructed in 1868 by the great grandfather of Najibe Mahdavi. The date of construction is engraved on the building's façade in brickwork (Figure 12). The house was initially a courtyard house with living spaces built in two opposite sides of the courtyard (Figure 13). The house was resided in by this family for more than 150 years.

Figure 12: Mahdavi house, the date of construction of the house is shown in the brickwork at the top of the windows.
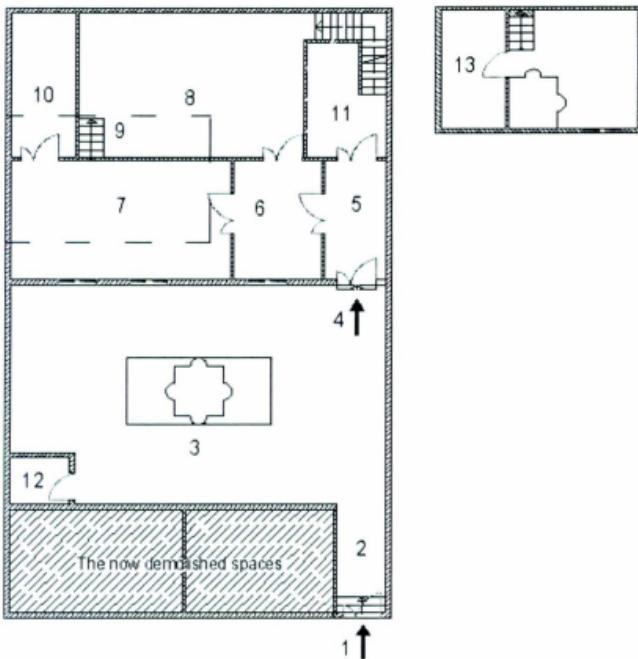
Figure 13: Mahdavi house, the floor plan.
The plan in the top right, shows the small part
of the basement which contains the bathroom
and is accessed through the kitchen.

Spaces

1	Main entrance
2	Dalan (entrance corridor)
3	Courtyard
4	Entrance to the interiors
5	Hallway
6	Son's room/Hallway
7	Living/Sleeping room
8	Ashpazkhane (Kitchen)
9	Stairways leading to the bathroom
10	Storage
11	Stairways leading to the second floor
12	Washroom
13	Bathroom

Originally Najibe's great grand parents lived here with their children. The house was then handed down to her grandfather and his brother who lived there with their extended families. The house was in its original form till the death of her grandfather. After his death the house was divided into two distinct parts by the two sons, each owning one part. The house was divided by a single wall constructed in the middle of the courtyard in a clumsy way without alterations in the interiors (Figure 14). This made the plan of both houses very inconvenient to use. The kitchen remained in one house and the bathroom in the other. However, they gradually changed the interiors and added the needed spaces but it never became a comfortable house again. I could visit and measure one of these two houses which belonged to Najibe Mahdavi and her family now.

The rooms on one side of the courtyard have been demolished by the city to construct a broader street (Figure 15). The remaining house is a two-story building consisting of a single multi-functional room used as living room and sleeping room (Figure 16), a hall way which is currently used as a very small and narrow room for the son (Figure 17) and a kitchen (Figure 18-19) in the first level. Through the kitchen, the bathroom is accessed in the basement level (Figure 20). The room spaces are multi-functional. The cabinets in the living room display a range of objects from fine china pieces to dolls and colognes (Figure 21). Functional eating utensils are kept in a cabinet near the kitchen door in the passage hall which is at the same time the son's room. A small table is located in the kitchen which is only used for breakfast (Figure 22). For other meals the family sit on the floor around a spread called 'sofre' which is set in the multi-functional room.

The second floor is resided in by Najibe's mother. Since she was out of town during the time of my visit, I could not see the second floor. Najibe remarked that she is tired of this old house and having the choice she would prefer to leave as soon as possible. In the second visit, almost one year later, I found out that the house had been torn down by the owners and the construction of a five-story apartment was started. Each floor in the new apartment belonged to one family member as Najibe says: the first floor belongs to her mother, the four remaining are Najibe's and her siblings'.

Figure 14: Mahdavi house, a view of the courtyard and the wall which divides the two houses.

Figure 15: Mahdavi house, a view of the other side of the courtyard, formerly rooms, now demolished.

Figure 16: Mahdavi house, a view of the multi-functional room. The tables stored at the corner are used whenever they have visitors.
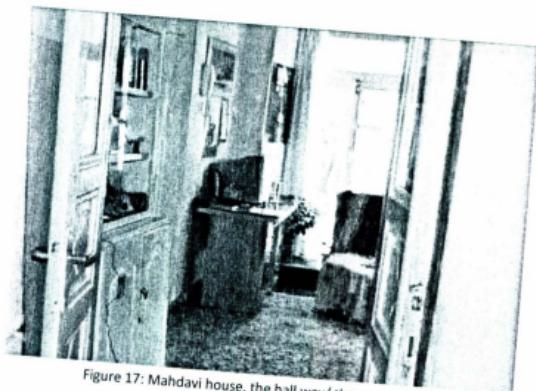
Figure 17: Mahdavi house, the hall way/ the son's room.

Figure 18: Mahdavi house, a view of the kitchen.

Figure 19: Mahdavi house, cooking utensil and ingredients.
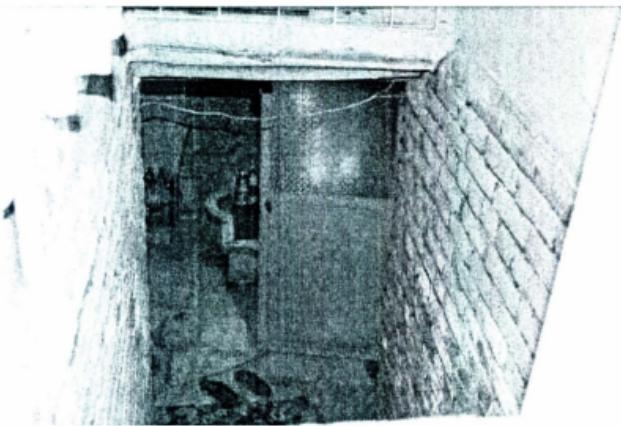
Figure 20: Mahdavi house, the bathroom in the basement accessed from the kitchen.

Figure 21: Mahdavi house, the display cabinet in the multi-functional room (the dolls are Najibe's childhood toys).
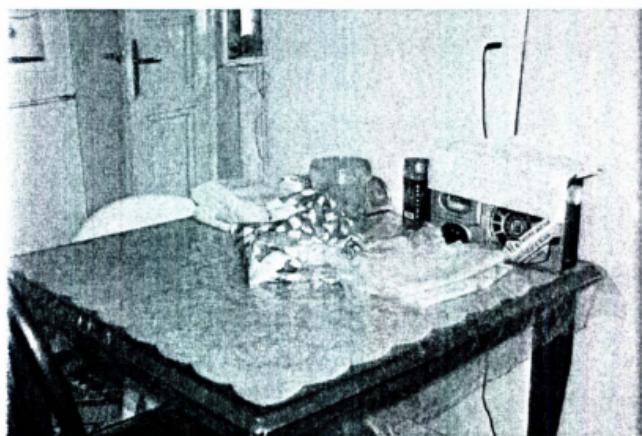
Figure 22: Mahdavi house, breakfast table in the kitchen.

Madine House

This house belongs to a single family. The house is a very small and plain one and is located at the very end of a narrow alley (Figure 23). It has a symmetrical layout both in façade and in floor plan (Figure 24). The family has moved to this house almost 40 years ago and they renovated it in 2001. The original house was the same in spatial organization but it was finished in brick. They have kept the form of the house but changed the façade. The façade which was originally made of brick is covered with cement, a very cheap façade material now (Figure 25). The floor which was covered by brick is of mosaic now. The house is accessed through a small roofed space (Figure 26) and its layout consists of two rooms in front on either side of a central hallway and two rooms at the rear. Each room has openings from the hallway and from the room in front of it (Figure 27).
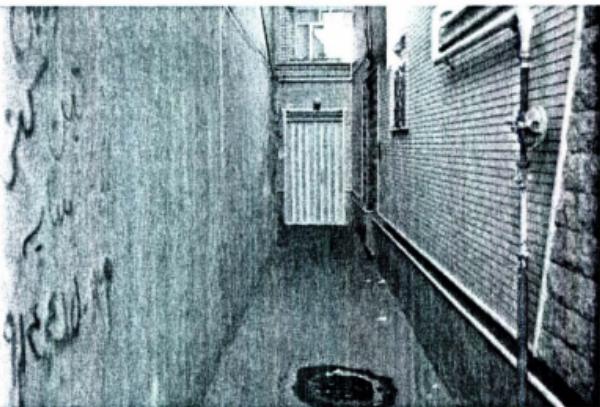
Figure 23: Madine house, the alley leading to the house.
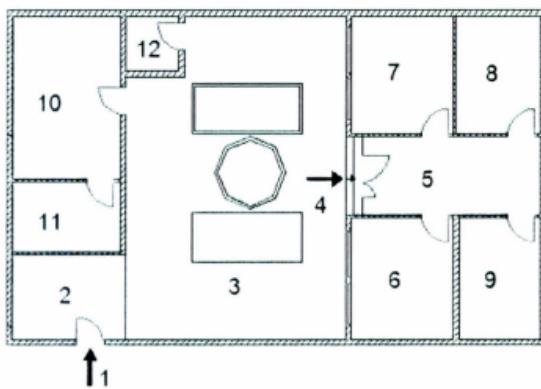
Figure 24: Madine House, the floor plan. The figures
(the circle and rectangles) show the *Hows* and the flower beds.

Spaces

1	Entrance
2	Hashti (entrance hall)
3	Courtyard
4	Entrance to the interiors
5	Hallway
6	Living room
7	Reception room
8	Backroom (sewing room)
9	Backroom (Working room)
10	Ashpazkhane (Kitchen)
11	Bathroom
12	Washroom

Figure 25: Madine house, the symmetrical façade made of cement.
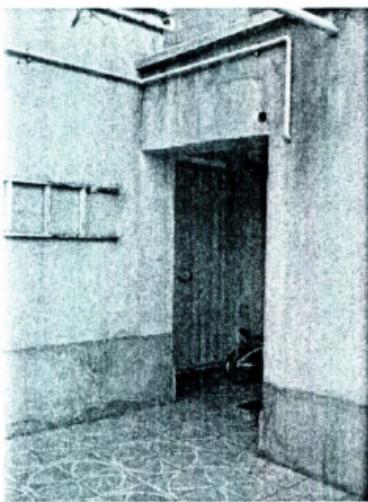
Figure 26: Madine house, the entrance roofed area.

Figure 27: Madine house, the entrance hall leading to the rooms.

The two front rooms which are approximately the same size are the reception room and the living room (Figures 28-29). The rear rooms are smaller than the front ones and have no particular function. However, Madine calls one of them her sewing room and the other her husband's working room. The kitchen is located at the opposite side of the living spaces. Attached to the kitchen is the bathroom which has its opening from the kitchen (Figure 30). The house is almost empty of any fixed furniture. The room which is referred to as the reception room is covered with carpets much like the other rooms but contains the stereo set and a few handmade decorative objects. Madine is very much into symmetry in decoration of the house. The cushions in the rooms are always in pairs, and the same is true about other decorative objects of the house.
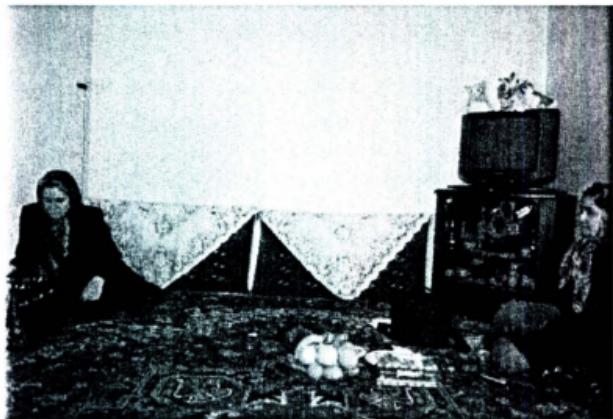
Figure 28: Madine house, the living room when Madine has visitors.

Figure 29: Madine house, the reception room.
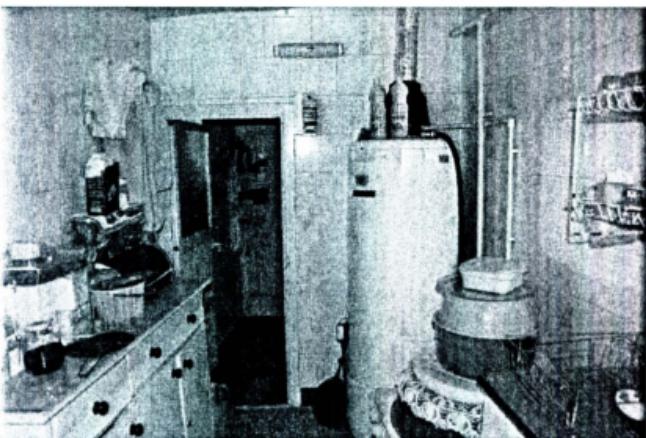
Figure 30: Madine house, a view of the corner of the kitchen which leads to the bathroom.

Nikukheslat House

The Nikukheslat family bought this house in its original form (as they believe) in 1982. The oral tradition of the house is that it was originally occupied by the famous families of two brothers who worked in the same occupation in *Bazzar*. However, the Nikukheslat family bought this house from a broker and they do not have any information about the previous owners. This was their second house as a couple and as a young couple they simultaneously wanted a traditional house with modern spaces. Thus, they kept the exterior unchanged and re-modeled the interior (Figure 31-33).
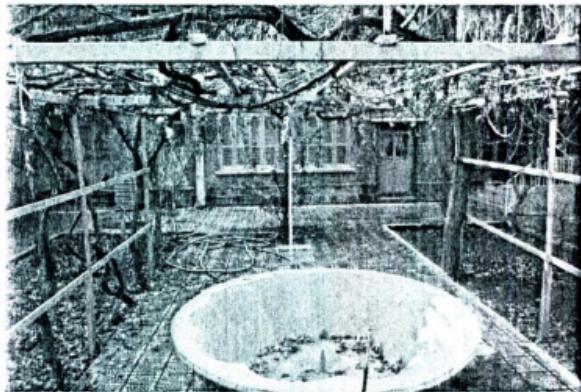
Figure 31: Nikukheslat house, a view of the front yard.
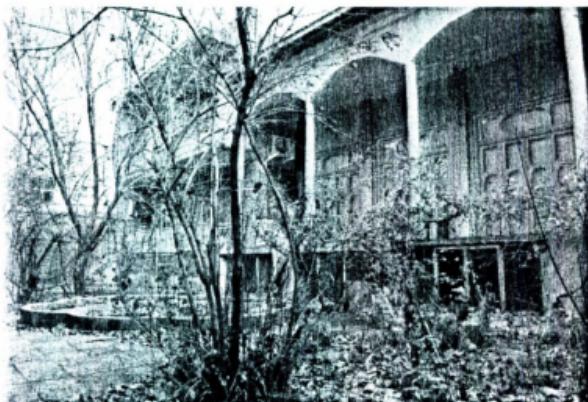
Figure 32: Nikukheslat house, a view of the back yard.

Figure 33: Nikukheslat house, details of an original window.

They are very proud that they have preserved the heritage of their culture. Mrs. Nikukheslat proudly shows me the small details of the façade such as an old stone to validate the age of the building and its architectural values. She also explains the alterations they made to the house when they moved in:

> When we first came to see this house, it looked huge in our eyes. You know, people in past were used to small and closed spaces, the small rooms, the narrow halls. The spaces were big enough to accommodate their functions not more. We thought the rooms are big enough but after a while we realized that they are not indeed and we started to remove the walls and open up the spaces (Figure 34).
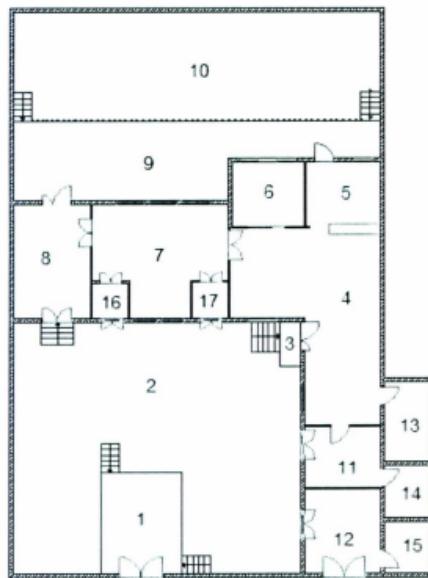
Figure 34: Nikukheslat house, the floor plan.

Spaces	
1	Main entrance/Parking
2	Courtyard
3	Entrance to the interiors
4	Living room
5	Ashpazkhane (Kitchen)
6	Bedroom
7	Reception room
8	Guest room
9	Balcony (Ivan)
10	Backyard
11	Room
12	Parking
13	Washroom
14	Storage
15	Storage
16-17	Reception's service room

In the remodelling of the house they considered both fashion and practicality. They removed some of the walls which separated the rooms and turned the house to an open, large space, keeping the reception room and the bedroom separated. Merging the rooms together, many of the doors which lead to the rooms from the courtyard became useless. However, to preserve the façade as it is, they kept the doors but nailed them shut. Thus, except for the main entrance door, many of the doors which are seen in the courtyard and façade are fake doors (Figures 35).

Figure 35: Nikukheslat house, the main entrance door from the front yard.

An open kitchen was constructed on the main floor instead of the original kitchen which was in the basement. The house contains two courtyards, one at front and one at the rear of the building. Both yards are used by family in summers for passing time. The rear yard is accessed from the kitchen and is frequently used as extension of kitchen

activities. None of the basement spaces including the bathroom are functional anymore. Mrs. Nikukheslat remarks that, the only function of the basement as she remembers was in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) when they used its hidden spaces as a haven in the times of bombing. The house, like the rest of Iranian houses is heated by gas and the central heater is located in the basement. Since the courtyard is a few steps down the street level it was not accessible by car. A raised platform is added in front of the door which is used as parking (Figure 36). The second car of the family is parked in a spare room at the other end of the house which was turned into a parking. This house is a very well decorated house compared to the rest of the houses I visited. It contains a large amount of fancy furniture. The spaces in the house are segmented and structured. Unlike the other houses, the bedroom and living room are designated spaces in the house determined by their particular furniture (Figures 37-40).
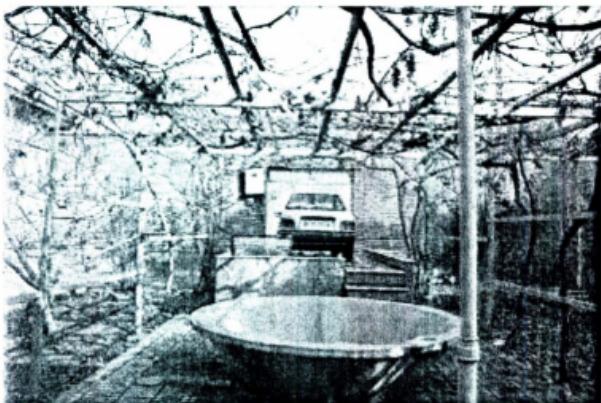
Figure 36: Nikukheslat house, the parking area which is added to the courtyard.

Figure 37: Nikukheslat house, the living room.

Figure 38: Nikukheslat house, a view of the bedroom from the living room.

Figure 39: Nikukheslat house, the dining area in the living room.

Figure 40: Nikukheslat house, the reception hall.

Mirzade House

This house is a very large, two-courtyard house which is handed down from Mirzade's ancestors. The courtyards are connected to each other through a door provided in the connecting wall. From the appearance of the house and the variety of materials used for construction, it is evident that different parts of the house have been constructed in different time periods (Figure 41). Some parts are two-story, some others are one (Figure 42). The materials and form of doors and windows also differ. The house is accessed through a very long and dark passage way. Then you mount a very high stairway to access the small part of the house which is liveable.

The house is not in very good shape. The large part of it is not liveable (see the hatched area in the floor plan below) and is abandoned and used as storage. The house was not very safe to measure. Thus, a sketchy floor plan is provided from the living parts of the house leaving out the abandoned parts (Figure 43). The house is very hard to maintain and also to live in. Given the choice, the Mirzade family prefers to move out. Mrs. Mirzade, in particular is very tired of this house which is scary to live in and very hard to keep clean. She did not agree to show me the functional kitchen in the basement and some other rooms. However, I was shown the old kitchen and cool storage areas (vault) in the basement which was used for food storage before fridges became popular. In these vaulted spaces, the food was hung and preserved for different seasons (Figure 44). The only rooms I was shown was the reception room and another empty room which does not have a particular function (Figures 45-47). Mrs. Mirzadeh was not willing to

share anything about the house, its past or family history. My efforts in encouraging her to share totally failed.

Figure 41: Mirzade house, the courtyard.
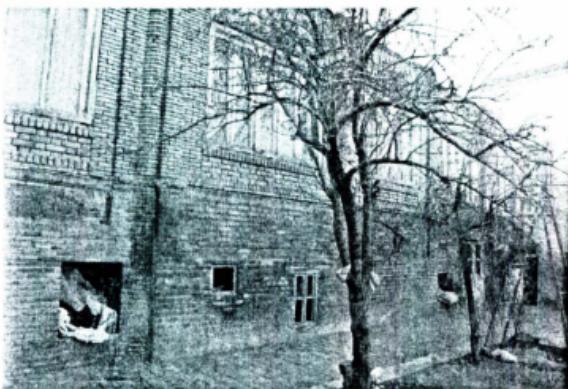
Figure 42: Mirzade house, another view from the courtyard.

Spaces
1 Hashti (entrance hall)
2 Dalan (entrance corridor)
3 Stairways to the first floor
4 Hallway
5 Living room
6 Hallway
7 Reception room
8 storage
9 Courtyard
10 Courtyard
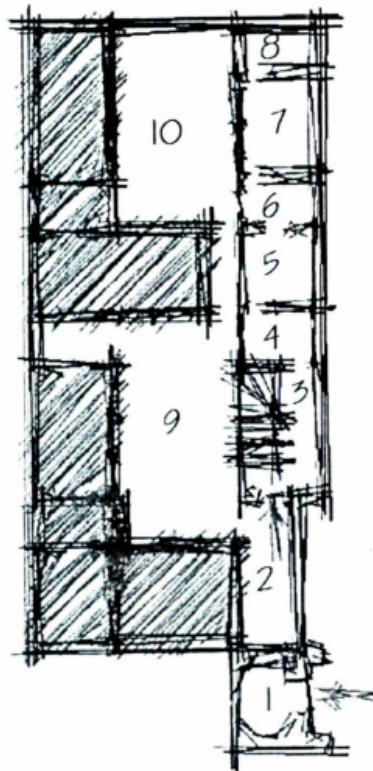
Figure 43: Mirzade house, the sketchy floor plan.
(The hatched area shows the abandoned part of the house.)
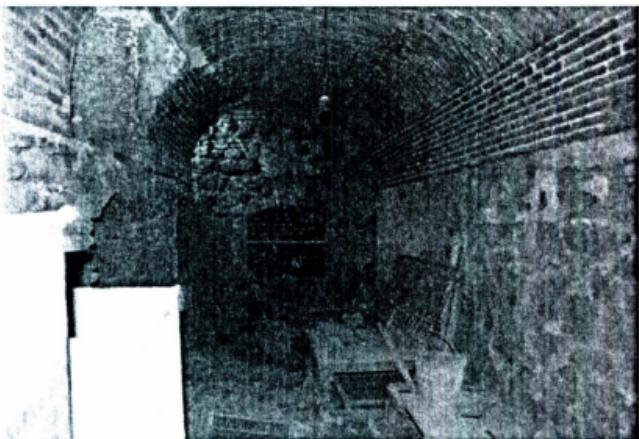
Figure 44: Mirzade house, the old, vaulted, kitchen area.
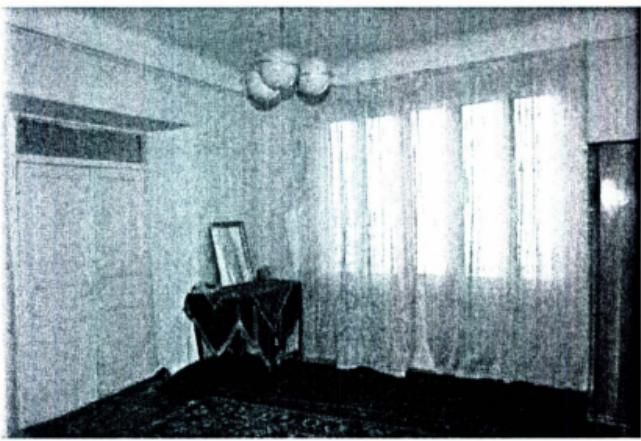
Figure 45: Mirzade house, the room with no particular function.
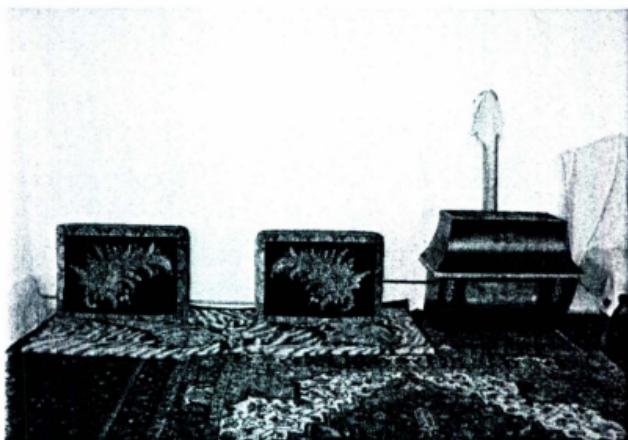
Figure 46: Mirzade house, the floor sitting area of the reception room.

Figure 47: Mirzade house, the reception room with the covered furniture. They will be uncovered when the visitors arrive.

Khoie House

This house belonged to a famous clergy man of Tabriz, Ayatoalah Khoie. After his death, his children left the country and left the house behind. The house had no official custodian now. I was let in by a neighbour who had the key to the house. The house is the only complete courtyard house I visited, surrounded on four sides by rooms and living spaces (Figure 48-49). The interiors are accessed through a stairway in one corner of the courtyard (Figure 50). The house contains much embellished doors and other decorations (Figures 51-53).

The house is abandoned, with objects in it providing a creepy and to some extent scary atmosphere. The neighbour woman said that this house is believed to be haunted and neighbours have seen supernatural beings around here. Based on the furniture left in the rooms, the spaces could be tentatively identified. For example, the fancy furniture and decorative objects gathered in the center of one room covered with a plastic sheet implied that the space was probably the reception room (Figure 54). The same was the case with the other room in which some cooking objects were scattered around; one could easily guess that this was the kitchen. Among the artifacts which were found in the basement were a set of bread baking objects (Figure 55). The elderly neighbour woman said that "having this stuff was an emblem of wealth" and remembered from her childhood that this family was affluent enough to assign bakers to bake their daily bread at home. The rooms are identifiable based on the number of their openings: the two-opening and three-opening rooms exist in this house. However, like the Mirzade house, I did not try to measure the house because it did not seem safe. One of the rare spaces this house

contained is the *Sardab*, a room in the basement with a small pool in its center which was used in summers for cooling purposes and also as a water source (Figure 56).
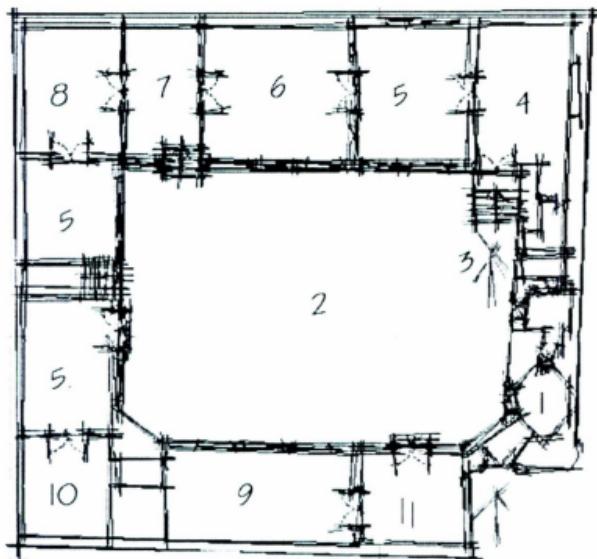
Figure 48: Khoie house, the sketchy floor plan.

Spaces

1	Hashti (entrance hall)
2	Courtyard
3	Main entrance to the interiors
4	Hallway
5	Room (Living?)
6	Reception room
7	Hallway leading to the reception
8	Ashpazkhane (Kitchen)
9	Guestroom
10	storage
11	Hallway leading to the guest room

Figure 49: Khoie house, the courtyard.

Figure 50: Khoie house, the main entrance to the house.
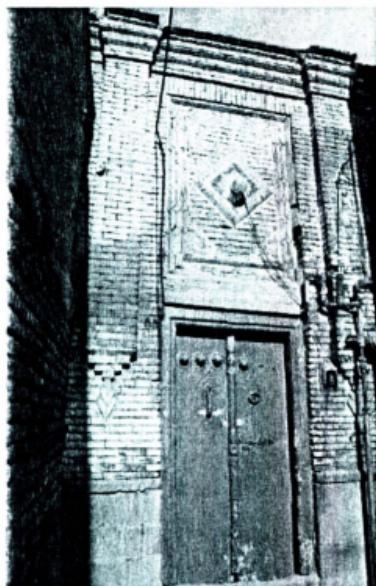
Figure 51: Khoie house, the exterior door with embellished brickwork.
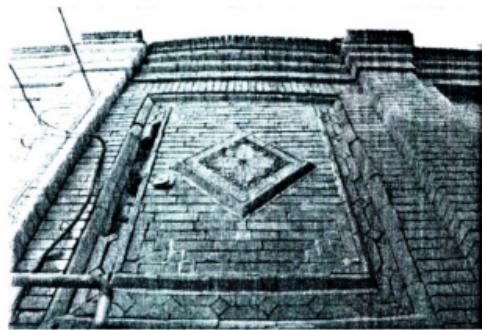
Figure 52: Khoie house, the details of brickworks.
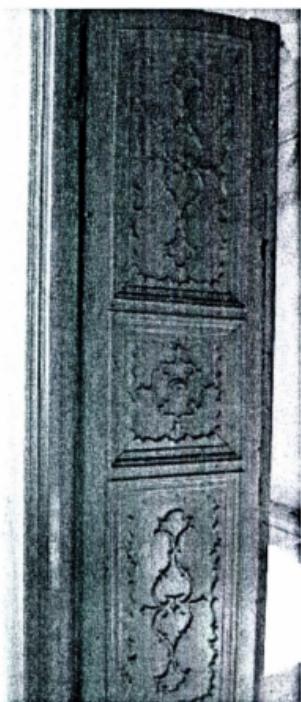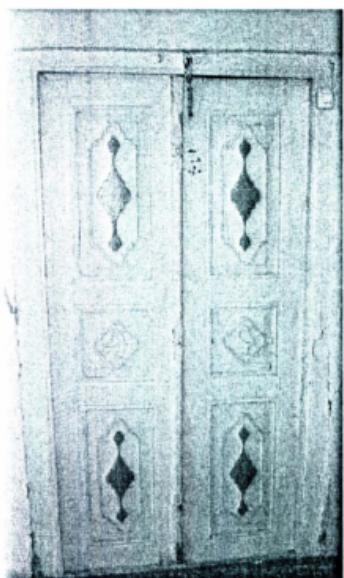
Figure 53: Khoie house, the details of interior doors.

Figure 54: Khoie house, probably the reception room.

Figure 55: Khoie house, the baking objects found in the basement.
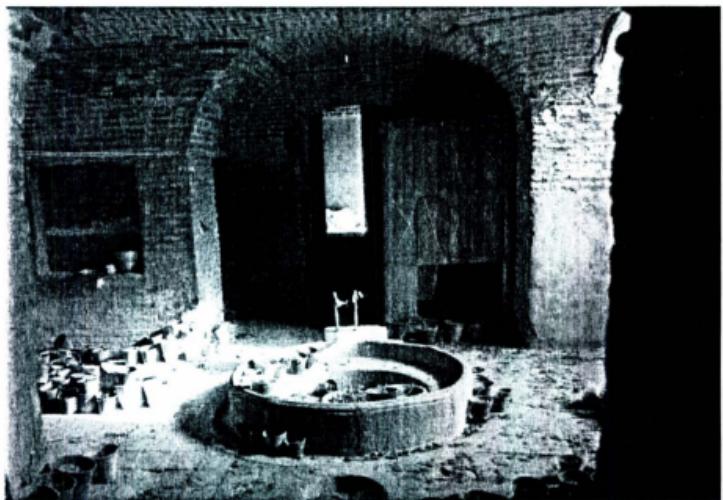
Figure 56: kholes house, the Sardab in the basement.

Sattarkhan House

This house is a protected house and originally belonged to Sattar khan who was considered as a national hero and had a significant role in the recent history of Iran. The original house was a large, multi-courtyard house. Due to the political position of its owner, the house has been used for purposes other than residential, such as military functions. SattarKhan, as a regional commander, used the house both as residence for his family and as the center of his political activities. Thus, the house has more fortification features than other houses (Figure 57). Sardari Nia, a historian of contemporary Tabriz, believes that the original house was totally demolished by the Russian attacks in 1912.

This means that the present house would be built afterwards on the original house's place. However, in an interview with Negar Azari, Sattar Khan's daughter-in-law, she assured that in that attack, the military parts of the house were torn down but the family parts survived. She believes that the current house is just a part of "*Andaruni*" (family part) of the house remaining from the old house. The current house consists of a medium-size central courtyard with one-room deep living spaces which are built in three sides of the courtyard (Figures 58). The facade is from brick and has detailed embellishments of brickwork (Figure 59-62). An elderly neighbour whose family has lived in this neighbourhood for more than 120 years remarks that the house was partially knocked down in 1972 and the exterior walls were moved toward inside in order to broaden the street. Only in the recent years the house became registered, renovated and preserved by the Cultural Heritage Organization as a heritage building.

Figure 57: Sattarkhan house, the protected, low passage leading to the house.
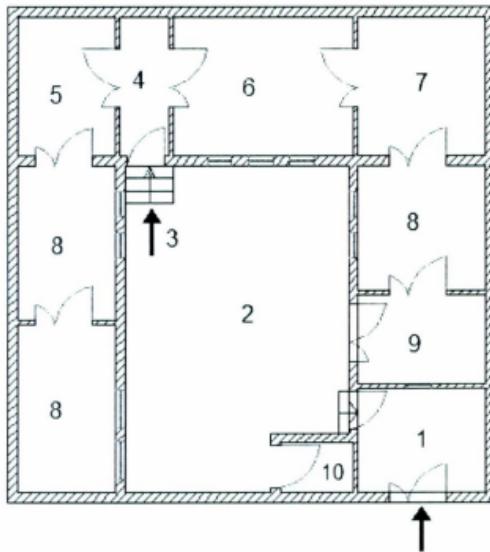
Figure 58: Sattarkhan house, the floor plan.

Spaces
1   Hashti (Entrance hall)
2   Courtyard
3   Entrance to the interiors
4   Hallway
5   Kitchen?
6   Reception room
7   Back room
8   Living room
9   Hallway
10   Washroom
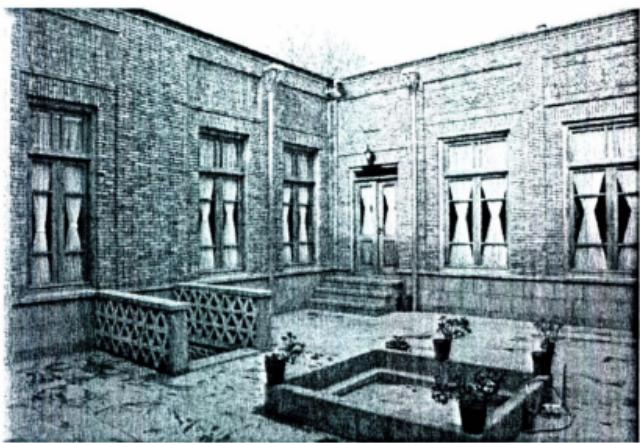
Figure 59: Sattarkhan house, the courtyard.
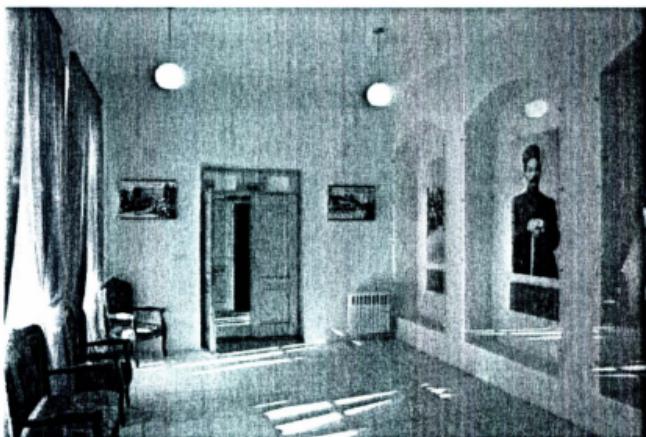
Figure 60: Sattarkhan house, the reception hall.
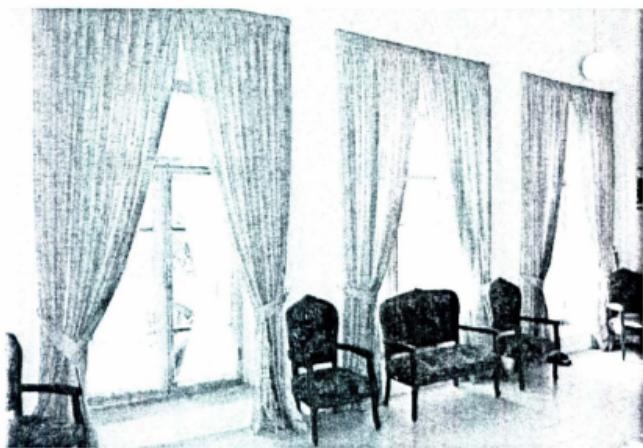
Figure 61: Sattarkhan house, another view from the reception hall.
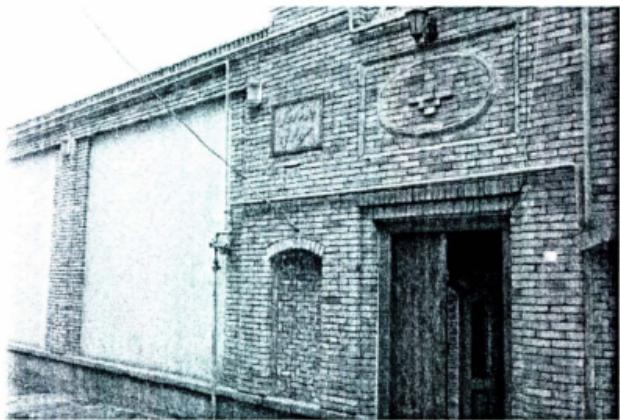
Figure 62: Sattarkhan house, the exterior door leading to the hashti.

Laya House

When I first came to this house, it was not the best time for a visit. Laya, the only resident of this large house, had lost her mother just a few weeks prior. However, she thought it would be a distraction for her to talk to me and therefore agreed to be interviewed. Since they have been through the funeral and activities connected with it, the house, as Laya commented, was not in its regular shape. Most of the objects and furniture were gathered in a room to open the space for the particular post-funeral gatherings. In the kitchen, the huge pots and dishes used for serving food for the post-funeral gathering were washed and still around.

Among the people I talked to, Laya is the only one who was born and raised in the house in which she lives now. After her marriage in 1973 she left her father's house and lived with her husband's family. But she again returned to this house after her husband's death to live with her sick mother. She showed me the place her mother was sleeping in for more than 30 years now. The house is a two-story structure built in one side of the courtyard (Figure 63-65). Laya explained to me that, the neighbouring house was part of this house when she was a child but they had to divide the house and sell a part of it because of the economic problems her father encountered. The main residential part of the house is the first floor. The main floor is used as storage. The first floor consists of a reception room and a living room approximately at the same size. There is also a kitchen in this floor but she explains that when they have guests over they use the larger kitchen in the main floor. The kitchen in the first floor is accessed through a hallway and is detached from the rest of the house by a patio-like void space (Figure 66). Several other

smaller rooms exist with no particular function. Unlike the other houses, a tendency to preserve the old objects can be seen at this house (Figure 67-70). The objects which are used on a daily basis are the old, sometimes antique objects
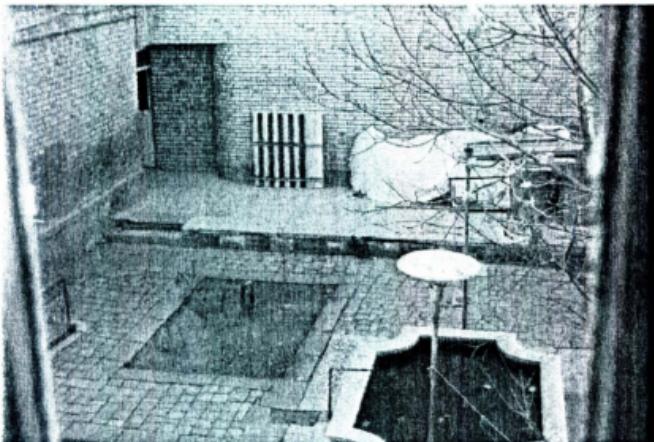
Figure 63: Laya house, a view of the courtyard showing the very small entrance door to the courtyard.
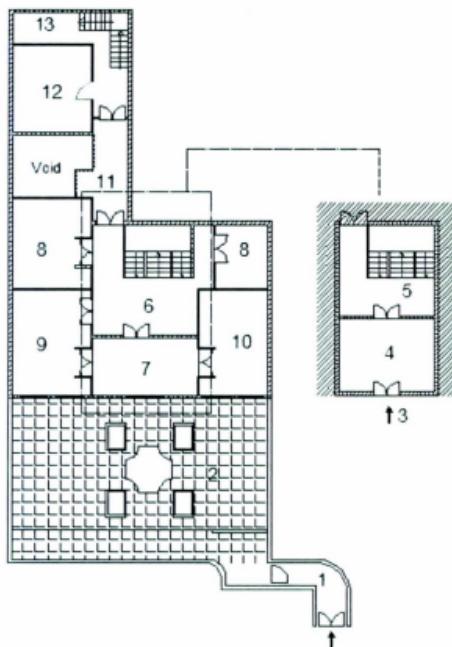
Figure 64: Laya house, the floor plan. The plan in the right shows a part of the entrance at the basement.

Spaces
1   Dalan (entrance corridor)
2   Courtyard
3   Entrance to the interiors
4   Entrance hall
5   Stairway leading to the first floor
6   First floor's entrance hall
7   Middle room(her mother's room)
8   Back room (sleeping room)
9   Reception room
10 Living room
11 Hallway leading to the kitchen
12 Ashpazkhane (Kitchen)
13 Stairway leading to the main floor
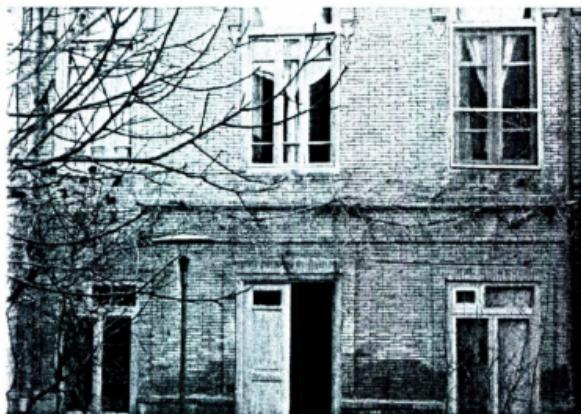
Figure 65: Laya house, the façade.

Figure 66: Laya house, the hall way leading to the kitchen.

Figure 67: Laya house, a view of a niche in the living room.
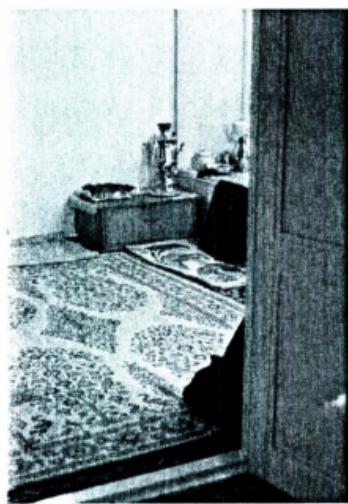
Figure 68: Laya house, another view from the living room.
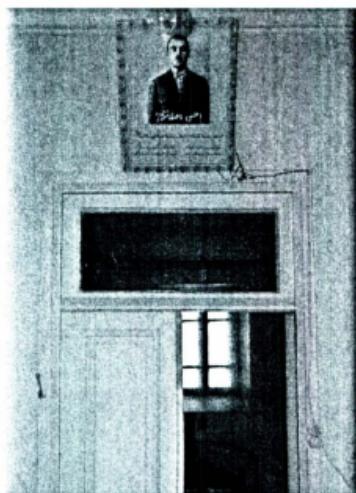
Figure 69: Laya house, the entrance door to the middle room with the picture of her grandfather at the top.

Figure 70: Laya house, a display cabinet.

The Reconstructed House of Reza

The floor plan for this house is reconstructed based on the memories of Reza, a 90 year old male informant. He has been raised in a courtyard house and clearly remembers all the spaces of the house and their functions. Since his father was a well-known merchant, the house he was raised in was a large house. The house was sold after his father's death. The new owner has knocked the house down and a multi-story apartment has been built in its place. Their house, as he portrayed was a one-story, two courtyard house: one in the front and the other at the rear. The house was located at the very end of a narrow alley. The house was accessed through a rectangular *Hashti* and a long dark *Dalan*. The interiors were accessed through a pair of doors situated in a symmetrical form (Figure 71). However, they used one of the doors which lead to the living room for everyday use. The other door was used to receive the visitors.

In this house he lived with his seven siblings, his parents and his grandparents. A room was allocated to his grandparents as he remembers and another to his parents. He slept in one room with his two brothers. The five sisters slept in another larger room. He remembers their always cold reception room; his expensive toys which were brought from overseas were on display in the cabinets of this room and his mother never let him play with them. Because the room was cold, particular food also was kept in that room when it was not in use. Thus, accessing the room always was a dream and also a quest for him and his brothers in their childhood, to have access to both the food and the toys. Although they had two large courtyards, they never played in there. He remarks that the yards were for girls. They played outside in the alley with the neighbour boys. He

remembers their kitchen in the basement. Since his family was a wealthy family, he remarked that, everyday cooking was done by the household's cook and his mother was only managing the kitchen. He remembers that his mother cooked only on very special occasion such as New Year Eve's dinner or similar important occasions.

Spaces
1   Hashti (entrance hall)
2   Dalan (entrance corridor)
3   Courtyard
4   Family entrance
5   Visitor entrance
6   Hallway
7   Living room
8   Room (Boys' bedroom)
9   Reception room
10 Backyard
11 Room (Parent's room)
12 Room (Girls' bedroom)
13 Storage
14 Room (Grandparents' room)
15 Washroom
16 Reception's service rooms
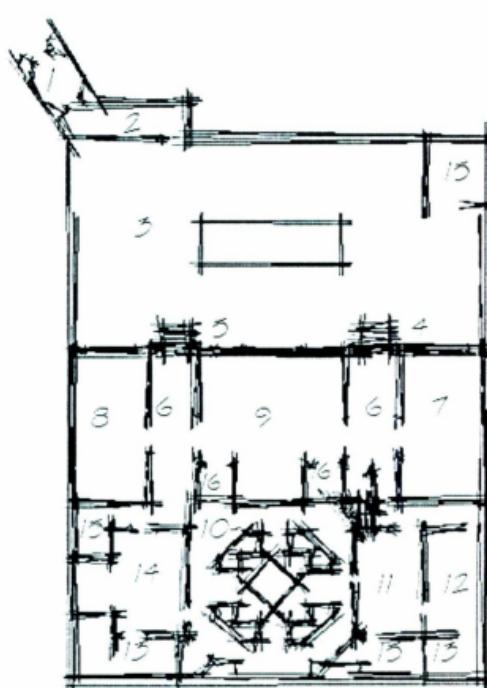
Figure 71: Reza house, the sketchy floor plan.

3. Spatial Patterns and Commonalities

Now that the houses, their spatial context, and the stories surrounding the houses have been discussed, two major conclusions can be drawn from the observations within them: first the kinds of spatial patterns which are found in Tabriz courtyard houses, and second, the commonalities of courtyard houses in terms of both their design and their use of space.

Drawing evidence from the studied houses, a number of spaces can be considered as the main spaces of a courtyard house and these exist in almost every house, though the form and scale of such spaces varies based on different factors. Those main spaces are introduced in this section in a descriptive way (The more analytical details of the spaces are presented in chapters four and five). Although Tabriz courtyards have regional varieties, they all contain some key spaces, and the layouts of their spaces follow a particular manner. Entering through the main entrance door, a roofed space is provided which mediates between inside and outside, termed *hashti*. A secondary door connects the *hashti* to the courtyard. From the courtyard a main door leads to the interiors. Some other doors may lead to the basement, kitchen and other spaces. In the one-room-deep courtyards, there is no connecting hall or corridor. In such houses, rooms frequently open into each other. In other forms of courtyards, hallways may be provided in order to avoid rooms opening into each other. However, even in such cases, there still exist rooms that open to each other. Regardless of the form, style and size of the courtyards, they all have these particular main spaces:

Hashti

Hashti is the immediate space that is entered from the exterior door and spans interiors and exteriors (Figure 72). *Hashti* is a small room, detached from the interiors. It is intended for distribution of accesses as well as providing a waiting area. *Hashti* can be constructed in linear, rectangular or octagonal forms, and its roof is frequently vaulted. The *Hashti* of wealthy houses is a rather embellished space with glazed tiles, patterned brick works, floral motifs, mirror works or mosaic works. In some cases, the *Hashti* does not directly lead to the courtyard; it may lead to a dark, narrow, humble passage way called *Dalan* in Turkic (Figure 73). The spacious courtyard is accessed through this *Dalan*. The courtyard is visually inaccessible from the entrance door because of the angle of the passage way and its position.

A room is usually constructed on the second floor above the *Hashti*, separated from the other residential spaces (Figure 74). This room was usually used as the guest room in middle-class houses and was accessed through a staircase from the *Hashti*. The overnight guests could stay in this room without interfering with household private living spaces. In one report in my fieldwork, a man remarked that this room - which is a rather isolated room- was used in the past to isolate women in times of menstrual cycles. He explained that women in those days were considered as impure and should be avoided from any physical contact and thus they were exiled to this room. However, apart from this single comment I did not come across similar points in any other case.

Figure 72: A view of a renovated Hashti.
Photo Credit: http://www.rahgoshaymuseum.ir/?lang=en&page=hashti.
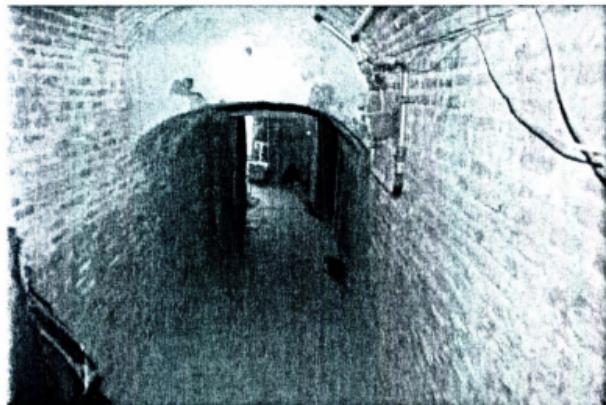
Figure 73: Mirzade house, the Dalan.
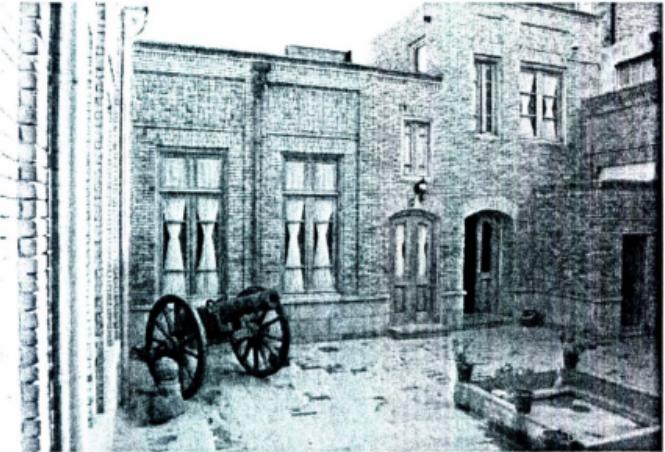
Figure 74: Sattarkhan house, the single (guest) room at the upper level (upper right hand of the picture).

Courtyard

The courtyard is a multi-purpose open-to-sky space and the heart of everyday life even if not geometrically located in the center of the house. The courtyard is rectangular in shape and fulfills both functional and symbolic purposes for the family. In middle-size houses the courtyard provides an extra room for everyday activities. As Ozkan (2004) suggests, the courtyard is "an extension of the living quarters" (1). In addition, the courtyard provides a convenient connection between different parts of the house (in the absence of hallways).

The courtyard house may consist of one, two or several yards depending on the size of the house and the means of the household. Where more than one courtyard exists, each

are allocated to the particular activities. The front yard in those cases becomes the ceremonial part of the house while the back yard contains the service areas. These yards also function distinctively in terms of gender. The inner courtyards are an exclusively private part of the house which are allocated to female activities, but the front yards are the realm of men and their visitors (see the discussion of gender-related distinctions in the courtyard houses in the fifth chapter).

The courtyard with its lush landscape works as an inner garden providing a pleasing area for the family to spend their leisure time (Figure 75). In the Tabriz courtyards, both decorative and edible plants are grown. Rose bushes are among the most common decorative plants. Iranian traditional families preferred to grow their vegetables and fruits in their courtyards as well. The grape vine is one of the most popular plants which can be found in almost all yards in Iran. In addition to consuming the grapes, Tabriz women use grape vine leaves to make Dolme, a very traditional food especially for New Year 's Eve. A particular structure is constructed in the courtyards to protect the grape vine bushes (Figure 76). These areas covered with the branches of the grape vine provide a pleasing shadowed space to take rest underneath during summer time.
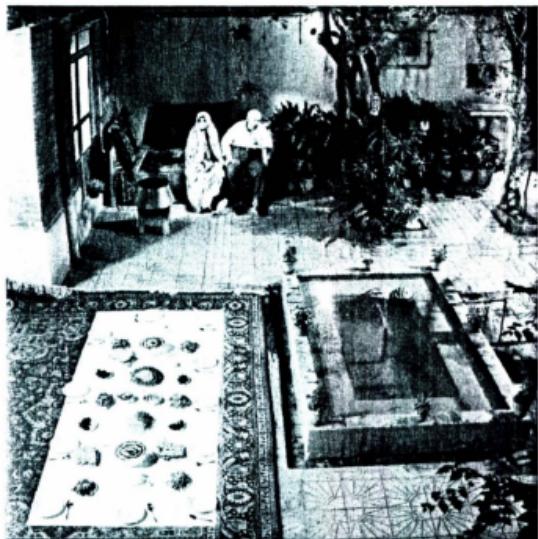
Figure 75: An elderly couple waiting for their children to come over for dinner in the courtyard.
Photo credit: Mehdi Allame

One of the essential features of courtyards is a central pool termed *Hows* in Farsi (Figure 77). It can take different shapes such as diamond, circle, rectangle or oval. A water tap is provided beside the *Hows* making it a functional space for washing purposes especially in summer. The pool may be filled with water or kept empty. When filled, goldfish are kept in it and people always have challenges in keeping their fish alive with the threat of crows and stray cats.

Figure 76: Nikukheslat courtyard, the structure supporting the grape vines.
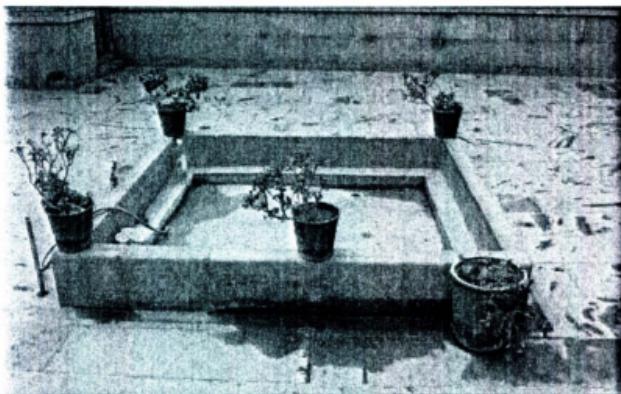
Figure 77: Sattarkhan house, the Hows.

A porch termed *Iwan* in Farsi is also provided in front of the building and is a raised platform, 4-5 steps from the yard level, and provides a pleasant space to enjoy the

beautiful view of the courtyard (Figure 78). This semi-open room, closed on three sides and located on the upper level from the ground, is an architectural element known throughout the Middle East and is possibly of Persian origin (Edwards et al. 2004, 15). The *Iwan* is usually decorated especially in wealthy houses and is one of the most architecturally significant parts of the home which adds to and enriches the aesthetic values of the building.

The courtyard is also used for communal, social activities like religious gatherings and weddings. In the case of such gatherings, the pool was covered with wood to provide a raised stage for various performances. The central position of this area made it an appropriate place for setting the stage. A particular form of folk drama, called *Ru-Howsi*, literally meaning 'on the pool' was very popular in traditional weddings which was performed on this stage.

Courtyards are regarded as living rooms and frequently bedrooms in the summers, enabling people to enjoy the cool outdoor weather. To fulfill these purposes, the courtyard is furnished with particular pieces of furniture. The most common and traditional one termed *Takht*, literally meaning bed, is a particular bench-like type of furniture, wider than a bench and covered with rugs (Figure 79). This furniture is used for sitting during summers when people spend their afternoon in the yard. It is usually placed near the fountain or the pool which is the coolest part of the yard.
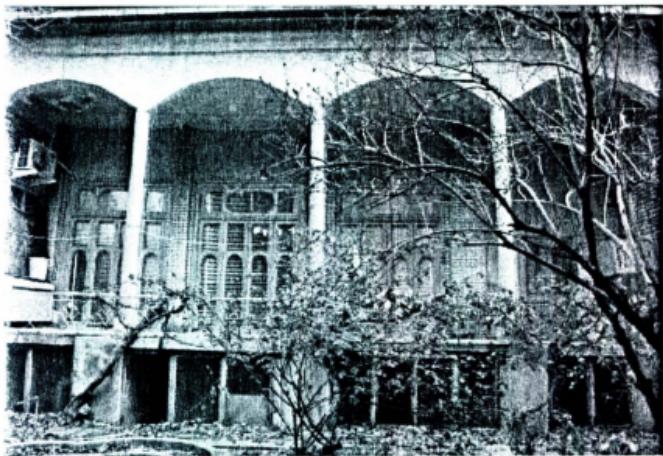
Figure 78: Nikukheslat house, the Iwan.
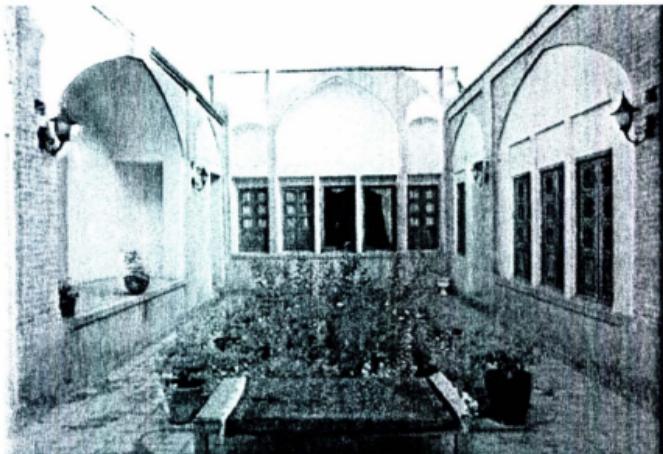
Figure 79: A Takht in an inner courtyard. Photo Credit: Cultural Heritage Organization archives.

The courtyard is also used for summer domestic activities. The household, especially women, had very busy days in summers processing the food for preserving for winter. Lack of technology to freeze and save the food demanded exhausting processes of preserving. Such processes included drying, pickling, salting and frying the food. All these activities were undertaken in the courtyard by women during the summer. However, later on, people abandoned most of these activities because of the introduction of new technologies and products. They also preferred to transfer the required activities to the indoor places. This preference led to construction of additional indoor spaces around the courtyards and the courtyard gradually lost its crucial, practical functions.

Rooms

Courtyard houses, in general, consist of a large number of rooms. The rooms in Iranian courtyards were named based on the number of their openings (windows) such as two-openings, three-openings, five-openings and seven-openings. The smaller rooms (two-openings and three-openings) were used as private living and sleeping rooms. The larger rooms of five-openings and seven-openings, if present, were allocated to that of reception rooms.

The reception room occupied a large portion of the house lot and contained all display items of the house (Figure 80). In two-story houses, the reception room usually is located at the second floor. The reception room in Iranian houses is in many ways analogous to the parlor in western houses. Gerald Pocius (1991) sees the Calvert, Newfoundland houses' parlors as "a kind of folk museum where the unique, special and fancy things are kept on permanent exhibition and every so often opened for viewing to a

select public" (239). Likewise, the reception rooms are the large areas of Iranian houses which are allocated to strangers and their occasional visits.
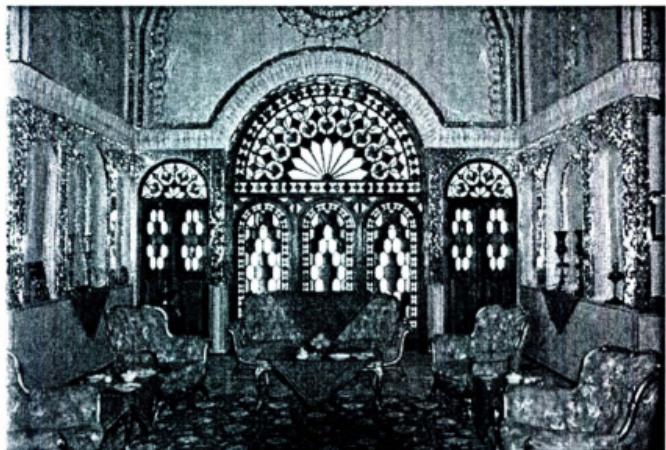
Figure 80: The reception room of an upper-class family house.
Source: Cultural heritage organization archives

Except for the reception room, the rooms in old Iranian houses were not specialized for a particular function. The families did not feel the need for allocating of a private room for individuals in the past. The cultural concerns in socializing children are one of the factors which influence the arrangement of the domestic space. The traditional approach to socializing children demanded the parents' constant access, both visual and non-visual, to the children's activities (Howell and Tentokali 1989, 284). The cultural

attitude toward socialization of children prevented Iranian parents from allocating separate and private rooms to children. Boys in very rare cases could have their own rooms, but for girls having a private room was very uncommon. This had to do more with the different ways of socializing of boys and girls. The actual identity of the child, girls in particular, was attached to her future life in Iranian culture, and there was no concern for self-identity in her father's house. Girls could achieve their identity only with marriage. The spatial manifestation of this cultural fact can be seen in the lack of privacy for girls in their father's house. There is also a relevant saying that "yours is in the store". People use this saying whenever a single girl asks for something, either material or such things like privacy, implying that you will gain whatever you want after marriage.

As most of my informants remarked, when they were growing up in their father's house, although they had plenty of rooms, the young, single individuals, boys or girls, did not have their own rooms. The allocation of space in such houses followed a particular pattern as they remembered. When there were enough rooms (three or more in this case), a room was allocated to the parents, a room for the boys and another for the girls. In the times that families had a large number of children, this meant that in a single room three or more persons slept. This lifestyle seems very crowded by current standards. However, as Pocius (1991) in his study of Calvert houses points out, "crowdedness is a cultural concept" and in his words, "what in one culture might be considered as crowded interaction, for some others [in some other time] is a normal one" (253).

Giving a specific function to a room is frequently achieved by placing particular furniture in a room. For example, placing the bed in a room makes it, tangibly, a

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bedroom. However, the middle-class courtyard houses, frequently lack fixed furniture such as bedroom or living room furniture. Activity-specific designation is given to the rooms neither by architects nor by the users. Visiting a house, moving from one room to the other in a traditional house, one could not find a salient indicator of the specific function for a room. All the rooms are covered with vibrant colored carpets, frequently empty of any other furniture. However, except for lower-class houses, this is not the case in most of the contemporary houses which have been touched by the impact of modern life now, with the immobile furniture.

The bedroom was not a well-known room for Iranian houses in the past. During my fieldwork, I never heard of the term *bedroom* when people introduced the rooms for me except for the re-modelled houses occupied by younger dwellers. The bed was not a popular furniture item especially in common families in the past, and people preferred to sleep on floor mattresses in traditional families. The lack of the particular furniture probably was one of the possible reasons for people's unfamiliarity with bedrooms. The flexibility achieved from the lack of fixed furniture in the houses enabled people to use a single room as living room during the day and as sleeping room at night by spreading out the sleeping materials. The bed, even if present was located tightly against the wall, permitting the room to be used for other functions. This demonstrates that the bedroom was not regarded as a totally private area (Figure 81).
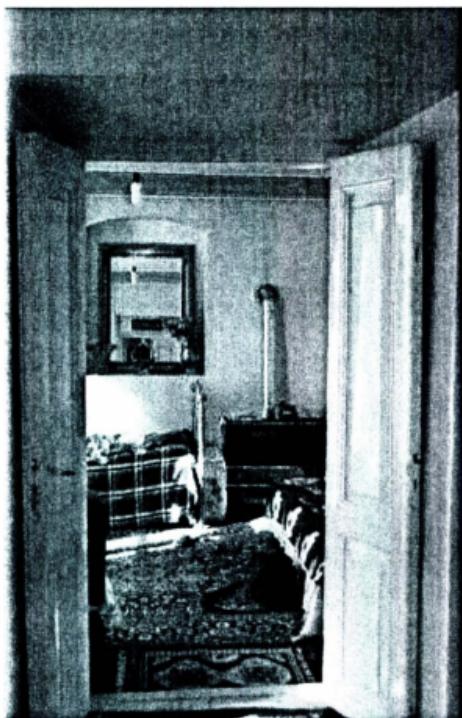
Figure 81: Mahdavi House, a view of the living/sleeping room. The beds are located tightly against the walls.

Sleeping areas in middle-class families were also determined by season. In summers, the family, male members in particular, usually slept in the yard or on the roof, which were the coolest areas during the night. In winters, as my informants explained, since nobody could afford to heat an extra room for sleeping, they used the same living room

for sleeping at nights. One woman remarked, "After the daily activities finished, we spread the sleeping stuff, which were usually kept in the corner of the living room, and slept there. In the morning, the sleeping stuff was removed and the room turned to the living room again". Interestingly enough, saving on heating materials was not only the case for lower-class families. My other informant, from a wealthy family, reports a similar story. He comments, "even if people were able to heat the whole house in winters, it was not acceptable at all in the past. People used to save everything including energy." When it was not necessary, people preferred to concentrate their activities in one or two rooms of the house in winters. This led to the popularity of evening gatherings in the winters which were the great occasions as my informants remembered. *Korsi* was the popular furniture of the old living rooms and a great setting for such occasions. *Korsi* is a type of rectangular, low profile table with a small floor hearth underneath it and heavy blankets and quilts thrown over it, overhanging on all sides to keep its occupants warm (Figure 82). The occupants sit on cushions around the *Korsi* with the quilt over their laps. *Korsi* was a multi-functional place; the daily meal was cooked on the hearth underneath, and the food was served on the table itself. *Korsi* was an excellent setting for storytelling events according to Reza, my elderly male informant. He remarks: "At the evenings, when everybody came back home, we usually gathered around *Korsi* to have our meal and to spend the rest of the evening listening to the stories that some family member was telling."
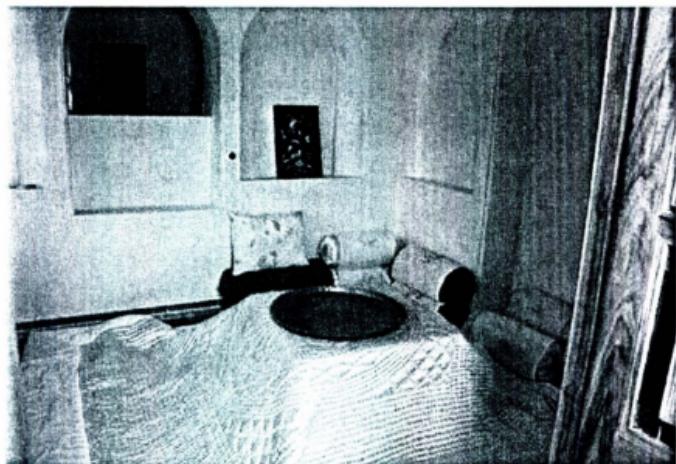
Figure 82: A Typical Korsi.
Photo Credit: Cultural Heritage Organization.

Kitchen

Kitchens in courtyard houses are usually located far from the living areas. They are either in the basement close to the heat and water sources or at the far end of the courtyard (Figure 83). However, a small, secondary kitchen might be provided close to the reception room to facilitate the serving. Utilizing charcoal ovens in the past made the kitchens a polluted space which should be away from the living spaces to prevent wood smoke and smell. Attached to the kitchen are some service areas such as the bakery room. As one woman commented, bread as the main food was usually provided in large quantities by the traveling bakers particularly in upper-class families. These bakers, generally women, dropped by the wealthy houses a couple of times a year and spent

several nights there baking. These bakers in addition to baking were good storytellers because they were travelers. Their presence in the house meant entertainment for the household, especially women and children, and was an exciting experience for some people I talked to. Thus, they were always welcomed warmly by the family. However, the common people who did not have the place or the oven or could not afford assigning the bakers bought their bread from other people or the bakeries.

Figure 83: Madine house, a view of the kitchen.

Washroom

Washrooms are usually located in hidden corners of the courtyard away from the interiors (Figure 84). In one of my documented houses, there was a washroom space in the interior but it was closed up and was used for storage. Residents of the courtyards have many stories about the inconvenient position of the washroom, particularly in cold winters and dark nights. Now-grown-up residents of courtyards remember how scary and inconvenient the washroom was for them as children at night, and how they dealt with this situation. They even have stories of encountering ghosts and other supernatural beings in their nightly trips to the washroom. Majid, a man in his 60s, told me his funny story. He was not the bravest child and he asked his sister to accompany him to the washroom on dark nights at the time when there was no electricity yet. Since he wanted to take his time there, he would ask his sister to return to the house and then he would whistle whenever he was finished and his sister would come and bring him back.

Figure 84: Sattarkhan house, the open door in the bottom right shows the washroom.

Bathroom

Private bathrooms within residences were fairly new phenomena for the common houses in early twentieth century Iran (based on informants' comments). Bathrooms, if present, usually were located far from the living spaces in the basement level to facilitate the access to water and heat. Most people used to go to the public baths in the center of neighbourhoods. In each neighbourhood there was at least one bath; in larger neighbourhoods there might exist two baths each allocated to men or women. When there was only a single bath in the neighbourhood, it was scheduled for men and women in different intervals during a day.

The hygienic standards were then very different from the present time. Everyday showers were neither possible nor common. People usually would go to bathe once a week. However, particular religious rules demand people wash themselves before sun rise in case of sexual intercourse. This connection between sex and bathing is the subject of many jokes in the culture. People I talked to have many stories about how embarrassing and shameful it was to go to a bath in the early mornings under the scrutinizing eyes of people. The same situation existed in the multi-family courtyards' bathrooms. Women, in particular, remember how inconvenient it was to go to the bathroom in the mornings under surveillance of the in-laws. In addition to such social issues, bath spaces had a mysterious aura in the past, and people have stories of encountering supernatural beings such as jin (fairy) on their way to bathe.

The social pressures and the increase in the standards of urban life lead to addition of bathrooms to the existing houses when people felt their necessity. As an example, Najibe

explains that the reason that her father decided to make a bathroom in their basement was the sexual harassment of her on her way to bathe when she was a teenager. By constructing the private bath, family members, women in particular, did not need to go out for such purposes.

Apart from the shared spatial feature of the courtyard houses in terms of their contained spaces, these houses reflect the general characteristics of Iranian vernacular architecture. The courtyard houses as architectural expressions of Iranian culture are reflective of values, desires, beliefs, fears and hopes of people. As Henry Glassie (2000) suggests: "architecture is cultural creation, ordering of experience, like poems and rituals (18)." Thus, buildings as cultural expressions can be used as evidence "in order to tell better versions of the human story" (Glassie 2000, 21). Iranian vernacular architecture develops gradually and coherently out of tradition and experience without sudden innovations (Pope 1965, 266). The vernacular architecture of Iranian cities is the consequence of experience-based knowledge handed down from master to apprentice and from generation to generation. Architecture was not only a great skill or occupation in Iran; the architects had very high social reputations as *creators* of space. They brought meaning to the spatial dimension by converting space into place (Glassie 2000, 21). The process of this conversion is accomplished by a wide range of social, cultural, economic and environmental considerations. Although there were no written regulations for building in the past, vernacular architects considered and respected the needs and highly held values of the community. Vernacular architecture always remained in harmony with the environment while respecting the cultural values of people.

The Iranian architectural historian, Mohammad K. Pirnia (2008), outlined the fundamental principles of Iranian vernacular architecture in his remarkable book *Study of Style in Iranian Architecture*. These principles which involve the concepts and ideas of design, construction methods and socio-economic aspects of the buildings are identifiable in courtyard houses. The main principles suggested by him include functionality and compatibility with peoples' needs, self-efficiency, introversion, plainness and structural rigidity.

Functionality, according to Pirnia (2008), is one of the significant characteristics of Iranian traditional buildings. A house plan and arrangement must observe and respond to the needs of the inhabitants regardless of their status and social class. The needs of the servants of the Iranian house were considered as well as those of the household. Fulfillment of physical and symbolic needs was the fundamental mission of Iranian vernacular architecture.

Self-efficiency in Iranian vernacular architecture is achieved through utilizing indigenous and local materials and applying traditional construction methods in an effective way to reduce the waste of natural resources.

Introversion and inward-looking spaces are introduced as the other principle of Iranian vernacular architecture which is observed in both public buildings, such as mosques, and private residences. The courtyard houses are the great example of the inward-looking architecture. This characteristic allowed the private activities of the residents to be removed from those of the public.

Plainness is observed in both spatial layout and use of materials. The spaces in the Iranian vernacular buildings are intended to achieve their greatest function. The traditional architects were also very careful in choosing and using materials and embellishments to avoid the least waste of material and space and achieve the greatest resistance in the buildings.

The courtyard type is one of the great manifestations of Iranian vernacular architecture constructed with regard to the principles listed above, employed in both public and private spaces (Figure 85). The courtyards of the mosques are the community spaces in which worshippers can gather and socialize. The courtyards of residences, on the other hand, are totally private spaces.

Figure 85: An example of the employment of courtyard in public places, Bazaar, Tabriz, Iran.

Apart from the general characteristics of Iranian vernacular architecture which are reflected in courtyard houses, some other points can be derived from the study of form and function of these houses.

Courtyard houses are a product of a combination of *intensity* and *simplicity* in their design. They are plain on the surface but richly decorated inside. In describing artistic values of Iranian Islamic architecture, Jale N. Erzen (2002) argues that, in the Islamic visual field, space does not fall into a sequential order up to the horizon (as it does in perspectival order of the western visual world). Rather, it surrounds the observer (as in a miniature). As such, the Iranian house encircles the courtyard and its components. While standing in the center of a courtyard, the observer feels a great sense of being embraced by the space. The space of the courtyard is evidently a kind of entity with its protected inner identity which cannot be easily invaded by an outsider (Erzen 2002, 59).

The *protective* nature of the building is the other commonality of courtyard houses. Iranians with different lifestyles in different times of history have constructed courtyards to protect themselves and their properties from potential dangers. While Iranian tribes employed this idea in arranging their tents to protect themselves and their cattle from wild animals and possible theft, urban courtyards provided safety for dwellers in times of social and political tensions (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997).

In addition to the immediate, physical dangers, Iranian courtyards provide the desired *privacy* for families by establishing clear boundaries between inside and the outside world (see chapter four for the discussion of courtyards and privacy).

Designating the property boundaries and unification of spaces and elements in the house is the other function of the courtyard houses. Memarian (1993) in his work on courtyard houses of Iran suggests that courtyards are able to define the limits of the property by clearly separating it from the surrounding landscape. By doing so, courtyards enable their dwellers to have control over their property.

From the ecological point of view, courtyard houses are *climate responsive*. A courtyard allows the inhabitants to escape the harsh environmental situation of their living area. However, since courtyard houses appear in almost all parts of Iran with very different climate conditions, environmental characteristics may not be the main factors. Courtyards appear in Iranian cities from the coastal parts of north and south to the central deserts and to the cold and mountainous parts of the west. Despite the wide use of courtyard form in Iranian cities, they do not share the same characteristics. The differences are architectural features, layout of interior spaces, and design as well as the architectural techniques employed to moderate the harsh weather (Memarian and Brown 2003, 3). A large portion of Iran is classified as a hot-arid geographical zone, where extreme weather conditions are experienced. In such situations, courtyard design is one of the architectural methods which can help to maintain an acceptable degree of comfort. This comfort can be achieved through traditional strategies in design, such as high thermal insulation materials, construction of basements, verandas and other semi-open spaces, as well as strategies of using these spaces. In addition, the courtyards of each area contain the particular architectural features determined by the environment and the building traditions of the region. Where the courtyards of desert regions include features

like wind-catchers for cooling purposes, the Tabriz courtyards use other strategies to keep the dwelling warm in the long, cold winters. However, courtyards, regardless of their regional varieties, allow houses to be packed efficiently into limited space without depriving them of light and air (Westgate 2007). By promotion of ventilation and air circulation, the courtyard provides a comfortable living space for the occupants. Iranian courtyards make the full use of light and shade, the heat and coolness of wind, the water and its cooling effect and the earth and its insulating features (Abdul Rehman 2002, 29).

The courtyard houses have the *flexibility of compatibility with different lifestyles*. They can embody the poor life of the working-class families as well as the splendid lifestyle of upper-class households. Although the generic spatial form of the house is a courtyard with rooms arranged around it, they can differ based on various factors including the economic status of the family. Except for the aristocratic and wealthy houses, the common courtyard houses experience an evolutionary life span. That is, the family usually initially constructed the main living spaces in one side of the courtyard. Some lower-class courtyards even started with construction of a single multi-functional room in one side of the courtyard. Later, and as the economy of household permitted, the family gradually added the additional new spaces to the elementary building unit. In addition to economy, the changing lifestyles and requirements led to such expansions and transformation. One possibility was the marriage of one of the individuals of the family. The newlywed couple required construction of a new unit of residential building or at least the addition of couple of rooms to the existing house. The new additions to the building followed a particular pattern. The new spaces usually were constructed at the

opposite side of the existing building. However, the remaining sides of the courtyard might be covered gradually by the construction for different functions.

The courtyard house type offers a *semi-structured* space allowing the fluid and flexible use of space. This flexibility in occupation is one of the interesting features of courtyard houses of Iran. However, the harsher the weather of an area, the more restricted are the design and arrangement patterns of the house. For example, in a city like Yazd which is surrounded by desert with hot summer days and very cold winters, the rooms are functionally specific to the seasons and are less flexible (Memarian 1993). That is, the winter rooms are very uncomfortable if used in summer and vice versa. Each part of the house should be used in its designated season. Tabriz courtyards are designed in a manner to make the great use of sun in winters. When space permits, the houses are constructed in two distinct sections each to be used in winter or summer. That is, occupants of courtyard houses move from some rooms to the others in different seasons to take the greatest advantages of sun or avoid it in hot seasons. The winter rooms usually have the least openings. However, people may move to rooms with larger windows in winter, sunny days to take advantage of sun. This moving around the house has been termed as *seasonal migration* in interiors by vernacular architecture scholars. Memarian (1998) in his study of Iranian houses introduces various patterns of this seasonal migration in courtyard houses. According to him, around May is the time when the occupants move from winter rooms to the summer rooms. However, this pattern does not exist in most of the common houses where no distinct seasonal spaces are provided. In addition, a vertical movement is possible in such situations. As he observes, in the houses

where no seasonally distinct spaces are provided, the basement plays the role of a comfortable and cool space for the summer days. In such basements, a small pool was provided for cooling purposes. In addition, another vertical movement may occur in hot areas to the roof, which is the coolest area of the house for sleeping at nights (Memarian and Brown 2003, 5). Except for the very wealthy houses, Tabriz courtyards very rarely have been designed in distinct seasonal parts.

As outlined above, the courtyard form has been used extensively in different regions of Iran as a predominant house form. Considering the form and function of the documented houses and people's views on them, it is evident that courtyard houses effectively accommodate people's domestic needs. The houses respect and respond to people's mundane and spiritual needs and wants. Courtyard houses contain some particular architectural features such as *Hashti* and *Dalan* which are exclusive to them. These spaces are intended to achieve the highest privacy within the house which is the ultimate goal of designing courtyard houses. In addition to the spatial commonalities, courtyard houses are designed and constructed based on a set of principles, a number of which are the shared characteristics of Iranian vernacular architecture.

Among those shared features are the functionality of the courtyard buildings, their efficiency achieved by use of local materials, avoidance of waste of space and material within them, and resistance and structural rigidity. Apart from these general features, some particular characteristics can be found exclusively in courtyard houses: 1) they are simple and plain on the outside and rich and embellished inside. The courtyard structures hide the wealth of the owners and prevent the visual access of outsiders into the house. 2)

The most important function of all courtyards is the protection of insiders against outsiders and providing privacy. The outsider can be an enemy, a thief or simply whoever that is not considered an insider. 3) Courtyard type is a great way of designating the boundaries of a property. By providing a solid boundary around one's property, a courtyard allows the control, and proclaims the authority of the owner over the property. 4) The un-structured and flexible space of the courtyard house fits different lifestyles. Courtyard houses are not aimed for a particular social class. They can accommodate both poor and wealthy lives of both nuclear and extended families. 5) The courtyard houses are climate responsive. They protect the interior spaces from the harsh weather of the outside by the thick walls which encompass them. Among these features, privacy seems to be one of the central functions of the courtyards which is largely inspired by religion. Iranian courtyard houses fulfill the need of privacy for families by protecting their female members from the eyes of strangers. Thus, courtyards are the great example of gendered space based on the widely held values and beliefs of a people.

Now that the commonalities of Iranian courtyard houses have been addressed based on what is learnt from the houses studied, in the following chapter these shared characteristics will be compared with examples of courtyards from around the world. This cross-cultural study aims to investigate which features of these houses are central to all courtyard houses, and how this house form accommodates the various needs of different cultures.

Chapter 3

Courtyard Housing: A Comparative Approach

Introduction

The courtyard form has always had universal appeal as a way to organize space both in residential and non-residential buildings. A close examination of courtyard arrangements in this study demonstrates that courtyards in general are intended, in one way or another, to distance the insider from the outsider. This distancing provides both physical and conceptual protection. The physical protective and defensible nature of the courtyard is one of the primary and most universal underlying reasons behind the use of this form. This may be protection against wild animals, an enemy, theft, or harsh weather conditions. The isolated lifestyle is not only an attempt to assure physical safety, but is also intended for security on a social level by maintaining the owner's privacy. Although privacy is a concept desired by all cultures, the degree to which it is required varies by cultures. In general, however, the courtyard is the spatial manifestation of the attempt to provide separation in order to withdraw family life from the outside world.

While the residential architecture of the Middle East is known for courtyards, the inclusion of these enclosed outdoor spaces extends to the architecture of many parts of the world. Although courtyards have different characteristics in different regions, this does not disguise their universal nature for providing private outdoor areas. Not enough evidence exists to trace the roots of the courtyard to one certain birthplace. In his study of typological variation of courtyards over time and space, Petruccioli (2004) argues that residential courtyards as an archetypal form are the product of 'polygenesis' (18). That is,

rather than originating in a certain region of the world in a particular time period, the courtyard type has evolved as an organizational form throughout history as a result of various factors. Thus, the main purpose of this study is not to trace the 'authentic roots' or the precise precedents of the courtyard. Rather, by sampling courtyards from different parts of the world, this study provides an overview of the courtyard form as it appears in various contexts and in different time periods.

This chapter considers courtyards from various regions of the world and tries to investigate why various cultures embrace the courtyard as a part of spatial arrangement. As well, it explains how people employ the courtyard form as a spatial organizational idea for a wide range of purposes: the courtyards of English colonists meant to protect against the Irish and Indian natives' hostility (St. George 1990), versus the self-contained Greek courtyard intended to ensure the authority of the independent Greek man over his family and property (Westgate 2007). Obviously, the courtyards of various regions are created for different and frequently overlapping purposes.

A Historical Approach to Courtyards

In his book, *Shelter, Sign and Symbol*, Paul Oliver (1975) argues that the courtyard as a form existed in nomadic settlements as well as the permanent urban houses. However, he argues that there is a difference in these two employments of form. The architect, according to Oliver (1975), determines and employs the form that seems appropriate and practical to the needs of a group or a society while the form of the dwelling employed by an indigenous community is symbolic of its self image (12). That

is, the dwelling of a tribal culture takes its shape from the forms that are essential to its lifestyle and there is no 'form-giver' architect engaged in shaping the settlement.

In the foreword to *Courtyard Housing: Past, Present & Future*, Suha Ozkan (2004) suggests that the idea of the courtyard can be traced back to Neolithic settlements where the form was developed to protect the settlers from the invasion of other groups or wild animals (xv). Evidence of courtyards that date back to the third millennium BC has been found in the regions of Levant and Mesopotamia (Zein AlAbedin 2004). The first courtyard dwellings were inhabited by sedentary farmers and by semi-nomads (Alhusban and Al-Shorman 2011). Petruccioli (2004) argues that the generic type of courtyard is traceable from the Egyptian-Sumerian civilization to the Mediterranean, Asia Minor and right up to the Indus valley (4). Petruccioli (2004) also cites Semper (1989) who associates the enclosure with a Southern Mediterranean agricultural society that "must struggle to coax a harvest from grudging soil and protect it from the elements" (3). This development of the courtyard in the Middle East later spread to western cultures including Greece and Rome (Abdulac 1982). Evidence of courtyards as part of residences in the western world has been found in excavations of the ancient Rome and Greece, and has been observed in France, Italy, Spain, England, New Mexico, New England, California and Latin America (Figure 86-93).
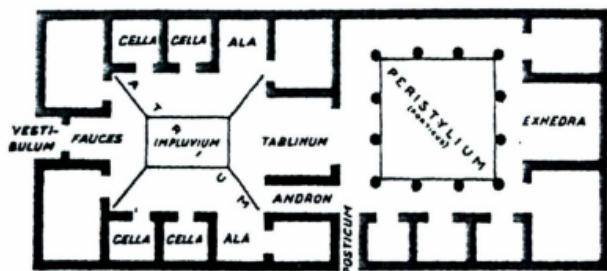
Figure 86: A reconstructed plan of a Roman courtyard house in Pompeii. After Memarian (1993): page 52.
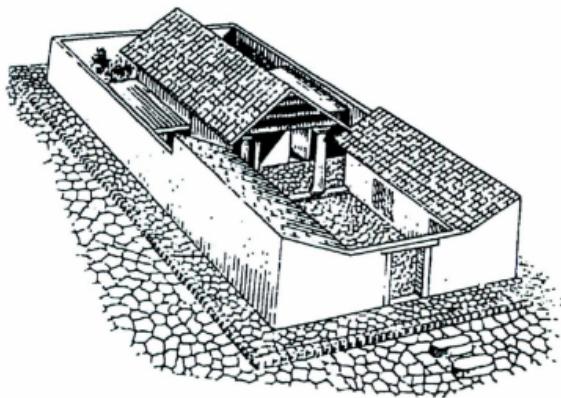
Figure 87: A reconstructed model of a Roman Courtyard house. After Memarian (1993): page 52.
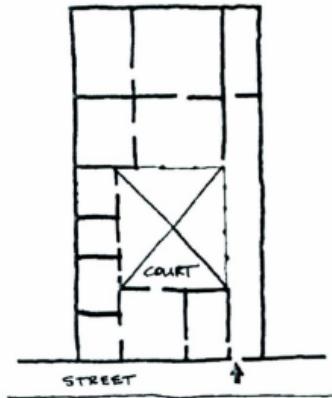
Figure 88: Diagrammatic plan of the typical Greek courtyard house. After Rapoport (1969): figure 3.16.

Figure 89: An ancient Greek courtyard house in Priene. After Memarian (1993): page 45.
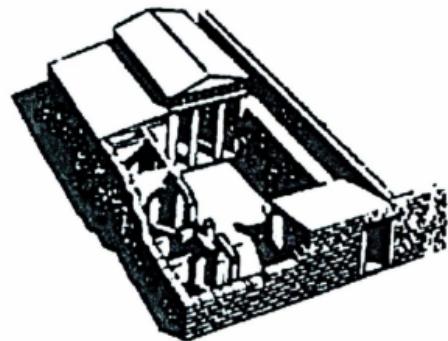
Figure 90: A view of a Greek courtyard house in Priene. After Memarian (1993): page 45.
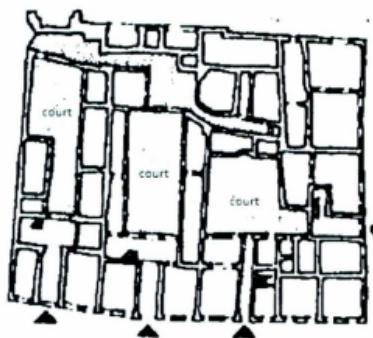
Figure 91: Plan of a courtyard house in Como, Italy. After Memarian (1993): page 48.
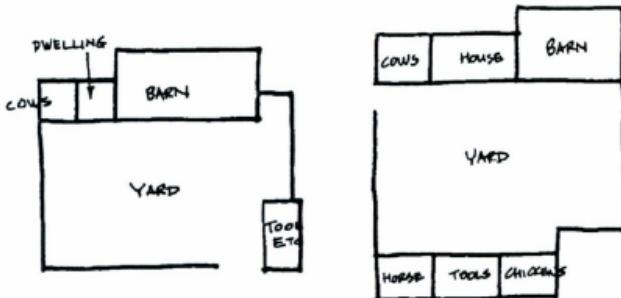
Figure 92: Diagrammatic plan of (left) a typical French farm and (right) an Italian farm with courtyard. After Rapoport (1969): page 35.
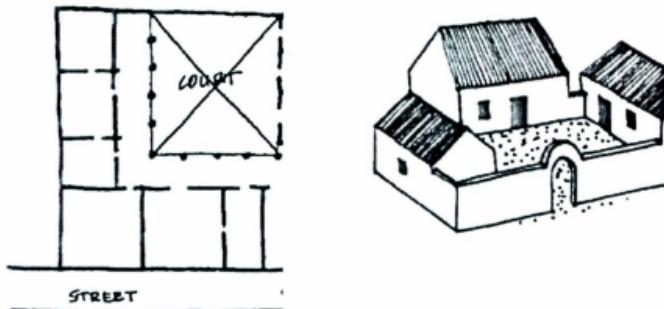
Figure 93: (Left) Diagrammatic plan of a typical Latin American courtyard house, Venezuela. (Right) Latin American courtyard houses, this type is observed in Peru and Bolivia. After Rapoport (1969): page 82 and 65.

Despite the generic similarity between the courtyards of distinct regions, they are very different in form, use and symbolism. However, while residential courtyards have evolved to serve different purposes and take on different forms in different cultures and regions, there are indicators that their basic idea may come from a few historical areas or time periods.

As one of the possible origins of courtyards, Petruccioli (2004) suggests that the byzantine *domus* can be considered one possible ancestor of the courtyard in the Islamic world. *Domus,* which was the house of ancient Roman upper class families consisted of multiple rooms and inner courtyards (Figure 94). These courtyards, as part of a residence inherited from the byzantine culture, according to Petruccioli (2004), responded to the requirements of Islamic culture, such as secluding and protecting women (13). However, as Westgate (2007) argues, since domestic architecture is a result of interplay between the practical needs and symbolic and ideological requirements, the appearance of similar architectural forms may have different meanings in different societies (241). That is, the similarities of Muslim house forms to the ancient *domus* do not necessarily represent similar values and beliefs of the occupants. As will be discussed in the following section, people of different regions with their different motivations and inspirations take the original form and adapt and adjust it to work for their own purposes, needs and values.
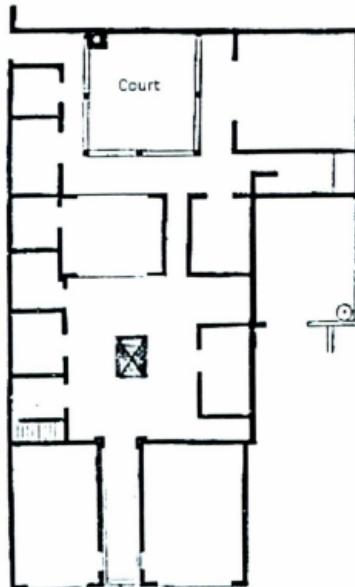
Figure 94: Plan of a *domus,* the house of the tragic poet, disinterred at Pompeii, 8 shows the open to sky court. Source: "Domus". LacusCurtius Educational Resource: *a Selection of Articles from 19th-Century Classical Encyclopedia.* Retrieved 2012-03-14.

Greek Courtyards[4]

One of the archaic forms of courtyards in ancient Greece was studied by Westgate (2007). She explains that the appearance of the Greek courtyard house and its characteristic form has been linked to the development of the idea of 'state' and the ideals of citizenship and equality. In other words, the development of the courtyard house form in ancient Greece "seems to be the architectural manifestation of the 'corporate' power strategy which promotes equality of access to the political power" (Westgate 2007, 241). The new power structure in Greece regarded each man as having authority over his family as the head of an independent household. As Westgate (2007) argues, the internal arrangement of the residential courtyard and its outward appearance reflected the owner's proper observation of moral codes which determined his suitability to participate in the political community.

Greek houses in the early Iron Age (tenth to eighth century BC) mostly consisted of a single multi-functional room. All of the domestic activities took place either in this room or the open space outside the house. However, from the eighth century onwards, the houses seemed to turn inward and withdraw from public spaces. According to Westgate (2007), *Zagora* in Andros (Figure 95) is the place where the form of the central courtyard first appeared in the late eighth century BC (229). The courtyards which began to appear around this time provided a private outdoor area for domestic tasks. Such houses had more than one room, usually two or three with a different range of functions. The extra rooms might be added as the storage rooms. The addition of extra storage rooms to

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[4] This section is largely derived from Westgate (2007).

houses with courtyards may emphasize the desire for self-efficiency as a way of avoiding dependence on the communal food supplies which were provided by the central power in the past.
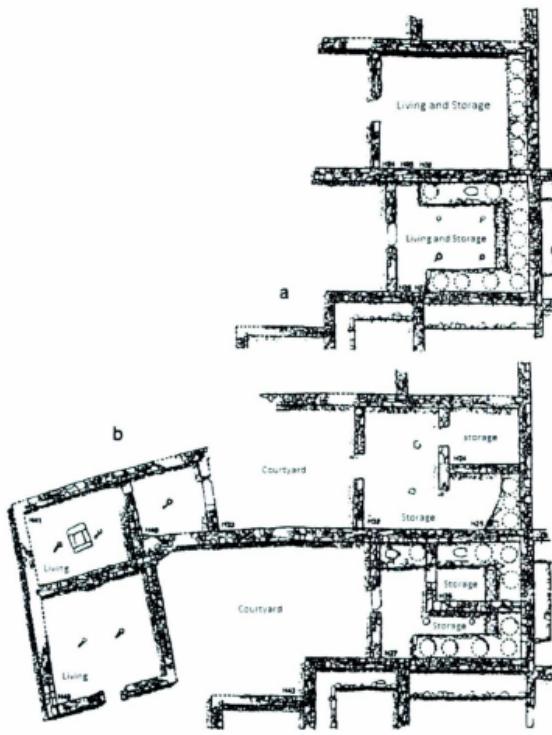
Figure 95: Zagora, Andros. a: phase 1, 775-725 BC; b: phase 2, late eighth century BC. After Westgate (2007): Figure 1

The appearance of such self-contained courtyard houses at the time (eighth century) can be seen as evidence for changes in the mode of power in Greece. Unlike early communities that were dominated by a powerful aristocratic individual (such as a king), the new communities took their shape through the new idea of the "corporate" state in which power should be shared more widely among a number of equal male citizens (the concept of polis) (Westgate 2007, 229). Morris (1999) also sees the appearance of courtyard houses as one of the many changes in Greek material culture related to the emerging idea of the polis (311).The emergence of the courtyard structures at the same time as this great change in the power relations, indicates a shift in values of the community. Rather than being dependant on a powerful man, each person was elevated to the status of head of an autonomous and independent household in his own right. The enclosed form of the courtyard house suggests a more strongly defined conception of the private sphere and a desire to have a control over the space used by the household (Westgate 2007, 234).

Coucouzeli (2007) and Morris (1999) both see the appearance of Greek courtyard houses as the first manifestation of ideas about gendered domestic spaces. The more enclosed and isolated plan of archaic courtyard houses probably reflected a greater degree of control over women and also promoted the honour of men. Westgate (2007) also links the classical form of courtyard houses of Greece to the concept of citizenship associated with the polis, specifically the need to ensure female chastity and the legitimate

transitions of citizen status (230). In the other words, the physical house could stand for the reputation of its owner and his family.

The plain façade of Greek courtyard houses with the small number of openings, which is the case in courtyards in general, including the Greek courtyards, is interpreted in different ways. The blank, unbroken exterior would have been a great statement of the propriety of the occupant's domestic arrangements which ensured the chastity of his female relatives and his children's legitimacy (Figure 96). The enclosing walls of the courtyard "guarded the household's freedom from interference and patronage which underpinned the political authority of its male head" (Westgate 2007, 236).
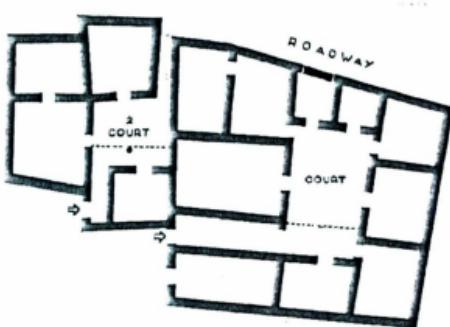
Figure 96: Classical courtyard Houses, Athens, fifth Century BC. (American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora Excavations). after Westgate (2007): Figure 3.

In addition, Westgate (2007) argues that the lack of embellishments in the outward façade of Greek houses may also have indicated the owner's commitment to the ethos of egalitarianism. She comments that from the late fifth century onwards there is evidence

for an increasing amount of decoration inside the houses, like wall paintings and columns, but there is no evidence for decoration of the facade or fancy doors and window frames. Even in the richest surviving houses the embellishments were apparently kept to the interior (Westgate 2007, 236). The lack of the emblems of wealth in the appearance of the houses can be seen as a result of a prejudice against projecting economic distinctions between households. The house of the great men of the past "should not be more splendid than those of their neighbours" (Westgate, 2007, 239).

Spanish Colonial Courtyards

The enclosed courtyard house is a prevalent residential form in the southern United States, resulting from the influence of Spanish architecture. The enclosed pattern of Spanish colonial architecture was adapted from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, based on the archaeological evidence from sites in Florida (Deagan 1986). Spanish colonists who occupied the southern boundary of the United States from Florida to California for more than 250 years, tried to maintain their own way of life in an unfamiliar environment. Their efforts to conform to their own culture and values lead to the development of a distinctive Spanish-American tradition in the area (Deagan 1986). Although Spain's rule ended in 1821 (Weber 1979), its architectural influence is still considerable (Deagan 1986). This includes the enclosed pattern of Spanish colonial architecture as a general pattern of domestic architecture in the area. However, this pattern was influenced and modified by the distinctive local traditions.

The use of space and city planning by Spanish colonists was very organized and rather unchanged through time (Deagan 1986). The grid plan of the city consisted of

streets which were arranged at right angles to one another forming blocks (Deagan 1986). The blocks created by the streets were divided into several lots. Within each lot the spaces were arranged in a consistent form as well. Houses usually were set in an enclosed compound with entry through a gate in the lot wall rather than directly in the house. The basic form of housing, the popular pattern in rural Spain, was one or two multi-functional, interconnected rooms usually with a covered porch on the south or east side to take advantage of the sun and air (Deagan 1986). The expanded version of this house form was built by adding rooms, often in single rows, on the basic rectangular unit plan. Such rooms opened to the central patio. Eighteenth century examples in Florida include a balcony on the street side (Deagan 1986). As Deagan observes, the windows in Spanish colonial Florida were located a step ahead of the wall and were covered with a wooden grating, providing a protected area from which the Spanish ladies could observe the outside world (Figure 97). The kitchen was usually a detached space which was located within the enclosure along with the wells and the areas for the livestock.
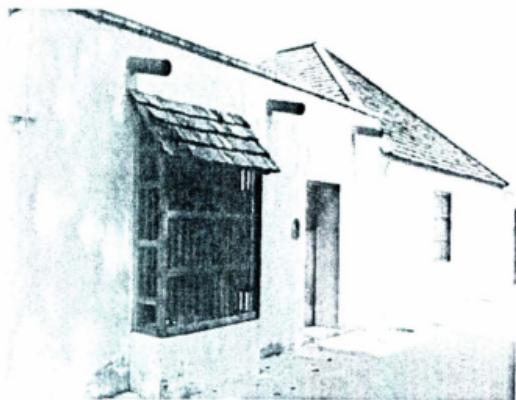
Figure 97: The protected bay window, Liambia House, a late eighteenth century colonial home, St. Augustine. (James Quine, St. Augustine Historical society). After Deagan (1986): page 88.

Many towns and cities in the Southwest of the United States were influenced by the Spanish colonial principles of city planning. Los Angeles and Santa Fe are among cities which were organized in grids with parallel streets around a central plaza. This central plaza was fortified by walls for defence and usually contained a church and government buildings (Graham 1986).

Central courtyards are also dominant in southern California multi-family residential buildings (Polyzoides et al. 1982, 9). The emergence of courtyard housing in Los Angeles is a result of multiple cultural influences, the most influential of which is the revival of Spanish architecture.

The courtyards of Los Angeles are a result of rediscovery of the mission-rancho background of Hispanic tradition (Polyzoides et al. 1982). California was initially colonized by Spaniards and later Mexicans (Polyzoides et al. 1982, 16). The pre-

American culture of the region is reflected in remaining missions and rancho buildings. Missions provided an isolated lifestyle for a group of people, living together as a community isolated from the potentially hostile environment. Rancho was "a rural element of genuine Hispanic parentage" (Polyzoides et al. 1982, 16) which affected the development of Los Angeles courtyards. The rancho consists of a set of inward-looking buildings encompassing an open courtyard within a harsh landscape. Rancho defined the spatial core of a small working community of a people and a center of productive agricultural activities. Although the mission-rancho heritage remained in very few original buildings, the early adobe buildings of Los Angeles represent a nostalgic attempt to create similar forms and ways of life.

Regardless of the possible factors in generating the courtyards in California and the degree of their influence, the courtyard structures provided a dwelling which suited the lifestyles and expectations of new Californians. Courtyard housing is still an active and valuable tradition in Los Angeles whether as a spatial organizational idea or landscape form (Polyzoides et al. 1982). The most popular examples of courtyard arrangements in California are simple repetition of the single family house arranged in series (Figure 98). They were frequently occupied by Midwestern retirees. The houses were, in most cases, modest, one-bedroom units. They accommodated a wide range of social groups. They were owned or rented based on the socio-economic conditions of the occupants. They were simple both in appearance and technology and were suited to the California climate. They worked as an intermediate link between the scale of individual houses and the neighbourhoods. The courtyard complexes also worked as ideal dwellings for older

people by simultaneously providing the convenience of compact, easily maintained living space with the advantages of communal outdoor places for social interaction. Since they were frequently low-rise, two story buildings, they were accessible for people with limited mobility. As Polyzoides et al. (1982) observe, immigrant families currently occupy these now old courts as affordable and convenient places to live; "a way station between a foreign existence (in Asia, Mexico,..) and the promised land" (10).
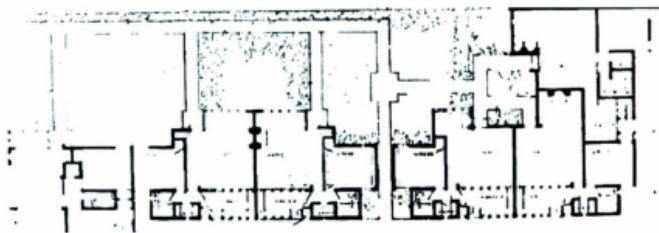
Figure 98: Plan of projected bungalow court for Jacob Korsen, Rudolph M. Schindler, Los Angeles, 1921 (Schindler Archives, U.C. Santa Barbara). After Polyzoides et al. (1982): Page 10.

The *urban patio house* and the *hacienda* or rural *cortijo* are the two models of Spanish courtyard models which influenced the southern California Spanish revival courtyard buildings (Polyzoides et al. 1982, 20). The urban patio house was the basic element of urban structure during the Roman domination of Spanish national space (Figure 99). The idea of arranging buildings around a central court remained a prevalent form of organization of space during the Arab rule as well. The patio house was not a monumental structure; rather it was a modest form of housing. The patio as the inner court was furnished by indoor furniture and was used in summers as an extension of

ground floor living areas. The patio was also partially the extension of the city in that it was separated from the street by a single iron gate (Polyzoides et al. 1982, 20). The Los Angeles courtyards, as argued by Polyzoides et al. (1982), are very much connected and derived from the Roman provincial patio houses (20).
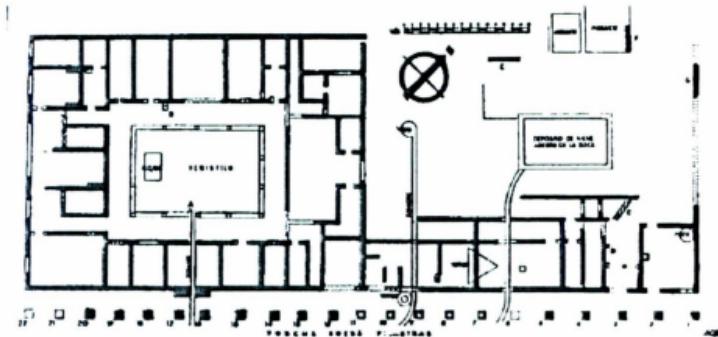
Figure 99: Roman patio house, Luliobriga. This is the form of urban dwelling in Spain and much of Mediterranean. After Polyzoides et al. (1982): page 21.

The other possible precedent of California courtyard houses is *hacienda* or *cortiji*. *Haciendas* were the Spanish isolated farm complexes which contained both living spaces and production areas. Their scale was usually larger than residential buildings. In addition to the direct influence of these buildings in courtyard housing of California, they also affected the courtyard tradition indirectly. As Polyzoides et al. (1982) argue, both mission and rancho, as the formal antecedents of courtyard housing, are influenced by *haciendas*.

The idea of the *hacienda* was employed by Spanish colonists as a popular form of domestic architecture in New Mexico and is also found in south Texas (Graham 1986).

Haciendas were flat roofed buildings arranged around a typical central *placita* (Placita is the Spanish word for the courtyard). *Haciendas* share a set of characteristic features of the Hispanic courtyard tradition. The building consists of a single row of rooms forming an enclosure, a covered passage or *Zaguan*, leading in from the street, and a door for each room opening into the courtyard (Graham 1986). *Zaguan* plays the role of medium between inside and outside. *Haciendas* were fortified with thick walls and were only accessed through the single entry provided in the thick wall (Figure 100).
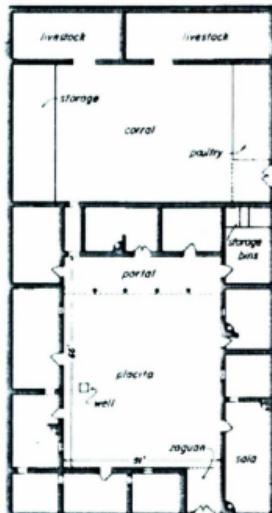
Figure 100: Plan for a typical New Mexican hacienda. The separate livestock area is not included in many cases (Based on plan by Bainbridge Bunting). After Graham (1986): page 96.

The flat roofs of the *haciendas* were influenced partly by the Native American traditions (Figure 101). However, as Wilson (1991) argues, the flat-roofed house built around a courtyard also has its roots in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean traditions and colonists carried it from Spain to central Mexico where a similar indigenous type already existed (111). He suggests that the Spanish colonists and Native Americans may "share the credit for bringing the courtyard to New Mexico" (Wilson 1991, 111).
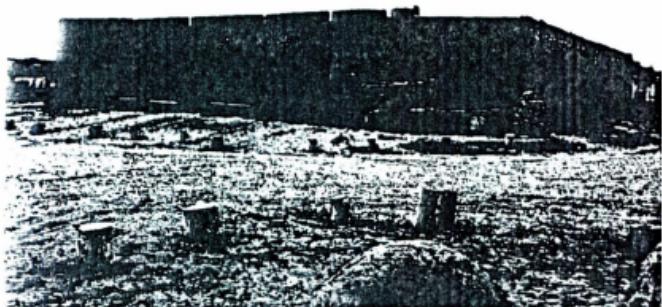
Figure 101: Martinez Hacienda, a flat-roofed hacienda, 1804-1827. After Pratt 1991: figure 48.

The protected pattern of *hacienda* architecture was employed on a larger scale as well. The organizational idea of the central courtyard was followed in many rural areas where the fear of Native American hostility was strong (Graham 1986). These small villages were made up of houses located around and facing a central plaza. Access to the village was from a *Zaguan*. The outside walls had no doors or windows. The villagers, when under attack, could put their livestock into this plaza and close the gate. Thus, the

central plaza provided an easily defensible place for the community. Such plazas existed in New Mexico for more than hundred years in the early nineteenth century (Graham 1986).

One of the best surviving examples of the Spanish Colonial/Mexican period *hacienda* is documented by contributors of *The Field Guide for the Twelfth Annual Vernacular Architecture Forum* (1991). The house is located near Taos. The occupation of this area dates back to at least AD 900. However, the Spanish settlement in the valley had begun as early as 1615 (Pratt 1991, 72). The house, which was completed by 1827, is constructed of adobe and consists of a series of rooms located around a *placita* (Figure 102). The original house consisted of three rooms; nine extra rooms were added to this structure afterwards to form a full *placita*-centered house.
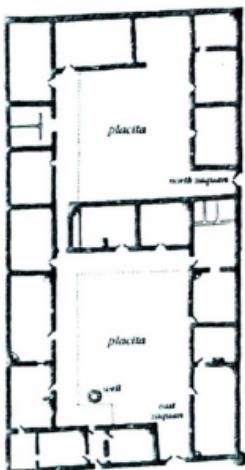
Figure 102: Reconstructed Plan of Martinez Hacienda. After Pratt and Wilson (1991): Fig 50.

Although courtyard houses were the common form of housing in New Mexico in the 1850's they usually belonged to the wealthy families (Wilson 1991). Common families made their houses in other forms such as U-shaped, L-shaped or single file buildings. L-shaped houses, however, were generally extended by adobe walls to form a family courtyard called *plazuela*. Like the *placita*, the *plazuela* lacked exterior windows and had only a large door or a pair of doors which lead directly into the courtyard.

Wilson (1991) comments that the lack of openings and the unbroken exterior was originally intended to protect against Nomadic Indian's attacks. However, he argues that this reasoning cannot be plausible in the case of urban houses where the threat of attacks was small. In such cases the fear of robbers can be considered as the cause of such high unbroken walls. In addition to guarding the house against thieves, the form of the house fulfills cultural needs as well; such arrangements provided a spatial and temporal distance between the private realm and the public intrusion of visitors. If a visitor arrived, the family had enough time to compose themselves before the visitors arrived in the main room.

Another remaining example of a house in Las Vegas is reported by Wilson (1991). This L-shaped house was built in 1882, and consisted of three rooms and belonged to Manuel Romero (Figure 103). Several other rooms were added in stages during the years which completed the courtyard by 1902. The large courtyard house was occupied by six families (four of which were related) in 1992. As can be seen in the examples above, one of the advantages of courtyard arrangement is its capability of expansion that makes it a

desirable and practicable form for extended families and for those of lesser economic means.
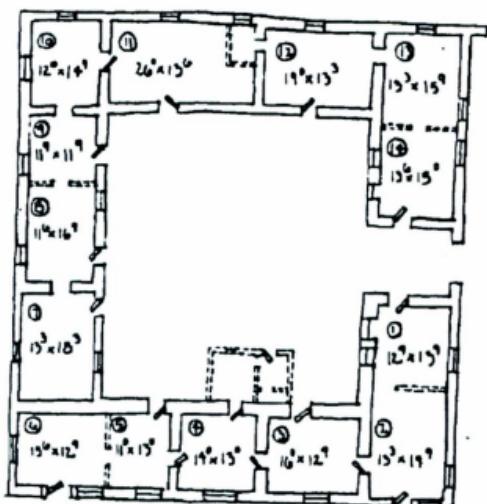
Figure 103: Manuel Romero House. After Wilson (1991): illus. 2.

Although the Anglo-American influence on architecture in New Mexico was slight before 1846, after the American occupation a campaign of modernization began quickly (Wilson 1991, 112). New windows and doors were attached and reoriented the existing houses to the street. However, new constructions continued to follow the courtyard or linear house type and only after the Civil War was the center-hall house plan introduced. Such houses are in contrast with the previous Hispanic tradition and consciously address

the street with porches and large windows. Hispanic builders also began to incorporate elements from Anglo-American house types in their works by removing the adobe walls forming the private courtyards and by adding extra porches to reorient the houses to the street (Wilson 1991).

English Courtyards[5]

A particular type of defensible courtyard structure, termed *bawn,* was studied by Robert B. St. George (1990). *Bawns* were constructed by the English in the sixteenth and seventeenth century in Ulster (242). The complex consisted of a courtyard fortified by walls around the yard to protect the house, family and personal property of the landlord (Figure 104). The walls were often made of stone but also of brick, clay or timber. St. George (1990) argues that the frequent use of stone in constructing the *bawns* in addition to availability of the stone as a local material suggests the desirability of the stone house in English culture as a sign of wealth and power (254). The house may be located either in the center of the *bawn* or against one of the surrounding walls. Building a stone house as part of a wall surrounding an enclosed compound is a well established English colonial practice that dates back to the mid sixteenth and early seventeenth century (St. George 1990, 256). To better protect the settlement, the small corner flankers were constructed in some of the *bawns*, from them the few entries to the property could be monitored and defended from the Irish hostilities.

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[5] This section is largely based on St. George (1990).
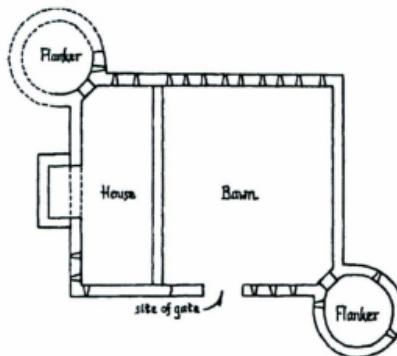
Figure 104: Plan of strong house and bawn, Salter's Company, Salterstwon, county Londonderry (Original source: Moyry Jope (1960): fig 14a). After St. George (1990): figure 13.

As St. George (1990) suggests, the original ideas of *bawns* were probably based on the native Irish "badhun" or "cattle fort" which was a common, native enclosed compound in the sixteenth century prior to the first arrival of English planters (244). The idea of the "badhun" was adapted into a *bawn* by the English to protect the house, family and property. The *bawns'* constructions primarily aimed to fortify the English settlements against a possible Irish uprising. As another possible origin of *bawns*, St. George (1990) reports on a defensive structure built by farmers in northern and western England a few years before any organized plantation in Ulster. These dwellings, called by a document of 1715, "Peel houses", typically had vaulted rooms to secure living property in immediate danger. They were established in the early seventeenth century to secure the farmers from an anticipated invasion of uncivilized Scots following the unification of Scotland and England (St. George 1990, 265).

To search the social origins and the inner cultural logic of *bawns,* St. George (1990) addresses a courtyard farm plan drawn and built by Bray Rossiter in Guilford, Connecticut, between 1652 and 1660. The property consists of three enclosed courtyards: a great court, an inner court to the rear of the house and a green court or formal lawn to its front (Figure 105). The house is located between the inner court and the greene court. The access to the property and the great court is from a gate-house at the lower right corner. The great court is allocated to livestock. The entry for visitors is provided through a deeper English style gate-house to the inner court. As St. George (1990) argues, this elaborate gate-house exerted the power and authority of the householder to visitors (248).
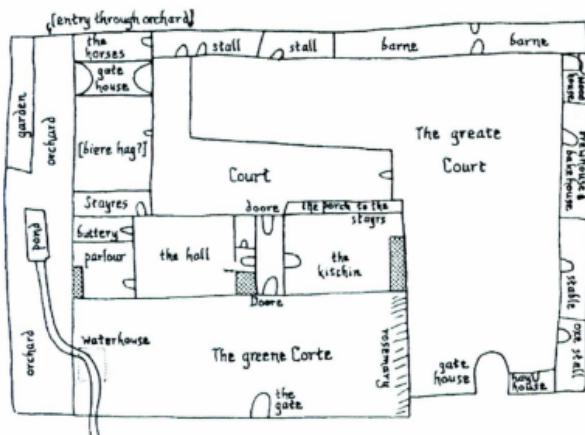
Figure 105: Plan of Bray Rossiter farm, ca. 1652-60. After St. George (1990): figure 3.

Bawns in their form and function provide an example of gendered space (St. George 1990). The inner court and the rooms arranged around it like the spaces for milking cows, provides a close area for the women and the female servants for their daily activities (248). The spatial arrangement of the building also plays a significant role in segregating the owners from their servants (249). As an example, the inner court (the service area) is connected to the chambers' level of the house through an exterior covered stairway which allows the servants direct access to their sleeping areas without disturbing the family. This separation, according to St. George (1990), emphasizes the role that domestic architecture plays in articulating social rank, and provides a controlled setting for rituals of status change (249).

The Ulster *bawns,* according to St. George (1990), are designed relating to two spatial strategies; first, they have concentric barriers such as gates, enclosed yards, entrance porches and sequences of domestic rooms. In addition to demonstrating social ranking, as discussed earlier, these barriers ensured that in case of enemy attack, all possible entrance points could be monitored and guarded by gunners positioned in flankers (256). The other strategy can be seen in the positioning of the *bawns*. They were often located at one end of a linear plantation layout, in a secured end of the town and more often near to the church. This arrangement and distance positioned the landlord in a safe distance from their tenants' houses in the case of their uprising (256).

The planning and design of the enclosures reflects both sacred and secular meanings in Puritan colonies. Three major factors may be taken into account when defining the use and symbolic meaning of *bawn*-like complexes: social class, economic

ambition, and religious belief (St. George 1990, 281). The English considered the Irish people to be either pagans or lapsed Roman Catholics and therefore tried to keep their *bawns* close to the established church to avoid the Irish-pagans' harm (258). Because the English believed that the Irish people lacked the proper sense of order to maintain Christian discipline, they began efforts to convert the native Irish to their own Protestant religion. In addition, the British planters tried to convert the Irish to be loyal defenders of the crown's interest and to become a reliable labour source. Thus, the enclosed, protective and defensive settlement pattern played a significant role in the growth of England's market economy.

When the English arrived in New England, some cultural similarities led them to equate the natives with the Irish natives they had already met. Based on the similarities between Indians and Irish natives the English followed the *bawn*-like pattern of structure in New England as an established approach to the cultural problem of how to secure an English settlement in an environment believed to be essentially hostile (St. George 1990, 264)

Similar enclosed structures were also designed and constructed in England based on the agrarian theories of the early seventeenth century that suggested models of well-ordered farmsteads in order to maximize the farmer's efficiency and to protect grains, animals and implements (St. George 1990, 271). The protective nature of the enclosed compounds was also appealing for landowners along the southern coasts of Cornwell, Devon and Dorset. They used this form to fortify their farmsteads and to protect their properties from periodic invasion by coastal pirates (266).

The urban counterparts of the enclosed structures also became a common form of housing in England in the early seventeenth century. The English courtyard house plans were also borrowed by English architects from France and Italy (St. George 1990, 266). The French town houses were being copied by London merchants who had seen them in Paris and in the textile trading centers (Figures 106-108). The English traders' courtyards followed a double strategy of architecture by, as St. George (1990) suggests, linking the domestic spaces to the counting house, warehouse and shop stalls. The complex protected money and commodity and at the same time provided "a civic stagecraft to mask commercial self-interest" and, as St. George (1990) comments: "evoked the public, benevolent images of a pre-Henrican monastic courtyard and a hospitable medieval inn, the latter of which frequently doubled as a theatre" (269-70).
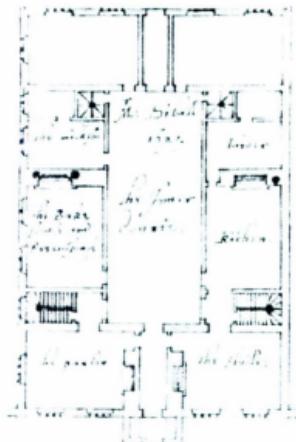
Figure 106: Plan of London town house for Mr. Diball, 1622. British architectural Library, Royal institute of British Architects. After St. George (1990): figure 25.
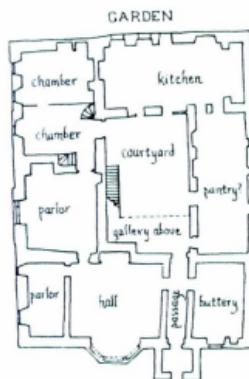
Figure 107: Fifteenth century merchant's house with an enclosed courtyard, Scaplen's Court, Poole, Dorset. Pantin (1962). After St. George (1990): figure 27a.

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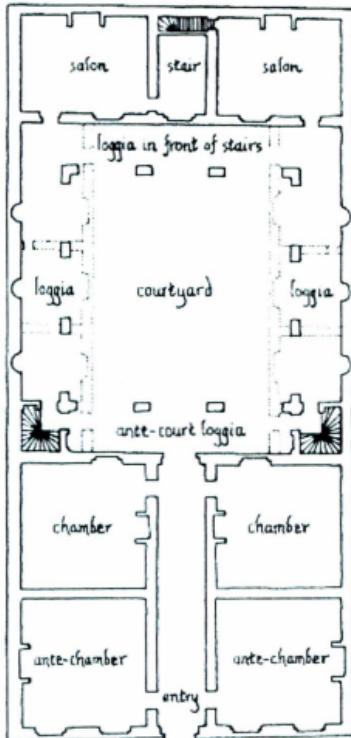
Figure 108: "Plan of a home for a rich citizen or merchant or similar person in the French manner" 1454-59. (Serlio, Sebastiano, and Myra Nan Rosenfeld ,1978) .After St. George (1990): Figure 26.

Chinese Courtyards

Like the western types of courtyards discussed earlier, enclosed structures are also an ideal form of residential building for eastern countries including China. The courtyard form in China is frequently employed as a fundamental rural type which "evolved out of a need for a protected retreat"(Spencer 1947, 275). In addition to residential functions, the enclosed form of scattered farmstead buildings may evolve into a courtyard with L- or U-shaped building arrangements. In isolated rural buildings, enclosed structures contribute to ensuring that the farmstead compound is both self-contained and easily defensible (Figure 109). In closely knit settlements, on the other hand, with dense population, the enclosure ensures the privacy that is desired by Chinese families (Spencer 1947, 275).

Figure 109: A view of a fully enclosed farmhouse, western Szechwan, 1938. The entry gate is located at the lower corner. After Spencer (1947): Figure 21.

The primary basic unit of the Chinese house consists of a rectangular room frequently duplicated to form a complex structure. Building the rooms and living spaces focused around a courtyard for both light and entry is a common building practice in China (Figures 110-112). Chinese courtyard houses are accessible through a covered passageway. A wall is also constructed in the entrance area adjacent to the entrance door. This wall which is called "Spirit wall" maintains and strengthens the privacy of the courtyard when the gate is open (Spencer 1947).
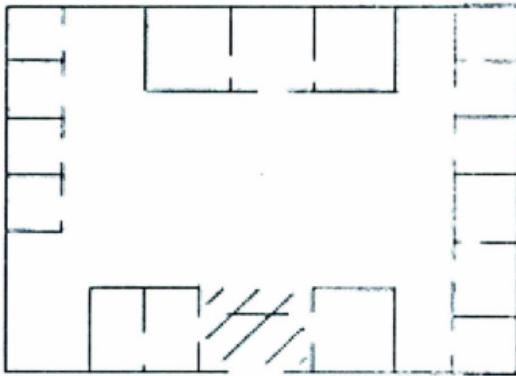
Figure 110: Diagrammatic plan of Chinese rural courtyard building pattern, the rolling mark shows the covered entry passage, the transverse line shows the Spirit wall. After Spencer (1947): figure 16.
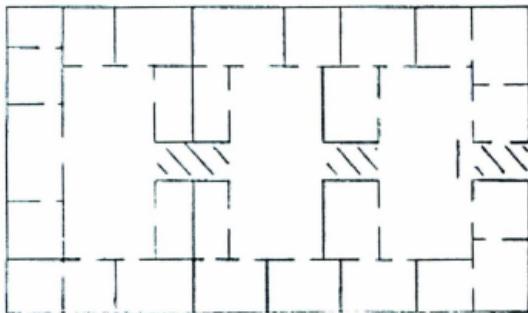
Figure 111: Diagrammatic plan of urban multi-courtyard Chinese house pattern. After Spencer (1947): figure 19.
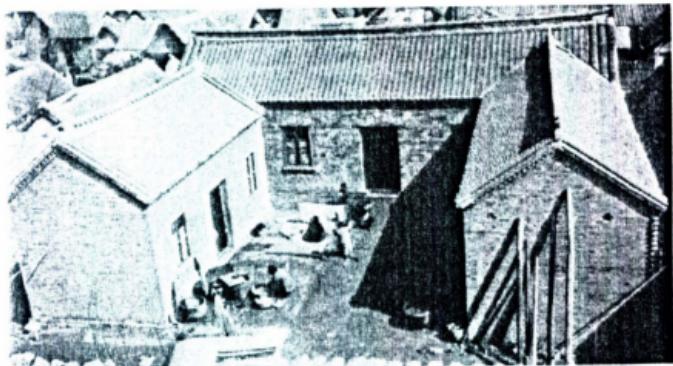
Figure 112: Large single-family urban courtyard house. Northern Anhwei, China, 1933. After Spencer (1947): Figure 9.

As Ma (2010) observes in the study of contemporary Beijing courtyards, the enclosed arrangement was the common design for houses in Beijing built in the early fifteenth century. The physical structure of these houses consisted of a group of single-story residential rooms constructed around a common courtyard. Chinese courtyards may be surrounded by buildings on all four sides or on three sides with the fourth closed by a wall and a gate (Figure 113). The north side of the house was considered as the main part of the house, while the opening was toward the south. This arrangement allowed cool air to penetrate the house in hot summers and obtain more warm sunshine in winters. The east and west sides were a bit lower and were built with plain materials and in simple styles. The south side may include another row of the rooms or simply a wall with a gate. These residential compounds could consist of one, two or several courtyards (*jins*) connected by gates. As Ma (2010) comments, the spaces in the house were used by specific age groups. For example, the north side, which was the most convenient part of the house, was allocated to elderly members of family. Much like the courtyards discussed earlier, Chinese enclosed domestic spaces can be seen as gendered spaces and as physical manifestation of women's isolation and segregation within the patriarchal feudal family (Ma 2010).

The third *jin* — Main part (North wing)

— East wing

The second *jin* —

West wing —

The first *jin* — — Main entrance

— South wing
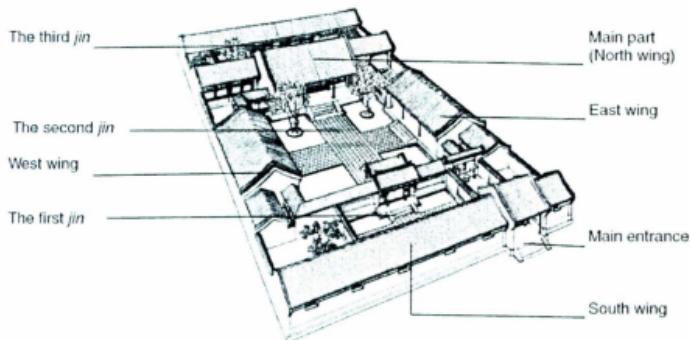
Figure 113: Standard Chinese three-jin courtyard compound (Lou (2001): *page 190)*. After Ma (2010): Figure 2.

Indian Courtyards

The Indian enclosed courtyard house called *haveli* is one of the prevailing residential forms in both rural and urban contexts of India (Bryden 2004). *Haveli* is primarily aimed to protect inhabitants from dust, heat and invaders in desert regions of India. The term *haveli* is derived from the old Arabic word *haola* meaning partition (Bryden 2004). The Indian courtyard, according to Bryden (2004), is evidence of an indigenous courtly civilization and has endured over a long period in India (Figure 114). Originally, the Indian courtyard was designed and built to respond to the needs of a lifestyle involving an extended family with maids and servants. As Randhawa (1999) suggests, Indian courtyard house architecture is not just an architectural style, but it represents a lifestyle (29). That is, the architectural elements of Indian courtyards symbolize the elements of tradition and a particular way of life.
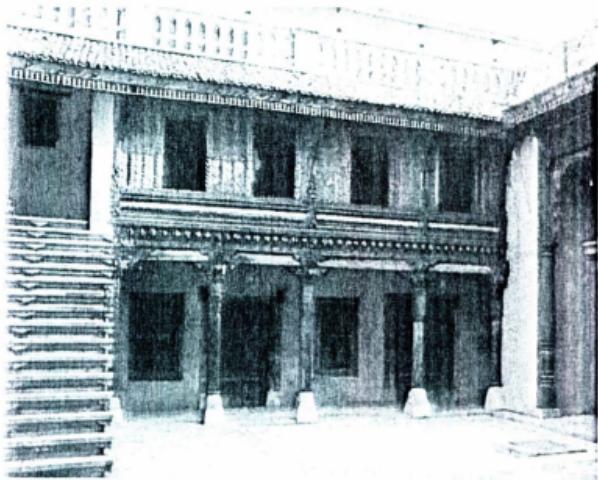
Figure 114: A view of an Indian courtyard. After Randhawa (1999): page 74.

In addition to symbolic aspects of the home, the design and construction of Indian courtyards respond to the environmental characteristics of the region. *Haveli* is a house which 'breathes' (Bryden 2004, 27) to provide comfort for dwellers by allowing for air movement and convection. Rooms are arranged around a central courtyard and have their openings toward the courtyard from which they inhale cool air. The thick walls (at least 60cm) prevent heating of the interiors during the day and they emanate the stored heat during the night and early morning when it is becoming cold (Bryden 2004, 27).

Space is not rigidly structured and specialized in Indian courtyards; rather, it is adaptable depending on the time of day, season and other demands (Bryden 2004, 37). In

this way the functions of the Indian courtyard house are of a more temporary and transitional nature. Use of space is dependent on practicality, convenience and personal preferences. The cooler rooms are used for living rooms in the summer, while the more protected rooms are used for winter.

Although Indian courtyards have regional variation in design and architectural techniques, they share mutual characteristics. They developed based on both Muslim and Hindu designs and motifs. Indian courtyards, much like their western and eastern counterparts, represent gendered spaces. They frequently include two courtyards (*chowks)*: the outer courtyard originally designed for men and the inner for women. Men can gather and receive their visitors in the reception hall at the front of the building in the outer courtyard. The inner courtyard, on the other hand, is where women stay and work (Figure 115). The connecting space between two courtyards belongs to women, and the rooms in this area face both ways, connecting the outer and inner courtyards. The gendered organization of the interiors is reflected externally as well by the size of the windows. Larger windows are provided at the front and tiny jail-work windows at the back. The jail-work in the windows allows women to look out without being seen. This strategy of protected windows is frequently used in courtyards of different areas including the Spanish colonial houses as discussed earlier. In addition to these windows, the Indian courtyard's living room contains an area called *jharokha* from which the women of the house would sit and look onto the street, but could not be observed. Mehta (1977), in her fictional account, portrays the Indian courtyard as a rather stifling space for young women. She writes: "the room seemed to suffocate her, she felt trapped in her *haveli* with

its traditions and its unchanging pattern." However, according to the ethnographic account of Bryden (2004), Indian women do not see their courtyards as prisons but as women's space where 'talking fills the space' (35). The security of the space and its privacy are the factors women appreciate the most about the Indian courtyards.
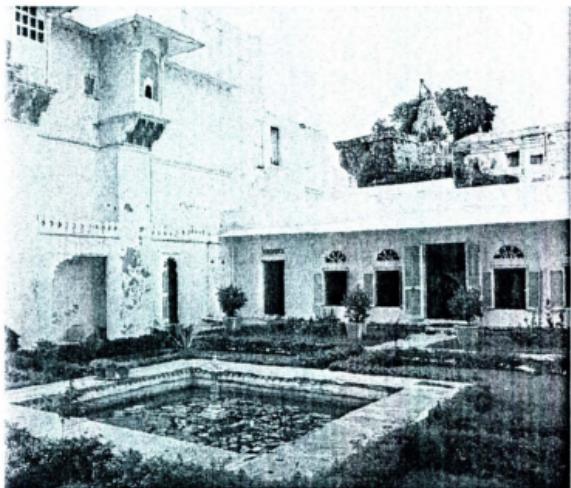
Figure 115: An Indian courtyard with a fountain in the center. The *jharokha* windows open into it. After Randhawa (1999): page 66.

The Indian courtyard fulfills symbolic, spiritual and also mundane functions for its dwellers. The typical Indian courtyard consists of three levels symbolizing earth, man and heaven, connecting the microcosm with the macrocosm (Bryden 2004, 27). The courtyard is significant for the Indian house because it symbolises the plot of Brahma, the

Creator. While the courtyard is regarded as both public and private space in Indian culture and is used for variety of household activities, one of the activities assigned to this space is praying.

Not only are these residential spaces designed with spiritual meaning in mind, but Indian philosophies regard the physical space of the home as inseparable from the cosmic rhythm of space. The harmony and protection of the home is seen to depend on the guidance of Gods. The traditional Indian architect was perceived not only as a craftsman, but a creator and the house itself as a symbol of 'being' in the world (Bryden 2004, 30). As Panikkar suggests, "the architect does not construct holes for privacy and comfort, rather, he shapes space as an unfolding of human life in the cosmos" (17).

The design of space in the history of Hindu architectural semantics is based on religious beliefs. Vastu[6] principles are largely practiced in Indian architecture including the design of the courtyards. The inhabitants of the courtyard are all aware of the ways in which their home is designed in accordance with Vastu. They believe in Vastu principles that have symbolic and functional effect on the space and the activities within it.

Vastu symbolically and functionally connects the body of the individual with the space of the home and a larger cosmological context (Bryden 2004, 36). Vastu is believed to be important for the health of both the domestic space and the body and for bringing peace and prosperity to the household. Indian traditional architecture is based on the idea

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[6] Vastu according to Bryden (2004) is a form of Vastu purusha mandala , a square grid for design, symbolizing the cosmic man who is held down on each of its subdivisions by a particular divinity (30). She explains that after determination of the orientation of a site for the house, this grid is superimposed on the site.

that households should aim to access the earth's positive energy. Thus, certain aspects of courtyard houses aim to achieve this goal; walls in the west and south should be higher and in the north and east lower to allow the air and energy to flow through the house. The main entrance gate should be larger than other doors and should be located in the east. The statue of Ganesh (the God) above the entrance door welcomes visitors into the house and signifies prosperity for the home. Within the house, the openings (windows and doors) and columns are designed in a way to avoid obstruction of the flow of air and energy.

The pattern of household activities in the Indian courtyards follows the movement of the sun and is oriented toward certain directions. People believe that direction affects their body and the circulation of blood. The nature of the activities around the house determines their associated direction. East is the direction to face while praying. Cooking is also preferred to be done facing east; then the food will taste better.

Courtyard houses, observing the Vastu principles, provide a balance between the physical (outer) and the spiritual (inner) comfort for people (Bryden 2004, 39). Courtyard houses provide simultaneously an enclosed space and an open area in its design and symbolism. Bryden (2004) suggests that Indian courtyards represent an ambivalent characteristic regarding the space because they are both enclosed and open. The plan of *haveli,* as she argues, is viewed as "delineating the interaction of both 'inner' and 'outer' space" (Bryden 2004, 39). Hindu domestic spaces allow easy and coherent transition between outdoor and indoor spaces. Domestic activities are extended from the courtyard to the outside. The house is connected with the street through a platform or sitting space

next to the entrance. This platform provides a transitional space between inside and outside.

Indian courtyard houses facilitate active and flexible relationships among individuals and their living spaces in terms of use and modernization. By creating a fluidity of space inside through an enclosed/open nature, the courtyard design is able to adapt to changing social patterns such as disintegration of extended family or the mixing of gender. The Indian courtyard, according to Bryden (2004), is not only a traditional house form, but it also provides an active space in terms of how it is adapted for 'modern' living. Indian courtyards continue to exist in the traditional way as residences or as heritage hotels for tourists while the family still lives in. The courtyards also are used as the 'second home' and leisure resort by some Indian urban families.

Courtyard Houses in the Islamic world (The Middle East)

Because of the mutual cultural and religious roots, more or less, Middle Eastern courtyards share commonalities both in form and function. Originating in the ancient world, the courtyard house remains a predominant, functional form of traditional residential buildings throughout the Middle East including Iran, Turkey and the Arab world. Although architectural traditions of an area – including the availability of certain materials as well as particular environmental factors – lead to different styles of architecture, courtyards still represent an active form of residential architecture all over the region (Figures 116-120).
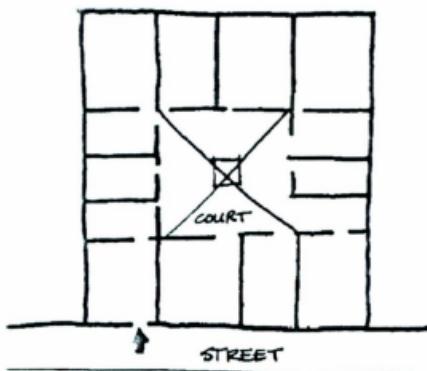
Figure 116: Diagrammatic plan of the ancient Egyptian courtyard house. After Rapoport (1969): page 82.
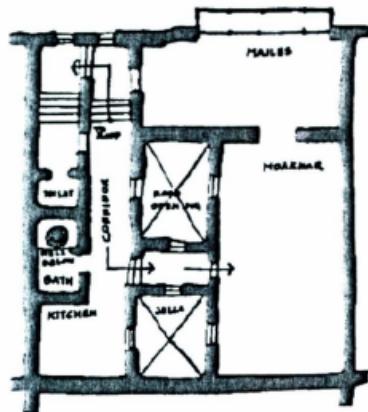
Figure 117: Diagrammatic plan of a courtyard house in Medina, Saudi Arabia. After Memarian (1993): page 27.
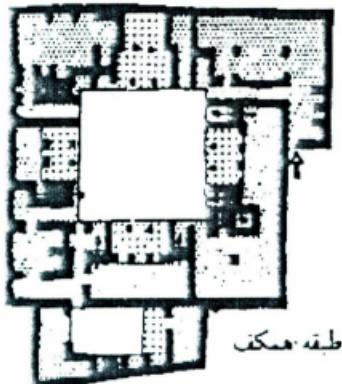
Figure 118: Plan of a courtyard in Bagdad, Iraq. After Memarian (1993): page 29.
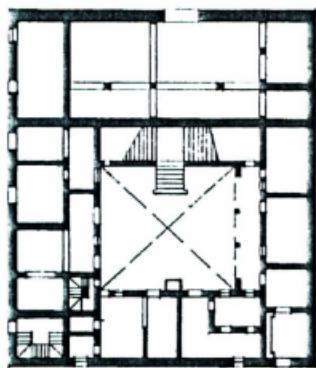
Figure 119: Plan of an old courtyard house in Libya. After Memarian (1993): page 39.
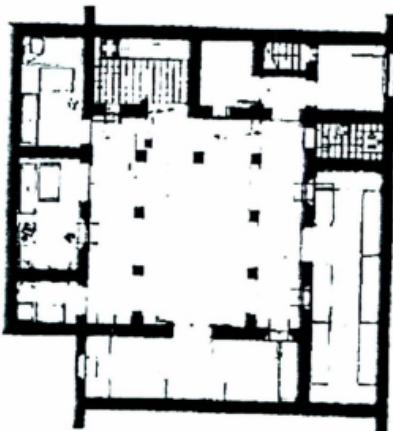
Figure 120: Plan of a courtyard house in Morocco. After Memarian (1993): page 39.

Since the courtyards of the Middle East are generated based on Islamic ideology, they reflect and respond to requirements of the Islamic belief system in an effective way. They are designed in response to the commandments of Islam which include withdrawing family life from the public world and the separation of the sexes.

The introverted pattern of the courtyards of the Middle East, like the types discussed earlier in this chapter, represents perfect gendered architecture. They work differently for men and women and are rigidly separated into two spatial quarters, allocated either to men or women, though this rigidity may differ based on the status and means of family. To provide a brief overview of the courtyard house in the Middle East, examples from Turkey, Syria and Jordan in both urban and rural contexts will be

discussed in this section. However, as mentioned before, since the Middle Eastern courtyard houses share many characteristics with Iranian counterparts, this section will not provide an elaborate discussion of the types.

Courtyards of Turkey

In their study of courtyards from Diarbakir, a southeastern Turkish city, Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011) argue that the appearance of the courtyard form in this area is a result of the influence of Muslim housing styles predominant in the neighbouring countries including Iran and Syria. Although the examined houses in this region show traces of Turkish architectural traditions, they do not completely reflect the characteristics of Turkish house types. Instead they reflect the outer influence of neighbouring cultures including Arabian and Persian architectural traditions (Bekleyen and Dalklic 2011).

The traditional structure of these courtyards has developed as a result of environmental and privacy factors. Turkish courtyards are aimed to protect inhabitants from the hot summer weather and any disturbances caused by outsiders. Turkish residences may have one, two or several courtyards. The houses have surrounding walls with an average thickness of 50 cm and lack openings to the outside. The buildings are designed to block sunlight in summer and to allow it in during the winter. The houses are usually divided into two seasonal parts: one for summer and one for winter (Figures 121-122). The southern part of the house consists of summer rooms with high ceilings and with large windows providing a pleasant temperature in summers. The winter rooms, on the other hand, are located in the northern part and are lower in height to decrease the

overall volume of the room. They contain smaller windows to prevent the cold weather of outside coming inside.

Figure 121: A view of the summer rooms of a Turkish courtyard. Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011): Figure 3.

Figure 122: A view of the winter rooms of the Turkish Courtyard. After Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011): Figure 7.

Muslim Turkish courtyards are designed in two distinct parts, called *harem* and *selamlik* (Figure 123). *Harem* is used by women and contained the kitchen and other service areas. The *selamlik* belonged to men and their visitors. The entrances of these two sections are separated in most cases but they are connected by a door. Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011) observe an interesting detail connecting the two parts which affirms the degree of rigidity of separation between genders: a whirling cupboard is provided between the two sections which allows women to pass prepared food to the male section without being seen by male servants or other men. The less restrictive form of this connecting area is observed in some Iranian houses. In Iran, the mutual wall of the reception room and the service room or kitchen contains a small window through which women can pass the prepared food to the men who serve it in the reception room.
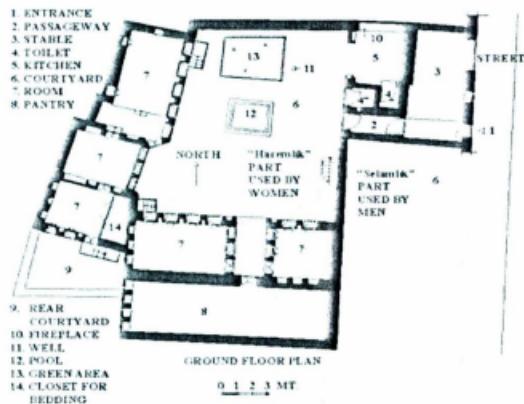
Figure 123: Plan of a Turkish courtyard house. After Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011): Figure 11.

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Regardless of religious practice and preference, the population of the Middle East values the isolation of family life from the public within their residential spaces. As Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011) observe, although a large Muslim population lives in this Turkish city, there is also a Jewish and Christian population. Their study of courtyard houses shows that the courtyard form is not exclusive to Muslims. Christians also live in the same house types because they share the common social values of isolating family life (914). To provide the ultimate privacy, the Turkish courtyards employ some strategies similar to Iranian counterparts, but in a looser way. A small entrance hall may exist between the entrance door and the courtyard. The courtyard may also be blocked to the street by a wooden screen between the door and the courtyard or a similar wall opposite to the entrance door. The exterior wall lacks any windows or openings except for a small window over the part of the house called *cumba* (Figure 124). This window, which is too high for a pedestrian to see into, provides a one way connection with the outside. However, this connection is rather limited and controlled due to the iron bars and screens outside the window which prevent the passer-by from seeing inside. Although similar examples of controlled visual connection of women residents and exterior street have been recorded in different contexts as discussed earlier in this chapter, the most controlled examples of wooden screen and protected windows can be seen in traditional houses of Medina, Cairo and Damascus (Abdulac 1982).

Figure 124: View of a *cumba* (oriel) from the street. After Bekleyen and Dalklic (2011): Figure 11.

Jordanian Courtyards

Studying the arrangement of courtyards in a rural context, Alhusban and Al-Shorman (2011) argue that courtyards represented a model for collective social, political and economic functions for their dwellers during the nineteenth century in northern Jordan. Jordanian courtyards were both climatically and culturally responsible forms for the region. They were the spatial reflection of socially acceptable norms for family life because the courtyards were withdrawn from the public. The courtyards reacted to the environmental characteristics of the region by protecting people from wind, dust and the excessive sun light of the desert environment. Each courtyard might start small and

expand depending on the development and means of the family and their needs. The courtyards were spacious open areas in the private realm of the house and the place of holding social events, and the center of social and economic relationships with outsiders in the village context. They worked as a place for socializing for women and educating children in the absence of official education systems.

In the rural context, courtyards were the spaces where food production took place (Figure 125-126). The food produced in the fields was processed and packed in the courtyards for future consumption. Women had the responsibility of securing food for winter by drying, pickling and other processing which took place in the courtyards. To respond to this function, the houses also contained lots of spaces for storing food in different seasons or in times of natural disasters. For the peasant economy, the courtyard was considered a space of economic activities where they could store the tools and machinery that were used in cultivation. The courtyard also accommodated animals which worked in agriculture.
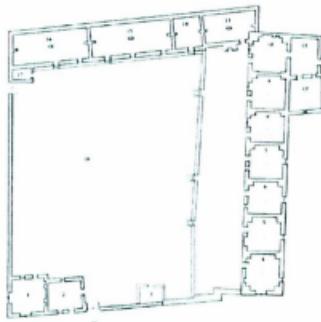
Figure 125: Plan of a Jordanian rural courtyard house. After Alhusban and Al-Shorman (2011): Figure 2.
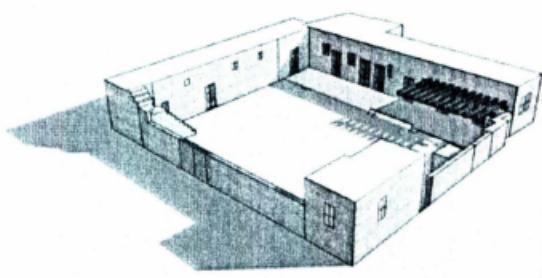
Figure 126: A 3D model of Jordan rural courtyard house. After Alhusban and Al-Shorman (2011): Figure 1.

As Alhusban and Al-Shorman (2011) observe, although the single courtyard may fulfill various functions for a family, the sum of the houses had functions beyond the single family. The positioning of the courtyards enabled villagers to protect and defend the village and its properties against different dangers. The arrangement of courtyards in close proximity to each other allowed for immediate assistance in case of incidents like property theft.

Syrian Courtyards

In his study of Syrian courtyards, Zein Al Abidin (2004) argues that Syrian-Arab nomads employed the courtyard concept by setting their tents around a central space which helped them to protect their cattle (1). He also suggests that the nomadic lifestyle of Arabs had a significant influence in desire of courtyard house lifestyle for them. Providing the open space inside the building, the courtyard house responded to the deep-

rooted need of Arabs to have an open, but, at the same time, protected living space. Studying the courtyards from Aleppo, Syria, Zein Al Abedin (2004) observes that Syrian courtyard houses, like the Iranian counterparts, are plain and unembellished on the outside (Figure 127). Based on the plain façade, it is impossible to judge the level of wealth or poverty of the family. However, the interiors are enriched and active. The transition from the outside to the inside is a "contrasting spatial experience" from a modest and humble entrance to the highly decorated interior spaces (Zein Al Abedin 2004, 2).
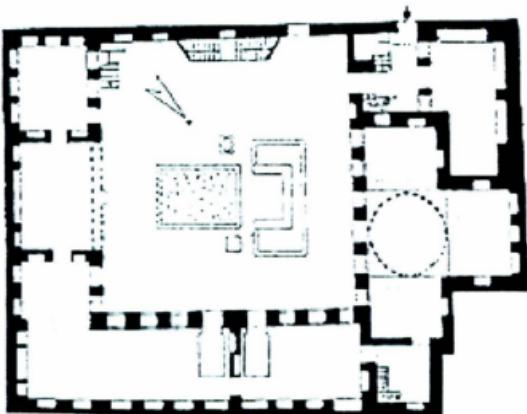
Figure 127: Plan of a courtyard house in Aleppo, Syria. after Zein AlAbedin (2004) : Figure 3.1.

Syrian courtyard houses consist of three levels: basement, ground floor and first floor (Figure 128). The basement, because of its even temperature, provides a pleasant atmosphere both in summer and winter for people to spend their time and to store the

yearly food supplies. The living and sleeping areas are totally separated in Syrian houses (Zein AlAbedin 2004, 4). The ground floor contains the kitchen, the reception room and the washrooms. The first floor in Syrian courtyards, in general, is called *haramlek*, a Turkish word meaning the women's section of the house and contains the private spaces of the house and the sleeping areas.
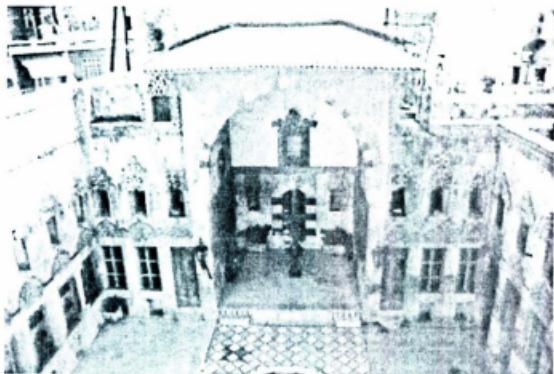
Figure 128: A view of a Syrian courtyard, Acikbas House. After Zein AlAbedin (2004): Figure 3.13.

Iwan, a significant feature of Syrian houses, is a covered open space in front of the house from which the courtyard can be watched and enjoyed. The external façade windows, if present, are small, plain and located from the first floor upward to avoid access to pedestrians. Zein Al Abedin (2004) also observes a protected area for women to look outside in Syrian houses, which is very similar to the Spanish wooden gating window or the Indian *jharoka*. He explains that the Syrian courtyard has a wooden

balcony located on the outer façade of the house called the *mushrabiya* which allowed women to enjoy the view of the public space without being seen from the outside (3).

Now that the cross-cultural examples of courtyards have been presented, comparing their forms and functions, we can investigate what spatial and functional features they share and how they work differently for various cultures. The courtyard as a spatial idea for organization has been utilized by people all over the world throughout the history. While the basic concept of the courtyard is a central court encompassed by the rooms, the form is adjusted and adapted by people to accommodate their own purposes and needs.

The *protective* and *isolating* nature of the courtyard, both physically and socially, is one of the primary reasons behind the employment of the form. The isolated lifestyle that the courtyard allows is embraced by different cultures for various reasons. While the Arabian nomads and other tribal cultures used the form as a spatial idea for arrangement of their tents to protect themselves from the physical dangers and enemies, the English colonists employed the form to avoid the threats of the hostilities of Irish and Indian natives.

Environmental issues are also among those basic reasons that make the courtyard a desirable form for different cultures. The courtyards have the ability to moderate harsh weather conditions for their dwellers. They protect their inhabitants from either the dust and heat of desert climate conditions or the cold winter storms in different geographical regions.

In addition, the high walls of the courtyards have always been used to *conceal the signs of wealth* of its dwellers. This function is embraced by wide range of people: the

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Greek as well as the English and Spanish colonists and also by Muslims. The tendency to disguise wealth is a result of various factors. While the Greeks preferred to keep the exteriors of their dwelling plain as a way of conformity to the new corporate power relations, the Spanish and English colonists did so to better control their properties and their profits from the harms of the natives. The Muslims' efforts in hiding their houses behind the high walls of the courtyards, in addition to the fear of robbery or the harms of the evil eyes, is a result of their *religious beliefs* which encourage them to maintain a level of social and economic equality.

Courtyards, regardless of their origins and socio-cultural contexts, have been intended to protect the family and female members in particular, from the *gaze of the outsider*. Thus, courtyards are a result of gendered architecture and represent a perfect *gendered space*. While the high walls of the ancient Greek courtyards aimed to protect the chastity of women, thus securing the political status of men (Westgate 2007), the Indian woman finds herself trapped in her suffocating courtyard with its never-changing traditions (Mehta 1997). For Iranians, Arabs and Indians the protective nature of the courtyard arrangement ensures the *privacy* of the dwelling and allows the *seclusion* of the female residents of the house.

Religion, also, has always been a significant underlying factor in the desirability of the courtyard from. While Muslims withdraw their family life from the public as a respect to the commandment of Islam, the Zoroastrians hide their family behind the walls of courtyard to avoid the insults and assaults of Muslims (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997). The Puritan English man, on the other hand employed the courtyard form to protect him

and his property from the harms of the "Irish pagans and lapsed Roman Catholics" (St. George 1990, 258). Thus, courtyards have always been played a significant role as a sanctuary and as a safe haven in the times of social tensions frequently resulting from power struggles with religious roots.

The frequent appearance of issues of *belief* and *gender* in the cross-cultural study of this chapter affirms the profound association of courtyards with these issues. Belief is one of those fundamental factors which has a significant role in the form of the built environment. Houses as the spatial contexts of everyday life are influenced by the beliefs of people who interact with them. Belief is articulated in different aspects of houses including their forms, decorations and functions. In addition to this direct association, belief can also influence the house form and use of its spaces in an indirect way. Gender segregation is one of those issues resulting from religious beliefs in different cultures including Iranian culture, and is very well reflected in courtyard houses. Courtyard houses can be considered as perfect representatives of gendered spaces which enforce and regulate gender segregation. Thus, belief and gender are the two significant issues central to all courtyard. To elaborate on the articulation of these issues in courtyard houses, drawing evidence from Iranian courtyards, the following chapters will discuss the role of belief and gender as two significant cultural factors in the forms of courtyard houses and their functions.

Chapter 4

Architecture and Belief: Signs of Faith in Tabriz Courtyard Houses

Introduction

The built environment in general and house form in particular reflect cultural values, behavioural norms and deep-rooted beliefs of a community. It is in the house –the place where one spends a great deal of his or her life—that such values and beliefs are most clearly expressed. In Pope's (1971) words, Iranian vernacular architecture, when examined, reveals a vocabulary of form and ornament and great depth of symbolic meanings. One of the fascinating aspects of Iranian architecture is the harmony it presents with people, their environment and their beliefs. Iranian vernacular architecture adheres to its traditional pre-Islam principles and at the same time corresponds to the requirements of Islamic faith. The fundamental principles of Iranian vernacular architecture are based on the Islamic faith upon which its housing traditions are built. However, within the same faith various solutions evolve determined by geology, geography and traditional methods of construction (Abdul Rehman 2002, 27).

Iranian Islamic architecture, during all its eras, attempted to bring about a sense "which is suitable for humans and respects his beliefs, personal ambitions, thoughts and high spiritedness" (Haji Ghassemi 1999). Traditional architects had their own moral code of building. In the signatures which are found in some old buildings, the architects use very humble titles for themselves such as 'God's servant' or 'God's obliged bondsman' followed by their name and the date of the building. These signatures were carved or

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applied to a small part of the façade demonstrating the status of the building and the architect.

Iranian vernacular urban houses were built without any written law and were only based on ancestral teachings, and they respect cultural and religious beliefs. Such beliefs set up the principles on how Muslims should live their lives and determine their relationship with the social and physical environments. In other words, the design of the Iranian house should be the product of the Islamic beliefs and values of their inhabitants. This chapter, thus, aims to investigate what aspects of Iranians' everyday lives are affected by religion and how this influence is reflected in their daily performances in a particular spatial context. The chapter also deals with the concept of privacy in the culture and the ways issues of privacy are defined and observed in Iranian houses.

Courtyard an Earthly Replica of the Promised Paradise

Islam is a way of life and offers guidance for the earthly life of a Muslim. For Muslims, the material life on earth is closely linked to the spiritual life after death. In addition, Muslims' attitudes and activities are regarded as their provision for the future life. According to Islamic faith, man is born pure and is given the ability and an unlimited scope to discover the nature of the physical world. However, since he is appointed as the vice regent of God on earth, he must use his abilities with wisdom and a sense of responsibility as God's vicegerent (Pirani 2002, 32). He is allowed neither to waste the earthly resources nor to destroy any living being. He must leave behind a better environment for future generations. These responsibilities of man are reflected in one of the principles of Iranian architecture identified by Pirnia (2008): plainness (which was

discussed earlier). The traditional architect focused on practical needs and attempted to avoid wasting space and material in his work. All the spaces are designed to achieve the highest functional aims. Since a strong connection exists between the body and soul in Islamic faith, physical comfort is always encouraged by Islam as a necessary factor for spiritual enlightenment (Pirani 2002, 33). Islamic houses should lead to comfort which in turn supports practices of religion and thus elevates the soul. With regard to the religion moralities, the enclosed courtyard serves to foster man's harmonious relationship with nature and the Absolute (Ardalan 2002, 12).

Iranian house plans are based on pure forms such as the square and symmetrical layouts featuring rectangular courtyards. As Ardalan and Bakhtiar (1973) observe, Iranian vernacular architecture provides a cosmic symbolism by which man is brought into communication and participation with the power of heaven. A sacred significance is attached to courtyard housing in Islamic culture. It is regarded as a part of heaven, or earthly heaven (Leherman 1980). Ardalan (2002) relates the idea of garden and courtyard to the promised image of the paradise garden in the Quran. This paradise garden is precisely described in more than 120 passages in the Quran as a "walled garden… containing water courses…emanating out from a central fountainhead … nourishing rows of fragment flowers, shrubs and trees beneath whose shadows are pavilions of everlasting bliss" (Quran 13:35). This image, according to Ardalan (2002), is reflected in two aspects of Iranian architecture, the gardens and the courtyards. The Persian gardens, because of their size and function are more similar to the image of the paradise garden. However, the courtyard symbolizes a smaller replica of such gardens. The architectural application of

the concept of paradise garden in residential building helps foster "the sense of place" as Ardalan (2002, 10) suggests, and provides dwellers with a private hidden paradise, inaccessible by others. Landscape features also constitute an integral part of the architecture of courtyards. Setting the house in such a landscape one can find himself in an idealized paradisiacal environment (Abdul Rehman 2002, 27). In other words, the spacious courtyard containing fountains, flower beds, and fruit trees provides the introduction of elements of nature and makes it possible for people to directly relate to earth and nature as Ozkan remarks (2006, 1).

Form, Scale and Orientation: Signs of "Belief" in Courtyard House Design

Form

House design is intended to generate, protect and reinforce religious identity and cultural traditions. It also can be regarded as a mirror of cultural and social conditions and a text to be interpreted (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997, 382). As Rapoport (1969), in *House Form and Culture* suggests, the built environment "reflects many socio-cultural aspects including religious beliefs, family structure, social organization.....and social relations between individuals" (47). For Kent (1990), architecture is "cultural material or the material expression of culture" (128). The built environment is also an "expression of culturally shared mental structures and processes" (Lawrence and Low, 1990, 466), including a belief system and religious values. Iranian Islamic domestic architecture and its functions carry significant symbolic meanings expressing religious and cultural identity, gender roles and relations and social status. Architecture also can become a

means of non-verbal communication conveying ideas and meanings among members of a culture (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997, 376).

The Iranian vernacular house fulfills both practical needs and symbolic requirements. Living a religiously proper life requires certain architectural facilities (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 1997, 410). The architecture of courtyard houses plays an instrumental role in helping people perform their everyday tasks in accordance with their beliefs. The associations found within the rooms and furnishing of the studied courtyards reflect widely held cultural norms and values of their dwellers. Religious belief is symbolically communicated through the *orientation*, *spatial layout* and *furnishing* of the houses.

The most obvious of these symbols are the inscriptions fixed right above the entrance door of the houses stating "This is by the favour/grace of God", "In the name of God" or "There is no power but from God" (Figure 129). The inscriptions may also contain a verse from the Quran like "And the unbelievers would almost trip thee up with their eyes when they hear the Message; and they say: 'Surely he is possessed!' " (Quran, 68:51).

Figure 129: An entrance door with an inscription.
Photo credit: http://telemachusunedited.wordpress.com

Although having these inscriptions are very common for all houses, the first inscription (This is by the favour/grace of God) can be frequently seen in wealthy houses as I observed in my fieldwork. In addition to blessing the house, this statement which introduces God as the cause of their bliss and wealth is a way of protection from the evil eye. The last inscription, the verse from the Quran, is heartily believed as a way of protection from the evil eye if carried with a person or hung in a place, and is used largely by Iranians for this purpose.

Given the places that these inscriptions are frequently located and the importance of a common farewell rite, another interpretation is possible. Iranians perform a rite for the person who is leaving the house for a trip; when one is leaving home, a person from the family holds a Quran or a part of it on a threshold of the house, on a height that the traveling individual could pass under it. This is believed to protect the traveler during his or her trip. Since the discussed inscriptions are usually located at the top of the entrance door of the house and frequently the main entrance, I suggest that this may also provide a permanent practice of the latter rite of passage as a way of protecting the family members whenever they leave the house. Hasan, who has been involved in house construction and renovations for many years, explains another example of the more secular strategies people employ to protect their property from the evil eye. He comments:

> Doing renovation or building a new house, people always fear the evil eyes which may hurt them in a way or the other. Some people just pray and ask God to prevent the evil eyes. But, over the years, there were many of my clients who asked me to leave the last brick of façade out or damage a small piece of ornamental elements of the house to impair the perfection thus preventing the evil eyes.

To bless the house, Iranians practice some other rituals as well. One of these rituals mentioned by a female informant, Fatima, is that when moving to a new house, people should bring with themselves a mirror and a copy of Quran in their first visit and place them in a niche in one of the rooms. These two items may be kept in the same niche forever in the house. The most common means of countering the effects of the evil eye and blessing the house, however, is to burn the seeds of wild rue or *Espand* (Shakurzadeh and Omidsalar 1990). The released fragrant smoke is believed to prevent the evil eye and

bless the house. A prayer is recited performing this ritual which is used by both Iranian

Muslims and Zoroastrians. The other, more temporal ritual which is performed on the

first day of a new year to bless the house in the upcoming year is reported by Amoli

(1994):

> The first visitor of the house, on the first minutes of the New Year is of
> importance for people. They select a decent and pious person from
> relatives or neighbours to perform this ritual. He should enter the house
> in the first minutes of the New Year carrying a *Sabzeh* (the grown wheat
> or lentil sprouts), a bowl of water, a mirror and a copy of the Quran. He
> should enter the house with his right foot ahead and sprinkle some water
> on the four corners of the courtyard, reciting some prayers to bless the
> house.

In general, people tend to hide their wealth and fortunes from the others, either

because of the fear of the evil eye or as a widely held cultural and societal norm. In this

regard, the blank, unbroken, high walls of courtyards disguise the fancy buildings and

make the house unpretentious, simple and rather plain on the outside. The houses of the

rich are only identifiable by their fancy doors and the entrance architectural ornaments.

The ideas Westgate (2007) suggests regarding the ancient Greece courtyard houses can be

contextualized in Iranian culture as the other possible cause for the lack of

embellishments in exteriors of Iranian courtyards. She argues that the lack of

embellishments in the façade of the Greek houses may be considered as the outward

manifestation of the owners' commitment to the ethos of egalitarianism. She argues that

from the late fifth century onwards the interiors of Greek houses became more decorated

but the exteriors lack any evidence of decoration (Westgate 2007, 236). Likewise, in

Iranian Islamic culture, people avoided flaunting signs of wealth and pride because of

Islam's great emphasis on maintaining a level of social and economic equality between

individuals and its encouragement to live a humble life even for the wealthy people (Quran 17:37). However, as I observed, there is evidence of people's desire for decorating the blank walls in the absence of any other possibilities for decoration such as window frames (Figure 130).

Figure 130: Sattarkhan house, blind windows, a courtyard wall containing the brickwork in forms similar to windows. Such forms may be used by people to compensate for the lack of other decorations in the façade.

Scale and size

The scale and size of the architectural elements may also directly or indirectly be dictated by religious rules and requirements; likewise is the absence or presence of

particular architectural elements. The evidence of this influence is the lack of a praying room in the Iranian houses. Unlike the traditional houses of most cultures, the Iranian house lacks a special prayer room. As Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1997) in their comparative study of Muslim and Zoroastrian houses of Iran suggest, while the Zoroastrian houses have elaborate praying rooms, Muslim houses lack a specific place for praying . They suggest that this absence is because of Islam's great encouragement of congregational performance of prayers (Quran, 2: 43). There are also other possible reasons for this lack. As one woman commented, "to say the prayers, one does not need any specific thing, just a *Mohr* (a small clay tablet used for praying by Muslims) and a piece of floor mat will work." Islamic rituals and prayers do not require special artifacts or sacred objects and as a result, they do not demand a specific room. However, as I observed in few of the houses I visited, there exists a small room called a "prayer room" by the family. This room does not contain any specific furniture or objects to be identified as a prayer room and may also be used for other functions such as a storage room. Reza, my elderly male informant had an interesting story about this multi-functional nature of the prayer room. He comments:

> People used to hang fruits from the ceiling to preserve them for winter. We had this prayer room, which was a little bit too big, and then we did use a part of it as the place to hang our grapes. It happened that we had over-night guests and they went to the room to say their prayers. Since the grapes where stored in a direction that people would face them when they stand for prayer, the guests would be distracted by them. They could not help their craving for the grapes and before finishing their prayer, they came out and asked me in the middle of the prayer, if they could have some grapes! After that incident, I gave orders that the fruit to be removed from that room because they distracted people from their prayer and from God.

The influence of religious morality and religiously inspired lifestyle can be seen in the practical level of daily life and in the size of the architectural elements as well. The size of the *Hows*, the pool or fountain in the middle of the courtyard, was one of those sensitive issues for people in the time when the running water was not yet common. The *Hows* was a both practical and aesthetic element of the house.

This basin was used as a water supply of the family for performing ablutions and other washing and cleaning activities. Since this stagnant water was used for purifying purposes, its container should have the particular criteria dictated by religious rules. Purifying water is the quantity of water that fills at least a container measuring 3.5 spans in length, depth, and width, and which weighs at least 383.906 KGs (Saneie 1993). If it comes into contact with unclean substances, it remains clean unless its color, taste, or smell is changed. Almost all houses contain a basin based on the above criteria. People I talked to remember the long, cold winters where they had to break the ice on the surface of the basin to access the water beneath it for purifying purposes. One elderly woman explains the difficulties the wrong-sized basin provided for them as a teenager. She comments:

> The guy made our basin did not pay enough attention to its height. My father measured the basin and he recognized that it is 2-3 centimetres smaller than the required volume and he advised us not to consider it as purifying water. So, my mother forced us to keep pumping the water with a hand-powered pump – which was common of the time – to the basin while she was washing clothes or dishes in it. If we stopped for a moment to catch our breath, she would be mad at us and she would wash the things again and again. You know, stagnant water, if less than the standard amount is not purifying and one needed to keep pumping extra water to it during washing.

The influence of religious belief on the scale and size of architectural elements may also be at a symbolic level. The example of this influence is the large size of the reception or the guest room, as it is called in Persian culture. Even in the houses which are not large enough to provide great comfort for dwellers, people may allocate their largest part to the guest room. This room is considered as the ceremonial and social part of the house and as an emblem of status and wealth of the family. Thus, people are willing to sacrifice their convenience and comfort to their occasional visitors' sake.

For believers who follow Islam's morality, respecting one's guest is a way to observe one of God's commands as well as an opportunity to display proper moral behaviour. Therefore, believers welcome their guests heartedly. Paying a visit to family and friends is encouraged in both Iranian and Islamic culture. According to a common Persian saying, "the guest is the beloved of God." This saying is the obvious expression of the importance of visiting one another in their houses in Persian culture. The visitors are always being welcomed very warmly in the best and fanciest part of the house. The guest reception room contains the fanciest furniture items. The house floor in traditional Iranian houses was not decorated with architectural materials. It was made of plain materials like concrete because people preferred to cover every inch of the floor with pretty, vibrant-colored Persian carpets. The multi-rugged floors were the indicator of wealth for traditional families.

The walls of the reception room are covered with paintings, hanging rugs and photos of the families' ancestors to memorialize the deceased. However, the photos of the living male family members, like the father of the family may also be displayed on the wall as

an honour. According to Laya, this room was always kept locked and as long as she remembers it was always cold when an unexpected guest arrived because her parents rarely opened that room unless for cleaning. She also comments that she has seen in the wealthy house of one of their relatives that this guest room was constructed in two levels, the second of which with a view to the first level, provided an extra room for gathering women in the case of social occasions or parties.

The furniture, sofas and chairs with tables in front of them are lined up all around the room (Figure 131). This type of arrangement is the requirement of the kind of gatherings and parties Iranians favor. That is, all Iranian gatherings, being an informal birthday party or a religious ritual, are seated events and the host is obliged to provide a seat for each guest. As a result, the reception rooms in Iranian houses are overly loaded with furniture of different kinds.

Figure 131: Nikukheslat house, the reception hall.

Even inside the guest room, the sitting spaces have levels. The top and bottom, the higher and lower have an absolute meaning in the sense of space and its values. In a guest room furnished by a couch and the armchairs, the couch is the highest level of sitting space (Figure 132). The seats far from the door are considered as the high part of the room as well. The host allocates the nearest seat to the door to him or herself and insists the guest to be seated in the high part of the room. The visitors, on the other hand may refuse to take that seat out of modesty. The most honourable guest should be seated in the highest part of the room. This status is usually identified based on age. That is, the highest seats in the room are allocated to the oldest visitors.
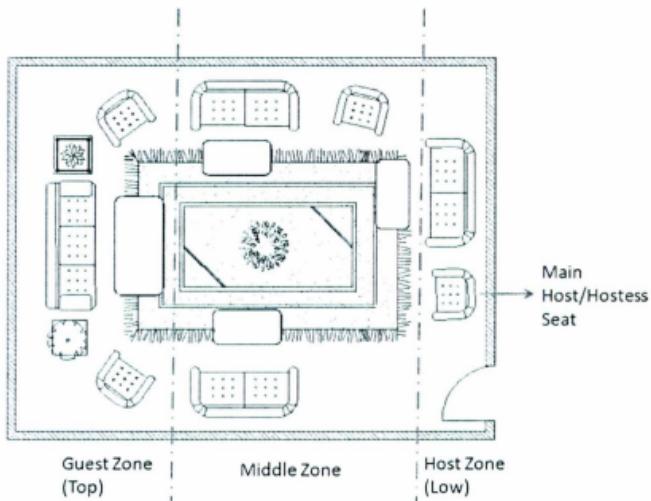
Figure 132: A schematic furnishing layout of a typical guest room.

Providing places for displaying ornamental objects is also desirable in Iranian houses. In the traditional houses the built-in wall cabinets, located within the thickness of the walls provide the space for such displays (Figure 133). These places are covered with glass doors and they are kept almost always locked. Niches on the other hand are open areas and are provided in the family living rooms to put everyday equipment like the lamps, mirrors, clocks and radios (Figure 134).
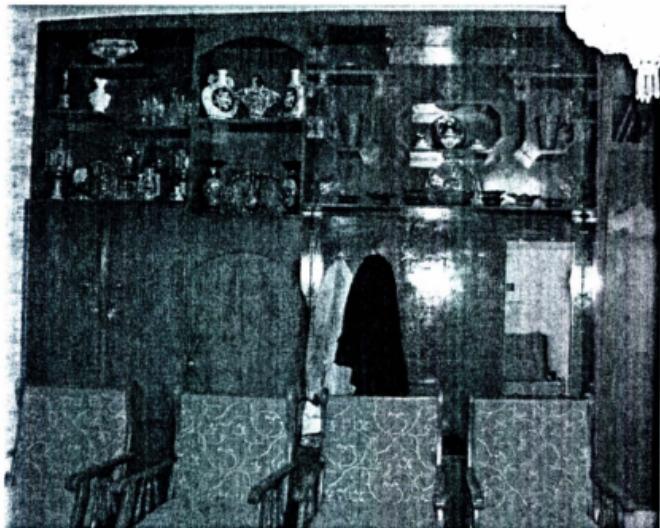
Figure 133: Nikukheslat house. a built-in display cabinet.
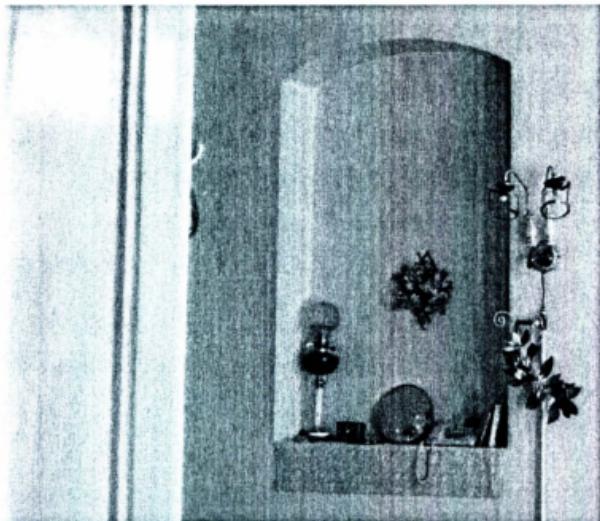
Figure 134: Laya house, a living room niche.

Orientation

Orientation is one of the key factors in designing and establishing a house building in Iranian culture. The house must be oriented to take the greatest advantage of the sun, especially in winters. This direction in Iran corresponds to the north-western exposure. In addition to efficiency purposes, a sacred direction governs the daily activities of people. *Qibla* is the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays. This direction has importance beyond praying, and plays a part in various aspects of a Muslim's life. There are activities which should or should not be undertaken in this direction. For example, the Muslim corpse should be buried with their heads in the direction of *Qibla*; in the

absence of other evidence, archaeologists can indicate an Islamic settlement based on this fact. This direction also governs the organization of the house and furnishings. Toilets, for example, should be located in a manner to face away from this direction. Other rooms, on the other hand, can have openings towards the sacred direction. People also may consider this direction in arranging the furniture. They may or may not arrange the bed in a way that they face the sacred direction while sleeping (an example of the importance of orientation in furniture arrangement for a recently widowed woman has been provided in the fifth chapter).

Privacy: A Major Consideration in Iranian Vernacular Architecture

Apart from the features of the house (such as size of its elements and their direction) which are directly influenced by religious belief, courtyard houses reflect a great consideration of privacy in their form and function. Privacy has been defined as the ability to control information about one's self or the ability to create physical boundaries that exclude others (Altman 1975). However, the concept of privacy in Iranian Islamic culture is far different from the general western concept that relates privacy to individuality. In Islamic culture, privacy is conceived as a notion strongly linked to protection of a family – female members in particular— rather than an individual (Sobh and Belk 2011). This concept has its roots in Islamic culture as well as pre-Islam Iranian culture.

The house, as the private territory of individuals and families, is a setting for enactment of self where the 'otherness' of potential visitors must be managed (Hockey 1999). This function of a house results in an intentional or subconscious effort by people

to achieve a level of privacy at home, the degree of which is determined by the expectations of culture. Henry Glassie (1975), in his study of housing traditions in Middle Virginia, argues that the changes in housing traditions in that area which resulted in achieving the higher degree of privacy (such as distancing the private spaces of houses from visitors) may be taken as the "working of cultural unconscious" (121). He suggests that such designs may not have been planned consciously to obtain privacy, but they must be taken as "a possibly conscious, probably unconscious, certainly genuine desire for privacy (121)." Thus, although protecting the privacy of one's house is a universal issue, desired and practiced by almost all cultures, Islamic moralities put a great emphasis on practicing it. As Memarian and Brown (2004) observe, verses from Quran emphasize the importance of privacy and stress the significance of getting permission by knocking on the door to enter one's house. As an example, the following verse advises people not to enter a house before getting permission:

> O you believers! Do not enter houses other than your houses, until you have asked permission and saluted their inmates; this is better for you, may be mindful (Quran, 24:27).

The verse continues that:

> But if you do not find anyone therein, then do not enter until permission is given to you; and if it is said to you: go back, then go back; this is purer for you; and God is cognizant of what you do (Quran, 24:28).

Privacy regulations in Islamic culture are governed by religion, customary law and architectural rules (Howell and Tentokali 1989). No written law existed to govern the design and construction in the past. However, according to a value system, Islamic architecture creates an unwritten guide for behaviour and for man's relationship to others and to the environment (Erzen 2002, 63). People observed the unwritten, customary law

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that restricted them from activities that interfere with the convenient passage of people or threaten other buildings' privacy.

Physical plans of residential buildings reflected the concern of Islamic culture for privacy. Islam requires that a view of the inside of the house be prevented, and protected from the gaze of the outsider. Opening the entrance door in front of the neighbour's door or near to it is not appropriate (Al Hathout 1980).

Introversion and inward-looking design is one of the significant principles of Iranian vernacular architecture suggested by Pirnia (2008) ensuring the privacy of the family (26). Islam regards the house and residence as a very private realm. Islamic culture, on the other hand, demands social segregation of families' activities from those of the public. These two factors strongly encourage the protected and inward-looking design especially for domestic spaces.

Abdul Rehman (2002) argues that in Islamic architecture and urban design, man and his relation with family and community are given high priority. Islam also regards the house as a place of expressing and strengthening family relationships. The room symbolically depicts "the cube of man" and is related to the house as the man is related to the family unit. Like family life, which is withdrawn from public view, the courtyard hides itself from the outside world, providing the privacy and sanctity of its inner surface (Abdul Rehman 2002, 29).

Although courtyard houses restrict the interaction between inside and outside, they do not stop the social interactions between neighbours. The compact urban fabric of traditional cities of Iran, with its hierarchical access, from broad streets to narrow avenues

and the private dead-end alleys, provide a highly dense urbanization which facilitated social interactions in neighbourhoods. As Pirani (2002) remarks, the narrow passages create a vibrant street life, with movement slow enough to facilitate social interaction.

The courtyard arrangement is a great example of *Transpatial Solidarity* suggested by Hiller and Hanson (1984, 144-5, 158-63) by proclaiming the inhabitants' adherence to the ideals of propriety, independence and privacy. *Transpatial Solidarity* is defined as a concept in which the enforced boundary between the inside and outside of house, in combination with the standard spatial pattern inside the house, expresses a social membership of a class. Such circumstances limit the potential for casual interaction with people nearby including the neighbours. The more the frontiers are impenetrable the more difficult are the contacts (Petruccioli 2004, 14)

Spatial solidarity, in contrast, which can be seen frequently in rural areas, is based on proximity. The boundary of interior and exterior is weaker both physically and conceptually, and the interior is relatively unstructured (Hiller and Hanson 1984, 158-63). Such structures permit free interaction between inhabitants and neighbours. Even the front doors may be usually open. Leaving the entrance door open is the example of *spatial solidarity* which is often the case in rural courtyard houses. However, as Maryam remembers, this was also common practice among middle and lower-class urban houses, and was a result of a degree of security and trust in the neighbourhood. In addition to security, the open door houses communicated a certain type of lifestyle based on strong ties with neighbours. However, the privacy of the courtyard was still ensured in such

cases by dropping some kind of heavy curtain or providing a second door in the passage area (Figure 135).
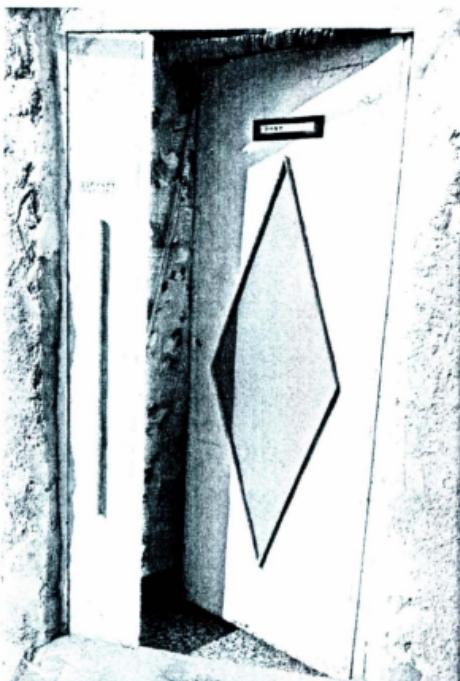
Figure 135: A rural house door, the interior's privacy is ensured by the curtain.
Photo credit: Milad Shirali

Spatial Mechanisms to Secure Privacy

Access hierarchy

Some spatial mechanisms are employed in courtyard houses to achieve a high degree of privacy. The hierarchal access in both domestic and urban scales is one of those strategies which stops the uncontrolled invasion of private spaces. In Islamic cities, in general, circulation is not direct. That is, the path from the point of departure to point of arrival is indirect and winding and not the most immediate one (Erzen 2002, 57). The access pattern of the traditional neighbourhoods does not follow a homogenous distribution pattern of equally accessible streets or alleys. Rather, they follow a progressive pattern from the public to the most private on the dead end of the street, and the houses have their entrance from these narrow lanes.

The distributive hierarchy of the courtyard house begins with *Hashti*, a vaulted roof, small room where the main entrance door opens to it. This small hall which can be in the form of a straight line, an L-shape one or a simple rectangle, provides the spot of liminality for a visitor (Figure 136). The person entering to this hall is neither within the house nor outside. One can enter to the hall after identifying him or herself to the insider from the behind of the door, however, he is not allowed to enter to the yard. He needs to wait for a person from the house to come and let him in.
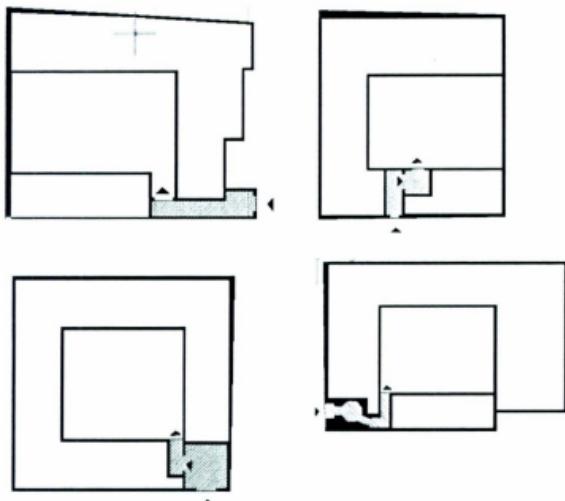
Figure 136: Various forms of Hashti,(the hatched area shows the hashtis).

Access hierarchy to the interiors dramatizes a social pilgrimage as St. George (1990) suggests, from marginal to fully legitimated status (256). However, in the case of Iranian houses, unlike the British *bawns* he studied, this marginality and legitimacy is defined based on the relations with the family not social status as a whole. This hierarchy mirrors the intragroup social relation between insiders (family) and outsiders (non-family). That is, a visitor, who is not close enough to the family, especially if he is a male, needs to pause in several spots to ask for oral permission of the insider. This hierarchy of access also emphasizes the role that domestic architecture plays in articulating social rank (St. George 1990, 249). The movement from the door to *Hashti*, to courtyard, and to interiors

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can be regarded as a passage from peripheral areas to central ones and from marginal positions to the more legitimate social status.

This hierarchy of access is recognizable in the scale of the neighbourhood as well. None of the houses open to the street. The long wide thoroughfare leads one from the street to a narrower alley and from that to a one-door-wide dead-end. In some cases, the latter path is two-doors wide which is shared by only two neighbours. These two are the ones who trust each other the most. Although these houses are very rarely sold and are passed down from generation to generation, in the cases that a house is being sold, the new neighbour should be approved by the existing one as Reza, my elderly informant explained.

A bench-like hidden place is provided near the house doors which is usually used by female neighbours where they can sit and chat in the long summer afternoons (Figure 137). The residential lanes are usually very quiet and empty. Although they are provided for privacy purposes, some of my female informant had stories of their sexual harassment passing through those dark, empty spaces.

Figure 137: Mirzade house, two women sitting in a neighbourhood bench near the house.

Visual Privacy

Various spatial mechanisms are employed to secure the privacy of family in Iranian houses. However, the strategies are subject to variation according to wealth, local traditions and values. Where a fancy door may separate a courtyard from the outside world in a wealthy house, a worn-out curtain may serve the same purpose in a poor rural house.

Openings and Entrance Treatment

The great manifestation of visual privacy of Iranian houses can be seen in the entrance arrangement. The houses are rarely more than one story but they are fortified by

thick, high and unbroken walls (Figure 138). The few openings, when they are not avoidable, are very small and located on a high level to prevent passers-by from looking in (Memarian and Brown 2004, 28). Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1997), in their comparative study of Muslim and Zoroastrian courtyards in Iran, suggest that while Muslim houses lack the openings toward the street for privacy purposes, the lack of openings in Zoroastrian houses is a result of prevailing social conditions that necessitate their protection against the intercultural conflicts and hostilities of Muslims (398).
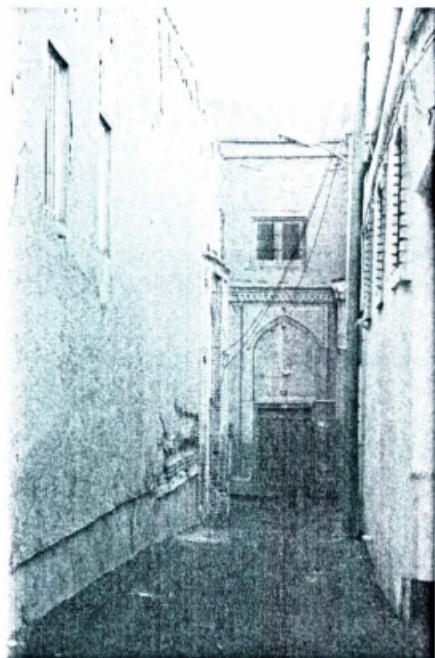
Figure 138: The high, unbroken wall of a courtyard house, a couple of barred windows at a very high level provide the limited connection between inside and outside.

The high blank wall is only broken by a heavy door which is the sole connection of the house with the outside world. However, this entrance does not allow a direct view of the private part of the house. The angle of the entrance is precisely selected to prevent direct sight to the living spaces. As Memarian and Brown (2004) argue, the bent entrance is common in many Arab houses primarily for defensive purposes and secondarily to ensure the privacy of internal spaces (28). As they comment, this pattern is by no means casual but a carefully considered response to the balance needed between hospitality and privacy (29).

The entry is sequential. A hall or passage way is provided as a medium that leads from the entrance to the court yard. This passage way is narrow and very dark (Figure 139).
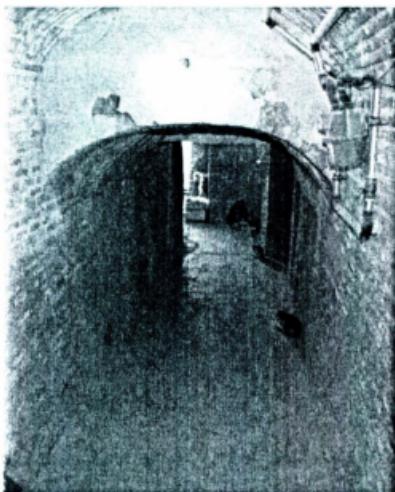
Figure 139: Mirzade house, the entry passage.

Mazumdar and Mzumdar (1997) suggest that these passages, lacking natural or artificial light, provided a momentary blindness for the visitor. A person entering from the passage to the sunlight of the courtyard required a period of adjustment. This moment also let people inside get ready to receive them (400). Courtyard privacy can further be observed by double doors, as I encountered in one of my documented houses. The visitor enters a rectangle hall from the main door and then needs to pass through another door provided between this hall and the courtyard. Both doors have knockers. This hall can be considered as a stopping point with the niches provided around it for sitting for the persons who do not need to enter the courtyard. *Hashti*, unlike the western form of halls which contained furniture items such as hallstand, mirror and hooks for hanging cloths (Ames 1978, 31), lack any piece of furniture. This can well explain the differences in functions of these two spaces similar in form but different in function. That is, while the Victorian hall functions as both connector and separator of rooms inside the house (Ames 1978, 28), the Iranian hall is an autonomous and separate element situated far from the family living spaces. A person entering to the hall of a courtyard has not entered to the house yet. They should not take off their outdoor clothing while in the hall because they will pass the outdoor courtyard to reach to the interior.

The courtyard itself is considered as a totally private space. The exception to this norm is in two cases: first when two or more families live in a single house and share a courtyard. In such cases the women will cover themselves when they are in the courtyard. Second, when a high building is built in close proximity to a courtyard and in a way that the courtyard becomes visible through its openings. Unlike the courtyard which is

regarded as private space, the entrance hall is regarded as semi-public spaces of the house. In two of the houses I visited, the Chador, the piece of clothing worn by women around the house in case of having male visitors, is hung on the wall just behind the hall. This implies that around the courtyard, women are free, but whenever they want to step into the hall, to open the door when someone knocks, they need to cover themselves because there always is a chance of being seen by a man when the door is opened.

The Changing Concept of Privacy

Unlike the great emphasis on the practice of privacy in inside-outside relations, spatial privacy is not practiced in interiors for occupants of courtyard houses. In grand courtyard houses lived a large number of people: the owners of the house, their parents, children, unmarried relatives and servants. However, as Laya, my female informant comments, the individuals did not have private spaces for themselves. The married couples had one or two rooms for themselves but they usually spent their time with the rest of the family. The rooms in the houses are not specialized, and all or most of the rooms open to each other, though some rooms have separate entrances from the courtyard. As Wilson (1991) in his study of Spanish courtyards argues, such circulation through the rooms to the other rooms suggests the existence of a close-knit family structure rooted in culture which has not entirely adopted values of individuality and privacy in modern times (115). Likewise, Iranian traditional families in the past were not familiar with the concepts of privacy and individuality and did not feel it necessary in their lives. As Laya remarks, since they lived in the same house with their in-laws, she

had to be always ready for the intrusion of one of her in-laws without any prior permission.

The courtyard, in the absence of hallways within the house, played the role of a large central hallway. The introduction of hallways and specialized rooms separated the public and private spaces and functions within the house. In the process of privatization of areas of the home, individual family members began to think of areas of the home as being their territories (Altman 1975). In contrast to the density of the social contacts in the past, the new, restricted and individualistic relations are introduced in the modern era between people. As Wilson (1991) observes, in the new modern tradition, introduction of the hallways internalized the social distancing provided by the courtyard in the past tradition (113). The halls allowed movements within the house without passing through other rooms. Guerend (1990) correlated similar developments in Europe to a reorientation of social structure from the medieval to the modern. A new desire for isolation and sense of individuality was the demand of modernity. The organization of the house also began to change around this time. The rooms started to be specialized and corridors were introduced as the public places of the house to prevent passing from the private rooms to reach a place. Henry Glassie (1975), in his study of folk housing in Middle Virginia, relates such dense social contacts to the agrarian economy with the sense of communal and familial obligations. He remarks that between 1750 and 1800, the money economy demanded the disintegration of the community to smaller, distinguishable groups and finally to isolated individuals. Such changes have a great influence on the local building

tradition as well as the economic and social structures. People started to demand and prefer the experience of such individualism and sense of privacy in their homes as well.

Houses are artifacts which encompass everyday activities represent the beliefs, values and norms of people who are involved in them. They accurately reflect the desires, needs and also dreams of people who interact with them. Objects, including houses, can take on a range of possible meanings, dependent on the performance of everyday life and the shared cultural language of interpreters and actors (Herman 2005). Living spaces affect daily performance and experiences, and provide a site for negotiation of multi-layered interpretive possibilities.

Courtyard houses are generated in response to ideals as well as pragmatic demands about the nature of a house in Iranian culture. They offer simultaneously spiritual satisfaction and physical comfort for their inhabitants. Whatever the practical motivations behind a courtyard house be, buildings are seen to be culturally mediated by values, preferences, rules and norms that imbue them with certain characteristics (Rapoport 1969). Such norms and rules are largely dictated by religion in Iranian culture.

When closely examined, courtyard houses reveal the great importance their inhabitants put on the observance of their beliefs in their everyday lives and their spatial performances. Religious belief is reflected in various aspects of Iranian's lives including designing and using their living spaces. Belief is articulated through design and use of courtyard houses and is symbolically communicated through spatial layout, orientation, and furnishing of the house. Form, scale and orientation are the main concerns of Iranians in arranging their living spaces consistent to the religious norms. These key issues are

perfectly addressed in courtyard houses by particular spatial strategies. The scales of spaces are totally determined by the regulations of religion. The spaces and their contained objects also are arranged in a particular manner and in a certain direction to conform to the requirements of a proper religious life.

Privacy is the key concern of the Iranian vernacular architecture (especially in residential buildings) which is also a result of religious moralities. Privacy is achieved through different mechanisms in courtyard houses: the access to the houses is hierarchal and there is no direct access available to the interiors from the outside. The visual privacy is also secured by controlling the number of openings and their form. The high degree of the privacy in Tabriz courtyard houses is a result of the concern of their inhabitants with the visibility of their family life. This concern, although inspired by religious moralities, has more of a gendered nature. The lives of women -- the ones who spend most of their daily lives at home— are considerably affected by the isolated form of the houses. The isolated lifestyle within the courtyard houses effectively contributes to restriction of women's social interactions. In addition, the courtyard houses, with their segregated spaces, allow perpetuation of gender inequalities. They can be considered gendered spaces in that they contribute in relegating women into domestic space and restricting their social interactions. However, as the following chapter will discuss, women do not always conform to their stereotypical gender roles reinforced by the spatial form of their houses. By controlling their living spaces, they exercise a low level of power and authority over their lives.

Chapter 5

Architecture and Gender: Women's Gendered Performances of Space in Tabriz

Courtyard Houses

Introduction

Living spaces that encompass everyday activities affect the performances and experiences of individuals who occupy them. As Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson (1984) claim, the structures of buildings "embody the knowledge of social relations or the taken-for-granted rules that govern relations of individuals to each other and to the society" (184). When exploring the meaning making process people participate in when interacting with their home and its contained objects (Hurdley 2006, 718), Elizabeth Cromley and Carter Hudgins (1995) emphasize the importance of considering gender. They point out that as simultaneously a private, intimate, personal category, and a public, communal, social expression of self (Cromely and Hudgins 1995, 5), "gender is not an optional category if we are to [re]construct the story of the ways humans have created and experienced their built environment" (8). A gendered approach to the house form can reveal the hidden power relations in the domestic context and consequently in the larger society.

This chapter investigates the interplay between the spatial arrangement of domestic living space and residents' gendered experiences through an examination of Tabriz courtyard houses. Specifically, I investigate the influence of the house form on the gendered negotiation of power within Iranian families. This chapter approaches the

courtyards from two different perspectives. First, I examine the courtyard house type in terms of gendered spaces to find out what aspects of a house are representative of gendered space inspired by patriarchy. Then I shift the focus of research from house form to function; I look at women's use of space within courtyard houses to explore how women make sense of their spaces and how they make use of them to respond to their own purposes.

The findings of this chapter are mainly based on the life experiences of a group of middle-class housewives and their interaction with their living spaces. One woman (the wife) from each documented house has been interviewed. I was able to speak with more than one woman (e.g. mother, mother-in-law or daughter of the main interviewee) in some cases. It is on these women's experiences that this chapter is based.

Courtyard as Gendered Space

Although gendered spaces exist in most cultures (see Howell and Tentokali 1989; St. George 1990; Pocius 1991; Carter 2000; Westgate 2007), the courtyard house establishes clear boundaries between male and female spaces. This house type reflects the cultural fact that while privacy is equated with individuality in Western culture (Altman 1975), in Iranian culture, it is largely about protecting women against unrelated men. As Morris (1999) observes, the Greek ancient courtyard houses can be considered as the first manifestation of ideas about gendered domestic spaces. The enclosed and isolated nature of the courtyard house ensured the chastity of women and spoke of the honour of men. In this regard, the physical form of the house protects the reputation of the owner.

As Shirley Ardener (1993) suggests, a correspondence exists between the "real" physical world and its "social reality" (1). Courtyard houses and the life styles they create can reflect the strictly practiced gendered segregation of the culture in which they exist. The courtyard house form reflects an acknowledgment of, and responses to, what are perceived as the accepted gender roles and relations of the culture. A variety of cultural, religious and ideological reasons led to the desirability of courtyard form in Iranian culture. One of the most significant underlying reasons is that traditional religious Iranians believed that women should not come in contact with men they are not related to.

The high, unbroken, impenetrable walls of courtyards, for Lewcock and Freeth (1978), depict women's veils, which represent protection, privacy, and anonymity. Westgate (2007) also regards the unbroken exterior of Greek courtyards as a statement of the propriety of the male occupants' domestic arrangements, which ensured the chastity of his female relatives and his children's legitimacy. Apart from these symbolic meanings, some explicit features in the form of Iranian courtyard houses demonstrate how these houses work as gendered spaces including segregated zones and the entrance door treatment.

Segregated Zoning

The most obvious strategy to secure the privacy of a house, and females in particular, is segregated zoning. Visual privacy is one of the most important issues in Iranian residential architecture (Memarian and Brown 2004). The underlying reason can be found in the great effort made to protect female members of a family from the eyes of male strangers in the Iranian culture. This protection is observed through different

mechanisms in different circumstances. In wealthy houses, the house may be divided into two distinct phases, *Andaruni* and *Biruni*, which literally mean inside and outside (Figure 140). *Andaruni* which is situated in the hidden part of the house, belongs to the women and contains the service areas. *Biruni*, on the other hand, is the ceremonial space and social face of the house, and belongs to men and their visitors. The visitors or other strangers who are received in the house have no access to the private zone, which is the realm of the women of the family.
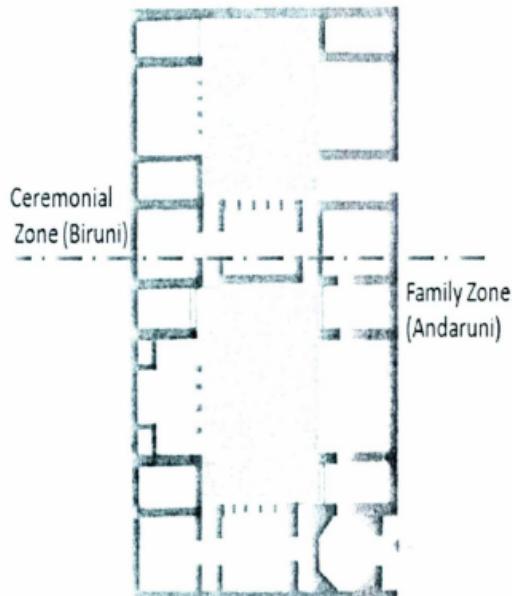
Figure 140: Segregated zoning in a multi-courtyard house. After Pirnia (1990), page 181.

Although the zoning concept can be interpreted as a strategy connected to gendered space and practice of religiously inspired privacy, Ames's (1978) observations in upper-middle-class American Victorian houses confirm the universal desirability of segregation of ceremonial and utilitarian functions within the house. He observes that the plans of these houses are conceptually devisable into two units, the first, larger and fancier than the other is the formal or ceremonial portion of the house. Behind this section are the service units like kitchen and laundry (Figure 141). As he observes, the former is architecture while the latter part is only building (28).

Figure 141: Plan of a conventional Victorian house [After Ames (1978)]. Source: John Riddell, Architectural Designs for Model Country Residences (Philadelphia, 1864).

The segregated zoning, according to Memarian and Brown (2004), reflects a socio-spatial pattern with cultural and religious roots (27). In addition to Iranian residential buildings, such multi-courtyard design is also desired in the Arab houses of Kuwait and Baghdad (Lewcock and Freeth, 1978; Al-azzawi, 1969). The very large houses may have more than two courtyards; however, they do not work completely autonomously. They are usually connected through an opening made in one of the shared walls. The inner courtyards are usually allocated to service units of the house and are used by both female members of family and their servants. A secondary entrance door (or back door) may lead to the *Andaruni* (the private part of the house), but it can only be used by family members or the very close female neighbours who are most trusted.

Since the segregated zoning of the *Biruni- Andaruni* distinction demands construction of at least two courtyards, the form is exclusive to wealthy families. The ordinary households, on the other hand, employ simple strategies to emulate a similar segregation in their homes. As an example, the family may use heavy curtains or window shades when a male visitor is in the courtyard. In such cases, the courtyard enables the family to see the visitor without the visitor seeing them. Despite these adaptive architectural devices, Memarian and Brown (2004) argue that it is not possible to achieve complete segregation in a single yard building.

The Entrance Door

Treatment of the entrance door in courtyard houses also reflects very strict gender segregation. The entrance door may consist of one or two small wooden leafs. The door has special power and meaning as the defining gateway between the private and the

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public, the inward and outward, and the core and periphery (Erzen 2002, 63). The door plays an important symbolic role determined by its form, scale and details. As Ardener (1993) suggests, since spatial boundaries are marked by rituals (13), by establishing and controlling the rules governing the space inside, a door creates a rite of passage (Erzen 2002, 63). One of my male informant explains one of these rituals: "A male stranger entering from a door which leads to a private space of a family should say a loud greeting to announce his arrival and to let the insiders get ready to receive him". The function of a door's threshold is to provide access as well as to keep a dwelling safe. To fulfill the latter function, Iranian vernacular architecture employs two strategies: first, gendered knockers, and second, controlling the height of the door.

Iranian domestic doors were equipped with two different knockers so that insiders could determine the gender of the person standing at the other side of the door .The shape of the knockers is related to correspondent genital forms: flowing curves and a simple straight shaft (Figure 142). The one to be used by male visitors produced a heavier, bass sound than the one for female guests. This application of distinct knockers determined who from the household was able to open the door: the men of the family or the women.
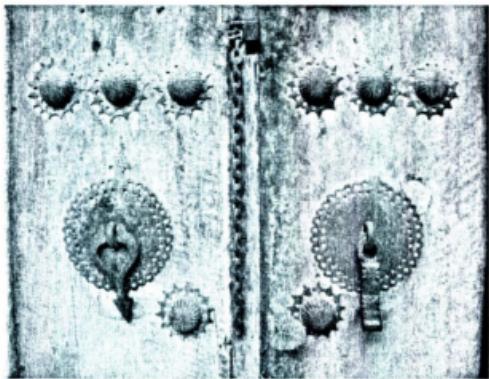
Figure 142: the gendered knockers
Photo credit: http://telemachusunedited.wordpress.com

The height of the door is usually less than that of an average man. These low passages, which are used in both large-scale urban contexts and smaller domestic household contexts, ensure the security of the space. In the time of war (for example, the Russian invasion, as one of my informants noted), these low passages prevented the intrusion of soldiers on horse to the neighbourhoods. In domestic dwellings, the size of the door reflects two paradoxical implications; first, plain, small doors, lacking decoration and embellishments, represent the humbleness of the owner. Simultaneously, the low level of the door forces a kind of prostration when entering a house. As Erzen (2002, 63) observes, this forces the visitors to bend their heads to pass through the door. This bent head, like in most other cultures, indicates the superiority of the household to the visitor and shows that to enter an individual's house you must respect the owner. The visitor, through his enforced gesture, displays his respect to the house and its owners. The other

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possibility is that the low height forces the visitor to watch his step or head and prevents him from looking inside the house upon entrance.

While Cooper (1995) concludes that having a space of their own enables women to construct their identity and develop the sense of their social identity (101), Spain (1992) argues that strict spatial segregation among genders not only creates a physical distance but also hinders women's access to knowledge, which could lead to a change in their status in society (xiv). Having private spaces for oneself is not a "gender" issue since almost every one desires some degree of privacy. It is important to separate the concept of gendered space from that of private space. Gendered spaces keep women away from certain spaces, and keep them away from knowledge used by men "to produce and reproduce power and privilege" (3). Women living in such sheltered and protected houses see the outside world as an unsafe and dangerous space which should be avoided. Spain (1992) also argues that architectural spatial arrangement reinforces status differences between men and women (3) and is a mechanism in the hands of the group with greater power (patriarchy) to maintain its advantages over the less-powerful (female) group (15). She observes that women's status is the lowest in societies in which housing is sexually segregated (Spain 1992, xiv).

Courtyards: Space and Construction of Female (gender) Identity

Architectural features like segregated zones and entrance doors demonstrate how gender stratification is an integral part of everyday life in the courtyard house. This characteristic of the house form tends to relegate women to the private sphere and cut them off from the outside world. In the past, women were enclosed and secluded in their

own courtyard houses. However, the question that arises in relation to courtyard houses and women's status is, whether the spatial organization of the courtyard house shapes the gender performance of the dwellers, or if this is a performance (behavioural norm) that makes a particular form unavoidable?

The courtyard house form is the product of the expectations of a culture within which it is designed and constructed. However, as Moore (1986) argues, the organization of space is both "product and producer" of existing social relations (89). In the other words, "it is not just that the spatial is socially constructed; the social is spatially constructed too" (Massey 1984, 6). Thus, gender roles and relations in a particular culture can be affected by the architectural and spatial contexts within which they are constructed. Spain (1992) argues that cultural contexts have a cyclical rather than linear relation to house forms. That is, the socio-cultural context contributes to constructing a particular house form, and the house form in return affects and reinforces the existing cultural norms and values (Figure 143).

Cultural Context
(Behavioural norms)

Spatial Context
(House Form)
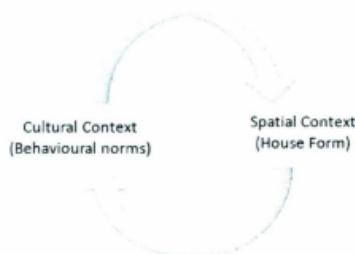
Figure 143: The mutual interaction of cultural and spatial context.

As Massey (1984) suggests, the spatial and social aspects of the phenomena are inseparable (3) and space and actions are different ways of thinking about the same thing (Harvey 1973, 28). Thus, space and social reality are intricately linked and interdependent. As Harvey (1973) argues, once spatial forms are created (based on the existing socio-cultural norms), they tend to become institutionalized, and in some ways influence future social processes (27). In other words, the existing status difference between men and women creates a certain type of gendered space (the courtyard form) and this institutionalized spatial segregation then reinforces prevailing male dominance (Spain 1992, 6). Whether the courtyard is intentionally built to enclose, seclude and hide the female family members, or culturally hidden and silenced women demand the courtyard lifestyle, the matter of the study of this chapter is how women conform to or challenge and subvert such social structures.

Cross-culturally the home is primarily perceived as women's territory. As a feminine space, it is seen to contain devalued knowledge of childcare, cooking and cleaning in the traditional patriarchal perspective (Spain 1992, 11). As Linda Dale (1982) in a study of rural Newfoundland homes observes, the time family members spend at home influences their perception of the home, their level of attachment, and the functions they see for it (19). The very limited presence of men in the home leads both men and women to have very different views of home as a place where "men rest but women work" (Dale 1982, 19). In the Iranian context, this may be the reason behind the answer of a middle age male dweller of a courtyard house to my question of when and where in the house he spends time. He obviously blushed and answered:

> Men do not spend too much time at home. They come home for dinner
> but a 'real' man does not come home for lunch. Home is for women. If I
> want to leave work early or I have free time during a day, I will come
> home for a while, but then I will go to the coffee-house[7] or gym or
> somewhere to be with my friends. Then I will come for supper again.

Spending too much time at home, in traditional Iranian male culture, is regarded as a womanly activity. Men may be ridiculed by their male friends (or even female family members or friends) as being "sissy" or "womanly" if they spend too much time at home. Patrilocal residence, which was frequently the case in courtyard dwellings, contributes to reinforcing these stereotypes. Due to the family structure of the past and the desirability of extended families, the courtyards were arranged for the possibility of accommodating several semi-independent units. However, although, the newlywed couple had a separate sub-unit, they frequently shared the kitchen, living room and bathroom with the other members of the family.

In the extended family, tasks and attitudes of the daughter-in-law were directed by her mother-in-law. The new couple were under family surveillance and their limited private space was accessible to their in-laws. Their own unit or room was only allocated to private activities and sleeping. As Fatima comments, "if the new couple spent more than appropriate time in their private place, it was considered as disrespectful to the mother-in-law and other members of the family". In patrilocal residences, as I observed, the husband's kin group support him and encourage him to participate in more "manly" activities rather than spending time with his wife in their limited private space. However,

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[7] Coffee-houses are the traditional public space of men in Iranian cities where they can drink tea and smoke.

the issues of age and class, among others, may add complexity to the relations of a patrilocal residence as Ardener (1993) observes.

Time can be considered a decisive factor in the use of space which adds another level of meaning to the intricate and fluid concept of space in courtyards. The long absences of men from home mean more liberty for women in these multi-family residences. In patrilocal homes, the courtyard is considered as a semi-public space in that it is shared by multiple families. The courtyard may be occupied by males of the family in the evenings for conversations or passing time. At those times, according to Najibe, a current courtyard dweller, women usually do not come out to the courtyard. However, the courtyard turns to a totally private space for women during the day in the male's absence. The women may share the space for communal daily activities or just for socializing purposes.

Time is an equally effective factor in the meaning of space in single family houses. While the kitchen is a working space of Masum from morning until evening, it is cleaned and done-up as a show stage for display of her house-keeping skills in the evenings and particularly when they have visitors. The living room, which as she notes is useless during the day when she moves around the house to clean-up, "turns to a vibrant and alive space in the evening when everybody returns home". Thus, the temporary nature of functions of the courtyard houses enables residents to use space in various ways and for more various purposes.

Courtyard, Women and the Use of spaces

Women make sense of their living spaces in very complex ways. A clue to women's perceptions of their living spaces emerged during my fieldwork when women showed me around their homes. The order in which they introduced their spaces to me (as an outsider) was revealing. Except for the few cases when women started from their yards (where they grow their vegetables or flowers), in almost every case the reception hall was the first place I was shown.

This room is often the fanciest room in the house. It is regarded as the intersection of the personal and the social for families, and the most attention is lavished on the decoration of this room. Since people only receive their visitors in this room, it becomes the site of potential surveillance and judgment by visitors or 'generalized others' (Allan and Crow 1989) who are invited to the house. The reception room also becomes a site of cultural anxiety for women, and the material culture displayed in it is of great importance for them. Families in general and women in particular, try to influence other's perception of their identities through good maintenance and rich display in this room (Figure 144).

Figure 144: Nikukheslat house, a view of the reception room.

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The objects displayed are usually intended to provoke visitors' admiration and assert the woman's identity as a person of taste. Evidence of this function of reception room furnishing is the comment Maryam made about the furniture in her reception room. Pointing to a sofa in a corner of the room she said: "my husband got this for my birthday" and turning to a fine piece of carpet she said "and this one for our anniversary." I did not ask her why she considers such domestic objects as appropriate gifts for her personal occasions because she could have been offended by this question. However, since these were not personal objects which are normally given as birthday or anniversary gifts, an interpretation becomes possible. She probably encouraged her husband (who would not otherwise buy such fancy furniture for the house as she noted) to buy these objects as gifts for her; by accepting them, she expresses the great importance she places on having fancy furniture. It is important to her status among other women. Maryam's experience reflects Hurdley's view that decoration of the house can be seen as a performance for others and at the same time a "marking practice contributing to negotiation of identity within a network of relations" (2006, 718). Comparing the decoration and furniture with personal accessories like jewellery and clothing, Belk (1988) suggests that individuals may use the house design and its furniture to define and present a sense of self to others (152).

Displayed objects may invoke absent times, places, and people (Hurdley 2006). An example of this is framed pictures of the ancestors of the family displayed on the walls of the reception room. This is significant because it is the woman of the house who decides what will be displayed or concealed. During the process of choosing an object to be

displayed or rejecting it, women exercise power and authority over their space (Figure 145).

Among the objects worthy of being displayed in the reception room are those from the dowry of the woman, provided by her father for her marriage. The dowry includes all the necessary items to establish a household. Almost all reception rooms contained at least some pieces of women's dowries. Through selecting objects (which are sometimes not as precious to be displayed in the reception room), women mark their ownership of the space. I have frequently heard women make the comment to other family members, "do not touch that, it is from my dowry." In a situation where women have no legal ownership over their house, these objects, as the only things belonging to them, play a significant role in elevating their status and asserting ownership over their living spaces.

Figure 145: Mirzade house, a display cabinet in the reception room.

In contrast to the highly prized reception hall, the kitchen was not a point of pride for most women when I visited their houses. The kitchen was the only room which six out of the eight women either refused to show me or expressed discomfort having me see. Although I had arranged in advance to visit the houses, some women refused to show the kitchen, using the excuse that it is messy. The remaining women were reluctant to show the kitchen and refused to allow it to be photographed. The women's reluctance implies that they are not proud of their everyday work space and/or the quality of their performance there. One of the women who unwillingly accepted to show me the kitchen was very nervous during my visit and constantly commented: "sorry for the mess", "I am not the greatest housekeeper", "sorry that everything looks old here" and so on.

Interestingly enough, Howell and Tentokali (1989) in one of their case studies report a similar incident during one of their house visits in a Muslim village in Greece. They note that the village women politely but persistently refused to show them the food preparation area on the ground floor of the dwelling (286). The women dissuaded them by comments similar to those of my informants: "you do not want to see that" and "it is nothing" (286). Howell and Tentokali (1989) interpreted this attitude of women toward their kitchen as a demonstration of the fact that food preparation is considered an unclean and devalued task in that culture.

The kitchen in courtyard houses is located at a far distance from the living rooms. In some cases, the kitchens are accommodated in dark, damp basements. In contrast to the role of the modern kitchens as 'the heart of the house', the kitchen of the courtyard house is a rather marginal space. Hirschon (1993), examining houses in a Greek community,

relates this marginality to the association of pollution with the kitchen, a reason that some of my informants also noted. Citing Lévi-Strauss (1969), Hirschon (1993) argues that the kitchen is a zone of transition in which the process of conversion from nature to culture takes place. Women as agents of cultural processes actively engage in transformation of raw material (nature) to cooked product (culture) and thus the kitchen becomes a liminal space betwixt nature and culture (Hirschon 1993, 76).

The peripheral location of the kitchen represents its ambivalent character. The kitchen is a female-related space, particularly in Iranian culture where food handling and preparation is entirely a female task. Thus, the position of the kitchen seems to be associated with the devaluation of women's tasks in the house. Some of the women I talked to felt exiled from certain spaces in their homes and confined to their kitchens, which were located in the far end of the courtyard. As well, the women expressed no feelings of attachment or closeness either through the decoration and maintenance of their kitchens or through their comments. Those kitchens lack any particular decoration or accessories and there is no evidence of a personal touch or attachment to the kitchen space. The kitchen is a solely functional space in which the functional objects are ordered without any sense of place. Madine, a working-class courtyard dweller, rejected my request to have our conversation in her kitchen commenting, "you don't like to be there". She continued:

> My husband never steps in the kitchen neither do my sons. I wonder if they know how it looks like at all (chuckles). They do not care about the kitchen at all. But I have to go back and forth to pour a tea or make a meal for them. It is too hard in winters to walk all the way down to the kitchen for a tea or something.

Madine then revealed explicit evidence of resistance and subversion in her life when she showed me a rather strange room. Madine's house is a small one with two rooms in the front on either side of a narrow hall, and two rooms at the rear. The two front rooms are referred to as the living room and reception room, though there is no particular difference in their size, appearance or furnishing. The rear rooms are referred to as the husband's accounting room and her sewing room. Madine explained that this winter she thought that due to her age she was not able to take the long trip to the kitchen for a glass of water or a cup of tea anymore. They agreed to bring the refrigerator and the Samavar (tea-maker) to the living side of the house and accommodate them in one of the rooms. Since all of the rooms are multi-functional in her house and none of the rooms are specialized for a specific purpose, she could pick each of the rooms for these objects interchangeably. While she could have put them in her sewing room for convenience, she decided to put them in her husband's accounting room. Picking that room, she obviously aimed to interrupt her husband's privacy in his work room, although she denied such intentions. Through this arrangement, she also makes her work visible to her husband - who generally ignores her and her work place - whenever she goes to pick an ingredient from the refrigerator to make a meal or to pour tea for him.

In contrast to women who spoke negatively about their kitchens, others I visited had a very close attachment to their kitchens. Masum, a woman who lives in a remodelled courtyard house with her husband is one of the women who is pleased with her kitchen. After remodelling the house, they built an open kitchen in the living space and turned the previous kitchen in the basement into a storage room. She is very proud of her new

kitchen and was willing to open all the shelves and cabinets and show me their interiors. However, she explained her challenges with the new, modern kitchen:

> Moving from the old kitchen to the new one was very exciting but rather hard at first. I was used to working in the enclosed, hidden space of my kitchen and I felt uncomfortable in this kitchen. You know, I felt as though I was naked or something when we had visitors and I had to cook there (laughs).

Masum then showed me a sliding screen which is designed for open kitchens that her husband had installed (Figure 146). Whenever they have male visitors, she covers the open wall of the kitchen with this screen and makes the kitchen a secluded place for herself. This screen is a way to block the space to others. She also explained that she never used this screen when she had just female visitors. In addition to confirming that the location of kitchen has great influence on women's attachment to it, this example conveys another possible meaning. Women prefer the modern spaces but they use them in the traditional ways. This addition of a sliding screen to the modern kitchen is intended to recreate (to some extent) the traditional 'stage,' as Hirschon (1993, 16) argues, while keeping the space modern and fashionable.
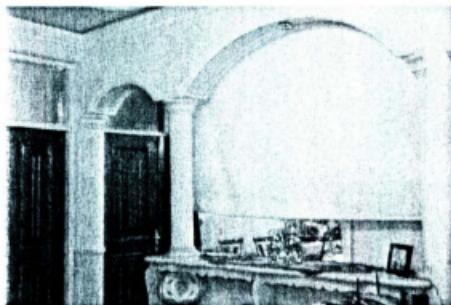
Figure 146: Masum's kitchen, the white sliding screen covers the kitchen's open wall when it is needed.

Another example of use of modern spaces in traditional ways is the show kitchen of Mahsa, a young woman, who was raised in a courtyard house. She currently lives in a modern apartment with her family of four. The house has a large open kitchen but the space is not functional and the objects are more for display rather than use (Figure 147). All the kitchen activities including cooking and washing take place in a back kitchen which is a very small room compared to the size of the rest of the house. Mahsa explains:

> This room was intended to be a patio in the original plan, but when we moved to the house, we found that the kitchen does not work for us. Every single thing you do in the kitchen was visible for the one sitting in the living room. You know, I am not very organized and when I cook or wash it becomes worst (chuckles). Also, in that kitchen I had to wear a scarf or something while having visitors and I can't cook that way. Anyways, then we got this place roofed (pointing to the roof) and added this door here (pointing to the door) and that is it. I have my cozy, tiny kitchen now.
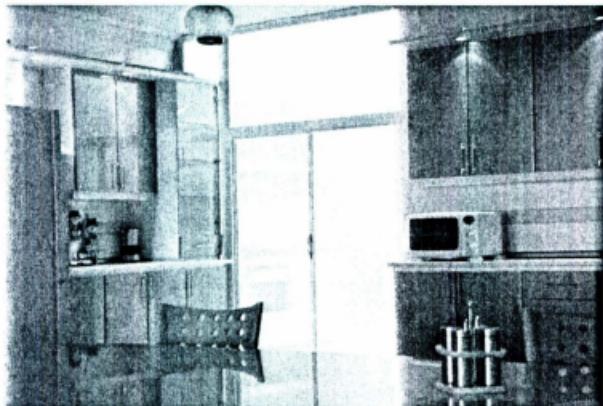
Figure 147: Mahsa's show kitchen, the functional kitchen is separated from this kitchen with the glass sliding door at the middle of the picture.

Young women like Mahsa may like their spaces to look fashionable and stylish (in eyes of other women in particular) but they still demand the traditional ways of organizing space. Although they regard themselves to be different from the previous generation (as commented by some of the young women), they conform to existing cultural norms even if these norms lead to their partial confinement. These observations also confirm that the underlying religious rules and the social norms associated with them are still very much in existence in people's subconscious, although in a modified form (Khatib-Chahidi 1983, 113).

Goffman's (1959) idea of front-stage/back-stage (106-140) seems applicable to women's use of space in courtyard houses. The order women introduced me to the spaces in their houses follows a pattern moving from the front-stage to the back-stage. The reception room, thus, becomes the very front-stage of the house which accommodates both the objects and behaviours that are appropriate for the front-stage. Individuals and families present the best of themselves to others and *act* their expected roles as man (host) and woman (hostess) in this room. The show kitchen of Mahsa, also, can be considered as front-stage which is decorated for the *acting* not the real everyday performance. The kitchens belonging to Najibe and Madine are their very back-stages. Unlike Mahsa and Masum, they do not have to *act* the role of dutiful, perfect housewife when they are in their kitchens. They can be themselves in places which are closed to others; however, they are again subject to the rules that govern their everyday performances and cannot be free from the restrictions and obligations of their role as home makers. Unlike Goffman's (1959) view on bedrooms as the back-stage, the bedrooms of my visited houses, if

presented (most of the courtyards have no room as bedroom) have an ambivalent nature. Although the room is shared by a woman and her husband, for some women, the bedroom is the back-stage where they feel free to be themselves. For others like Faran, the bedroom is the space in the house which she has to *act* rather than being herself more than any other room. Considering the discussion above, it is obvious that back-stage or front-stage is not defined by place but rather it has a temporal nature. As Ardener (1993) suggests, "people define space". A space in the house can be a back-stage for a woman during the day and a front-stage for her in the evening when other family members including her husband are present. However, although the back-stage and front-stage can be gendered as Goffman (1959) himself suggests, it is not always the case. While Goffman (1959) sees the places where women get together alone as back-stage, there is another level of performance or *acting* in those spaces as Beckham (1988, 85) observes. Women may *act* their expected role for other women as well as for men. This fact dramatically reduces the back-stage time and space for women.

Women and Alternative Ways to Mediation of Space

Women exercise a level of power and authority by mediating space through activities and decoration. As the women's comments above show, although the organization of space can perpetuate status differences and existing power relations, women have their own ways of contributing to power negotiations. The general assumption is that men and women together create the power relations and spatial segregation systems. As Moore (1986) argues, women are engaged in upholding gender differentiations, as are men (18), and the dominated are as involved in the use and maintenance of power as the dominant.

This argument ignores the context in which this negotiation of power occurs. As Spain (1992) argues, some women may believe in the legitimacy of their lower status due to strong ideological or religious pressures (18); others subscribe to them as a virtue handed down from their mothers. However, there is the possibility that women conform to these regulations because, in one way or another, they serve women's own purposes. One of the examples I encountered in my fieldwork convinced me that women may voluntarily choose and conform to such segregation.

I was invited to one of the houses I was documenting for dinner after establishing a relationship with the daughter of the family. Right after the meal, each of the female diners, carrying something from the table, went to the kitchen, while the men did not move at all. My first reaction was negative. These actions seemed to be a vivid portrayal of patriarchy within the family. However, my next observation, completely, changed my view. When one young man tried to give a hand and bring some dishes to the kitchen, he was stopped at the kitchen door by women instructing him that he could not enter the kitchen because women were uncovered there. Throughout that evening women stayed in the kitchen chatting while doing the after meal cleaning up.

That post-meal cleaning could have been done in half an hour, but these women never left the kitchen to join the men who were trying "to solve the world's problems" as one of the women in the kitchen said. In doing so, the women created and defined a temporary, isolated territory for themselves in a way that prevented men's intrusion. The boundaries for this *created isolation (*Jordan and Kalčik 1985, 48) were paradoxically defined as a *covering issue,* the regulation of which is regarded as imposed by male culture. Although

spatial boundaries contribute to the unequal status of genders, women in this case used male rules against men. Banning men from the kitchen the women provided a venue for themselves to spend time with each other.

Women and Controlling Space

Domestic affairs are potentially the means by which women exercise control and authority over space. Women's responsibility for domestic tasks has been generally assumed as one of the reasons contributing to women's economic dependence and thus their lower status. However, some women I talked to find very different meanings in their daily activities. As Hirschon (1993) observes, the association of women with spatial arrangement and thus with symbolic order is an integral part of their everyday activities. Women feel a covert power and authority over the other members of family, including males, through their domestic affairs. While men make most of the household decisions, they have a rather tenuous ownership over the house. Women, as mediators and allocators of space, as Ardener (1993) suggests, are the ones who decide about the use of spaces in the house and enact the regulations for them. For example, Faran described her responsibilities in the house:

> When we first moved to this house I was the one who decided which room was to be what. We had most of our furniture from the previous house, but I decided what to buy or where to put the things we had. My husband just brought the money; he does not care as much as I care about the home stuff.

Similarly, Najibe comments:

> I don't let anybody enter to the house with his shoes on. I also make my husband and son wash their feet at the *Hows* (the small pool in the courtyard) before coming in the house. You know, they have been out

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all day. I also don't let them touch my kitchen stuff or touch the food on
the stove before I serve it.

As these comments demonstrate, daily activities for these women are valuable and

enjoyable tasks and help them to take control of their space. Domestic affairs dominated

by women become a site of negotiation of power within the family. Having these

responsibilities, women exercise power over other members of family and authority over

the space. They also provide women with the right to establish rules and regulations for

their living spaces and force other members, including the (powerful) men, to conform to

the behaviour they regulate. However, the experiences of some of my female informants

also demonstrate the boundaries and limitations of such female authority. The autonomy

and joy of household management for many of these women stop when the men arrive.

Food preparation and serving is the other process by which I found women

dominated the function and thus the space. The concept of *fluidity* of gender segregation

in space, suggested by Goffman (1977), is applicable to this process. He argues that men

and women periodically separate into different places but re-group in integrated spaces to

carry out shared goals. Eating is one of these shared goals which again provides a site of

contestation and power negotiation within a family. Although in the process of choice of

food the husband's taste may have the priority, as Tye (2010) observes in her study of her

mother's baking, it is the woman who decides where to serve the food and in what order.

At supper time, as I observed in Parvin's house, she picked the seat that enabled her to

access almost everything. When the supper was served on the kitchen table, she picked

the seat that was the closest to the stove. She also arranged the food on the table in such a

way that she could easily serve everybody's food. Although women organize these settings so that they can efficiently do their tasks, the settings obviously influence the nature of the social interaction among the seated, as Ardener (1993) observes. In my example, Parvin is the one who decided how much food everyone received, and in what order family members were served. However, even in this process of choices and orders, patriarchal regulations may, once more, make her give the priority to her husband.

The same process is observable when setting up to serve tea in traditional houses (Figure 148). A small table is located in the corner of the living room with a Samavar (tea-maker), cups and ingredients. As I observed, the seat right beside this table is almost always reserved for the woman who brews and serves tea to everybody. If somebody else is already in that spot, the woman of the house will take the seat and make her or him move. All these examples demonstrate how women, in one way or the other, control the space by exerting their presence. One of the material manifestations of such exertion is the choice and arrangement of the furniture in a way that allows women to control the space and through the space direct their lives.
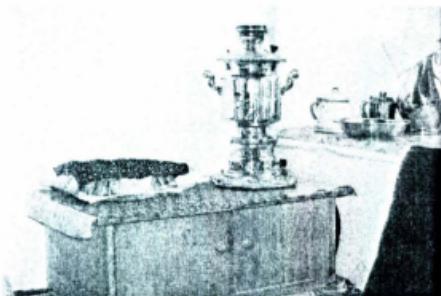
Figure 148: A Samavar setting in Laya's House.

Furniture as Signifiers of Control of Space

As mentioned above, women control their lives through choosing and arranging furniture. Furniture, as artifacts, can take on different meanings according to the context in which they are being used. These arrangements carry significant meanings, and through these choices and their display, women can communicate significant messages to others. Women may also mark the furniture as personal objects by adding hand-made decorative objects such as cushions or a table cloth.

Furniture is marked by symbolic connotations. Changes in life, intentionally or subconsciously, parallel changes in artifacts and their ordering, which sends a message to others (Hirschon 1993, 16). Such changes evoke a dimension beyond practical consideration in the organization of space. An impressive and meaningful example of these practices is the remodelling that Parvin, a recently widowed woman, has done in her bedroom. She comments:

> Not long after my husband's death, I replaced my queen bed with a single bed and reoriented it to Qibla (the sacred direction). I put the queen bed in my son's room and brought his single bed to my bedroom.

Then she explains:

> You know, couples must direct their beds away from the sacred orientations because it is offensive, you know, [to have intercourse in the sacred direction]. But, people are recommended to sleep toward the sacred orientation because they will have a peaceful and relaxing sleep, and in the case of a sudden death, they will die as a pure Muslim.

Parvin's replacement and re-orientation of furniture, and the story she attributes to it, carries multiple layers of meaning and can be interpreted in various ways. Through this

replacement, she symbolically accepts her new status as a widow and presents herself as a de-sexualized person who will never engage in a new relationship. Locating the bed in her son's room she acknowledges her son as a sexualized person relative to her own de-sexualized self.

By re-orienting her bed toward the sacred direction, she communicates her profound belief in religious moralities, and acknowledges the importance of shaping her life based on religiously inspired behavioural norms. On the other hand, and on a psychological level, cutting her husband's spot from her bed is a symbolic or physical way of coping with her loss. Because Iranian traditional women are extremely dependent upon their husbands, this loss is considered a cultural disaster. She also expresses her conformity to accepted modes of behaviour (which prohibit women from new relations after their husband's death). She admits that after her husband's death, she intends to avoid pleasure of any kind. She will sacrifice her life to God and prepare for death as a pure Muslim.

Some Notes on Courtyard and Women's Social Life

The enclosed form of the courtyard houses and the domestic culture practiced in it, are obviously intended to control the dwellers both physically and socially. Women living in the traditional neighbourhoods and the enclosed houses had the least opportunity for social interactions. Women in such circumstances are segregated from the outside world and are expected to have the least mobility because of their obligations in house making.

Sara, a woman in her mid-sixties who has grown up in a courtyard house, explains her experience as below:

> We were living in our little heaven; we very rarely went out. All our
> friends and relatives were like ourselves. We did not know what is

> going on in the outside world. Once, a drought occurred and all people
> suffered from famine. My father and brothers did not let us know what
> was going on in the outside world. Me, my mother and sisters didn't
> notice of the occurrences outside the house up until two month. We
> were cut from the outside world in our heaven.

However, although her comments clearly reflect the absence of social interaction in the life of these women, there is no hint of negative connotation in her comments. Sara does not see this situation as her confinement to the house. Rather, she feels in her seclusion a sense of pride and enjoyment because of her higher status among other women. She has the similar feeling about her status compared to those of men by commenting that: "we enjoyed the pleasure of domestic life but poor men had to go out all day for work."

However, no matter how women felt about their social life, what is obvious is that in the absence of any form of public associations, women create alternative ways to compensate for this lack. As Beckham (1998) observes in her study of women's social life in American porches, women find socially acceptable ways to circumvent their public limitations (71). Having limited access to the public, Iranian, traditional women bring the public to their private realm. This can well explain the frequent all-female parties and gatherings which are held in their houses. These parties, in the absence of other social activities, provide a sociable environment for the hostess and the visitors at the same time. The interesting point is that on such occasions male members of family temporarily are banned from the areas of the house in which this event is going on. In other words, men are peripheralised in their own home in the presence of other women.

The degree to which women engage in social activities and public life is a result of the social status of a family. Social status has a great influence in practicing privacy and protecting women in a family. Drawing evidence from my observations, strict gender segregations and the protection of women seems to be a more common practice among wealthy families than the common ones. As such, it is more common among urban families than the rural households. Although no generalization can be made in issues involved with people, and it is hard to claim this norm as a rule for all people, my observations in the visited houses, confirms the accuracy of this idea to some extent. One of the underlying reasons is that the wealthy and higher-class families of Iran in the past were those associated with *Bazaar* (major marketplace) and thus in close relation with religious institutions as well (historically the Bazaar merchants were very close to the mosques and religious institutions). The wealthier a family was the more restrictions were set for the women of the family.

Some of the great houses I documented belonged to the leading merchants of *Bazaar* and the way their dwellers talked about the issues of privacy practiced in their homes was very different from those of ordinary people. Such families see women's visibility in public as risking their honour. The most obvious example is in the comments of Reza, a 90 years old man, who was a successful merchant in Bazaar, made when I asked him about the life of women of his family. He comments:

> Women did not need to go out unless for a religious gathering or something. They did not need anything. We provided everything for them and we did not like them to be visible outside. The women who wander outside and hang out with others are not proper wives for their husbands. Our women were happy at home. They had to take care of the kids and they had no free time to get out. If they needed anything, they

would send a kid to bazaar and he would let us know something was needed in the house.

In contrast, in ordinary houses, the rules for women were less restrictive. One of the underlying reasons was the lack of enough possibilities inside the house to observe such segregations. As Fatima, a member of lower-class family comments:

> How could we heat all the rooms of the house to separate women and men in the long winters? Nobody could; Oil was rare and expensive. How it was possible for us to live separately? We all gathered in a room in winter evenings around a hearth and we cooked our supper on the same floor hearth as we used to heat the room.

The other reason can be found in the differing lifestyles of these families. Unlike the affluent families who assigned servants for everyday tasks, women of middle and lower class families had the responsibility of everyday shopping required for the family including, bread, milk and fresh vegetables. These obligations provided a great opportunity for them to meet and chat with people outside. Far from being in total seclusion, these women could engage in social life on a daily basis. However, their social life was limited to these few interactions in the domain of neighbourhood and just outside their houses.

Laya, my female middle-class informant provides another example of women's liberation in lower and middle-class families:

> In the afternoons when the pressing domestic tasks had been completed, we would go and hang out with our female neighbours in the niches that were provided beside the house door. We would spend all the afternoon sitting and chatting there until half an hour before the husbands would come back.

These afternoon gatherings in the neighbourhood were a common practice for these women while it was not considered as proper behaviour by upper class families. According to the comments of women I talked to, they also had certain rules for such occasions. For example, Fatima explains these afternoons' rules as below:

> You had to stay as close as to your own house door. You may also stay at your doorstep to keep an eye to your house as well. Kids may play around you or in the neighbouring alley. Some women preferred to bring with them their hand-works like knitting. You know they did not want to look idle. You could wear a 'goldar chador' (the informal Hijab) if you don't intend to go far from your house but if the spot was fairly far from the house you had to wear 'chador meshki' (the more formal Hijab). Some women also would bring some cookies or other food to offer to neighbours while standing there or sitting and chatting.

Neighbourhood life is well-developed in traditional parts of Tabriz. However, despite the close relations of the neighbours in these quarters, there is a sharp distinction between inside and outside. Neighbours, who are involved in frequent interactions outside the house, very rarely enter each other's house except for the special events like New Year. In this situation, the door area works as a middle space between public and private. Like the interiors, maintenance of a particular part of alley right outside the house door, which was regarded as the extension of a house, was the responsibility of women. Women and their housekeeping skills were being judged based on the quality of this area. It was usually swept and cleaned on a daily basis. The door and this area together communicate the house keeping skills of women in the lack of access to house interiors by neighbours.

In addition to having conversations, women staying in their door area keep the track of neighbourhood activities. In addition to sociability of these occasions for women, as Hirschon (1993) observes, through their association with the public life of the

neighbourhood, women facilitate the social life of the family in the neighbourhood, providing them with the latest news and occurrences of the neighbourhood (85). In the life of a family whose head is the husband, women become paradoxically the central figure through such activities.

The close examination of Iranian courtyard houses reveals the gendered dimensions of vernacular architecture and allows the understanding of how gender relations are constructed and experienced in a spatial context. Architectural spaces play a role in maintaining status distinction by gender (Spain 1992, 7). House form, in particular, contributes to shaping the socially and culturally constructed concept of gender. The expectations of how men and women should behave in society are negotiated in a smaller scale at home (Spain 1992). Thus, houses and their spatial arrangements make the hidden power relations tangible. Whether the house forms are the results of conscious effort of individual builders/owners to dominate others (females) or not, these concrete forms of housing regulate and reinforce the existing gender roles and relations to perpetuate the privilege of the dominant group.

Courtyard houses as an example of gendered space are a product of gendered views within Iranian culture. They contribute to perpetuating the accepted gender roles and relations in a number of ways. The segregated zones the courtyard design provides, allow the distinction of female and male spheres within the houses. This distinction becomes the spatial expression of the devaluation of domestic chores associated primarily with women.

In addition to segregated zoning within the courtyard houses, some other features prove the gendered nature of these houses. For example, the entrance door and its treatment is one of those extremely gendered features of the houses. By providing the two distinct knockers, each for women or men, the main entrance doors of courtyard houses are able to reveal the gender of the visitor.

Although the spatial arrangement of courtyard houses confirms the gender stratification in the Iranian culture, the observations of this research reveals another dimension of the everyday life within the courtyard house. Gender-related studies of space, by and large, have considered the form of space from the standpoint of gendered inequalities. However, the realities of gendered power relations are much more complicated, contested and open to interpretation in residential contexts (Carter 2000). Women's performances in the house can correspond to or differ from the conventionally expected roles. Women may conform to or resist and subvert their gender roles by spatial expressions and performances. By transforming some spaces within the house -which normally belong to men- into their working place, women effectively make their works visible to the family. In doing so, the household responsibilities which normally are seen as oppressive and confining may turn to sites of power negotiation by women in certain contexts.

Household responsibilities such as furniture choice and arrangement, and control of food production and consumption, are tied to issues of power and position (Tye 2010, 79). By engaging in such activities as allocation of space for different activities and establishing the regulations for use of such spaces, women actively play a significant role

in the family life. Albeit within limits, engaging in such activities, in the absence of other

social associations, enables women to take control of their living spaces and their lives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis adopts a multi-dimensional ethnographic perspective to examine courtyard houses, a particular house type from Tabriz, Iran. My research investigates the interplay between spatial contexts and socio-cultural performances in this built environment. It studies the architectural manifestations of social and cultural processes to investigate how the courtyard house as an urban house form has been adapted to accommodate modified lifestyles. Houses, as artifacts, are representative of cultural identities, norms and values. When closely examined, house forms reveal the multi-layered cultural meanings and considerations in their construction and use.

The need for the present study emerged because of the absence of adequate ethnographic concerns in Iranian vernacular architecture scholarship. Most often Iranian vernacular architecture has been studied by historians and architectural scholars who have documented architectural styles and forms. To date researchers have demonstrated little interest in observing and interpreting how these spaces were used. Nor have women and their adaptation of domestic dwellings been a focus of much, if any, earlier inquiry in Iran. This thesis tries to fill this gap by extending North American-based scholarship that combines the methods of both fieldwork and object-centered research. The thesis utilizes individual narratives based on discussions held with owners and residents of the houses as the central research materials.

The self-representation as articulated in spatial context and shaped by it is a valuable cultural resource (Bryden 2004). Thus, built on the ethnographic methods of vernacular architectural studies, this thesis takes into account the interactions of people with their living spaces. As individuals interact with the material culture of the house, they form an ongoing narrative of self (Bryden 2004). Studying these narratives enables the researcher to access the deepest meanings in the individual's everyday performances of space.

A wide range of factors contributes in shaping a particular house form in a culture including the environmental, economic, social and cultural factors. Courtyard houses are the result of a combination of factors including the abundance and inexpensiveness of land in the past. The structure of family is also an important component of culture that made the courtyard a desirable residential form in Iran. Courtyards were originally intended to accommodate a single extended family. However, both the physical appearance and residential population of these houses have undergone change over time. With disintegration of the extended families, the courtyard houses lost their original purpose. In addition, a major drawback of living in the old courtyard buildings is its maintenance. Thus, people lost interest in living in courtyard houses in the present time and the very large courtyards were gradually abandoned. Population growth and rapid urbanization and migration from rural areas to cities in the recent 50 years caused the shortage of space in Iranian cities. When people could not afford to rent the urban houses, the old, large courtyard houses transformed to slum-like residences where multiple families cramped in them each renting a room or two. However, such transformed

courtyards are not the focus of this research. The research materials of this thesis are selected from those houses which continue their lives as the proper residence of single (extended or nuclear) families.

The interest in vernacular forms of housing has reduced in the recent decades because of the constantly changing requirements of the modern life. However, the new movements in architecture such as sustainable and *Green* architecture, once more, draw the attention of modern architecture towards the vernacular. The advancement of technology enables architects to turn their concepts to actual buildings more easily and rapidly. However, in the process of this rapid transformation, today's Iranian architects seem to overlook the actual needs of their clients based on their cultural values and beliefs. Modern day architects, by and large, ignore the fundamental principles of Iranian life which should be reflected and responded in the built environment, and they end up designing the spaces in which the sense of place and comfort are missing. Such principles can be learned from looking at vernacular architecture and the simple solutions traditional architects employed to provide a comfortable and functional place for the users of the spaces. Examining vernacular housing traditions, their spatial arrangements and construction methods provides important insight and lessons for today's architecture.

Courtyard houses are one of the great examples of traditional housing which perfectly fit the Iranian lifestyle. They are simple in form but absolutely functional and efficient. Courtyard houses have passed the test of time and proved to be a suitable spatial idea to Iranian life with its particular requirements. As discussed in this thesis, the courtyards are the architectural expression of major cultural issues. Such cultural

expectations are considered in the design of the houses and are articulated in the spatial arrangement of the dwelling. Beliefs, values and the worldview of the residents are taken into account in the design of the courtyard houses. The gender-related issues, in particular, are effectively responded to in the spatial form of courtyard houses. Courtyard houses and their enclosed spaces restrict women's social interaction and contribute to their secluded life. However, although courtyard houses are gendered spaces, they still can be considered as culturally responsive spaces because they are built within a particular culture with specific requirements for gender segregation.

Apart from the cultural considerations, the design and construction of the courtyard house corresponded to the principles of sustainability, even before the rise of the Green architecture movement. The criteria of modern sustainability can be easily found in the courtyard houses. They reflect perfect ingenuity and efficiency. The use of the local materials obtained from the areas in close proximity to the site is one of the most important issues of sustainability advised by the Green architecture movement. Although easy and rapid transportation is available now, the use of local materials helps to reduce the economical and ecological costs of constructions.

All this is not to say that the traditional practices of architecture are applicable to our contemporary situation and they answer all our current problems and challenges in architecture. Nor do I aim to regress back in time and present a sentimental and nostalgic view of past architecture. Rather, I believe that courtyard houses can be used as a reference and guide for modern architecture which seemingly forgets the significance of

such issues as the need for privacy in Iranian buildings and simply imitates Western architecture which developed to fit the needs of a different culture.

Unlike traditional houses which were the pure and simple responses to the needs and wants of their inhabitants, today's houses are a result of the architectural ambitions of their designers with the least functionality and comfort for their dwellers. The outcome of this ignorance becomes the nonsense box-like buildings which are growing up everywhere in the cities that nobody can call them home. To sum up, there is much to be learned from the vernacular architecture. Learning the knowledge of the past along with the requirements of the contemporary lifestyle can lead to the development of the built environment which effectively responds to the needs of its users and provides less harm to the surrounding environment.

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