

Entering Iranian Homes: Privacy Borders and Hospitality in Iranian Movies

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Abstract: The architecture of homes in Iran has changed significantly over the past four decades since the 1979 Iranian revolution. We ask how these architectural changes shift neighborhood relationships and how they transform the Iranians' hospitality rituals and practices. We conducted a qualitative content analysis of eighteen Iranian movies filmed after the 1979 revolution. They allowed us to make comparisons among various dwelling patterns and neighborhood relationships. We argue that the representations of neighborhood relationships reflect these changes, demonstrating the impact of architecture on interactions. Our focus in this article is on borders of privacy, power dynamics in the neighborhoods and among families, and communication forms to better understand the impact of changing architecture on hospitality through the lens of cinema. Additionally, we engage with Goffman's (1956) concepts of frontstage and backstage, demonstrating that these are not dichotomous, although they are opposites, and there can be a thinning of frontstage along with a thickening of backstage. Entrances to homes are often gradual, and visitors may gradually penetrate through layers of the frontstage as they become closer (emotionally and in space) to the heart of the home's (and its occupants') backstage.

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Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, which coincided with increased architectural modernization, apartments started to gradually replace previously yard-centric and yard-sided traditional Iranian homes. Structural changes to family living have accompanied this shift in housing. Our study delineates these changes in architecture and hospitality by comparing the portrayal of relationships in cinema, which depicts life in both traditional Iranian houses and new apartments. We focus on interpreting borders of privacy, power dynamics in the neighborhoods and among families, communication forms, and their differences in two kinds of dwelling patterns in the field of Iranian cinema. This study demonstrates the disruptions resulting from changing dwelling patterns. We also discuss the residents' agentic practices in various situations, that is, the actions they take to accomplish agency in a given context—a concept Maxwell and Aggleton (2011) coined to indicate how young women in unequal power relationships “take action” or “take power back”—to cope with some of these fundamental changes and adjust to new architectural forms.

Hospitality is a central part of the house and home in Iran. The word *khaaneh* (خانه) in Farsi or Persian is in relationship with the land (Barati 2003) and translates to both home and house in English. It relates to the concept of *sokoonat* (سکونت)—a dwelling that refers to habitation, as well as being established and living in comfort (Diargahe Shahr Co 2015). The relationships between the terms house and home, however, vary across cultural and historical contexts, including the North American context, which is influenced by Anglo-Saxon origins. *Khaaneh* captures both the physical aspects of the place of habitation (house) and its ideals, feelings, and practices—the related (home) aspects (Mallett 2004). We

use “home” and “house” based on the mentioned differences, but we also use the term “house” in opposition to “apartment,” which is a building comprised of different units that may become home for their residents.

Iranian hospitality and its rituals, central to Iranian culture, rely on gradual entrances and exits as guests are accompanied through progressive and layered spaces into the home. We argue that this creates a gradual process of moving through spaces where the frontstage thins as the backstage thickens. Traditional Iranian architecture accommodates these gradual processes through more than twenty-six defined private, semi-private, or public parts of the home, including the yard, five-to-seven-door rooms, the *eivan* (an Iranian-style porch), the *orsi* room, the *korsi* room, the water fountain house, among others (Diargahe Shahr Co 2015). From an essentialist perspective, Iranian architecture has unique principles that Pirnia (2008) identifies as human scale; inward-looking; self-sufficiency; avoiding non-essentials; structural rigidity; and proportion. However, these terms are no longer suitable for contemporary Iranian architecture, which has moved away from yard-centric houses toward apartments (Qayyoomi Bidhendi and Abdollahzadeh 2014).

Privacy borders, particularly in traditional houses, which are designed to accommodate these practices, are complex and yet clearly understood by all. In apartment buildings, there is a lingering complexity to privacy borders. However, the architecture does not permit accompaniment through spaces. Privacy borders become muddled, and conflict ensues. Because of the visibility of the kitchen in apartments—traditionally the heart of the Iranian backstage when hosting—hosting becomes even more of a challenge as the architecture allows the backstage to be visible

and penetrated. While apartments disrupt the coherence and continuity of performing Iranian hospitality, they also make women's household labor more visible by introducing the open-concept kitchen, a trend previously noticed among other cultures as the kitchen and back regions become more architecturally visible (Halle 1996; Munro and Madigan 1999). We argue that the agentic work towards interpreting and maintaining privacy borders is a generic social process that looks different in various settings, such as apartment kitchens in Iran.

Apartments also force people to move through vertical spaces outside their unit, such as staircases. People must develop vertical relationships with each other—if they ever happen. In traditional homes, where groups live in the wings of the home, there is an expectation that residents and visitors will be calling to each other through windows, across alleys, and generally interacting in horizontal spaces, creating more horizontal relationships. The dominance of the vertical form of relationships further complicates privacy borders and hospitality and can lead to conflict. Ultimately, thresholds that bring unity and order in traditional homes, leading to continuity and coherence, gain a disruptive characteristic in the apartments and suspend traditional Iranian hospitality work.

Thomas Gieryn (2002) comprehensively defines the difference between space and place from a sociological perspective. A space requires three things to become a "place;" a geographic location, material form, and social meaning. We use the term "place" to refer to specific places in the movies we analyze, but the term "space" when speaking more broadly of a category of space rather than a specific place. For example, people move through space to penetrate deeper into a home. However, in a mov-

ie, we would note the movement of specific people from one specific place (someone's specific foyer in the film, say) to another specific place (the unique threshold depicted). We refer to the collective sense of a "threshold," however, as a space because it is not anchored in one geographic location. Of course, time is intimately connected with space, and as people move through spaces (or move from one place to another), they are also moving through time. We recognize this and make some reference to the temporal aspects of movement, but ultimately, we focus on space and place in this article.

We will first discuss dwelling pattern shifts in Iran and the new proliferation of apartment buildings. From there, we discuss privacy and the home, connecting these literatures to mobilize our analysis and to argue that front and backstages, while opposites, operate along a continuum.

Dwelling Pattern Shifts in Iran

Norberg-Shultz (1985), as a phenomenologist, based his definition of "dwelling" on the relationship of humans with the environment and with each other. According to him, dwelling somewhere means being at peace, having relationships with others, and being protected from the outside. Architectural patterns in the preindustrial era ensued from local and embedded socio-historical contexts, resulting from the interactions between people and places. Architectural patterns were most often the outcomes of cooperation between builders and people. Given that "buildings stabilize social life" (Gieryn 2002:35), traditional relationships acted as a guarantor of coordination between culture and architecture.

The process of modernization, along with a move towards Westernization, however, discredited these

relationships and building practices. Modernization brought the gendered ideals of progress, rationality, and authenticity to Iranian society, embodying new forms of male subjectivity (Felski 1995; Baydar and Heynen 2005). Moreover, according to philosophers Adorno and Heidegger—although coming from different perspectives—modernity and dwelling are incompatible concepts and cannot be reconciled (Baydar and Heynen 2005).

The disruption of dwelling patterns couples with the modernization process and transforms houses into predominantly market-oriented economic capital. These rapid changes began during the industrial revolution, which spurred the mass production and industrialization of housing (Diargahe Shahr Co 2015). Accordingly, form and function replaced traditional knowledge as a driving power behind architecture in the designing process. Thus, the driving forces of experiential knowledge, tradition, and culture lost influence over architectural designs (Rapoport 1969). Ultimately, buildings reflect power dynamics (Gieryn 2002), and in this era of hyper-globalization, decision-making powers lie less and less at the grassroots level.

In Iran, modern architecture brought the same lack of connection with previous cultural practices to the Iranian architectural context. In the 1960s, the Shah embarked on a modernization program, bringing the industrial revolution to Iran, along with changes to economic and material expectations (Hetherington 1982). Housing forms and everyday life practices also changed. Living patterns shifted away from the extended family living to nuclear families, and life in the historic districts and neighborhoods expanded beyond these areas with the arrival of automobiles. In the newer parts of the cities, it became more common to construct housing along a grid and

to include resident complexes and apartment towers. These rapid changes and their inconsistency with the traditional Iranian ways of life, this “unfriendly architecture” (Dawson 2008), disrupted Iranians’ everyday lives. The 1979 revolution marked an end to any feelings of affinity to Westernization. However, modernization clung fast, and apartment living has become a norm. This raises the question of how Iranians agentically navigate the gap between more engrained, traditional cultural practices around the home and their newer living arrangements in apartments. We should note that the rise in apartment living is unequally distributed across classes, which we will discuss more below.

These rapid changes potently impacted women in the realm of home and society. With the increase in the level of education and occupation of women in paid jobs outside of the home (Fazeli 2020) and the inevitable modernization process, the architectural changes led to creating spaces where women had more opportunities to come out of the backstage of the house and play a more visible role in the public arenas. This does not mean architecture had a deterministic role in bringing these changes to Iranian society, but we acknowledge its role as an accelerator of such processes and how people have to agentically engage with new forms of dwellings as they relate to cultural hospitality practices and privacy borders.

Additionally, today, people outside and inside Iran often move several times during their lifetime in a highly globalized world (Diargahe Shahr Co 2015) rather than remain established in one place during their life span. We argue that neighborhood relationships also changed in line with these processes, resulting in more limited neighborhood relationships and more conflicts among residents, especial-

ly in apartment buildings and residential towers. We take the neighborhood relationship changes as a significant sign of disruptions to the Iranian way of living. Our study examines the dwelling pattern shifts in Iran through the lens of cinema by focusing on neighborhood relationships and everyday life entering and exiting practices of residents at home. Since these practices are home-based and oriented around both hospitality and privacy, we will now turn to a discussion of privacy and the home.

Privacy at Home

Privacy is a critical concept in Iranian culture. With a long history of habitation and urbanization, Iran has incorporated its history of dwelling, religion, and continuity into Iranian cultural values. Therefore, like other cultural elements, privacy has a complicated nature and comprises different layers in accordance with architectural elements. We begin with a discussion of the definition and meanings of privacy and link this to *home*, as a concept, as a practice, and as a process. We emphasize the contextual nature of privacy and highlight its implications for social order, power, and control. We then explore how people accomplish privacy through their everyday life practices, focusing on the Iranian context. The everyday, on-the-ground practices of privacy take place in the home, so the varying types of homes are perfect places to observe privacy practices and the maintenance of boundaries and the borders of the home.

Erving Goffman (1956) set the tone for the literature on the boundaries between public and private. He postulated a frontstage, where people present their ideal and desired selves, and a backstage, where people can relax their concentrated performance of self. Of course, people are still performing to themselves,

even when alone, but when the curtains are closed and the public act, the public-facing self, relaxes. This framework serves as the basis for many scholars across a variety of disciplines in their analysis of the performance of self and roles (e.g., Goretzki and Messner 2019; Moncada-Comas 2020). Although there have been studies that examine what happens when the frontstage and backstage collide or fail in some way (Miller 2004; Turner, Wang, and Reinsch 2020) or where frontstage norms are subverted and challenged (Coates 1999), we take the opportunity to study frontstage and backstage as a continuum rather than a dichotomy—a continuum that varies in specifics according to the cultural context and which is instantiated through interaction. As such, the process of maintaining the front-backstage continuum is a generic social process (Prus 1987). The interactions we examine, the entering and exiting of Iranian homes, are spatially arranged. As guests are escorted through connected spaces and penetrate the home more deeply, the roles required of both hosts and guests adjust along the continuum of front to backstage, where acts are contextualized by being in (or out) of place (Cresswell 1996). What results is a team performance (Goffman 1956) reifying rituals of the public-to-private transition.

The concepts of backstage and frontstage correspond with the Persian architectural concepts of *andarooni* (backstage; private inner quarter available only to the family) and *birooni* (frontstage; public, social area for hosting) spaces in traditional Iranian houses. Iranian home architecture involves a variety of forms, functions, and meanings that vary across different regions, climates, cultures, and throughout history. *Andarooni* and *birooni* are context-specific and are in the *darongara* style, that is, an introverted architectural pattern (Pirnia 2008). However, they are the macro-spatial form of *darongara* pattern, which is

very common in traditional Iranian architecture (Diargahe Shahr Co 2015). While they define and separate the more private realm of the home from the semi-public areas, they also manifest patriarchal relationships in the form of architecture (Fazeli 2008). Jafar Shahri (1988:407) investigates the position of Iranian women in the house domain during the Qajar dynasty era (1789-1925). He indicates that women used to be present mainly in the *andarooni* realm of the house, which included the more private places of the home. However, their presence in the *birooni* place was limited as they were mostly absent in public spaces outside the house.

Andarooni and *birooni* provided different functions for the members of the family. While *andarooni* created a private area at home for the family, the function of *birooni* as a semi-public space allowed men to continue their work at home without interrupting the family's private life. In other words, the *birooni* mediated between the public and private realms of the house. Moreover, according to religious interpretations, *andarooni* used to provide private spaces for women to unveil their hijab and "be protected" from the eyes of *naa-mahram* (any male who is not a brother, a father, a grandfather, an uncle, or a spouse—who is not supposed to see women without a hijab according to Islamic rules). The arrival of new dwelling patterns dramatically challenged *andarooni* and *birooni* spaces and their functions for family members, especially for women. While our study focuses on the interruption of hospitality, a core feature of Iranian culture, more work certainly needs to be done that focuses more directly on women and gender.

Home and Privacy

We combine the literature on privacy and front-back-stage with the literature on the concept of home,

where privacy and boundaries are enacted daily. Saunders and Williams (1988) focus on the meaning of home as a refuge, and they refer to privacy at home as freedom from surveillance and external role expectations. Somerville (1992) identifies six signifiers of home: hearth, shelter, privacy, roots, abode, and paradise. In defining home as it relates to privacy, he argues that home is a space where people can establish and control their personal boundaries. Therefore, the privacy and the boundaries people make at home are noteworthy in terms of how they impact one another. These conceptualizations of the home have been challenged as representative of Western, middle-class perceptions (Jackson 1994). However, the middle-class ideals impacted by modernization in Iran have become entrenched in how people idealize the meaning of home, and thus how people strive to create a home, particularly given the architectural breakdown of *andarooni* and *birooni* spaces (Habibi and De Meulder 2015). People work towards accomplishing "home" with respect to these ideals, even if those ideals are not realized in practice (Tucker 1994; Kusenbach and Paulsen 2013). These ideals may be cultural ideals, such as hospitality in the Iranian context.

As people define the meaning of home differently across class, gender, and different geographical locations, the meaning of privacy at home varies. We argue that the meaning of privacy and how people accomplish it depends on their cultural context and their role within that cultural context. For example, people in the same home may have varying experiences and expectations around privacy that are rooted in gender. Religion, history, and tradition in Iran impact how people accomplish privacy, as we have seen above. Islam, for instance, provides a framework to attribute individuals with various levels of intimacy with their surrounding people,

including different family members. The way Iranians practice privacy also varies across local cultural contexts. For instance, privacy for families in the historical district of Yazd (a city in the center of Iran) involves more rigid and strict boundaries than in Boushehr (a city in the south of Iran near the Persian Gulf). It is important to people in Yazd for women, especially those in more traditional and historic neighborhoods, to protect themselves from *naa-mahram* or “stranger’s eyes” and to wear scarves.

The architectural structures are in line with these practices. There are very few windows on the external walls facing the alleys in Yazd. The climate has also impacted the limited number of external windows. Access to a home and surrounding space is controlled with a surrounding wall and a closed door. In contrast, privacy in Boushehr is more flexible in historic neighborhoods. In Boushehr, the house structure is similar to Yazd. However, the doors in the walls, which surround yard-centric homes, are usually partially open in the historic district. Therefore, the residents always expect people, especially neighbors and relatives, to come in and chat.

The form of family living in traditional houses also differed among the social class. Either a single family or multiple families together occupied the yard-centric houses, mostly in central Iran. Multi-family houses were found among the working class in the lower-income neighborhoods that suffered from poverty and had no choice but to live in communal houses. On the other hand, there were numerous elaborate traditional houses named after their wealthy owners across the country. In this spectrum, many other variations exist that mostly include extended family living in one big house. However, the children of extended families sometimes moved to their houses a few years after marriage.

Women often cover their hair with a scarf in all areas of a traditional house because they know that neighbors or relatives may enter the house during the day. A male neighbor usually says *Ya Allah* loudly when he enters his neighbor’s house to notify them of his presence. Boushehris and Yazdis consider the yard a public space, compared to the private space inside, but they accomplish privacy in the yard differently. Boushehris imagine people outside the house as potentially present in their yards and daily lives. They expect people from outside anytime during the day. Such expectation, however, does not necessarily extend to strangers for people in Yazd. These examples show how privacy is a subjective, fluid concept and differs across geographical and cultural Iranian contexts.

Privacy and Access

People accomplish privacy in homes based on their cultural understandings and “cultural toolkits” (Swidler 1986). Some spaces at home are architecturally more suitable for private life, and some are more convenient for public rituals. Ozaki (2003:105) states that “the front region of the house is a place where performance is given, whereas the back region is where informal behavior and domestic activities take place.” This is in line with Goffman’s (1956) conceptualization of front and backstage. Ozaki (2003) argues that the architectural form of houses is the product of underlying social relations within the household and reflects the interactive use of the back region.

In Ozaki’s definition, the functions of the front and back regions correlate with proportionate access. This is of particular interest to us. The front and back region, and the agency with which these are managed, help us understand how people accomplish privacy in the Iranian context, what series of actions are related to the public or private realm, and what

they mean. As we demonstrate, for instance, the story of *Mum's Guest* revolves around Effat's efforts and struggles to offer her guests hospitality in an honorable way. She is highly concerned about how to represent her family and keep everything in order on the frontstage of her home. Therefore, we see many tensions in various scenes about keeping her private and public realms separate from each other and intact. We observed the similar efforts and struggles in keeping private and public realms separate and distinct from each other in *Leila*, *The Lodgers*, *Mother*, and *Felicity Land*. The main characters are concerned about how they keep the private realm out of reach of the public to control their narrative and their presentation of selves.

Privacy often maps onto spaces through access. Moving into more private spaces equates to more access to the private lives of individuals. On the other hand, accomplishing privacy varies depending on how people decide what information to share and what to keep private. In their sociological review of privacy, Anthony, Campos-Castillo, and Horne (2017:251) define privacy as "the access of one actor (individual, group, or organization) to another." According to this definition, privacy refers to "what people conceal or reveal and what others acquire and ignore" (Anthony et al. 2017:251). Many factors, including the law, social practices (such as levels of supervision or interaction patterns), technology (from architectural elements to smart technologies), and privacy norms, affect access. Christena Nippert-Eng (1996;2010) conducted two seminal studies on how people police access and maintain boundaries in their everyday lives as they negotiate the physical elements of movement in and out of homes and work. She finds that people put in a significant amount of work, which she calls "cognitive engineering," to mark boundaries through daily practices and interactions (Nippert-Eng 1996). In ad-

dition, she argues that we all face a "privacy problem" that is subjective and contextual (Nippert-Eng 2010). In short, privacy is a process—one that involves interactions around entrances, exits, access, expectations, and idealized notions of the home. While we cannot access the cognitive work at play in this study, we can analyze how movies represent this work; how privacy is represented and normalized; how characters perform front and backstage transitions. We hone in on the process of entering a home to tease out the issues of privacy and access that arise at the moment of entrance—which turns out not to be a moment, but a gradual progression towards the inside, as we will discuss.

Privacy and privacy norms have implications for social order, too. Social control, for instance, is highly dependent on visibility. We are certainly familiar with discussions about what should be allowed "in the privacy of one's home" and what should be policed. Recent policy changes around marijuana, sexual norms, and abortion in the United States are an example of this conversation. Privacy has implications for social cohesion as well. It is relevant to the intimacy of relationships (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, 2011) and implies a level of trust, solidarity, and unity. Therefore, "achieving social order requires managing privacy in a way that allows for an optimal balance between revealing and concealing" (Simmel 1950:361). We can thus indicate that privacy is an inseparable constituent and essential component of social order (Anthony et al. 2017). Accordingly, it significantly impacts any micro-level interactions, particularly those involving visitors and residents of a home.

Privacy also intersects with inequality. Having access to places and their attached information as a resource is unequally distributed in society. Therefore, priva-

cy can be “a scarce social commodity” that reflects status, prestige, and power differences (Schwartz 1968:744 as cited in Anthony et al. 2017). In short, visibility and accessibility are unequally distributed within hierarchies (Anthony et al. 2017), and they are “as important structural elements in a bureaucracy as the distribution and delimitation of authority” (Cosser 1961:29). Finally, the allocation of privacy indicates the individual’s or groups’ status and power within a given social context (Nippert-Eng 2010). We, therefore, attend to social class and hierarchies as they intersect with privacy in our analysis. Think, for example, of marginalized groups and how much more easily a warrant might be issued to search their home. Their living spaces are considered less worthy of protection and privacy.

Adding a layer of nuance by acknowledging that access, disclosure of private information, privacy, and front/backstage regions exist on a continuum allows us to more accurately understand interactions as people enter homes. In other words, privacy affects interpersonal relationships, groups, and communities and has implications for group boundaries, cohesion, and collective action. While most of the studies referenced above are focused on Western contexts, we now turn to the accomplishment of privacy in a non-western context—Iran. This allows us to make the strange familiar and to establish interactions around entrances as generic social processes rather than only Western constructs. We ask how people interact with each other when it comes to managing the private-public sphere of their lives. We examine this through Iranian cinema and the portrayal of entrances and exits.

Methodology

We conducted an ethnographic qualitative content analysis to examine neighborhood relationships, hos-

pitality, and privacy practices in 18 Iranian movies. We chose movies set in two different dwelling patterns and local cultural contexts—the traditional yard-centric home and newer apartments or condos. In addition, we focused on films set across regions in Iran. This method allowed us to pay attention to the emerging data in these movies and to code for themes inductively while attending to differing neighborhood relationships in these two types of dwelling patterns. We should stress that one limitation of this kind of study is that we are watching a representation of practices rather than the enactment of practices on the ground. These representations resonate as strong depictions from the perspective and experiences of the Iranian first author, but more importantly, we know that studying representations can be key in understanding what we think, as a society, about our norms.

We approached through the lens of ethnographic content analysis (ECA) (Altheide 1987; Altheide and Schneider 2013), which emphasizes reflexivity as visiting and re-visiting the data allows for sensitizing concepts to emerge (Blumer 1954; van den Hoonaard 1997) rather than applying a codebook as in some forms of content analysis. Not only did we record data from watching the movies, but we memoed throughout the process, including details around our affective engagement (Kavka 2008). We watched and re-watched the movies, allowing themes to emerge inductively “from reflexive fieldwork through constant discovery and comparison” (van den Scott, Forstie, and Balasubramanian 2015:422).

After watching movies and categorizing the sub-themes into major groups, three broad themes emerged: 1. Borders of Privacy, 2. Power Dynamics in the Neighborhoods and among Families, and 3. Communication Forms. Since the data were rich and nuanced, we present each major theme with its relevant subcategories (see Table 1).

Table 1. Main themes

Borders of Privacy	Power Dynamics in the Neighborhoods and among Families	Communication Forms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance and Exit Processes: Thresholds • Inside and Outside 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict Resolution • Women’s Struggles and Action Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horizontal and Vertical Relationships

Source: Self-elaboration.

We chose movies produced after the 1979 revolution in Iran in drama/narrative, drama/social, and comedy genres. This aligns with increased living in apartments and unequal access to traditional, yard-centric homes across age, geographical location, and class. Iranian cinema after the revolution is still predominantly independent, and the Iranian directors who worked independently were able to create movies with less censorship and fewer external, political, and market forces. Therefore, the cinematic image of Iranian homes varies, emphasizing different aspects of the home across various forms of architecture. We chose the movies with specific attention to multiple characteristics, including the Iranian critics’ and popular opinion ranking lists, geographical places, the main place of the story, and years of production. We selected movies, particularly from different regions in Iran, in different decades to ensure the representation of movies over a forty-year period, which included at least a part of the story at home or in relation to home.

We focus much of our discussion around changing neighborhood relationships on *Mum’s Guest* and *Dayereh Zangi*. These two movies are in two different types of homes—a traditional Iranian yard-cen-

tered house and an apartment. They portray neighborhood relationships in two different contexts, and they can be representative of the ideal types of each kind of dwelling in our analysis. We will primarily use examples from these movies so that the reader can have a sense of continuity and follow the stories of the movies, deepening the reader’s connection with the context of a potentially foreign culture. The examples we draw on are representative of our findings across movies.

Dayereh Zangi is a 2008 movie about a girl (Shirin) who claims she had an accident and needs to collect money to repair her father’s car. Her boyfriend (Mohammad) helps her by installing satellites for residents of an apartment to collect his wage and give it to Shirin to repair the car. The story of this apartment begins when Shirin and Mohammad enter an apartment to install a satellite for one of Mohammad’s clients. Coming from various cultural backgrounds, the apartment residents have different levels of religious adherence. The apartment building is in the “uptown” part of Tehran, and the most common point between neighbors is their wealth. All the neighbors live in the same apartment, and the movie focuses on the conflicts they experience due to living near each other.

The other movie is *Mum's Guest*, which Dariush Mehrjui produced in 2004. The movie takes place in one of the older neighborhoods in a poor district of downtown Tehran, in a big yard-centered Iranian house on two levels. The house is a multi-family dwelling divided among at least six families. Effat is the main character. She is also a mother and wife who lives in one part of the house with her husband and two children. In the movie, her nephew and his newlywed spouse arrive as unexpected guests, but Effat and her family are not prepared to host the guests, especially by their cultural standards. They are poor and do not have enough money at the moment to buy groceries and prepare food for their guests. The neighbors notice their situation and help them hold a suitably fancy dinner. One of the neighbors is from outside the building (Mrs. Akhavan), and the rest live in the same building as Effat, in the multi-family dwelling. The story highlights the level of collaboration and a sense of community among neighbors despite the conflicts and amid financial and emotional struggles.

The 16 other movies (18 in total) we chose, cover a spectrum—from highly elaborate yard-centered houses to small apartments. One end of the spectrum is traditional Iranian houses—which are diverse across varied cultural contexts and geographical regions of Iran (*Mum's Guest* [2004], *A Cube of Sugar* [2011], *Gold and Copper* [2010], *Bashu, the Little Stranger* [1989], *Pop* [2014], *When the Moon Was Full* [2019], *Mother* [1991], *Where Is the Friend's House?* [1987], *Just 6.5* [2019], *Children of Heaven* [1997])—and yet always yard-centric. The other end of the spectrum consists of apartments of different styles, primarily reflecting the residents' class more than any other characteristics (*Dayereh Zangi* [2008], *The Lodgers* [2000], *A Separation* [2011], *Felicity Land* [2011], *Just 6.5* [2019, included both patterns]). There is another

type of dwelling roughly in the middle of the spectrum—the yard-sided houses surrounded by walls around the yard, resulting from the transitioning time from tradition to modernity in Iran (*Shokaran* [2000], *A House Built on Water* [2003], *Unruled Paper* [2002], *Leila* [1996]).

In these 18 movies, we found several ways of portraying home—home as a place of retreat and refuge (*Where Is the Friend's House?*; *Leila*; *Children of Heaven*); home as a communal space (*Mum's Guest*); home with its associated feelings connected to the presence of mother (*Mother*; *Mum's Guest*); home as a unifying space for the extended family and/or neighbors (*Pop*; *A Cube of Sugar*); home as a place of uncertainty and betrayal (*Felicity Land*); and home as a place of loneliness and terror (*A House Built on Water*; *Just 6.5*).

The familial and neighborhood relationships and friendships these movies portray also vary. Each movie focuses on some specific aspects of these relationships, that is, neighbors as members of the family or even closer than family (*Mum's Guest*); neighbors as hostile unwanted intruders of privacy (*Dayereh Zangi*; *Bashu, the Little Stranger*); or neighbors with both hostile and friendly characteristics (*The Lodgers*). These movies demonstrate how neighborhood relationships, like a mirror, reflect the transition of the way of living and associated cultural practices from yard-centered houses to apartments. We indicate how movies depict privacy borders as having changed in this transition and how people adapt to the new, structured, architectural borders of privacy and their affiliated constraints by negotiating them through their agentic actions and interactions. We will go through each of our main themes to examine how privacy is enacted at home, paying particular attention to agency, neighborhood relationships, and hospitality practices.

Borders of Privacy

Entrance and Exit Processes: Thresholds

As we watched representations of entering and leaving, privacy emerged as one of the main themes. The entering and exiting processes have certain rituals and formalities. How do people perform the rituals of moving from one place to another? How do these processes take shape in each type of dwelling we introduced in this article?

Thresholds are inseparable spaces in traditional Iranian houses. They regulate and order private and public spaces by controlling the entering and exiting processes. They manage access from the most private space to the public and vice versa. While Bourdieu (1970) recognizes thresholds and doors as “worlds reversed,” his conceptualization does not entirely account for cultures whose thresholds extend through multiple doorways or spaces. These spaces function as consequential mediating zones that make the entrance and exit a gradual experience. Thresholds prepare people to enter a more private or public space in harmony with the continuum of privacy. These thresholds have semi-private or semi-public natures, which people negotiate and navigate as they move between public and private spaces. Ikebuchi (2016:88) defines the threshold as an

environment that defines what must be maintained and/or set aside in an effort to ensure the purity and clear delineation of each realm...it is not simply an empty space between two spaces: it is a space where practices and ideologies from both sides are negotiated, played out, embraced, and sometimes discarded.

The difference between the nature of the thresholds in these movies and Bourdieu’s definition is that rather than connecting two completely different worlds, they manage and unify the attached spaces. They are liminal transition spaces that keep the Goffmanian frontstage and the backstage in their places and create a continuum between them. Thresholds in traditional Iranian houses not only prepare the people to pass through different spaces but also bring them together and present them as a whole. We argue that thresholds unify two main arenas in traditional Iranian houses, *andarooni* and *birooni*, which differ dramatically in terms of privacy and access. The representation of entrance and exit processes in the movies demonstrates that there are two or more separate thresholds for each arena to control and manage access to the other.

The first arena is the yard which has more public characteristics. Family members can gather together in the yard with each other or with their guests (i.e., in *Leila*, *Mother*, *A Cube of Sugar*, *Mum’s Guest*, and *Pop*). The door, the corridor (*daalan*), and the *hashti* (an octagonal vestibule connecting the corridor to the yard) are the thresholds mediating between the public world outside the yard’s surrounding walls and the semi-private realm inside the yard. For instance, after entering through the door of the yard, guests pass through the corridor in *Mum’s Guest*, *Mother*, and *A Cube of Sugar*, along with residents who welcome and greet their guests while they accompany them inside. Passing through sequential spaces of the corridor, *hashti*, yard, and the Iranian-style porch, or *eivan*, from more public spaces outside towards the more private area of the home, prepares guests to enter the house and the occupants to host them. While thresholds can disrupt the existing order with

their messiness and contradictory nature (Ikebuchi 2016), the sequential stages of traditional Iranian houses create order. In other words, people move gradually through spaces from public to increasingly private ones as they pass the *hashti*, yard, and porch and then withdraw similarly when they exit.

Screenshot 1. *Eivan* (porch) is a threshold that mediates between the yard and the inside of the house



Source: *A Cube of Sugar*.

We observed these gradual and sequential processes in *Mum's Guest* with careful attention. Four spaces with different levels of privacy mediate between the inside and outside of the house. When a neighbor, a friend, or a stranger rings the door's bell from the alley, at least one person from inside the house goes to the yard and opens the yard door. Accompanying the guest from the yard's door to the inside, and vice versa, is necessary and a part of the entrance and exit ritual. This makes the entering or exiting process a gradual one. For example, when the visitors entered her house, Efat's husband accompanied his colleagues from the yard's door, through the different spaces, to the inside of the room (1:03:20).

Screenshot 2. The gradual process of entrance and welcoming guests



Source: *Mum's Guest*.

A similar process happens in *A Cube of Sugar*, *Gold and Copper*, *Bashu*, *the Little Stranger*, *When the Moon Was Full*, *Mother*, and *Where Is the Friend's House?* Interestingly, this process is less formal in *Pop* and *Bashu*, *the Little Stranger* (the movies from the south and north of Iran, near the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea). The yard door is usually open in *Pop*. There is no wall to surround the yard in *Bashu*, *the Little Stranger*, as the architectural design complies with the climate and the work on the rice fields. Accordingly, the entrance and exit processes involve less formality, and the residents only accompany the special guests or strangers once they enter the yard. In other words, the level of intimacy and the borders between private and public are defined differently, at least in the north and south of Iran, compared to the center of Iran. Privacy norms, borders, and privacy management are thus portrayed differently, but in both cases, they are instantiated through interaction. Entrance and exit processes in these movies show how people accomplish privacy differently by passing through spaces in various re-

gions of Iran, with different climates, geographical characteristics, and cultures.

The second arena is closer to “inside” the house—the *eivan*, a threshold that mediates between the yard and inside the house, acts as a more private space than the yard. The *eivan* is also accessible to guests and relatives. A regular, Western porch is a place to pass through rather than to stay. The *eivan*, however, draws a fine but invisible line between the private “inside” (of the actual building of the house) and the semi-private “outside” (which is the yard and the rest of the open space of the house). The *eivan* exists as a liminal space, but one where you can linger, unlike the porch. This shows the degree of fine detail in the transition from public to private, with many stops and liminal spaces in between. In *Mum’s Guest*, we observe that Effat serves dinner for the guests on the *eivan* (see screenshots 3a and 3b). Note that Effat faces the private inside of the house, with her back to the yard, while her guests face the yard. They both occupy this liminal space, but their orientation speaks to their membership in the space and whose front and backstage are being managed.

Screenshot 3a. Serving food in the *eivan*



Source: *Mum’s Guest*.

Screenshot 3b. Serving food in the *eivan*



Source: *Mum’s Guest*.

While drawing a line between the public and the private is controversial and full of ambivalence and contradiction (Ikebuchi 2016), the corridor, *hashti*, and *eivan* create continuity and coherence. They are transitional spaces with a character of their own and become a place that offers stability and standing. Therefore, in addition to Ikebuchi’s (2016) argument that thresholds can both order and disrupt, we add that they have unifying and ordering characteristics in traditional houses, establishing norms and degrees of frontstage and backstage. The worlds may be reversed on either side (Bourdieu 1970), but there are anchoring norms and a place where these worlds intersect and mingle.

The movies portraying the apartments, such as *Day-ereh Zangi* or *The Lodgers*, show there is no guard (or host) to control the entrance or exit process. Additionally, there is no yard to create a gradual process for entering the home. Instead, each unit has a bell near the apartment’s door so that people from the outside can ring-push a button to ring the bell and get a family member’s permission to access the lobby, elevator, or staircase. This process can even start from the parking lot instead of the lobby for residents or visitors with cars. The entering and exiting

experiences are not as sequential as in traditional houses and differ in pace, design, and function. Thus, the apartment threshold's meaning contrasts with that of traditional Iranian houses. Contrary to traditional houses, thresholds of apartments, where visitors have their first interactions with residents, are not spaces to linger. Their function is restricted to connecting two spaces (inside and outside the apartment) and allowing people to pass through them to reach another space. While there is still gradual movement from a parking lot to a lobby to an elevator or stairs to the doorway, the architecture prevents a genuine sequential process of *accompaniment* through gradual thinning frontstages and thickening backstages.

While the gradual entrance and exit process in traditional homes resonates with and regulates the Iranian *hospitality work*, we can also see the disruption in apartment buildings of the gradual process of entering and exiting through the lens of hospitality. For instance, when guests exit from the unit in the *Felicity Land*, Yasi closes the door behind them. Also, nobody will accompany them when they enter the apartment building until they get to the unit's door. We argue that the apartment suspends hospitality work for Iranians, especially in relation to entrance and exit processes. No family member accompanies the guest to facilitate the guest's entering and exiting. Therefore, there are fewer opportunities to linger and to have a conversation on the way in or out. This directly counters cultural hospitality norms.

Entering, the guest passes through the lobby, the elevator, and the hall, which are shared spaces for the residents. There is no space for waiting, being, and negotiating between the public and private realms without any disruption and awk-

wardness of encountering unwanted strangers or other neighbors. These examples show how the meaning of threshold decreases and collapses into a single point rather than a series of spaces, in this new dwelling pattern, without necessarily providing the possibility of experiencing various stages of liminality and transition. The corridor and the elevator are the only spaces connecting the lobby to the homes. Narrow hallways do not encourage accompaniment. Their function is restricted to moving people through various areas on the way to a destination.

Hospitality is all about the journey for Iranians, but the end space, "inside," becomes the goal within the architecture of the apartments. We can see the thresholds' *disruption of order* in various movies such as *Dayereh Zangi* and *The Lodgers*. In *The Lodgers*, there is a moment where the tenants make peace and start negotiating over who should host the construction workers and other neighbors. However, a process of serious negotiating for who gets to offer hospitality, which could take a long time in a traditional house, becomes shortened and simplified. The architectural structure does not allow residents to perform their hospitality work. When everyone enters the building, they immediately face the narrow space of the staircase. While all residents insist on hosting everyone, Abbas Agha wins the negotiation because his home is located on the ground floor, right near the staircase. He has already opened both slides of his unit's doors and leads everyone to enter his home. In a similar vein, the door closing behind the guests in *Felicity Land* demonstrates the sharp suddenness of the departure, the lack of liminal space, and the failure of the characters to mitigate the messiness of the unfriendly architecture and the awkwardness and suspension of the Iranian hospitality rituals.

Screenshot 4. Inviting guests inside the apartment



Source: *The Lodgers*.

Inside and Outside

With two different arenas in the house, two main borders exist in the realm of a yard-centered house, as shown in the movies. From the inside out, the first border separates the inside of the house from the yard. The *eivan*, discussed above, is not a specific line. It is an extended border, mediating between the inside and yard of the house. It is a semi-private or semi-public space. It is a space to linger. The second set of spaces that work together as a border separates the yard from the alley. These are the *daalan* or corridor, the *hashti*, and the doorway with a portal (*sar dar*, which is an elaborated decorative crescent on top of the main entrance door). Ultimately, the outside wall surrounds the yard and the house, uniting them conceptually as the home. Although the yard is in the center of the home, as in *Mum's Guest*, *Mother*, *When the Moon Was Full*, and *A Cube of Sugar*, it works as a shared space for neighbors in a multi-family house or in a single-family who reside inside the house, and everyone has equal rights to use it. The yard is an inevitable part to pass through in the process of entrance and exit and

works as a mediator between the inside of the home and the outside of it.

In *Mum's Guest*, borders of privacy among neighbors, as opposed to visitors and visiting relatives, are more flexible. In other words, neighbors are closer to each other than relatives. This becomes more apparent when Effat feels stressed out about having her nephew visit them. Effat's family fridge is almost empty, and she has no money to buy groceries. She has no issue with a lack of food when she is hosting neighbors. However, when her nephew and new wife are coming, she brings it up as a concern with her neighbors and asks for their help. She is determined to keep her dignity in her nephew's eyes.

Effat's embarrassment in encountering her nephew and his wife (as guests) in the kitchen as backstage reveals the importance of keeping *aaberoo* (honor and reputation) on the frontstage of her life among the guests. This includes having the ability to offer hospitality along cultural norms. Effat works to conceal her difficult economic situation in front of her nephew. She also instructs her husband to act appropriately, that is, narrate fewer jokes for their guests, to maintain her social status.

The kitchen is one of the most interesting places when having guests in Iran. It is key to how people offer and perform hospitality. In *The Lodgers*, the kitchen is still a defined place with walls (contrary to open-concept kitchens that became more prevalent later in the apartments), where the hosts negotiate how to serve the guests in the best way. It is a clear backstage area. No guest enters the kitchen, and the hosts lead the guests to the best part of the living room to be served. On the other hand, the kitchen gets a more public characterization in the more contemporary apartments, such as in *Felicity*

Land. In line with the changes in the structure of the homes in offering less sequence and continuity, the level of formality decreases. This also affects the hospitality work and the nature of interactions between hosts and guests, particularly where a formal reception of guests is the backbone of Iranian hospitality. As we observed in *Felicity Land*, friends rush into the kitchen and contribute to preparing the dinner. They succeeded in dealing with the hosts' levels of *ta'arof*—a widespread Iranian ritual of verbal and non-verbal communication and performing mutual deference (Maghbouleh 2013), which Majd (2009:65) described as “the great national trait [of] exaggerated politesse, modesty, and self-deprecation that Iranians seem to be born with.” Eventually, they pushed the boundaries of hospitality towards a much less formal tone. In apartments, kitchens are easier to access, view, and breach than in yard-centric houses. Also, the bedrooms are not completely out of sight. More importantly, bathrooms—as the most unpleasant spaces, usually in the far corner of a traditional house—are in the same space as other parts of the apartment.

Since the appearance of the apartments, the meanings of inside and outside, and shared and semi-private spaces have changed. Controversy over defining the boundaries of different spaces caused conflicts between neighbors in *The Lodgers* and *Dayereh Zangi* and severe legal and moral dilemmas in *A Separation*. There is relatively little clarity in the definition of shared spaces in apartment buildings. Some residents use rooftops to install their satellites and consider it a public place, such as in *Dayereh Zangi*. However, other residents consider it illegal or against religious values (because of its uncensored content). Khosrow, a religious, traditional wealthy man, complains about people installing satellites on the rooftop. Similarly, while some residents use

the roof as a place to hang their family's clothes after washing and drying them in the sun, Khosrow disapproves. He considers the rooftop a semi-private place and insists that men should not go on the rooftop because the clothes of wives and children are hung there and should not be seen. The more open-minded residents disagree with Khosrow's definition of shared spaces. Each resident tries to impose their definition of shared spaces and manage the apartment building based on their system of values.

Another example of tension over a lack of consensus regarding defining borders occurs in *The Lodgers*. The rooftop is a public space for some residents and a private space for others. A tenant whose unit is the closest to the rooftop considers it his space and uses it as he wants. He creates a garden and limits the other residents' access to it. It leads to a crisis over who has the right to occupy space and who has not.

Similar to *The Lodgers*, the staircase and the lobby are public spaces in *A Separation*. The neighbors have a bit of interaction on the staircase. However, as long as it is not necessary, the neighbors avoid interacting with each other in the shared spaces. In *A Separation*, Nader kicks Razieh (the grandfather's caregiver) out of the apartment because she left the grandfather alone and is accused of theft. Despite Razieh's insistence on her innocence, she is expelled from the apartment and then she falls down the stairs. A moral question and crisis appear concerning the definition of the inside and outside of the home. The law also becomes confused about how to judge Nader's behavior towards Razieh. The rest of the story revolves around the boundary of where the “inside” of the home ends and the “outside” of the home begins. Why is there no consensus on defining the inside and outside? What does

such a crisis tell us about living in an apartment? Would Nader do the same thing if he knew Razieh was pregnant? In fact, the existence, meaning, and usage of the public space and the border that separates the two realms from each other are obscured in the apartment. While the borders of the units in the apartment are more rigid among neighbors, the border of public space is blurred and disrupted in comparison with the yard-centered houses, that is, in the *Mum's Guest* or *A Cube of Sugar*.

Power Dynamics in the Neighborhoods and among Families

Women's Struggles and Action Strategies

In *Mum's Guest*, the story takes place in a traditional Iranian house in the south of Tehran, the capital of Iran. History, tradition, and religion are critical elements in the movie. People are from a low economic class in this neighborhood. The main character, Effat, is a woman who is also a wife and a mother. She runs the household, and the rest of the family obeys her rules. While Effat is a housewife and does not work outside the home, she has the most control within the house. This also puts the responsibility on her shoulders. If there is any disorder in the home realm, it is first directly attributed to Effat and brings into question her management skills. Effat's high sense of responsibility and her efforts to represent her family among their guests in the best way possible demonstrate the amount of pressure she feels when encountering, and especially in hosting, others. However, in such a traditional context, she is also equipped with the community's support and overcomes the situation with their help.

While a traditional context provides some opportunities for women to exercise power, it also limits their

abilities to act outside of the expected framework. As discussed in the above sections, the way people negotiate and accomplish social cohesion and privacy challenge or maintain the social order (Anthony et al. 2017). In *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, Naei, the main character, is a woman working at home and on the land for harvesting. Her husband is working far away, out of town. She is from the working class and manages economic errands at home with hardship. Even though she is poor, she shelters Bashu, a child war refugee whose appearance and language are different from the people in the village. The people in the village never accepted Bashu—a child who escaped alone on a truck from the Iran-Iraq war from the southwest of Iran—as an insider. When Naei saw Bashu struggle for his life, she decided to adopt him no matter what. Without her husband's and relatives' approval, she faced bitter controversies and complaints on their behalf. However, Naei exercised action strategies in this difficult situation to defend her decision about Bashu by pushing her relatives and neighbors out of her collective life. In this way, Naei, a woman in a highly traditional context who was expected to obey the norms and expectations, became a rebel and put her life in jeopardy to protect Bashu, "a little stranger."

Maxwell and Aggleton (2011) used the concept of agentic practices to explain how young women, motivated by their provoked emotional reaction, "take their power" back in an unequal power situation with their partners. We extend the realm in which women "take action" and concur that taking power back is an agentic practice Naei exercises in the relationship with her extended family and neighbors living in a patriarchal-dominant village. While social orders require stability and norms, Naei interrupted stability in the village by exerting her agency to oppose expectations. She capitalized on the norm

of her home as her private realm of decision-making to gradually establish firmer boundaries between inside and outside. This correspondingly increased her ability to make decisions unhampered by the influence of others, although she could not decrease the judgment of others. Naei was able to become more independent and not leave the final decision to her husband or the extended family in her husband's absence. Once she thought out of the box to defend her stance and used her agency to do what she believed was true, contrary to the village norms, she refused to step back and let others impact her in making the decision.

Contrary to *Mum's Guest* and *Bashu, the Little Stranger*, *Dayereh Zangi* takes place in a new apartment in one of the northern neighborhoods of Tehran. In this apartment, people are from the upper-middle class and are mostly wealthy. The apartment manager, Mahnaz, is an educated woman and a school principal. Mahnaz is also a mother and a wife, and she is engaged in household work, as well as other jobs outside of the home. *Dayereh Zangi* is an example of a shifting era in Iran during which Iranian women increasingly experience engaging in paid employment outside the home.

While modern ideals have encroached on the lives of the upper-middle class residents of the apartment in this movie, and the architecture also brings opportunities for women to make their work more visible, we still observe the new forms of gendered relationships. Women's employment increases, but they are still expected to get the majority of household work done. While men also experience these changes and may become more involved in household work, as the husband does in this movie, men's engagement at home is not quite expected. *Dayereh Zangi* portrays the husband's participation in run-

ning the home as a goodwill gesture to "help" his wife. Thus, we see another way in which an ambiguous definition of inside and outside of apartments implicates relationships. In addition, the architecture of the apartment in *Dayereh Zangi* makes the kitchen more visible, and less of a backstage space. A reason behind an unequal transformation and the continuance of the male gaze dominance in the home's realm is traceable in the ideals of modernity. As Baydar and Heynen (2005) mention, modernity was not concerned with equality and fairness, but with dominance, reason, and courage in opposition to the capacities of care.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution appeared as another significant theme connected to entering, exiting, and time spent around privacy boundaries in these Iranian movies. In *Dayereh Zangi*, the story occurs in a new and modern apartment, while *Mum's Guest* occurs in a traditional home. Familial relationships, neighborhood relationships, and the people's different ways of interacting with each other let us compare the power dynamics in these two dwelling types. Here, we turn to the context and interactions around conflicts, a consistent theme across the movies.

In *Mum's Guest*, when Yousef (the husband) attacks Sedigheh (the wife) because of some contention over his addiction, all the neighbors appear in the yard and try to calm them down. Effat and her husband had a significant role in solving the situation as a more established, middle-aged couple. During and after this conflict, the neighbors bond, and then, hearing about her woes, they get involved in preparing Effat's dinner. Sedigheh and Yousef's relationship also becomes peaceful again for the time being. The reliance of the neighbors on each other

in conflict resolution shows how the relationship between communal life and traditional architecture is reciprocal and dependent on each other.

The neighborhood relationships have a completely different dynamic in *Dayereh Zangi*. The boundaries are more rigid, and characters champion individualism over friendship and care. Therefore, residents are highly cautious and suspicious of each other. The architectural structure exacerbates segregation and disorder in the relationships. The most serious conflict in *Dayereh Zangi* occurs between neighbors because one of them installs a satellite on the rooftop. The neighbors fell to insulting each other and chasing each other to fight. Mahnaz, the apartment manager, was impartial in the conflict, but she could not find common ground for the residents' controversy over how to use the rooftop. Khosrow threatened to call the police on his neighbors, but his wife did not let him. Abbas, another neighbor who had some conflicts with Khosrow, tried to make peace between Khosrow and other furious residents.

In the meantime, Mahnaz was not at home, and Shirin, a young woman, asked Mahnaz's husband if she could use their bathroom. Mahnaz arrived and saw Shirin coming out of the bathroom. She became suspicious that her husband had a relationship with Shirin in secret. As a result, Mahnaz called the police and told them about Shirin, Mohammad, and the satellite installation. Owning or installing satellites in Iran is illegal, and, finally, police arrested Mohammad, Shirin's boyfriend. The movie portrays the fragile relationship between neighbors, the amount of distrust, and a lack of empathy among them, particularly when privacy boundaries are disputed. The family relationship also follows the same pattern, being unstable and full of doubt, as we see Mahnaz's outrage after seeing Shirin in her home.

This kind of conflict, with poor resolutions and a lack of cohesiveness among neighbors, is representative of the relationships across movies that take place in apartments. Of course, we do not argue that there is an innate way that apartments always structure relationships but rather that, in this case, they have disrupted hospitality norms and impacted interactional expectations. This relates to the changed patterns around entering, exiting, and interacting within liminal spaces—who has the responsibility for maintaining a peaceful and hospitable environment. Families in apartment buildings are not living together in the building in the same way they would share, and understand the spaces of, a traditional yard-centric home.

Communication Forms: Vertical and Horizontal Relationships

We observed that relationships, influenced by the changing architecture of homes in these movies, were either horizontal or vertical relationships. Horizontal relationships occur among different units on certain levels of a building or group of buildings. On the contrary, vertical relationships refer to relationships that occur between different levels of a building. For instance, there is a vertical relationship between the first, second, and third floors of a building. We argue that the yard is the heart of traditional homes and has a unifying character. Yard (*hayat*) means "life." It is a place that usually includes gardens with many flowers and trees and a water fountain (*howz*) in the center. It facilitates the transformation from outside to inside and vice versa. The yard brings the two contrary inside and outside spaces into harmony through sequentializing access. However, for apartment residents, the yard is often absent or exists with questions over the right to access and privacy. We argue that the hori-

zontal relationship is fading in the apartments with units on different levels, and the vertical relationship has become dominant because of the absence of the yard.

In *Mum's Guest*, *Mother*, *When the Moon Was Full*, and *A Cube of Sugar*, neighbors and family members enact a horizontal relationship shaped around the yard. A traditional home, even when occupied by multiple families or extended family, would not be broken up into units on one floor. Rather, the wings of the house would be populated by different families or different adult children. The neighbors and family members have lively interactions, calling across the yard, through windows into nearby homes, and generally expecting to engage with others routinely. The yard is their most significant gathering place. Most of the sequences of *Mum's Guest*, *Mother*, and *A Cube of Sugar* occur in the yard. They discuss matters with each other in the yard, confabulate, cry, play, help, laugh, or even throw a traditional wedding and a funeral in the yard. We argue that horizontal relationships result in centralism, solidarity, and a shared sense of space for defined insiders. A yard is a public place for gathering, which unifies and connects all the residents. A yard is where the neighbors and family members help each other solve their problems, like the members of a unified family. Thus, the yard is the heart of the house in traditional Iranian houses and provides the most important space for different forms of communication and interaction.

However, in *Dayereh Zangi* and other similar movies set in apartments, such as *A Separation* or *Felicity Land*, there is no gathering space for apartment residents. There is no unifying space in the apartments shown in these movies, and we can see the reflections on the neighbor's segregation and conflicts.

Neighbors think of each other in terms of which apartment or unit they occupy. Interactions mostly occur on stairs, on the rooftop, or in the parking lot. Residents move through vertical spaces in ways that do not contribute to a sense of shared destiny, responsibility, or hospitality. In other words, apartments dramatically decreased the amount of interaction and level of mutual understanding over contradictions. This, along with issues around borders of privacy, caused numerous conflicts and discussions among family members and neighbors, as we discussed above.

Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate that neighborhood relationships have changed along with the shift in dwelling patterns in Iran, particularly along the lines of privacy and hospitality. Goffman's frontstage and backstage coexist in layered ways in traditional Iranian houses. As one gradually moves into a yard-centric home, the frontstage thins as the backstage thickens. According to Western literature, thresholds that may disrupt order, here, create order and unity in the traditional Iranian houses through their elaboration and sequential stages. Interactions around thresholds contributed to mutual understanding and care. The yard, for instance, used to be a unifying element at home, bringing nature to the house and providing a proper context to perform elaborate Iranian hospitality. This closeness, however, is transforming in Iranian culture because of architectural changes and cultural influences. The arrival of modernity in Iran, without adaptation to the cultural context, intensified these changes (Hetherington 1982). Our findings highlight the impact of apartment dwellings on Iranian neighborhood relationships and hospitality. While we can only comment on how the presentation of these practices

has changed rather than the practices themselves, further work can reveal how these changes disrupt privacy borders, power relationships, and communication forms, among other things. Also, further research can demonstrate Iranians' agentic and collective practices in localizing the apartments according to Iranian ideals and ways of life. However, given the data extracted from movies, we do see nostalgia for yard-centric homes and the relationships around them due to the deterioration of traditional ways of living. We also see the agentic practices with which people work to practice hospitality despite architectural constraints. Movies portray apartment living as disconnecting cultural values from the Iranian socio-cultural context.

The dwelling pattern shifts to apartments have brought Iranians a new way of life, full of contradictions, tensions, and uncertainties that align with the nature of modernity. The architecture of apartments makes it difficult to maintain dynamics that originated from thousands of years of experiences of living in traditional houses in Iran, for example, their hospitality work. Nonetheless, returning to the past is neither ideal nor feasible. Iran has entered a new era. The role of modernity is significant in igniting

the flame of desire for change. Women, for instance, negotiate patriarchal-dominated power relationships in the apartments, which gives new meaning to the concept of privacy and how to accomplish it. However, we also saw how Naei used agentic practices to take her power back in a traditional home in a small rural town before the prevalence of the apartments.

This study is limited in its ability to observe how people are agentially navigating the constraints of apartment buildings. In addition, we are limited by our choice of movies, and the range of what movies depict. This study merely provides a starting point for approaching how Iranians enact front and backstage practices on the ground, as well as how modernity and globalization impact cultural practices of arriving and leaving. A future direction of study would be to conduct an ethnographic study of how and when people bring traditional hospitality practices into apartment buildings, and how they perform and enact privacy through interactions in those spaces.

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