Historical Study on Gender Identity in Forming Social and Architectural Space: Northern Cities of Iran in Qajar Era

Hosna Varmaghani*, **Hossein Soltanzadeh and Seyed Ataollah Tahaee**

Faculty of Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran
*Corresponding author's E-mail: hosnavarmaghani@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: Due to some ambiguities in defining the domain of gendered space in traditional cities and gaps in the knowledge related to the northern cities in the Qajar Era, this paper examines the conception of the public and private domain in Gillan and Mazandaran cities. We delineate the intricacies of how people of northern Iran conceptualized the public and private domain, and specifically how females have experienced these domains, with regard to the common view of "gendered space". We also describe the role of women and their relationship to space outside of kinship ties. The paper concludes that the northern context to some extent was different from other Iranian traditional contexts, due to the environmental circumstances and livelihood causing the different status of northern women. Therefore these conditions led to a kind of soft boundary between the two realms of public and private life and, thus, allowed the possibility of women's negotiation with public domain more than in other traditional cultures.

Keywords: Gender, Space, Northern City, Qajar Era

INTRODUCTION

"Gender" is a socio-cultural concept that is changed at different times and places. It influences manner of specifying territories and the social domain's properties, through changes behavioral patterns and the two gender's activities in different societies. Physical architectural and urban space covering social spaces is changed according to transformation of the gender's concept at different times and places. The relationship between gender and space has had different essences throughout history of Iran. Sometimes it has remained constant due to stability of socio-cultural indicators in a long time, sometimes it has been changed because of dynasty transformation and consequently changes viewpoint to gender causing the expansion or limitation of the gendered domains.

This paper reviews the relationship between gender and space in the public and private realms in the northern cities of Iran during Qajar era. General hypothesis can be expressed as follows: "The spatial features and application public and private domains have been affected by gender identity and social cultural status of men and women in the Qajar era".

The research objectives are as follows:
• Determining the relationship between "spatial identity" and "gender identity" in the public and private spaces in the Qajar era
• Specifying the characteristics of gendered spaces of architectures and cities in Iran

In the present paper, we could find needed data about the study subject by investigating remained past works, documents, books and articles, travelogues and memoirs. Hence, the historical method and interpretation should be applied.

Review of literature

Goffman believes that the gender difference between the men's and women's social behaviors and actions does not create due to fundamental biological differences between them. But many social practices considered as a natural consequence of differences between the two sexes, are practically the means for emerging those differences (Goffman, 1959).

Socialization is a process by which people, as members of a culture, accept appropriate attitudes, values and behaviors (Schaefer and Lamn, 1992). In this regard, we can define "gender roles" as expected behaviors, attitudes, tasks and preferences that each society considers for the genders (Keller et al., 1994). Socialization perspectives believe that appropriate roles and behaviors for men and women to some extent refer to the teachings learned through socialization process (South and Spitze, 1994). The gender roles are those that define culturally a set of behaviors segregating based on gender. The gender role ideology refers to the value judgments about the proper roles of men and women, or the symbols and attributes that each of the two genders should present (Gibbons et al., 1997). Other researchers define the family structure as an important system defining "gender identity". In this field, they signe to the power factors, patriarchal or matriarchal systems or nuclear and extended family. A part of decision-making power in the family refers to the functionality of the traditional roles of men and women (Ritzer, 1979).

In the word of Millett, "the family has an important essential role in the transmission and internalization of the patriarchal ideology through educating and validating roles and situations for each gender" (quoted in Donovan, 2001). "Almost all traditional family forms were based on men's domination over women. This is commonly accepted in law enforcement" (Giddens, 2007). Rapaport

explains gender relations as a part of the socio-cultural factors affecting house form. "Features such as type and time of family members connections, ways to meet others, women presence in the society and the rate of men and women communication in the exterior and interior home space have affected forming house in every historical period" (Rapoport, 1969).

How humans connect to housing and provide their own privacy involved in how they wear dress, because an important part of privacy is defined by kind of dress and people's attitude to veil. "In the traditional societies, dress is the ability to communicate. It is used in modern societies less than traditional" (Rapaport, 1969). Erikson explains social application of residence as a means for providing the possibility of connecting together and doing activities (Erikson, 1994). The residential space can be an obstacle or strengthening for the social treatments and collaborative activities. Based on Pallasmaa's point of view, "we can't create home at once, but we need to gradually match the individual and familial attitudes towards the world, hence building home need to continuity" (Pallasmaa, 2003).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Gender and space in Qajar era

Iranian women had the specific domain not allowing men to enter during the Qajar's era, as they not available to many of the realms allocated to men. Socio-cultural norms in the traditional society in the Qajar's era specified the internal space of the house belonging to women and the public space outside the home belonging to men. So that, the secure limits of Iranian women in the past centuries and even now in some of the old cities of Persia, have been the interior home space, semi-private space between few houses, deadlock alleys and subsidiary porches in alleys. The woman's identity was defined in the private space.

Investigating the wide range of texts from travelogues and historical sources of Qajar era indicate that traditional society have emphasized on the gender segregation causing formation of "feminine realms" and "masculine realms".

It seems that the tall walls and castellated houses which have mentioned by travelers for describing Iranian houses were the most important symbols of the separation between the private domain and the public realms outside the home.

The data show that two important factors have transformed public spaces into the realms only for men, and have made it increasingly difficult for women to enter these spaces or even completely have forbidden them to contribute to some spaces: first, lack of social security and second, state laws. Figure 1a shows that women from central cities, in Qajar era, were always in house due to domestic work and insecurity.

Figure 1b describes undesirable public spaces due to presence of vandal men and wanderers. Figure 1c illustrates reflection of social structure on gendered structure of traditional city in central Iran. Lubeck and Britts suggested that veiling as practice protects women from harassment in the streets, and thus, provides them urban mobility (Lubeck and Britts, 2001).
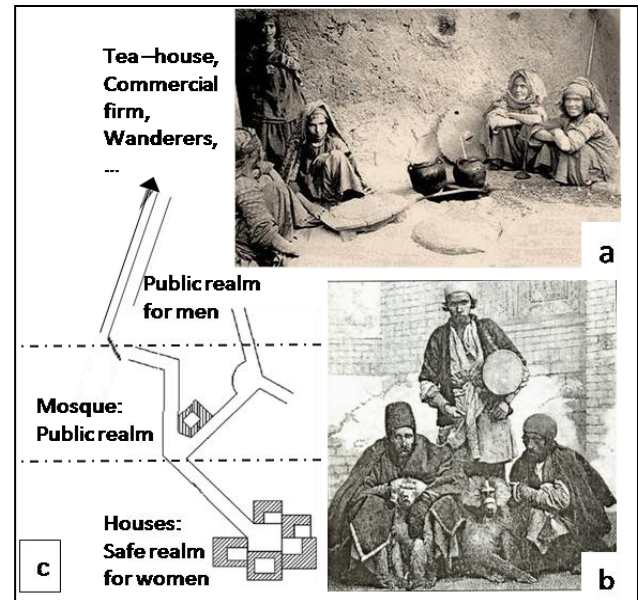

Figure 1. Effect of insecurity on separating gender spaces in traditional cities (a: Moezi, 2013, b: Benjamin, 2012, c: Author, 2014)

The travelogues and historical texts have reported from public domains that boat men and women present. These spaces include mosques, "Hosseinyeh" for the Moharram mourning ceremony and "Taziyeh", shrines, cemeteries and markets. Studying documents also clarify that gendered spaces and their separation or conjunction have a direct relationship with the social class and level of landlord's wealth. So that the aristocratic houses had two completely separate gendered parts: One, inside (internal part) for women and relative men, and the other, external (foreign part) for men. In these houses founded in the central region of Iran, almost all women's and children's time, except when they went to shopping, party, pilgrimages and public bath, was spent indoors. Figure 2, illustrates this two separate gendered parts in an aristocratic house from Qajar era.
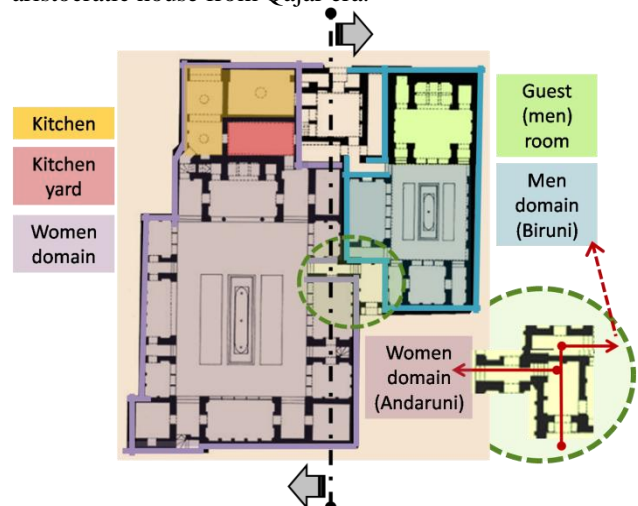

Figure 2. Plan of an aristocratic house, Yazd, Qajar era (Abgineh museum, quoted in Zomorshidi, 2011)

As stated by scholars, ''in wealthy families, the daily shopping is done by servants'' (Khatib-Chahidi, 1981; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2001). On the other hand, if one turns one's view to the lower strata of the community, where most of the people live, the women

had to go out for shopping and to work in order to contribute to the income of their family. Based on Thompson's point of view and in contrast to the elite urban women who protected their status by not appearing on the streets without being veiled and guarded by large retinues, their poorer female neighbors routinely worked at home in cottage industries or outside as peddlers, bathhouse attendants, servants, and so on (Thompson, 2003). This subject, in rural and tribal societies of Iran, has been observed more than urban contexts, due to more outdoor women chores.

For example, Brugsch, who lived in Iran from 1859 to 1861, explained that ''the women's work was not limited to domestic chores'' (Brugsch, 2010). As he observed, "In most of rural societies of Iran, women do the farming in addition to household chores. Men are mainly sleeping, drinking tea and smoking hookah". (ibid). Hence, they had to interact within the public spaces of the Village, especially in farms.

As stated by travellers, in tribal societies, women enjoy of the best situation in family due to their important role in livelihood. This distinction between women of urban, rural and tribal societies reflected in dividing spaces of houses. Tribal people have lived in black- tent and gendered spaces provided through daily activities.

Each tent served as a complete housing unit where places for sleeping, eating, entertaining guests, the kitchen and the granary were arranged in a space of a few square meters. This was based on a systematic arrangement wherein each part of the tent was designated to a particular function. The interesting point regarding an educational and practical approach to the study of tribal architecture is the conventional division of the tent's inner space and its multifunctional use. Figure 3, illustrates each distinct domain of activity within the tent's inner space.
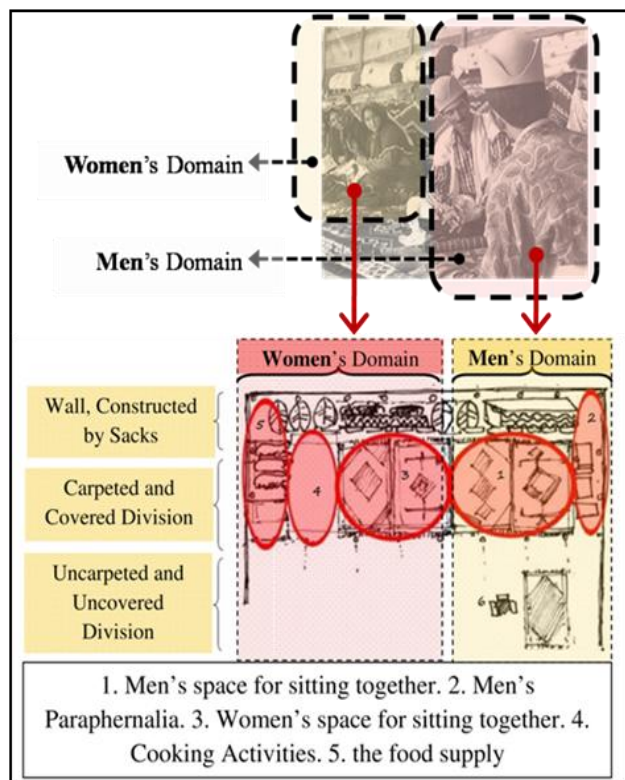

Figure 3. Plan of tribal house (black tent): Soft gendered borders defined by family activities

RESULTS AND DISCUSION

Northern Cities of Iran

Apart from the above discussion concerning women's presence in the public spaces in traditional cities in Iran, there is a view that each context has a distinctive approach to that idea which makes it difficult to put forward any generalization for all the societies within Iran. Even in one country, one may find different treatment of the subject which can be linked to the socio-cultural and environmental circumstances developed within that society. In northern societies, the way women interact within public spaces can be investigated in terms of the people's attitudes to privacy, the status of the women and the socio-economic structure of the society. This context was recognized more liberal than other contexts in central Iran related to the women's presence in the public realms out of kin groups.

An interesting point in all travelogues is their particular attention to the specific socio-economic role of women in Gilan and Mazandaran societies. Lady Sheil has written: "I realized that Mazandaran women like most tribal women enjoy a lot of respect, due to their important role in the family"(Sheil, 1983). Della Valle, Italian tourist, has described Mazandaran women as beautiful, and noted that "northern rural people have so good culture and customs that nowhere women in the world have" (Della Valle, 2002). Olearius has written about the relation between northern women's veil, their economic roles and their interactions in public places: "The men and women's duty were separated and specified. The men plowed the ground with the bulls and women were carrying the burden of seeds towards the rice-fields. This occurred when women were wearing the best and most beautiful clothes exposed to neighbors. The men were obliged to irrigate the rice-fields. Women were providing products for packaging. Finally the men were carrying it to houses" (Olearius, 1984). Figure 4, is a photo from Qajar era shows northern women working on rice-fields.

Figure 4. Northern women working on rice-fields, Gillan province, Qajar era (Moezi, 2013)

Considering the above points, livelihood and geographic region are the factors that have changed the gender concept in northern regions against central and southern regions of the country. Thus, gender boundaries were also different and spatial integration was observed more than absolute separation of realms. In these societies, social relations are local and near connections between neighborhoods. For this reason, the social connection between men and women of northern cities are less restrictive than those of central cities. Therefore the

relationship between the house and the neighborhood and surrounding space can be less bounded as well. Here's the verbal communication between people, defines separating approach of the gender spaces. The absence of the rigid boundaries between strange guests and household members, and lack of barrier to verbal and visual communicates have not created any problems from cultural perspective in northern rural community (Figure 5).
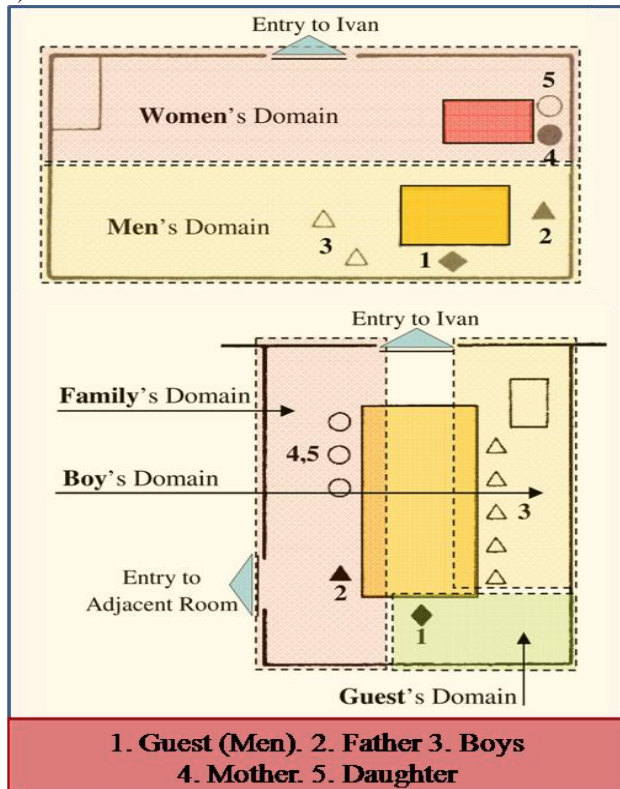

Figure 5. Two samples of northern houses: doing activities considering gender division of an integrated interior space (Bromberjer, 1991).
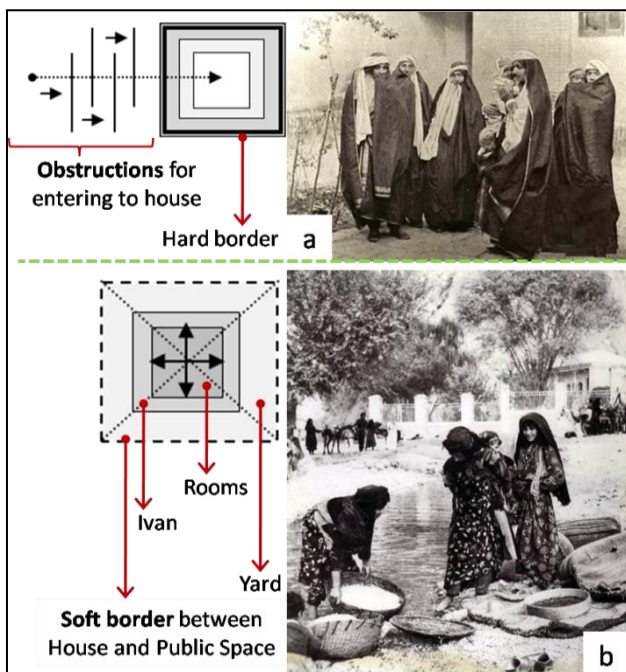

Figure 6. Comparing two contexts from the perspective of the manner of women's presence in the public realm and their houses: a. central cities and b. northern cities (photo a and b: Moezi, 2013)

In the light of the above status, throughout Gilan and Mazandaran history, it is possible to find northern women reaching high positions and becoming the political, in some cases even military and heads of tribe[1].

Carla Serena has written about educational spaces for girls in these areas: "Wealthy girls' education is not more than that of low-income people. It can be found the city's population is interested in learning, due to the number of Rasht's schools" (Serena, 1983).

In keeping with the status of northern women described above, the use of the veil in the public domain can be compared with other Iranian cities. In the central Iran, the women usually were using a black veil in order to go outside the world of the enclosed courtyard and enter the public realm (Figure 6a). But in northern areas in general, the women were used to going out with vivid traditional dress as a response to the social customs and the hospitable and intimate environment (Figure 6b). ''In Gilan and Mazandaran, unlike the rest of Iran, a black Chador is generally only worn for mourning''.

Gender and Space in Northern Iran

Effective factors on the relation between gender and space can be divided into three main factors as follows:

- Gendered Livelihood Role
- Social Contacts
- Climatic Circumstances

Women's Livelihood Role

The economic factors, including geographic region and livelihood approach, change social space. So that, the labor's division and the acceptation of the agriculture and gardening responsibility by women, eliminated the necessity of their limitation to the interior private realm of the home. So, the rate and way of influencing of "gender identity" on "spatial identity" has intensified or weakened according to livelihood practices and environmental conditions in each region.

The difference between public and private domain, domestic and outdoor work and the division of household and social roles have been observed in northern cities more than others. The appearance of the harem, the interior part of houses and intensive veil have been occurred in the patriarchal urban societies, and also prosperous families in which women played less production role and endured less economic burden. Thus, the livelihood economy importance of the agriculture and gardening has improved the women's social status in northern Iran, as well. "The main livelihood activities among farmers are typically undertaken by women. It is not coincidental that the majority of farmers despite pastoralist communities are known due to their matriarchal kinship patterns" (Lenski, 2005).

Social Contacts of Northern People

The words of the tourists to some extent clarify the circumstances of northern people with respect to the presence of women in outdoor spaces. Most important, the working rhythms of women explain their presence in the public spaces. The adult females were responsible for many of the affairs of the house, and more important, for going out and visiting the public spaces.

In the cultural field, determination of privacy and visual realm were less important than the central parts of Iran, due to strong social relations between men and women in the society and the public realms. In general, the privacy has configured based on women's protection. So, in these area in which social security existed and the relations between women and men in the society is essential to perform daily activities, the privacy provided in milder forms (Figure 7).
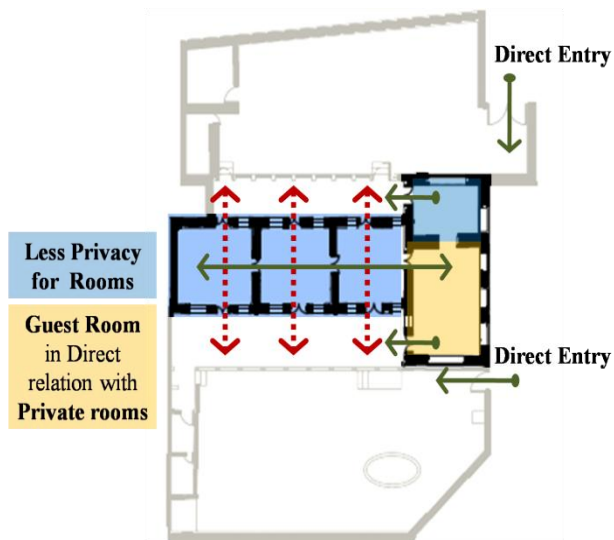

Figure 7. Plan of a northern house in Qajar era, Gilan (Khakpur, 2010)

This indicates that the semantic function of privacy has been the definition of ownership's property and land limits; than providing women concealment in Gilan and Mazandaran. In this society, the concepts of "privacy" and "overcrowding" are more important than men's domination over family. Determining the rate of social relations between the genders in every society arises from human's social interaction. This will mean by some concepts such as privacy, power, gender and religion.

In line with these, the northern woman's identity was one of the most important effective factors on determining the public and private realms, and the gender and common realms. It can be said that the patriarchal system intensifies gender domains. The other variables such as privacy or social position would be effective on this issue. In northern cities, being bounded required for limiting realm and providing privacy was not necessarily emerged by architectural fixed elements and rigid materials. In most cases, this quality was only appeared by semi-porous, semi-fixed or even unusual elements for spatial determination, such as change of context.

Climatic Circumstances in Northern Iran

In the warm and arid climates, the spatial delimiters have been wider due to the need for introverted spaces. In contrast, in wet weather of the northern cities in Iran, the need for air flow in the interior spaces leads to a reduction of delimiters and converting them to the invisible gender boundaries. These points somewhat reduced the tension between the two realms, the strict boundary between the public and private domains. Figure 8, illustrates the open spaces and the large number of openings in northern houses.
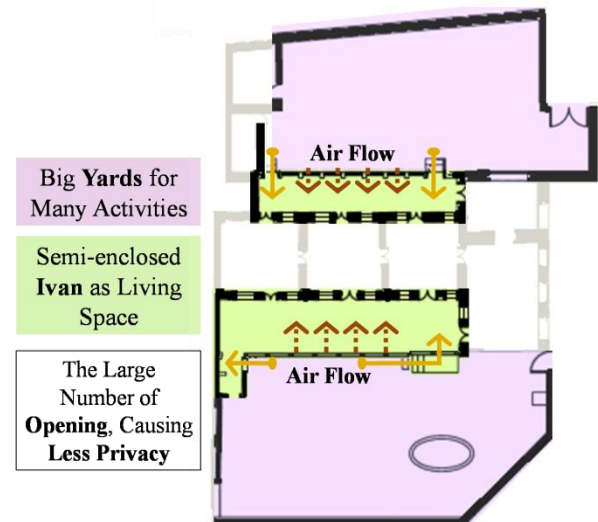

Figure 8. The effect of climatic circumstances on Northern houses

CONCLUSION

We can claim that the perception of privacy in northern cities has been somewhat different from those of other traditional cities as has been pointed out by scholars. Research findings show that the impact of gender identity on spatial identity has been intensified or weakened according to the local climate and environmental conditions in each region. This can be studied on travellers' specific attention to women's lifestyle in different parts of Iran. So, daily behaviors and practices, and participation in social, cultural, economic and productive activities are the most important factors that will help to redefine the social status of women.

Appendix

1. In this regard, there are many witnesses. The reader is referred to the work of (Piruzi, 2012; Abu-Alghasemi, 2010).

REFERENCES

Abu-Alghasemi M.T. (2010). Encyclopedia of civilization and culture of Gilan: The Historical evolution of Islam in Gilan, Rasht, Illia.

Benjamin S.G.W. (2012). Persia and Persians, Translated by Kurd-bacheh, Mohammad hossein. Tehran, Information press.

Bromberjer C. (1991). Housing and Architecture in Rural Society of Gillan, Translated by Gushegir, Alla-din. Tehran: Institution of Cultural Studies and Researches.

Brugsch H.K. (2010). A Journey to the Court of Soltan Sahebgharan, Translated by Kurd-bacheh, Mohammad hossein. Tehran, Information press.

Della Valle P. (2002), travelogues of Pietro Della Valle, Translated by Shafa, Shoa al-din, Tehran, Cultural and Scientific publications.

Donovan J. (2001). Feminist Theory. New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc

Erikson J. (1994). Dwelling Values Aspects of Housing Quality. ENHR Conference, Glasgow.

Gibbons L, Beverly A, Dennis W. (1997). Researching gender role ideologies internationally and cross-culturally. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21: 151-170.

Giddens A, Duneier M, Appelbaum R. (2007). Introduction to Sociology, W. W. Norton & Company, Seagull Ninth Edition edition.

Goffman, E. (1959). Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, Anchor Books

Keller S, Light D. (1994). Sociology, McGraw-Hill, New York.

Khakpur M, Ansari M, Tahernian A (2010). Typology of Houses in Old Context of Rasht City, Journal of Fine Arts, Architecture and Urbanism, 14: 29-42.

Khatib-Chahidi J. (1981). Sexual prohibitions, shared space and fictive marriage in Shi'ite Iran. Women and Space, London. 112–135.

Lenski G, Nolan P. (2005). Human Societies, Paradigm Publishers, 10 Upd Rev edition.

Lubeck PM, Britts B. (2001). Muslim Civil Society in Urban Public Spaces: Globalization, Discursive Shifts, and Social Movements. Centre for Global, International and Regional Studies <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgirs/CGIRS-2001-6>.

Mazumdar S, Mazumdar S. (2001). Rethinking public and private space: religion and women in Muslim society. Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, 18(4): 302–324.

Moezi F. (2013). Women in Photo. Electronic Journal of Women in Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies, 28.

Olearius A. (1984). Travelogues of Olearius, Translated by Behpur, Ahmad, Tehran, Publishing and Cultural Organization press.

Pallasmaa J. (2003). Identity, Intimacy and Domicile, http://www.uiah.fi/studies/history2/e_ident.htm.

Piruzi Sh. (2012). Encyclopedia of civilization and culture of Gilan: The Life of Gillian's Women, Rasht, Illia.

Rapoport A. (1969). House Form and Culture, United State of America, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

Ritzer G. (1979). Introduction to Sociology. SAGE Publications, Inc, New York .

Schaefer FT, Lamn RP. (1992). Sociology. Mcgraw-Hill, New York.

Serena C. (1983). travelogues of Madam Carla Serena; People and Rituals in Iran, Translated by Saeedi, Ali-asghar, Tehran, Zovar press.

Sheil L. (1983). Lady Sheil Memoirs, Translated by Abu-torabian, Hossein, Tehran, New press.

South S, Spitze G. (1994). Houswork in Marital and Nonmarital Households. American Sociological Review, 59: 327-347

Thompson E. (2003). Public and private in Middle Eastern women's history. Journal of Women's History, 15(1): 52–69.

Zomorshidi H. (2011). Iranian Architecture and Residential construction from Qajar Era till Now. Iranian Islamic City, 3: 1-10.