

# Privacy in Arabian Architecture: Past and Present Differential Understanding

## —Part I: Egyptian House Designing

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**How to cite this paper:** Touman, I. A., & Al-Ajmi, F. F. (2017). Privacy in Arabian Architecture: Past and Present Differential Understanding. *Art and Design Review*, 5, 258-276.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/adr.2017.54022>

**Received:** July 20, 2017

**Accepted:** November 27, 2017

**Published:** November 30, 2017

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### Abstract

This study tackles the issue of privacy in Arabic house design with reference to aspects such as form, style and design in the past and present. Through a historical review of Arabic house design with particular focus on the Egyptian model, attention will be paid to different factors affecting the issue of privacy in house design. The study will emphasize current considerations resulting in the contemporary status of the privacy. The findings and recommendations of this study are presented as additions to the existing knowledge base in the design process of the Arabic house, and provide data that may be used as a guideline by architects, designers and researchers with regards to the issue of housing privacy.

### Keywords

Architecture, Privacy, Arabic House, The Dwelling Site, Urban Environment, Noise, Islamic Culture and Civilization, Sociological Traditions, Socio-Economic, Socio-Cultural, Ecology, Egypt House, Haramlek, Salamlek

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## 1. Introduction

Lack of privacy is the common shared value in Arabic house design, despite the fact that privacy is an important social value. The overwhelming changes in Arabic society and many other factors were the reasons for the change in the understanding and criteria of privacy, and people seem to be accepting the new situation despite its negative sociological and psychological consequences.

This study will discuss the privacy question as an urgent social need in the past and present. It will also clarify the different criteria impacting privacy. It will show how important privacy is to the Arabic society in general and to the Egyptians in particular. It will explain the traditional features of privacy, show-

ing how contemporary architecture can make use of it. Conclusions and recommendations will help architects attain proper privacy standards in contemporary house design

## 2. The Privacy and Its Different Levels

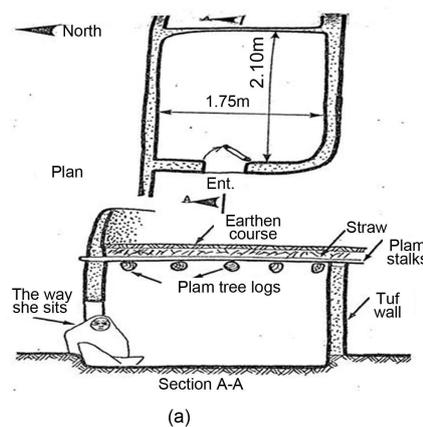
Privacy is a basic need. It is really a complex and varied phenomenon that provides someone with individualistic desire through a social convention. It may allow individuals to become absent and, in effect, invisible, through their strong social interaction. It allows individuals to separate their domains and to effectively separate their house and their life from both street and neighbors, and hence from the activities thereof. But they remain sociologically and psychologically connected with society. Accordingly, privacy is something that links isolationism, individuality and uniqueness, to the desire to live as part of a society (Abdel-Fattah & Saeed, 1984) [Figure 1(a), Figure 1(b)]. Privacy is part of an individual's feelings, senses, talents and his or her relationship with others. In other words, there is a relationship between society's hierarchy and its constructed urban environment. Therefore, it is possible to classify privacy into two fields:

1) Architectural privacy, which is related to non-materialistic aspects. e.g. sight, hearing and smell, and;

2) Psychological privacy, which is related to human nature, and is part of an individual's behavior.

In both architectural and psychological privacy, the human scale is the module of an individual's living space, the place, the region, etc. Hence, architectural and psychological privacy can be part of a feedback loop. However, the privacy issue in this treatment of the subject will encompass the following two major factors:

- a) The human space, (dwelling).
- b) The dwelling site.



**Figure 1.** (a) one person's house (1 storey) expresses the minimum space for privacy and individualism illustration; (b) house appears blocking part of street, but expresses the monolithicity of the society where the little house coheres with others.

### 3. The Effect of Different Factors on Privacy

#### 3.1. The Sociological Factor

Any society is a population agglomeration living in one place, sharing both pleasures and the toils. They also collaborate through common roles, organizations, and legislation, as they may differ in their form from place to place, or from one specialization to the other.

Societies can be classified into family, clan, religion, and/or profession. At a certain level, this classification is not applicable, and other categories may apply. These are the nation or nations in different organizations, (Fouda, 1966). This includes codes regulations, facilities; cooperation, participation, cultural; behavioral quality and contributions of the individuals developed new measurements. The latter developed new measurements: individuals' cultural, psychological, and also, developed their constructed environment and its urban content. As a consequence of individual needs, groups differentiate in many respects. Privacy, as one of those individual needs, was the most affected, as the following discussion illustrates:

##### 1) The Influence of Religion

Religious beliefs and teachings are considered to be some of the most influential factors in any society. Religious affectivity is the strongest form of attachment for both individuals and society. Religion has existed in many forms since the dawn of history and many rituals were practiced by groups long before the advent of our heavenly religions. Those rituals, be they magic, dances or medicine, etc., were considered to be society's laws, roles and legislation, and they were obeyed with no argument of any kind exactly as they are in our religions (Saliem, 1985). Thus, religion is considered to be a ruling and organizing set of instructions that no one can discuss, argue, or substitute with personal viewpoints. Islam is unique in terms of its firm teachings concerning social relationships. It calls for strong social interaction and respect for either individual or societal privacy (Ibrahim & Ahwal, 1987).

The Holy Quran pointed out on many occasions the issue of privacy. In Suranur or Light (Yusef, 1983) house privacy, family affairs, and women's privacy were ordained upon people as the following texts illustrate:

*“Ye who believe enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them: that is best for you, Sura (Nur), Aya 27.”* *If ye find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you: if ye arte asked to go back, go back (Aya 28),”* *“say to believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them (Aya 30) “say to believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not reveal their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not reveal their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their brothers' sons, (Aya 31),”* *But when the children among you come of age, let them (also)*

*ask for permission, as do those senior to them (in age): thus does God make clear hissings to you: for God is full of knowledge and wisdom, (Aya 59). Gazing inside the others' houses is forbidden in many of the prophetic teachings. Mohammed the prophet says. "If a man stared at you without your permission, and you hit him with a stick to the extent that you hurt his eye(s), you have done anything to be blamed for".*

Those heavenly texts and prophetic teachings are reflected in Islamic architecture to achieve the required privacy (Abdel-Fattah, & Saeed, 1984).

### 2) Sociological Customs and Habits

In this respect, the author points to the following physically and ecologically, human beings did not change significantly nowadays. Their physiological functions, their senses, desires, life toil and suffering, and, hence, their social interaction are more or less the same (Yusef, 1985). Accordingly, customs and habits, become inheritable, and therefore "sociological traditions" were developed.

One might say that customs and habits are sociological regulations that emerged from Islamic Culture and Civilization. They may be considered to be any nation's law in the form of codes, roles, organizations and legislation. They were, are, and will continue to be the behavioral models of many generations. As those customs and habits provide regulations for society, they are also capable of supplying penalties to accompany any sociological faults, (Saliem, 1985). Customs and habits differ from country to country and develop over time, but every society keeps the primary pattern of its customs and habits as they may develop within the specific human nature of one society, as it was created by the almighty. This differs very much from the patterns seen in Western societies (Abdel-Jawad, 1982).

### 3) Sociological Traditions

Traditions are rules and common shared behavioral patterns that control a specific society at a limited level. Those rules derive their influential force from the society itself. The difference between the custom and the tradition is that the former is inheritable but the latter is constantly developing and being transferred from one generation to the other. A tradition is transferred by groups (society), and this in itself distinguishes it from the inheritable patterns, *i.e.*, customs and habits. The existence of a well-organized group and the continuity of its interaction over time, is by all means the existence of the traditions (Saliem, 1985). Therefore, traditions differ from one society to the other, from period to period, and may develop as a natural reaction of the individuals, e.g. English people's reaction to unacceptable sociological behaviors and their consequent desire to have private houses (Dixon, 1988).

## 3.2. Economic Factors

Economic conditions are vital to accomplish the goal of privacy at different social levels. For example, when seeking privacy in a single-dwelling unit we may add an entrance hallway and a saloon, [Figure 2(a) & Figure 2(b)]. These additions increase the cost of the single unit, so when seeking the economy for the

sake of economy, privacy and the whole architectural criteria will be affected regardless of where this policy is applied (Al Bena 1985). In designing the site, the dwelling units should have a distance ranging from 18 - 36 m between each other to attain the maximum privacy (Figure 3). This greatly affects the economic scale of site designing (Abo Al-Naja, 1988).

### 3.3. Political Factors

Political considerations may be a positive or a negative influence on the privacy question, as politics in general may change the habits and traditions of any country. Accordingly, privacy criteria have varied considerably over time. This

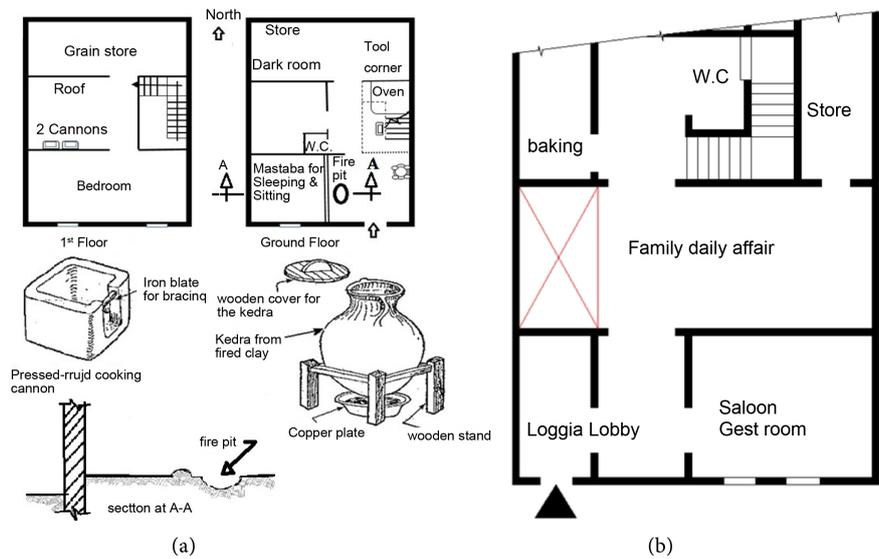


Figure 2. A representation of the growth of the economic factors corresponding to the growth of the house area, (a) typical two story house in rural Egypt (b) represents a bent entrance as a private concept with addition of a saloon (authors representations).

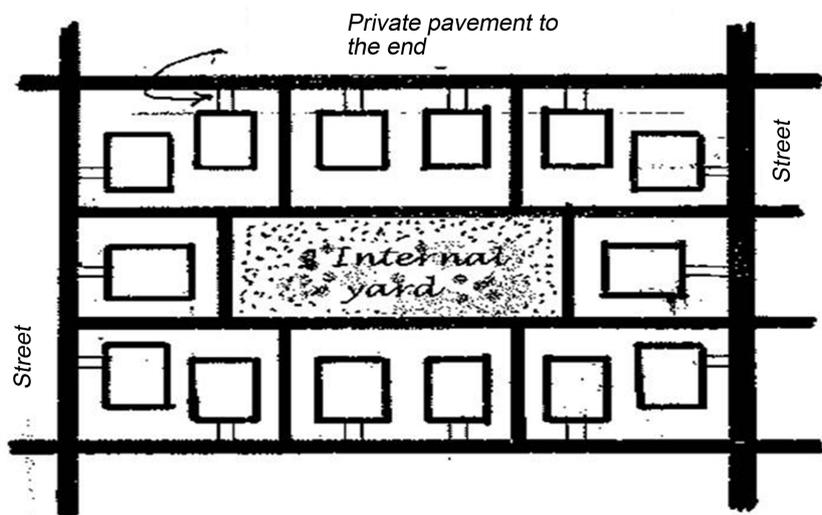
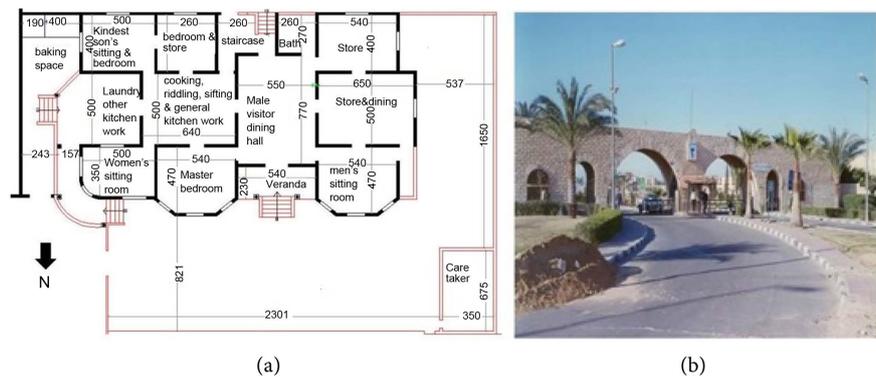


Figure 3. Maximizing privacy considerations with no direct neighbour contact; the houses open directly to the street and increase the distances between houses.

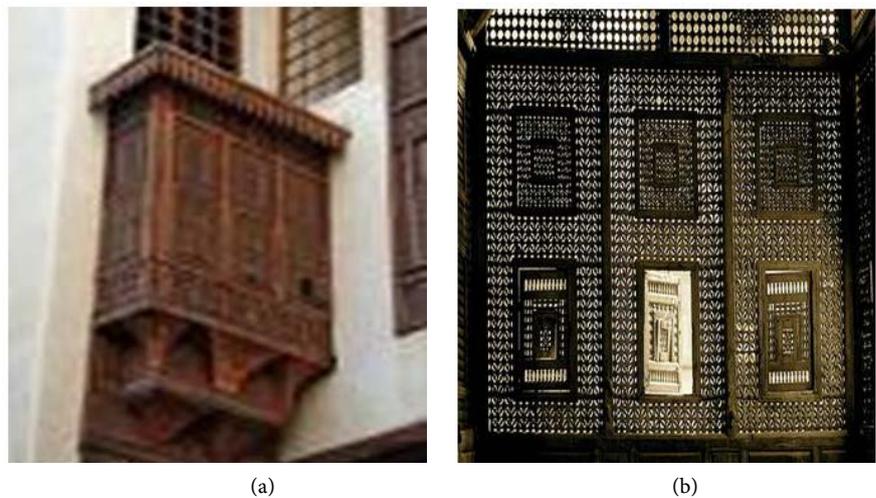
may have resulted in the first instance of city planning, for example, some cities have great walls and huge gates surrounding them for safety or to isolate special groups of people distinguished and classified as of high rank (Abdelhamid, 2005) (Figure 4).

### 3.4. Environmental Factors

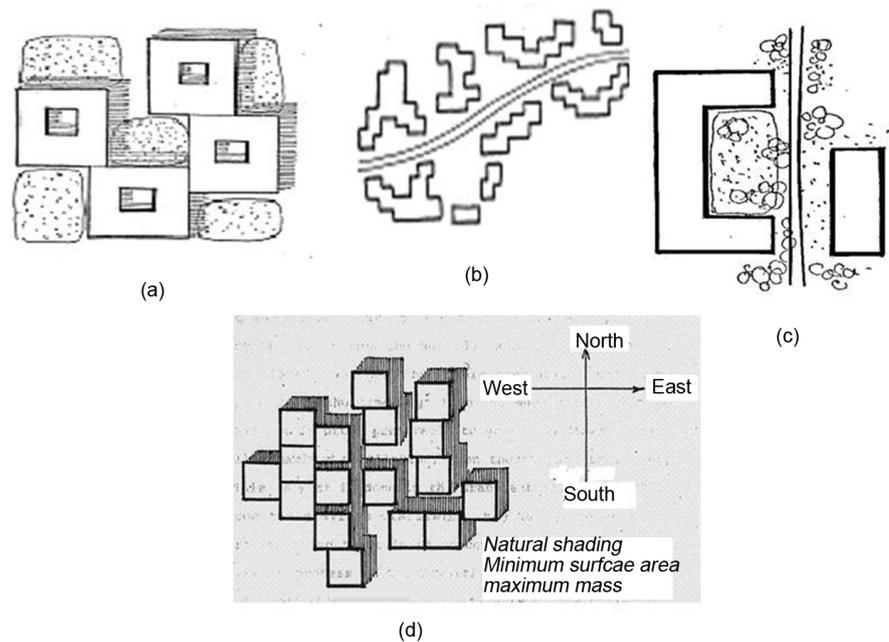
Of all environment-related factors, climate is the most determining factor. It is considered to play a crucial role in the creation of the built shelter and its form. The early man sheltered himself in a cave and experienced both the amenities and the privacy of this type of dwelling. In his efforts to shelter himself against the extremes of weather and climate, men, and in particular Moslem men have developed many types of buildings, one of which is the court house. They used lattice windows to cope with the climatic conditions, Figure 5. Consequently, the court house, lattice windows and other features in designing and building gave him needed privacy as a natural result of sheltering himself against the climate, see Figures 6(a)-(d).



**Figure 4.** (a) Highlyranked person's house surrounding with gated great wall. N.B. the design made and constructed on the site, no professional interference, and the functions are subjected to alteration; (b) gated community.



**Figure 5.** Mashrabiyya as a wooden lattice work (a) inner view (outer view).



**Figure 6.** (a) group construction example; (b) another possible scheme for group construction (c) another possible scheme for group construction (d) compact plan elements crowded together, typical of hot, arid climate, proposed by the Authors.

## 4. Privacy in the Ancient Egyptian House

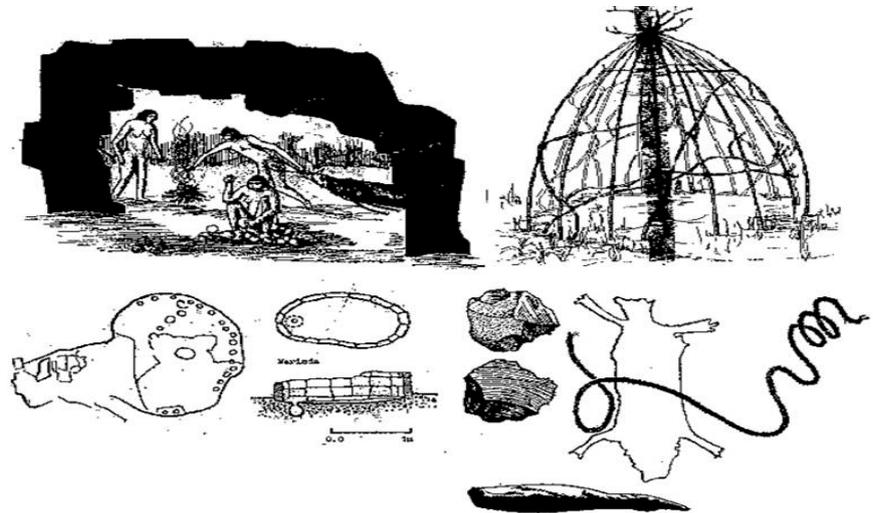
### 4.1. Pre-Civilization Era

There is no special interpretation needed for the privacy issue, since man in this era was struggling for survival, whether through food-gathering or defending himself from external danger. Man was simultaneously trying to adapt to his surrounding ecology and environment, (Figure 7). Caves were the only available shelter at that time. They offered sufficient protection against enemies and environmental harm, and they provided satisfactory privacy (El-Ekiaby, 1975). It was not until 30,000 years ago that population agglomeration started to occur, leading to groups or small societies (Seraj, 1985). Hence, social relations and interactions began to improve, though no one can really evaluate the privacy level of that era.

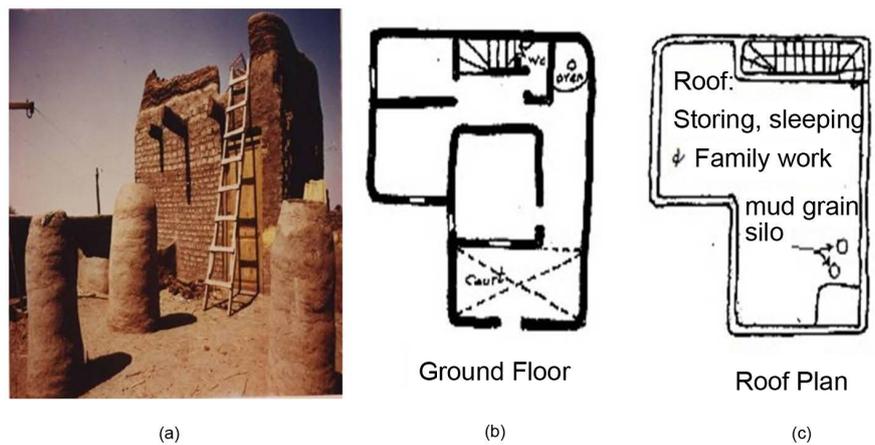
### 4.2. Pharaonic Era (Ancient Egyptian)

The previously mentioned factors influenced the architecture in ancient Egypt and how privacy was attained. This aim toward privacy was obvious in their residences. Houses were divided into three areas: reception, living and sleeping (Figure 8). These three functions were separated in order to accomplish the head of the family's desire to keep away from strangers (Mohammed, 1988).

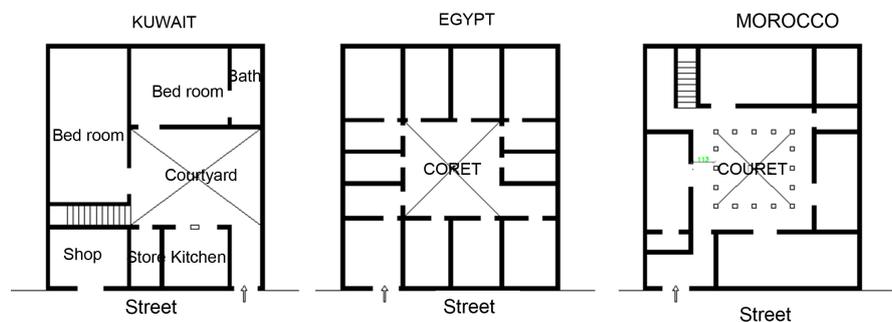
The entrance and windows in the outer walls of the house were allocated in a way that they never faced the opposite house's openings and the doors and windows of the different spaces faced the centre of the house, (Figure 9).



**Figure 7.** Oval huts from Protodynastic period, and human beings needs.



**Figure 8.** (a) An ancient rural Egyptian houses (20<sup>th</sup> century shown practice of typical storing over roof, (b) is the illustrated house plan (photo by authors).



**Figure 9.** Bending the circulation to the core of arbian house, in addition, opening windows and doors towards the core of house (Touman, & Al-Ajmi, 2005).

### 4.3. Ptolemaic Era

The court was introduced in this era and different house spaces developed around it. The outside openings were removed. This solution created complete

privacy against street nuisances like noise and passers-by (El-Ekiaby, 1988).

#### 4.4. Islamic Era

Islam brought many influential factors to Egyptian society. These factors, traditions and teachings left their marks on house design and planning. In Egypt, religion was not only a code of ethics, but a way of life. It has provided a civic code that has influenced social behavior and social interactions. The code, the religious dogma, and what is dictated by socio-cultural considerations changed planning and designing in Moslem society. Privacy was a matter of respect and dignity for both individuals and society. The court was introduced to architecture in general, and to the house in particular because it was an appropriate solution to the privacy question. The house elements were oriented toward the court, and the presence of few windows in the outer walls reduced the noise and different nuisances (Figure 10). Amenity, quietness, and coolness too were brought into the house (Al-Sheshtawy, 1979). The social institutions and interactions in the Moslem society of Egypt were dominated by two basic and inter-related forces. First, and perhaps most important as far as the design of houses is concerned, is the role that women played in the society and their place in the household structure. The second influential force on house design is the nature of the socialization process in a society dominated by men.

Generally, the society has been described as a community of men. Men and women moved in two separate circles. A woman's activities clearly centered on the private life of the family, but there were social interactions with other women and with members of the family which, to a great extent, were parallel to the interactions engaged in by men (Gideon, 1980).

Women were not allowed to or supposed to maintain direct social contact

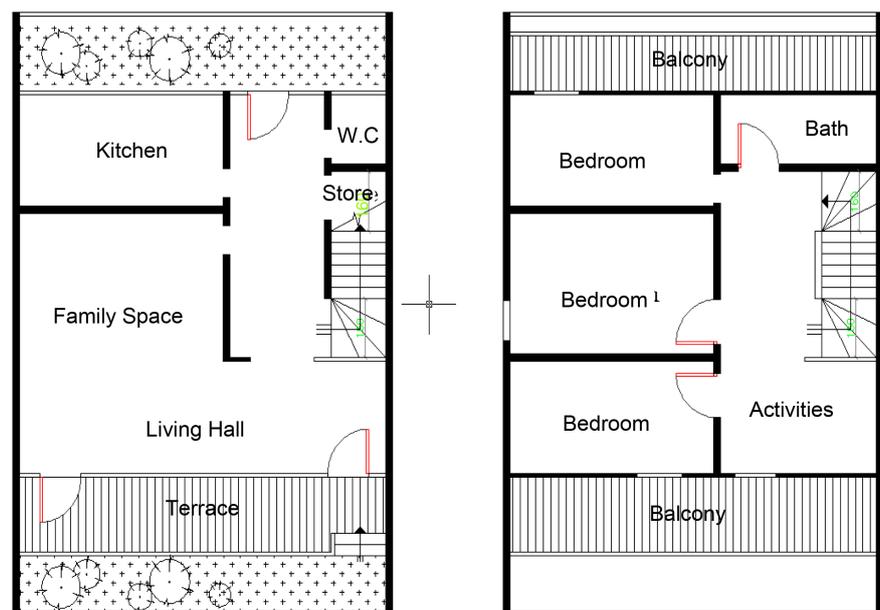


Figure 10. Substituting the interward court with terrace facing the front garden.

with unrelated males especially during their infrequent trips outside the confinement of the house. The immediate result of such practices was the separation of the house into two distinct parts: the Haramlek and the Salamlek (Abdel-Fattah & Saeed, 1984).

The Haramlek was the women's part, used by women and members of the family. It was more private with limited access to the outside, but with facilities almost identical to those provided for the men (Fouda, 1966). The second, the Salamlek, was the men's part. It was semi-public in nature and was intended to provide the male head of household with facilities for social gathering, entertainment, and accommodations for male guests. The Haramlek was placed in the upper part of the house and was provided with what is called Laquany for women to sit behind and watch any ceremony in the Salamlek without being seen by men. The main entrance of the house was designed with a private lock that directed circulation to the core of the house in the Arabian Cultures, **Figure 9**, El-Ekiaby, 1975.

Despite the fact that the court is considered a very important part of the Moslem house, its function did not offer privacy so well in flat system houses (Zaitoon, 1987). The relation between the street and the inside of the house was secondary, as a result of the few windows provided in the external walls, which were, in turn, covered with lattice work (Wazeery, 1987). This sort of privacy accomplished the following:

- 1) protection against indiscretion coming from the street, and;
- 2) isolation from the street noise, for example, in a kritliyya house (Cairo), the noise is 14 decibels less inside the house than in the street (Wazeery, 1987).

From the previous discussion, one can conclude the success of the private house in Moslem culture throughout the ages. Privacy, social-interaction, noise reduction, protection from environmental hazardous, and respect and dignity among the social classes are all outcomes of that success. Privacy became an accepted dogma and was introduced to houses and flats. It became a feature of the town and social planning over hundreds of years.

## 5. Privacy in the Contemporary Egyptian House

### 5.1. Contemporary Influential Factors Changing the Privacy Criteria of the Egyptian House

The Egyptian house maintained the privacy criteria that developed in the Islamic era. It was not until Mohammed Ali's time, (1805) (Mohammed, 1977), that the Egyptian house started to lose its privacy as a result of different social behavior and structure, and a new way of life. The following is the discussion of these changes:

#### 5.1.1. Religious Factors

Islam is the root of the regulatory and characteristic milieu (culture and civilization) of Egyptian society, and privacy was one of its products. It continued in a

strong form until new ideologies came to Egypt. Marxism, secularism, and other ideologies were perplexing to the Moslem mentality and created a psychological struggle in their spirits (Bastaweesy, 1985). People did not give up their religion, but they gave up their inherited moral orders, customs and traditions, and began to engage in a new society of secularism and uncertainty (Majed, 1985). Mohammed Ali's rule, followed by different forms of foreign occupation, contributed to the undermining of society's moral order, and to the destruction of social interaction. Consequently, neither the built environment nor those distinguished houses with their privacy properties remained the same.

### **5.1.2. Sociological Factors**

The following are different factors that affected the social behavior and consequently the structure and the attitude towards such moral criteria, especially the privacy question:

- 1) The appearance of new commodities such as cars, radios, TV's, the Internet, etc., increased environmental pollution such as excessive noise, and overcrowding.
- 2) The emergence of the nuclear family, and the decline of the clans and the extended family resulted in the difficulty of obtaining a house with proper privacy features (Majed, 1985).
- 3) Exposure, through immigration and tourism, to foreign countries led to the adoption of styles alien to both the society and the environment (Wazeery, 1987 & Bastaweesy, 1985).
- 4) The exodus from rural to urban areas, which was not matched by proper housing capacity in the city, resulted in diminished privacy.
- 5) Foreigners who lived in the different districts of some big cities, brought to these districts foreign behaviors in general, and a new culture. Thus new traditions appeared in these cities (e.g., Cairo) (Wazeery, 1987; Bastaweesy, 1985).
- 6) The call for hierarchical differentiation and isolation clashed with the Islamic culture and civilization of Egypt and gave new meaning to the traditions and the moral considerations. As a result, the latter is considered to be a call for foolishness and may obstruct progressive attitudes (Bakheet, 1966).
- 7) Ignorance against knowledge and any developmental goals started to develop in an environment of illiteracy (Ghaith, 1985).
- 8) The role of women in the Islamic social structure changed negatively as they competed with men at work and left home and family partially or perhaps totally for the sake of equality with man (Ghaith, 1985).
- 9) The above-mentioned points resulted in giving up the need for privacy. Private space in the house, in the street, in public transportation, etc., became a secondary issue. Accordingly, the private entrance, especially for women, was removed as a result of the mixing between the two sexes, whether in the workplace or in public areas.
- 10) As a result, individuals who care about privacy in our contemporary time,

are regarded by the majority as foolish, eccentric, or inferior.

### 5.1.3. Technological Factors

The faster the development of technology, the greater the change in the sociological reactions becomes, and, consequently, the greater the neglect of the privacy issue. This point can be exemplified as follows:

1) The progress of technology developed new standards and forces in the relationship between individuals from one side and between the family components on the other. The traditional role of women changed considerably. The man's power, which he gained from his religion, habits and traditions, was weakened. Female power started to grow vigorously as women started to make a living. The conflicts between these two social powers and their great changes led to the weakening of the family structure and, hence, to the undermining of the social structure (Ghaith, 1985).

2) The new housing schemes, especially the tall buildings, had a negative impact on social relations too. This sort of housing is suitable for neither small nor large families (Ibrahim, 1987). It may suit bachelors, for whom privacy is of less importance than it is for families.

3) The new building materials, advanced building industry, standardization and dimensional co-ordination, helped develop modern styles never sought before, with glazed facades, open spaces, and many styles that do not reflect any consideration of privacy.

### 5.1.4. Building Codes and Legislations

The influence of the previous factors and the emphasis on modernization allowed foreign codes and legislation to dominate local codes, at the expense of the habits and traditions of Moslem society (Abdel-Fattah & Saeed, 1984). These codes and legislation imposed controls, which, in turn, imposed their restrictions on planning and designing, especially for our society. For example, the street's width was limited by legislation to 8 m. This is very small, and no privacy can be achieved around it (Act No.106/1076, 1985). Obviously, such technical orders resulted in a loss common shared values. In some other codes, these streets were transformed to alleys with a width of no more than four meters. This narrowness eliminated any chance for privacy.

### 5.1.5. Economic Factors

Housing facilities became an acute problem for both the nation and individuals. The government allowed for an increase of population density per square kilometer by allowing four or five story buildings to be constructed in huge numbers near to each other to the extent that privacy was neither possible nor even considered (Ewedah, 1987). It was not only the elimination of privacy on the site, but it reached the elements of flats. The entrance and the living room were eliminated from the design, and the rest of the spaces were reduced to minimum areas, so privacy was abolished altogether. People accepted this situation for it

was better than nothing and they acclimatized to it despite their lack of privacy (Bastaweesy, 1985).

### 5.1.6. Political Factors

Since Mohammed Ali's era, Egypt witnessed many political changes, each with differential features, especially in the field of architecture. This was done to impose the ruler's cultural and civilizational ideas to memorialize his era. For example, consider those European styles brought to the streets of Cairo by Ismael Pasha (Wazeery & Alam Al-Bena, 1986). Not only did Pashas' rule affect the local architecture, but it also influenced political attitudes. These styles affected the individual's private behavior both in his own dwelling and in society (Bastaweesy, 1985). They also affected the individual's relations with others and attitudes toward the privacy requirement.

### 5.1.7. Ideological and Cultural Factors

Jamal Hamdan (JES, 1985), divided Egypt's cultural development into four stages:

- 1) the culture build-up;
- 2) exporting culture;
- 3) self containment; and
- 4) importing cultural forms.

In his book: "The character of Egypt", Hamdan J., divided the latter into three phases:

- 1) cultural and self (psychological) flourishing;
- 2) self-confidence; and
- 3) the Balancing and settlement phase.

The fourth category displayed the forms of the imported culture materialized in many artifacts. Some of these artifacts featured foreign architectural styles. Experts from the west were imported too. They, in turn, injected their ideology into society (Majed, 1985). Books, periodicals, and scholars introduced the features of foreign architectural schools (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 1987). They not only imported cultural change for society in its construction, but also imposed themselves on the shared moral and spiritual values of the society—values that make people accept closeness to others (Yosef, 1983). Egypt, like any developing country, has received and will continue to receive the foreign forms of Western culture (Bakheet, 1966). Accordingly, architecture will reveal culture based on imitation instead of Egyptian tradition.

As a result of the aforementioned factors, the privacy of the house has been abolished. Consequently, the house has become a noisy space, the building has become a noisy gathering-place and the district has become a dreadful built-up environment (Abu Bakr, 1987). This environmental hazard is becoming worse and its negative consequences reflect on the individuals' physiological development and psychological reactions. Noise, be it low or high, needs to be prevented from entering the building through the use of insulating materials, and to be absorbed and damped in the interiors in order to accomplish maximum noise

reduction (Mahmoud, 1986).

## 5.2. The Contemporary Egyptian Dwellings and Their Privacy Implications

The above-mentioned factors are not temporary events. They are permanent and influential. They exist, change, develop and evolve according to a feedback process, *i.e.*, they revolve as the earth revolves and time passes. Every factor affects other factors (Mahmoud, 1986). Under the umbrella of Islamic traditions and society's moral orders, the Egyptian dwelling displayed privacy criteria, and its inhabitants enjoyed the merits of this privacy. The lost privacy of our contemporary habitat began with the coming of Mohammed Ali's and his followers, (since 1805) (Mohammed, 1977). The following discussion discusses house design in the different stages of development starting from the year 1805. It will also illustrate the privacy level of each stage:

### 5.2.1. The First Stage: Private House with External Garden

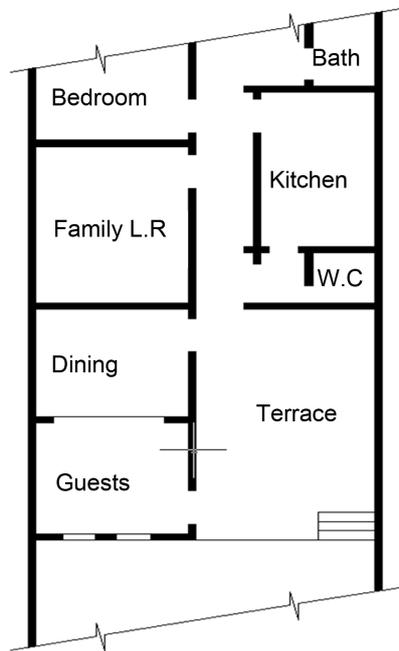
The European influence appeared in planning and designing. In planning, big building areas facing spacious streets was the new land-use scheme. Accordingly, the architects applied European styles in their designs. The style was a new blend of the European house design and the Islamic traditional house model. Rich people, the pashas (bashaws), the governors, etc., enjoyed the advantages of this era (in terms of the big areas and the spaciousness). The main characteristics of the houses of those days were:

- The separation between the family entrance and the servants'.
- The division of floors according to the residents' classifications, *i.e.* family bedrooms on a separate floor. Another floor for the guests, and one for the servants and house utilities.
- The separation between the parents' bedrooms and the children's. The latter were divided into boys and girls, for more privacy.
- These houses are characterized by terraces facing the front private gardens in order to substitute for the internal court, **Figure 10**.
- The provision of the guests' room gave these houses reasonable privacy in the interior (**Figure 11**).
- The planning of these districts with wide streets, allowed for a free site arrangement with no rigid pattern. This resulted in the provision of external privacy (Mohammed, 1988).
- The free site planning, the private garden and the wide streets allowed for greater privacy measures against noise.

### 5.2.2. The Second Stage: Storey Building with Two Flats on the One Floor

The following are the main characteristic points of this sort of housing system:

- The existence of entrances that offer privacy against outsiders.
- The existence of a private guest room.
- The separation between the living part and the sleeping area in the dwelling unit.



**Figure 11.** The addition of the guest room.

- The separation between the parents' bathroom and the children's.
- The existence of private stairs leading to the kitchens allows for the separation of the kitchens' entrances.

### 5.2.3. The Third Stage: Storey Building with more than Two Flats on One Floor

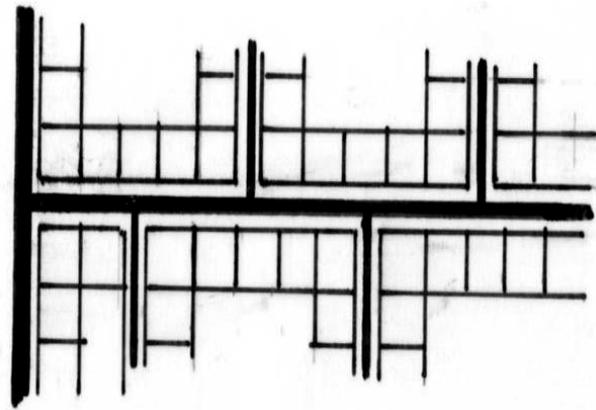
The following are the main features of this sort of housing system:

- The disappearance of the entrance and hence the privacy it provided.
- The disappearance of the guest room.
- Remaining flat components diminish in area and hence usher in a decline in the privacy level.
- Lack of external privacy as the spaces between the blocks became smaller and the streets became narrower. **Figure 12.**

### 5.2.4. The Fourth Stage: Housing Standardization

Standardization, modular co-ordination, pre-fabrication, etc., are concepts introduced to the field of architecture in general, and to housing projects in particular, to cope with economic deterioration and overpopulation. The result was inevitable: a lack of design creativity, a lack of privacy, a lack of site organization, narrow streets and poor services. From the design point of view, it is a rather unfortunate outcome. The dwelling is no longer spacious. Privacy is completely disregarded. House spaces such as the entrance hallway, the guest room, and the separation between the living and sleeping rooms, were left out. Site planning and organization eliminated privacy from the surrounding dwellings.

From the above discussion, one can realize how far the privacy issue was influenced according to the differential changes in Egyptian society and one can



**Figure 12.** The narrow the spaces between the building masses, the lack of the privacy

also understand how this vital need became a secondary or even a negligible requirement after being crucial in the past.

### 5.3. The Present Day Aspects of Privacy Urgency

Egyptian society has undergone numerous revolutionary changes that have led to a paradox in evaluating the privacy issue in Egyptian housing policy. Design details reflect this paradox, as most current architectural solutions do not meet people's needs, nor do they suit the Egyptian social milieu. People do not claim privacy in their habitat, but they have not forgotten it as an urgent issue. They have tried various ways of obtaining some sort of privacy in their dwellings. Some of these include:

- Expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of privacy.
- Altering one of the bedrooms into a guest room when none was provided.
- Abandoning the balconies and using curtains to protect from outside.
- Changing their house design by placing partitions between rooms or removing others in order to achieve maximum privacy.
- Ground floor residents sealed off spaces in front of the flat with a wooden or metal fence to shield against street noise and passers-by.
- Covering their balconies and windows with gypsum or wooden latticework to improve privacy, see **Figure 5**, (El-Ekiaby, 1975).

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the previous discussion, one can see that privacy was, is and will continue to be considered both an amenity and a necessity. In the past, privacy was limited to preventing the inside of the house from being seen from the outside, and the prohibited part of the house from being seen by guests and/or strangers. As technology added the noise factor to the environment, privacy became a necessary consideration to avoid both visual and auditory harm. Unfortunately, contemporary architecture in general, and housing in particular, do not offer such measures to achieve a reasonable degree of privacy. The following are some

recommendations to help obtain privacy in the present.

### **6.1. Planning Considerations**

- 1) Adequate studies should be conducted in order to identify needs with regards to site selection.
- 2) The site should be far from noise sources. Noise reduction in built-up areas can be achieved through the use of buffering to separate the habitable areas from the noise sources of non-residential projects such as railways, airports or highways.
- 3) Applying religious traditions and teachings concerning city planning, which are firmer than codes and legislations, will help reach a proper solution to the planning issue.

### **6.2. Housing Location**

- 1) Open spaces in the housing site should be organized and functionally separated, *i.e.*, private open areas should be distinguished from the public open areas. This will help initiate the spirit of socialization which makes people respect the other's rights of adjoining people and the settlement as a whole, and do not intrude on others' own privacy.
- 2) Minimizing the number and the area of the external openings by orienting the house design components toward an inner court and covering them by metallic, wooden or plastic lattice-work. This will help achieve privacy to a great extent.

### **6.3. The Dwelling Unit**

- 1) Any house or dwelling should have a private entrance positioned to avoid direct peeping into the internal parts of the house.
- 2) It is desirable to separate the sleeping rooms and the living spaces within the dwelling unit.
- 3) Great care should be taken in choosing the construction materials, system and technology in order to achieve noise reduction and to absorb any vibrations induced by mechanical installations such as lifts.

### **6.4. Other Considerations**

- 1) New legislation and building codes should be developed with great emphasis on the privacy issue.
- 2) Elaborating an architectural theory originating from Islamic customs and traditions that care for the privacy issue throughout its long history.

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