Visualisation of Kinship Relations and their Transformations in Domestic Architecture and Spaces

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ABSTRACT

Houses are not mere sites of human habitation but domestic space that mirrors various aspects of an individual as well as a society, be it social, cultural, personal, historical, economic or political relationships. Kinship literature from time to time by Pierre Bourdieu, Janet Carsten, Levi Strauss, Stephen Hugh Jones, Susan D. Gillespie, and many others have stressed how our relationships shape the design, structure, and organization of our domestic spaces – both inside and outside – and in turn how our domestic spaces shape our relationships. In this direction, Levi Strauss's works based on considering houses as a key principle in the social organization was a major point of departure from earlier understanding of kinship relations and inspires future researchers to explore this dimension. The kinship relationships that I am focusing on here are not only as of the dominant understanding of them, based on descent, alliance, or affinity but also relationships that are neither consanguineal nor affinal, which may include one's friends, neighbours, colleagues, and others; in a whole all our intra societal relationships. My paper will try to bring forth the factors that suggest this correlation between domestic architecture and kinship relations, and the transformations in them with time. It will focus on a few works including *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village 1949-1999* by Yan Yunxiang; *The Fall of Gods: Memory, Kinship and Middle Classes in South India* by Ester Gallo; *Berber house or the world reversed* by Pierre Bourdieu and *the architecture of memory: a Jewish-Muslim household in colonial Algeria 1937-62* by Joelle Bahloul.

Key Words : Domestic Spaces, Architecture, Oppositions, Kinship Relations, Gendered Spaces, Hierarchies, Privacy, Modern, Transformations

INTRODUCTION

Domestic spaces are structured and organized based on our social relationships is not a phenomenon of the modern world but even can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Interpretative archaeology and anthropology have been studying ancient societies like the Indus valley civilization, the Egyptian civilization, and many more through this approach and have presented before us the social organization in these societies drawing from the remains of their architecture. Analysis of domestic spaces brings into light various visible and hidden aspects of kinship relationships that are expressed through either symbolism or metaphors in them, as in the description of the Kabyle house by Bourdieu (1970), Illams by Gallo (2017), Dar-Refayil by Bahloul (1996), and Xiajia houses by Yan (2003). Sociologists and social anthropologists have been mostly using ethnography as a research methodology to understand this correlation in different societies from different parts of the world, and Bahloul uses phenomenology as well. Also, to better understand the transformations with time in both kinship relations and domestic space concerning each other, researchers conducted longitudinal studies different from cross-sectional studies, as conducted by Bourdieu to study the Kabyle houses in Algeria to make sense of this correlation at a specific point in time. Relation of kinship with the architecture of the house is not only confined to its

structure, organization, or design but also extends to the use of the same, "As Sayer notes, the use of space cannot be separated from the objects in a given physical environment" (Yan, 2003: 133). This ubiquity of kinship relations being expressed in domestic space can be scrutinized through multiple intermediaries - based on different categories - in different societies simultaneously with their spatial expression.

Understanding of Kinship:

One's meaning of kinship and the institutions constituent in it shapes the domestic space's structure, use, and organization – we can simply observe this by looking at the 'Rules of Residence' and the relationships between people therein. Other features of the space as well, reveal something about the understanding of kinship by its inhabitants for say, as in the Illam, although a lineage-based inhabitance could be seen, their enclosure and openness to the outside world differentiated their understanding of kinship relationships as limited to the primogeniture-based lineage, from that of the Dar-Refayil, where it expands to even include neighbours in it and so is mirrored in their domestic space through open doors and windows. This meaning may vary from culture to culture and hence it is said that "Domestic space is designed as a space of social and cultural inscription structured by the collective and symbolic organization of its residents" (Bachelard, 1969: 14, quoted in Bahloul 1996: 28). Bourdieu presents an idea of how kinship relations are not only applicable to human beings but can be extended to one's animals as well. An example of this can be the relationship that pets and their owners share and how this relationship can be seen within the domestic space, as in Kabyle houses the animals are kept within a part of the house and the birth of an animal baby is considered equivalent to that of the birth of a human baby.

The transformation in one's understanding of kinship and the evolution of domestic spaces in the light of these transformations is the theme of Yan's study of Xiajia village, we can see there is a change in the notion of kinship from a joint family or household towards a nuclear family or household. Yan (2003: 128) finds out that the reasons behind this change were – '*shunxin*' (satisfaction/happiness) *and 'fangbian'* (convenience). Bahloul (1996: 31) in her work as well attributes a reason behind such transformations saying that 'familism is comfortable as long as it does not interfere with the individual's attempts at social advancement and integration into local society'.

Spatial Hierarchy:

Hierarchy in society can be seen in various forms – generational, gendered, class-based, caste-based, and many others. All these hierarchies get expressed in our spatial arrangements and their uses in the form of structural oppositions. A common understanding can be drawn from the positioning of a room or a section of an individual in domestic architecture, as the maximum privileges reside with those that are higher in position than others. We can see this in Yan's work as Yan (2003: 115) mentions that the sleeping arrangement in old Xiajia houses was hierarchical, as 'kangtou' (bed head) was reserved for senior male members, but these hierarchies got reversed in the new 'functional' houses as the elderlies were given the least comfortable room – dark, in the back, and poorly ventilated or were living separately in the old houses with fewer amenities. These hierarchies are not only present in sleeping arrangements but in every domestic domain as well as in the outside world. Bahloul expresses the hierarchies in Dar-Refayil in the forms of – the wandering sleeper, enclosure of femininity as domesticity, spatial and social distribution of doors and windows, apartments, and single rooms by different ethnic groups, and many others. Both Bourdieu and Gallo emphasize the strict gendered and generational hierarchies present in Kabyle houses and Illams respectively.

Children's position within domestic architecture defines our kinship relations as well. We can observe a general trend that even today the smallest of the room is given to children in domestic architecture, which represents their position in the domestic hierarchy. Whereas Illams were considered 'childless' due to their follow-up of the law of primogeniture. In Xiajia houses, we can see that different from earlier shared beds, newer 'functional' houses have separate rooms for children with the rising notion of individuality and privacy. Although this opposition entails another gendered opposition in it, as shown in Xiajia houses, Illams, and Dar-Refayil, usually a female child was given lesser amenities and privileges than a male child. Bourdieu (1970: 153) also highlights the same in the Kabyle house where a female child is considered 'shame' and it is the son-in-law who is considered to be the 'veil of shame'.

The transformations in these hierarchies are accompanied by changes in the style of domestic architecture but in an ambivalent way. For example, middle-class Malayali Nambudiri dwellings in contrast to the Illams show this transition and diluting hierarchies

concerning generation, gender, and caste, but as suggested by Gallo (2017: 37), " The contrast between men's and women's house memories allows us to nuance the ideological middle-class opposition between the 'closed old house' and the 'open modern one', and to critically reflect further on the ways past caste and gender hierarchies feed into modern forms of patriarchy and Brahminism." The sexual division of labour in a routine activity like cooking tells us about one of this kind of transformation that is depicted in various male narratives in Gallo's work which stresses, the fading gender-based hierarchies, but the female narratives present before us the modern form of gender hierarchies because the household work is still largely considered a feminine work. Order of eating and eating places in a domestic arena also highlights the kind of hierarchical kinship relations therein, although with modern changes it is changing to an extent still some kind of hierarchies can be pointed in the eating order on a dining table, say the concept of 'head chair'.

Power Dynamics:

These hierarchies also affect power dynamics both in domestic space and outside space. As with transforming hierarchies, we can also see the changes in power dynamics, termed the democratization of houses, as the modern Nambudiri working woman has much more power in domestic space than she had in Illams. Similarly, as Yan (2003: 131) says, "Gone with the old house design and its underlying principles are the previous hierarchical spatial arrangements; also gone is the kinship hierarchy based on generational seniority and age as well as the superiority of the male gender. The most obvious and significant change is the rise of the centrality of the conjugal relationship, accompanied by the displacement of the previous saliency of parental power and authority". Even the coming up of new-age concepts like the master bedroom and others can be analyzed in light of this idea.

Gendered Segregation:

Gender segregation of spaces and gender-specific architecture has been continuing since ancient times. Different compartments for women, popularly known as 'Jananas' and Trellis patterns in architecture to separate these compartments are some examples of gender segregation. Gendered segregation is not only within inner space but also exists between inner and outer space. Bahloul, Bourdieu, and Gallo in the form of structural oppositions paint this segregation in front of us, in the form of, 'Men: Women:: Outside: Inside:: Light: Dark:: Nature: Culture' (Bourdieu, 1970: 154).

Bahloul and Gallo trace this segregation through the remembrance of the past. Within Dar-Refayil, Bahloul (1996: 42) says "These Sunday washing sessions remain associated with the symbolism of enclosure and of sexual segregation in the domestic space…while boys and young men were having a good time downtown with their friends…the weekly washing is also a key moment in women's social life". This sexual division of labour is reflected in all 4 works that we are referring to here and even in modern houses. As Gallo (2017: 9) suggests, the spatial boundary of Illams, both within and outside, was based on gendered structural opposition. Even in newer 'open houses' the spatial freedom of women is the major point stressed in male narratives whereas in opposition female narratives express the modern spatial boundaries and especially the sexual division of labour in household work, highlighting the 'double burden of work' to women. The presence of structures in a domestic space like, 'anthapuram', wall of darkness or maiden, courtyard as a womb, and others present before us a wider picture of gender-based segregation in domestic space. In opposition, Yan's work reveals a more egalitarian society where, although some segregations were present, they were not so much in isolation from another gender, and with modern houses, they got faded away even more. The more visible segregation in the Chinese village was concerning inside and outside segregation based on gender. This suggests the highly patriarchal nature of kinship in the Illams, Dar-Refayil, and Kabyle house. Violation of these spatial boundaries was considered, a matter of social significance not only an act of sacrilege against culture or society but the house itself.[1]

Idea of Privacy:

Earlier houses lacked the idea of privacy, a general phenomenon observed was a collective or multifamily household as shown in Dar-Refayil with no place for

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1. As the house was "deemed to have a personality and vitality of their own", says Janet Carsten. See, for instance, Gallo (2017), pp: 11. And acts like that of theft or others were considered as an offence to the honour of the family, house as well as the whole community. See, for instance, Bourdieu (1970: 155)

conjugal intimacy and also in the Kabyle house. Yan (2003: 135) in his work put forward the idea that some ideas of privacy even existed earlier but it was only a privilege of the elites and the boundaries of privacy were not legal but based on social status – social superiors enjoyed privacy. Yan highlights in detail the changing notions of privacy both at the individual as well as the family level. New ideas of physical barriers or thresholds and etiquettes in form of physio-socio code show the growing interiority within a family in opposition to the outside public. But within the family as well there is a growing concern for the privacy of the individual or the couple. The increasing conjugal intimacy can be seen in opposition to the concept of inter-generational privacy, as couples found it interfering in their personal matter by the elderly. Domestic space too transformed with these changing notions of privacy: elderlies were either left back in traditional homes or given a room with the least amenities. Yan also brings to our notice the decreasing social intimacy with the growing notions of privacy, as people were not aware of their neighbours and a decrease in 'chuanmenzi'[2] . Some of the reasons that we come across in all four works behind the growing need for privacy are – convenience, happiness, and satisfaction, but essentially not for all[3]. Gallo (2017: 23), also presents an ambivalent understanding of privacy in women's narratives, as elder aristocratic women consider 'open houses' with less privacy as smaller in extent than Illams; whereas younger women have a sense of privacy – especially conjugal privacy and individual privacy in the newer spaces. All these perceptions of privacy suggest the varying understanding and needs of people even of the same family, house, or gender. Therefore, transformations in spaces were not essentially for all and were disadvantageous to some of them, but these also proved to be beneficial for some earlier disadvantaged members of the family.

Memories of space and kinship:

Past remembrance of kinship and the role of visualization or spatial imagination play an important role in collective memory, is an idea that both Gallo and Bahloul stress. They also analyze the oscillation of memory and the ambivalent relationship with memories

that an individual or group possesses. Gallo (2017: 1) says "Indeed, houses are conceived as sites where kinship is 'made' by either reproducing the past, or by searching a distance from it… Village memories signal how past rural life and inter-caste relations were widely understood through the physical presence of Nambudiri houses, which constituted a crucial marker in village political and social life… Illams inspire memories of past discrimination but also act as reference points in the tracing of transformations in caste and class relations. Gendered memories of past Illams inform how Nambudiris have made sense of changing housing strategies and how modern dwellings are conceived and inhabited (Bahloul 1996; Carsten, 2004; Tebbe, 2008) ... Overall, modern houses have undergone a process of de-ritualization and of increasing cosmopolitan exposure, producing different rituals of food consumption, socialization, and family reunion which have in turn introduced distance from past forms of ancestral life. This also emerges in relation to gender and inter-caste relations—although it does so in an ambivalent way." Bahloul also traces past remembrance of kinship and domestic space in the collective memory of people and uses the political history of people to look at the transformations in them. As Bahloul (1996: 29) says, "Remembrance is moulded into the material and physical structures of domestic space".

Social Mobility:

Societies, in general, are differentiated in some sense or other, maybe based on caste or class or gender as seen above, and many others. This social differentiation gets mirrored in our domestic spaces – symbolically or metaphorically. Yan (2003: 123) in his work explains this 'Leveling effect' in different classes as a result of communal feeling developed by the state policies amongst its people. As class differences in housing arrangements in Xiajia started fading out after the 1949 revolution, for which Yan (2003: 138) marks that "The previous class- and status-based social differentiation in spatial privacy in particular and in private life in general has disappeared." Bahloul (1996: 30-31) as well highlights social differentiation in an ethnic pluralist society in forms of hierarchy in housing arrangements and amenities, for say, upstairs the owner had a huge apartment that generally

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2. The dropping activity of villagers to each other's house. See, for instance, Yan (2003), pp. 117.

3. As the elderly people of Xiajia were neither happy nor satisfied with the new transformations in 'functional' houses, as these rapid transformations were to their disadvantage and made them feel left out. See, for instance, Yan (2003), pp. 128-133.

belonged to the Christian community, with them were Jews with smaller apartments and downstairs lowest in the order were Muslims with single rooms. Gallo (2017: 3-4) presents the differentiation in Malayali society based both on class as well as caste. And this differentiation was visible in domestic architecture. As she marks, "The Old Nambudiri abodes lay at the center of the *agrahamam* — the sacred place of origins of patrilineal ancestors—and were symbols of social distinction with respect to lower caste". She even presents the transformations in spatial arrangements losing their caste character. Although class differentiation in houses can still be seen.

Rituals:

Religious practices, rites, cults, and magic are also great determinants in kinship relations and domestic space. Ideas of prosperity, sacredness, profaneness, and others shape not only our domestic design and use but our kinship relationships as well. The construction of modern houses against Illams is also inspired by Hindu Architectural Science (Vaastu Shastra). Even in Dar-Refayil to practice rituals 'kanoun' was separated using a curtain to maintain its sacredness. Bourdieu (1970: 158) depicts the role of rites and rituals in the Kabyle house beautifully, he writes that the principal direction of movement that is, west to east, is considered to have magical benefits, and therefore all the movements of the house and its inhabitants were organized around this direction. And this is the reason behind the semi-rotation axis at the threshold of the house, to maintain this principal direction and benefit from it.

Conclusion:

Applying these categories even outside of the domestic arena gives us the reasons behind the nature of the social relationships of the house as a whole with the rest of the world as a whole. "As a microcosm organized according to the same oppositions which govern all the universe, the house maintains a relation with the rest of the universe which is that of homology, but from another point of view, the world of the house taken as a whole is in a relation with the rest of the world which is one of opposition, and the principles of which are none other than those which govern the organization of the internal space of the house as much as they do the rest of the world and, more generally, all the areas of existence. Thus, the opposition between the world of female life and the world of the city of men is based upon the same principles as the two systems of opposition that it opposes. It follows from this that the application to opposed areas of the same *principium divisions"* (Bourdieu, 1970: 156), he further suggests that this opposition follows the powerful structure a:b::b1:b2 which opposes things with simultaneously uniting (and inversely) them and indefinitely being repeated. We can also see the same principles being applicable in Illams as suggested by Gallo.

Therefore, the paper suggests that "because domestic space is both a physical and a social construct, underlying the specific house forms are principles by which people categorize their relationships and organize their everyday life in spatial terms" (Yan, 2003: 123). And these principles even extend to the space, outside of domestic space. It even suggests that the transformations and changes in kinship relations are best expressed in the reformation and remodelling of the domestic and outside spaces. And this impact of kinship relations and domestic space on each other is not unidirectional but bi-directional.

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