Revolution Begins at Home:

New Housing Typologies, and Collectivisation of Life in Post-WWII Tehran

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Abstract

Experiments in the collectivization of domestic spaces such as of kitchens and laundries, and, in some cases, childcare, had already been tested in parallel to social movements in Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States until the nineteen-thirties, but they came to an end in the post-war period. However, in countries like Iran it was the second wave of Modern Movement that aided post-WWII social movements and revitalised the discourse. Being located at the fault line between the communist and capitalist worlds, Iran became a laboratory in which such ideological projects were tested. The chapter revisits how new housing typologies became spaces of resistance in Iran. Itpresents an overlooked period in the history of the International Left in Iran and traces the multifaceted life of a couple who were among the founders of two influential organisations: the Women’s Association and the Association of Iranian Architects. The chapter discusses how new experimentations in housing typologies enabled domestic spaces in Tehran as spaces of resistance where class, gender, social, and political conflicts are played out.

The aftermath of World War II not only marked the beginning of a new geopolitical order but also once again brought discourses of architecture and domesticity back to the front line of these confrontations. Although the immediate need for post-WWII reconstruction left almost no time for comprehensive theoretical development in architectural and planning principles, the “occupied” and “liberated” territories became laboratories in which new concepts of territory, city, and forms of life were tested. At the heart of the discourse was the significance of domestic spaces as spaces of resistance and of cultivation of community bonds and individual freedom. Domestic space has been described as a collective sphere, a breeding ground in which narratives of liberation and radical ideas could develop, as well as a nurturing place for collective memories and cultures. Such a task was mainly performed by women. This was a true process of the construction of political consciousness—not because of a supposedly “natural” disposition of women toward care and nurture but as an active space of resistance.

Experiments in the collectivization of domestic spaces such as kitchens and laundries and, in some cases, of childcare had already been tested in parallel to social movements in Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States until the 1930s, but the experiments came to an end in the post-war period. However, in countries like Iran, it was the second wave of the Modern Movement that aided post–World War II social movements and revitalized the discourse. Being located on the fault line between the communist and capitalist worlds, Iran became a laboratory in which such ideological projects were tested.

Back in August 1941, the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran had inaugurated an interregnum that lasted a full twelve years. It was the beginning of a period in which the new monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah,[[1]](#endnote-1) continued to hang on to much of the armed forces but lost control over the bureaucracy and the system of patronage. This interregnum was first challenged in January 1949 when President Truman launched his Point Four Program in the Middle East, and in particular Iran, to take back control of the strategic territories over which the Soviet influence had expanded. If the 1949 Point Four Program was a “soft counterproject,” August 1953 marked the violent end of the twelve-year interlude, when the shah, through a coup engineered by the Americans and the British, re-established royal authority, thereby recreating his father’s regime and enabling him to act as an executive monarch for the next twenty-five years. In this twelve-year interregnum, power was not concentrated in one place. On the contrary, it was hotly contested between the royal palace, the cabinet, the parliament, and most importantly the urban masses, who were mobilized first by socialist movements and then by a nationalist one. Indeed, in this period the masses, mainly made up of the urban middle class and working class, constituted a major threat to the Pahlavi dynasty.

The first real challenge to the state came from labour movements. On September 29, 1941, within a month of Reza Shah’s abdication, a group of recent graduates from European universities and former political activists announced the formation of an Iranian communist party: the *Tudeh Party* (the Party of the Masses). Besides their political activities in the form of demonstrations and gatherings, they set out to train and educate the public, specifically the working and middle classes. During 1946 the Tudeh Party extended its activities with a view to mobilizing middle-class intellectuals. The mission resulted in the formation of numerous groups, circles, and clubs as subbranches, if not sympathizers, of the Tudeh Party, namely the Women’s Association, Youth Association, Officers’ Organization, Students’ Association, and affiliated groups such as the Writers’ Association and the Association of Iranian Architects.

The Awakening

The role of the Women’s Association and the Association of Iranian Architects was quite fundamental; the discourse of domesticity was at the centre of their political program to activate urban society, addressing women in particular as a forgotten half of the active political mass. Their ideology was influential in the design and construction of mass housing projects in Tehran during the late 1940s and 1950s. Each association ran its own publication in order to reach a larger audience. The journals *Bidari-e Ma* (Our awakening) and *The Architect* soon became quite popular and were distributed countrywide. The two leading figures behind the organisations were the writer Maryam Firouz and the architect Noureddin Kianouri.

*Bidari-e Ma* was launched in June 1944—a year after the foundation of the Women’s Association—and ran till December 1948. Every issue had the same front cover; it was a lithograph illustration signed Sarvari, depicting a female figure, dressed in an unorthodox fashion, waving a large flag with her left hand against the rising sun of the East. On the ground, there were broken chains signifying freedom and emancipation of the Iranian women. Beyond its name, the inner cover bore the motto of the journal: “We Have a Right in This House Too,” referring to both the country and the domestic space. In the editorial essay of the second issue, the author(s) wrote:

“As it is evident from the title of the journal, our mission is to wake half of the nation up, the women. Although in many circumstances both men and women are deadened and are incapable of claiming their rights, we must admit that these conditions, coupled with other forces, have pushed women back more than men.” [[2]](#endnote-2)

The authors made a clear statement addressing their target group and distinguishing

themselves from the decrees of Reza Shah when he banned the wearing of traditional clothes in public, including veils, in 1936. They criticized these state-initiated policies:

“If in the twenty dark years of the former shah’s [Reza Shah’s] rule, in the name of a privileged group of women a so-called “Women’s Movement” was propagated, it was to exploit more of those women who were working in factories, […] this was a fake movement! The true movement is the one that is mobilized by the nation itself or emerges out of a serious class struggle, the one that is a continuous movement toward fulfilling the real goals. A true movement cannot go on without high expectation.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Their mission was clear and explicit:

“*Bidari-e Ma* wants to initiate a true women’s movement in Iran, whose aims are claiming equal rights for women, women’s education, and their economic empowerment; a movement that embraces modesty and belief, as well as a sense of solidarity among women; a movement that unites women, turning individuals into socially confident, skilful, and independent members of the society.” [[4]](#endnote-4)

The journal was carefully structured to communicate to the widest audience possible, from a housewife to a worker, a traditional or an intellectual one. Manifestos and statements usually were the opening titles; they were followed by socio-political critiques of society, reports of the association’s activities, short stories and poems, essays on women’s hygiene and health, and translated articles on international women’s movements from around the world; and they usually ended with a series of recommendations on housekeeping, home economics, and low-budget food recipes. The tone was both critical and seditious; however, the language was culturally appropriate and comprehensible.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Maryam Firouz (also known as Princess Maryam Firouz Farman-Farmaian) was a linguist, writer, and poet. She was born in 1914 into one of the most influential aristocratic families on the Iranian political scene. Educated at the French school in Tehran, Maryam grew up as an independent thinker and entered the circles of the Iranian intelligentsia in Tehran, which included figures such as Bozorg Alavi, Sadegh Hedayat, and Abdolhossein Noushin, all of whom were left-wing by inclination, if not officially associated with the Iranian Communist Party and later the Tudeh Party. Through her circle of comrades, she was officially introduced to the Tudeh Party and became one of the founders of the Women’s Association of the party in June 1943. Najmi Alavi, in her memoir, recalls the day that Maryam joined the second meeting:

“We had gathered in Zahra Eskandari’s house. After a few minutes, Bozorg Alavi (my brother) joined the meeting together with a lady. She was introduced to us as Maryam Firouz. […] The twenty nine-year-old Maryam was one of most beautiful ladies of those days. Her look, her clothes, and her style caught everybody’s attention immediately. When Bozorg left the room, Aalieh Shermini followed him and asked: ‘Who is this girl?’ She added, ‘Remember, Mr. Alavi! We are here to fight against this class!’”[[6]](#endnote-6)

Not only was Maryam received very well by the other members, but soon she took the lead and became the most influential figure of the association. She sponsored the publication of the journal and rented an office for the association in Baharestan Square, in front of the parliament.[[7]](#endnote-7) She eventually took over the task of the editorial responsibilities of *Bidari-e Ma* and frequently wrote essays, manifestos, and poems and translated articles. The journal found its ground in the social and political limbo of Iran in the mid-1940s. The association successfully attracted many active and affiliated members and enabled a large body of committed readers.

Maryam Firouz became a fundamental figure in making the Women’s Association an official part of the Tudeh Party. Together with Zahra Eskandari and Aalieh Shermini, they were the only founding members that managed to get involved in the Tudeh Party’s activities before the establishment of the association. Although during 1941–42 the central committee of the party, headed by Soleiman Eskandari, was hesitant to accept women as active members, Maryam had her own ties with the party through her friend Noureddin Kianouri, whom she married in 1944.

Maryam had got divorced from her first husband, Abbas-Gholi Esfandiari, in 1939; only a year after that, she met Kianouri, an architect who had been introduced to her to design her house in Shemiran. Kianouri was a graduate of Tehran University. He later moved to Germany and obtained his doctorate in architecture from the Technical University of Aachen in 1939. A year later, he returned to Iran, and in 1945, together with a few other architects, he founded the Association of Iranian Architects. Despite his academic career at the University of Tehran and his professional work as an architect, he was a left-wing activist and already a member of the Communist Party in Germany. Kianouri became one of the founding members of the Iranian Tudeh Party in 1941 after his return.

However, on February 4, 1949, Tudeh was accused of the assassination attempt on the shah during an annual ceremony to commemorate the founding of the University of Tehran. The party was subsequently banned, and most of the party leaders were imprisoned. After two years in jail, Kianouri escaped from prison and lived undercover. A couple of years later he fled the country, first to Iraq and then to Italy. There, with the help of the Italian Communist Party, he was given a new identity as Dr. Silvio Macetti.[[8]](#endnote-8) Maryam Firouz followed him after a few months, and she subsequently became known as Mrs. Maria Macetti.

Towards a New Socialist Architecture

In 1957 The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, invited Silvio Macetti (that is, Kianouri) to Moscow, where he stayed for two years and started working with the architect and urban planner Georgy Alexandrovich Gradov. Their collaborations were mainly focused on designing large-scale housing projects, the initial phase of a larger institutional research project that continued in the years after. After their time in Moscow, in 1959 the Macettis moved to East Germany and settled in Berlin; Silvio was later appointed as one of the research directors of the Bauakademie to run a project in collaboration with the research institute at the Academy of Architecture in Moscow, directed by Gradov. In Berlin, Maryam gradually got acquainted with cultural scenes and organizations. She became friends with the Jewish painter and activist Lea Grundig and her husband, Hans. Both Lea and Hans had been active members of the German Communist Party during the 1920s, and after the war, they became affiliated with the newly established Socialist Unity Party. Lea was a full member of Akademie der Künste der DDR (East German Academy of Culture) and served as the president of Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR (East German Visual Artists’ Association). Maryam and Lea had shared interests and dedication to both culture and political activism.[[9]](#endnote-9) Through Lea, Maryam was introduced to the professors in the Department of Philology at Leipzig University. She started teaching eighteenth-century French literature and in parallel began working on her doctoral research on three influential French figures in eighteenth-century Iranian literature: Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. [[10]](#endnote-10) After finishing her PhD, Maryam began to teach French literature at Humboldt University in Berlin.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Firouz and Kianouri dedicated the next two decades to research and writing. Their form of political activism was tuned in to the linguistic and architectural apparatuses. They both believed that the key aspects that could possibly trigger social mobilization lay in domestic space. Kianouri (Silvio Macetti) and Gradov worked on an extensive research project whose purpose was to establish and promote the theory of what was to be called a “new socialist architecture,” aligned with the new social structure and technological advancements of the time and a vision for the future. The two architects were tasked with revising the fundamental ideology of socialism and applying it in a Neufert-like handbook of socialist architecture, proposing new typologies of collective habitation, public institutions, and urban forms and developing new planning principles for the territories. The twenty-year research collaboration resulted in the publication of two books: *Großwohneinheiten* (1968), by S. Macetti, and *Stadt und Lebensweise* (1970), by G. A. Gradov. In the introduction to *Großwohneinheiten* [Large-scale housing units], Macetti wrote:

“Today we live in a great era; it is the era of revolutionary transformation for the whole society, the age of a worldwide transition from capitalism to socialism. This transformation of the world opens up new perspectives on the spiritual and material conditions of human life. Like every realm of human activity, architecture is also under the decisive influence of these overall processes. As architects and urban planners [our] first and foremost duty is to adapt the built environment of the society to the demands of the socialist way of life. […] To constantly provide housing for more people and to offer them such a cultural and living milieu as affects the development of individuals as well as society. This [new] form of living must comply with the requirements of our time and the socioeconomic performance of the space in order to foster a high degree of socialization in household tasks.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

What was pointed out by Macetti was indeed a continuation of *Bidar-e Ma*’s mission, as that publication had clearly stated:

“Today, as a result of the evolution of civilization, domestic labour has been limited, and most of women’s traditional responsibilities and tasks now are to be assumed by the society at large… Women’s creativity and hidden talents have bloomed and have been clearly manifested as they entered into society, so much so that today they manage to take part in all affairs that used to be men’s business. [Indeed] the meaning of family and household is completely different today from what it used to be centuries ago.” [[13]](#endnote-13)

Their agenda was clearly in line with the Soviet ideology, in which women’s emancipation from domestic labour had been seen as the fundamental factor in the evolution of the society. They wanted women out of houses not only for their capacities in production and the labour force but also as the forgotten half of the society that could be available for a mass mobilization—a revolution toward new socialism. Macetti further elaborated on their motivation for proposing new forms of domestic spaces: [[14]](#endnote-14)

“Among the main objectives, creating the spiritual and material conditions for the comprehensive emancipation of women is a major task in the socialist transformation of society. As Lenin has put it explicitly: ‘The woman, however, remains a house slave, as she was before the oppressive laws were repealed. She is still engrossed in, and stultified by, the petty details of household management; she is still chained to the kitchen and the nursery, still engaged in the same unproductive and nerve-destroying labour. The real emancipation of women, real Communism, can only begin when the proletariat, at the helm of State, leads the fight of the masses against the system of small housekeeping; it can only begin with the transformation to Socialist great economy.’”[[15]](#endnote-15)

In their works, the architects addressed the changing nature of labour from manual to automated forms. They claimed that architecture should respond to this radical transformation; they claimed that more flexible spaces would be needed in order to integrate leisure activities with learning and education within a collective spatial framework. In *Stadt und Lebensweise,* Gradov made such a statement clearer when he wrote,

“Our cities will face an age of automation and cybernetics; production, therefore, will be mostly carried out by a non-human labour force. However, in order to embrace the social development of our communist society we need to adjust its architecture and cities to form new cultural and creative organizations. Architecture will be no longer a passive envelope containing social processes but will rather become a decisive element, mobilizing the development of a communist way of life.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

Both Macetti and Gradov published many journal articles and research reports, a number of which appeared in *Deutsche Architektur*. However, most of their extensive joint project was never published and has remained as manuscripts dispersed in various archives in Germany, Russia, and Iran. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate to what extent such a theoretical project was actually implemented and promoted by the two institutions in planning new settlements and developing architectural typologies. However, one can trace the migration of the ideas and application of these principles of cohabitation and a new socialist way of living along with the movement of the two leading figures.

Gradov was tasked with moving to the southern republics of the Soviet Union to plan new settlements and to develop new public architecture for the capital cities. His legacy is quite visible in the planning and design of the city of Frunze (now Bishkek) in the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic and Dushanbe in the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic. He died in Pamir in 1984. However, for Macetti (that is, Kianouri), the story was a bit different. It could be claimed that he established, if not developed, the discourse of social housing in Iran parallel to the progression of the research project.

Although Kianouri was not personally involved in designing and planning the first social housing projects in Iran, he served the architectural movement through his theoretical and ideological inputs. The other members of the Association of Iranian Architects, such as Mohammad Elahi, Manouchehr Khorsand, Ali Sadegh, Abbas Ajdari, Iraj Moshiri, Siavash Kasraei, and Nasser Badi’e, most of whom were sympathizers or affiliated members of the Tudeh Party, took the lead.

New Experimentations in Tehran

The Association of Iranian Architects soon became the only organization that systematically criticized, envisioned, and discussed the problems and the possible futures of architectural discourse and discipline in the country. For them, the urgent problem to be addressed was housing. Many of the members of the association were graduates from European universities. They were all acquainted with the theoretical discourses put forward by CIAM (*Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne*), including the Athens Charter, which in fact were put into practice after World War II in the reconstruction of the war-torn cities of Europe. For them, the new design and planning standards were not only cost effective methods of construction, they were rather spatial catalysts for a new social landscape of the city. In fact, the key to making any social and political change in the society had lain in the question of domestic space; a space that was no more about the fulfilment of the necessities, desires, and needs of the individuals, but was rather about the collective mobilization of those individuals through the maximization of the communal facilities and minimization of the living units to the bare essential infrastructures.

The city and the society indeed were the ultimate targets of the project; where the political dimension of life can be exercised. Macetti (aka Kianouri) directly referred to the CIAM principles in his book, and suggested that although they are currently serving the capitalist societies they could, however, be read differently and instrumentalised for the mobilisation of the society:

“Responding to housing demands remains the original task of building science and architecture. According to the theses of the CIAM, outlined also in the ‘Athens Charter’ in 1933, housing is associated with one of the four major functions of the city: work, housing, recreation, and transport. However, the concept of living and housing in the 20th century, as a result of the development of social life, has gone beyond the mere function of the dwelling to which it was formerly limited. Today living no longer encompasses only the private part of human life, but is an essential and dynamic part of the entire system of life. Living no longer takes place in isolated homes, but rather in an active encounter with the associated communities and their facilities (the city)….The habitation factors and the material-technical and cultural backwardness of the capitalist past are overcome fundamentally.…

House should be a space for a meaningful life, for the economy of the time, for reaching a higher cultural level, for better working and living conditions, for emancipation of the woman, for better conditions for the care and education of the children; These are considered by many outstanding architects of the capitalist world as well, and are taken up in their works to fulfil them progressively. This is how the work of Le Corbusier should be understood and judged.”[[17]](#endnote-17)

In the first issue of the journal *Architect*, published in August 1946, Mohammad-Ali Sheybani, the author, described the initial attempts that had been made during the inter-war period to outline a general strategy for affordable housing provision in Iran. He referred to his meeting with Louis Loucheur, former French minister of Labour, Hygiene, Welfare Work, and Social Security Provisions, who had famously helped Le Corbusier in solving some legal problems surrounding Pessac and had supported his investigations on mass affordable housing typologies and construction techniques: Dom-ino, Monol, Citrohan, and the Immeuble-Villas. Sheybani claimed that he had compiled a preliminary proposal for planning mass affordable housing in Tehran—based on Loucheur’s ideas and the French experiments—and discussed it with Ali-Akbar Davar, Minister of Finance.[[18]](#endnote-18) The plan had full support of the Minister and had been commissioned to the *Société Générale de Construction en Iran* (*Sherkat-e Sahami-e Kol-e Sakhteman-e Iran*) for further development and implementation. However, all the planning development stopped following the sudden death of the Minister. These unrealized models were discussed and were put in the context of the post-war development of the city in another article in the same issue of the journal, “The Problem of Housing in Tehran, and other Cities”. In this article, Abbas Ajdari outlined the mission of the association. He pointed out that the post-war migration and industrialization have created overpopulated areas in the outskirts of the city with no proper infrastructure and living facilities.[[19]](#endnote-19) For him, and thus for the association, planning mass affordable housing for the working class and the lower middle-class was the answer. Ajdari’s proposed solution was new forms of urban development according to the modernist principles of planning.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Following the enactment in 1944 of the Law of Affordable Housing for Working Class and Governmental Employees initiated in parliament by the Tudeh Party faction, the Association of Iranian Architects – with the financial support of the Mortgage Bank (*Bank-e Rahni*) and later, the Construction Bank (*Bank-e Sakhtemani*) – developed a series of social housing schemes for Tehran: *Chaharsad Dastgah* (1944–46), *Kuy-e Narmak* (1951–55), *Kuy-e Nazi Abad* (1951–58), *Oudlajan* Neighbourhood (1959), *Kuy-e Nohom-e Aban* (1961–63), and *Kuy-e Kan* (1961–64). <Fig. 1>

The first project, Chaharsad Dastgah (400-housing-unit), marked a turning point in the way it changed the traditional modes of living through decomposition, reduction, and reassembly of domestic spatial components. The architects proposed a new typology, where the plan of the dwelling units was reduced to a bare minimum of spaces: a series of bedrooms with almost no living room or spacious kitchen, as used to be the case in traditional Iranian houses. The projects were provided with day-care centres, public laundry facilities, and most importantly, gathering places in the scales of blocks and neighbourhoods. For them, the social, political, and economic performance of the project was the absolute priority. The design of the housing typologies thus followed the ideas of socialisation of household tasks promoted by *Bidari-e Ma* journal:

“Today, as a result of the evolution of civilization, domestic labour has been limited, and most of women’s traditional responsibilities and tasks now are to be assumed by the society at large… Women’s creativity and hidden talents have bloomed and have been clearly manifested as they entered into society, so much so that today they manage to take part in all affairs that used to be men’s business. [Indeed] the meaning of family and household is completely different today from what it used to be centuries ago.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

The next experiment was done in Kuy-e Narmak. It was the largest mass housing project until recently, extending over 507 hectares of barren land on the north east outskirt of the city. Instead of building the entire project, the association provided the main infrastructure, including water, sewers, roads, and electricity; they divided the land into 8000 small plots to be leased to low-income groups. The project was then carried out by the residents as a self-build, with the association of architects providing them with a series of construction guidelines, subsidised materials and free supervision. On the north quarter of the site, 400 model houses were built using a prefabricated technique, named after the cement panel company *Kuy-e Calade*. If in Chaharsad Dastgah the architecture of the dwelling unit and their typologies were the main devices through which the ideological agenda of the project was tested, in Kuy-e Narmak it was the planning apparatus, the urban form, and of course, the process of construction that carried the core idea of the project. The plan was divided into 100 sections, each provided with an open space at the centre. These squares were designed for communal activities of the residents; but the performance of these spaces soon went further than simply eating, chatting, cooking, and playing: they became platforms for socio-political meetings and public gatherings. <Fig. 3 and Fig. 4>

Kuy-e Nazi Abad was constructed in two phases: first a total of 2600 plots were allocated to single-storey houses with two or three rooms, and in the second phase – since the bank had managed to absorb more credits – they built higher density apartment blocks. Each building contained between 24 or 32 dwelling units. The plan of the units was strictly divided and minimised into the functional cells. A uniform 80 square metre layout was used for all the apartments: each unit had three 3 by 4.5 metre rooms, which were two bedrooms and one living room with a balcony attached. The kitchen was an enclosed unit placed between the living room and the bathroom. The same approach was followed in Kuy-e Kan. The construction process was however more industrialised and prefabricated elements were used. In both Kuy-e Nazi Abad (second phase) and Kuy-e Kan the architects eliminated the very core element of the courtyard. Such a condition consequently forced inhabitants to go out into the city in order to exercise communal life. Not surprisingly, all the aforementioned projects were planned next to the industrial areas and factories in the periphery of the city, in order to accommodate the working class. <Fig 5 and Fig. 6>

However, following the ideas advocated by Macetti and Gradov’s visionary socialist architecture, a rather radical plan was also developed in 1959 for the city centre. The project proposed to destroy one of the oldest neighbourhoods of the city, Oudlajan, entirely. It was to be replaced by large-scale urban blocks, towers, school, shopping centres, and other facilities. The architect, Ali Sadegh, justified the project by saying: “Tehran has grown unevenly and in a disproportionated manner. At the heart of the city there are still neighbourhoods, frozen in the past centuries, which gives us the best opportunity to implement principles of modern urban planning. It seems like a strategic mistake to go and build in the desert [periphery of the city] while having such neighbourhoods at hand.”[[22]](#endnote-22) Although Shah approved the proposal it was never constructed. The project bore an undeniable resemblance to Macetti and Gradov’s proposal for what they called “Experimental designs of collective residential and social complexes”. Published and discussed in *Stadt und Lebensweise*,[[23]](#endnote-23) their proposal aimed for maximum collectivization and programmatic density:

“It is precisely the collective system that is the best means, the best form of organisation, to ensure a high level of comfort and an equal development for all members of society, to the extent that the communist way of life requires.”[[24]](#endnote-24)

These hypothetical models were equipped with communal spaces at both the block and neighbourhood scales, where meetings, social exchange, and political gatherings and demonstrations could take place. The initial idea of these projects was founded on high-density and maximum social interaction. However, the projects that were realised in Tehran were all relatively low-tech construction, with low-cost building materials and techniques, owing to a lack of financial support and sufficient executive power of the association.

Revolution Begins at Home

It could be argued that through these projects the concept of collective living was significantly reinforced, which in fact had a direct effect on the everyday practice of citizenship, manifested in the fight for the right to the city, public demonstration, and collective ownership that drove the mass movements from the 1950s onwards. The architecture of the city was indeed a manifestation of a political project at large. Tehran’s domestic spaces, in particular, became a launch-pad for socio-political mobilisation – spaces whose role is undeniable as breeding ground of resistance during the years leading up to the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In these projects, which were mainly made for the working and the lower-income classes, architecture was reduced to its barest form, and facilities were at the minimum. In this way, the dwellers’ lives were administered, controlled, and shaped through a series of spatial protocols and concrete measures. These ideological projects were later turned into codes and regulations, proposed by the 1963–1967 masterplan of the city: simple protocols of minimum housing units through which an entire city was formed. Within three decades the typologies first explored in those mass housing projects occupied the entire extent of the territory; an expanding lava of urbanisation spread between the mountains in the north and the desert to the south.

Tehran’s typical apartment was in fact born out of such ideological recuperation of the modernist principles of urban development. Bare frames that expanded Le Corbusier’s *dom-ino* into a five-story apartment, raised on *pilotis*, equipped with Schütte-Lihotzky’s Frankfurt kitchens, and laid out following Gropius’s Zeilenbau grid: an infrastructure that could accommodate any form of life. Such characteristics – namely domestic space as an infrastructural frame – blurred the strict division between public and private space, between the space of living and the space of political action. Consequently, the practice of citizenship was no longer restricted to the outside spaces of the city, but also flourished within the interiors of the domestic spaces, where the political agency of architecture is not limited to the public domain. Domestic interiors cease to be the exclusive domain for individual life and family matters; houses become the spaces in which new forms of collective life are experimented and nurtured: the battleground for social conflicts and political constituencies. They become spaces for political action.

The works of Kianouri and Firouz (a.k.a. the Macettis),[[25]](#endnote-25) and their associates, had throughout this period been set on one essential belief: “Revolution begins at home.”

Notes:

1. Mohammad Reza Shah was the second, and the last, Pahlavi King, whom was brought to power by a British intervention during the occupation of Iran in 1941. He replaced his father, Reza Shah, who reigned between 1925–1941. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Editorial, *Bidari-e Ma*, vol. 1, no.2 (August 1944), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid*, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid*, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The editorial team was mainly composed of the same members of the Women’s Association: the Alavi sisters (Badri, Najmi, and Shah-Zanan), Zahra Eskandari (Bayat), Mehrangiz Eskandari, Aalieh Shermini, A’azam Soroush, and perhaps the most fundamental figure, Maryam Firouz. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Najmi Alavi, *Ma Ham dar in Khaneh Haqqi Darim* [We have a right in this house too: Najmi Alavi’s memoir], ed. Hamid Ahmadi (Tehran: Akhtaran, 2008), 60–61. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Maryam Firouz, *Khaterat* [Memoir] (Tehran: Ettelaat Press, 1994), 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Noureddin Kianouri, *Khaterat* [Memoire] (Tehran: Ettelaat Press, 1992), 403. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Interview with Afsaneh Gidfar (Esfandiari), Maryam Firouz’s daughter, on 15 August 2018, Tehran. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Maryam Firouz, *ibid*, 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Noureddin Kianouri, *ibid,* 401. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Silvio Macetti (N.K.), *Großwohneinheiten* (Berlin: VEB Verlag Für Bauwesen, 1968), 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Farrokh-Laqa Alavi,‘House, Household, and their Constraints in the Contemporary Time’, *Bidari-e Ma* vol.1 no.4 (September 1944), 13–14. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Silvio Macetti (N.K.), *ibid*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, *The Great Initiative: Including the Story of Communist Saturdays*, trans. P. Lavin, (Glasgow: Socialist Labour Press, 1919), 23–24. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Georgy Alexandrovich Gradov, *Stadt und Lebensweise* (Berlin: VEB Verlag für Bauwesen, 1970 ), 5–6. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Silvio Macetti (N.K.), *ibid,* 11–13. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Mohammad-Ali Sheybani, ‘Peydayesh-e fekr-e tahiyehe sakhteman-e khaneh-haye dast-e-Jami’i-e arzanbaha dar Iran’ [First ideas for collective and affordable housing in Iran, *Architect* 1 (1946), 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Abbas Ajdari, ‘Mas’ale-ye tahiye maskan dar Tehran va shahrestan-ha’ [The problem of housing in Tehran and other cities], *Architect* 1 (1946), 15–16. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Farrokh-Laqa Alavi,‘House, Household, and their Constraints in the Contemporary Time’, *Bidari-e Ma* vol.1 no.4 (September 1944), 13–14. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ali Sadegh, ‘Tarh-e Bank-e Rahni baraye Mahalleh-ye Oudlajan’ [The Mortgage Bank’s proposal for Oudlajan neighbourhood], *Mokhtasari az Tarikhcheh-ye Khadamat-e Bist Saleh-ye Bank-e Rahni-e Iran* [A brief report on twenty-year activities of the Mortgage Bank of Iran] (Tehran: Bank-e Rahni, 1959). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Gradov, *Ibid*, 154–170. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Ibid*, 154. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Although Kianouri signed his books and articles with his pseudonym, Silvio Macetti, Maryam kept her name on her writings. She did not stop addressing Iranian women in her works. She wrote books such as *Madar-Nameh* (Epic of motherhood), *Afsaneh va Afsar* (Afsaneh and Afsar), and *Chehreh-haye Derakhshan-e Mobareze Iran* (Prominent figures in Iran’s activism). But undoubtedly the most influential yet less-known project of hers was the *Bidari-e Ma* journal.

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