

# Privacy in Literature and Film: Introduction

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THE concept of privacy in the Muslim world is explored in this section through three case studies in film and literature. Our authors readily acknowledge that their examples of privately inspired artistic expressions have been constrained by the strictures and limitations of the public domain. This problem is particularly relevant to their studies since the public sphere is represented by the ubiquitous arm of the autocratic state and the restrictive authoritarian norms of their respective cultures. Since the societies involved are predominantly Muslim, religious issues play a significant role and impose severe boundary limitations on any private expression that is perceived to impact the public negatively. This public/private struggle has traditionally been an enduring feature of the creative arts in Islam. It has been at times a positive but is generally a negative factor on artistic creativity.

Its negative influence is obvious in the way the state or the religious hierarchy has dictated the form and venue for creative expression. Perhaps the only positive aspect of this public/private "combat" has been the manner in which the artists have been able to find their own voices of dissent despite the imposed rules. These can be seen in the special shape that the language of the arts has taken in the Muslim world, particularly in its use of elaborate flowery language, parables and allegories, poetic ambiguity, and subterfuge. These hidden voices have been the expression of difference and the voices of dissent.

The three articles in this section highlight the significance of private voice in art. Nafisi explores the place and direction of

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women under autocratic rulers of Iran (be it secular or Islamic) and women's attempts to create a personal space for themselves. Dabashi places Shirin Neshat's visual art in the context of metaphorical and metonymic expressions of intimacy and privacy in group situations and within a social structure. Pamuk uses Andre Gide's private journal to highlight the private/public dichotomy and how the distant "other"—from an alien culture—is portrayed in private thoughts. The three authors demonstrate both the importance and the complexities of the two spheres of public and private in the Islamic world. As their work shows, this angle is an essential key to understanding some of the fundamental features of Muslim society.