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It is not to Run but to Win: Traditional-Religious Muslim Women's Agency in Iran and Türkiye

Koşmak Değil Kazanmak Önemlidir: İran ve Türkiye'de Geleneksel-Dindar Müslüman Kadınların Eylemliliği

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Abstract
Despite widespread assumptions about women's agency in the Middle East that show the concept of agency as not typically useful to them and submission and obedience as characteristics typically used to describe these women, this study was able to show there is insufficient knowledge about the meanings of women's agency for women living in conservative non-western regions, especially the Middle East. We gathered data from 50 lower-middle-class traditional-religious Muslim women in Ankaras and Tehran. We used a qualitative method, thematic analysis, and cognitive and semi-structured interviews. By emphasizing the quiet encroachment theory, the result shows that the encroachment of religious women in their everyday lives may be silent, hidden, and slow. Still, these women have been able to demonstrate their agency despite low education and economy. They don't act and think according to the traditional patterns of religiosity or social, cultural, and religious expectations. They create environments and resources for their freedom of action and fulfill their wishes outside. Women make decisions as active agents in the decision-making process after exiting their safe space and experiencing the joys of change.

Öz
Orta Doğu'da kadınların eylemliliği ile ilgili olarak, genelde eylemlilik kavramının kadınlar için uygun olmadığını ve bu kadınları tanımlamak için genellikle boyun eğme ve itaat kavramlarının kullanıldığını gösteren yaygın varsayımlara rağmen, bu çalışma, batı dışında muhafazakâr bölgelerde, özellikle de Orta Doğu'da yaşayan kadınlar için kadınların eylemliliğinin anlamları hakkında yeterli bilgi olmadığını gösterebilmiştir. Ankara ve Tahran'daki 50 alt-orta sınıf geleneksel-dindar Müslüman kadından veri topladık. Nitel bir yöntem, tematik analiz, bilişsel ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden yararlandık. Sonuçlar, sessiz ihlal teorisini vurgular bir şekilde, dindar kadınların gündelik hayatlarındaki ihlallerinin sessiz, gizli ve yavaş olabileceğini göstermektedir. Yine de bu kadınlar düşük düzeydeki eğitim ve ekonomik koşullarına rağmen eylemliliklerini gösterebilmektedirler. Geleneksel dindarlık kalıplarına ya da sosyal, kültürel ve dini beklentilere göre hareket etmemekte ve düşünmemektedirler. Eylem özgürlükleri için ortamlar ve kaynaklar yaratmakta ve isteklerini dışarıda gerçekleştirmektedirler. Kadınlar, güvenli alanlarından çıktıktan ve değişimin keyfini yaşadıktan sonra karar alma sürecinde aktif aktörler olarak karar vermektedirler.

Keywords Agency · Muslim women · The Middle East · Iran · Türkiye

Anahtar Kelimeler Eylemlilik · Müslüman Kadınlar · Orta Doğu · İran · Türkiye

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Introduction

Most scholars agree that women's agency is at the core of their capabilities. We can say that women's agency is the factor created in them because of fundamental changes in their awareness or internal transformations that allow them to define their choices and interests while considering themselves as empowered people capable of choosing (Sen, 1993; Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2001). Kabeer goes beyond this definition and considers agency as thinking outside the system. He believes women should play an important role in the change process and not be the receivers of changes described and measured for them (Sen, 1993; Mehra, 1997). Agency is regarded as a multi-dimensional structure proportional to different fields. Decision-making, freedom of action, and attitudes towards gender are some of these fields (Kabeer, 1999; Yount, 2016). Kabeer sees agency as an important part of women's empowerment, as a process obtained over time (Kabeer, 1999). This is rather similar to the Quiet Encroachment theory of Asef Bayat, which will be discussed later on. Qutteina defines empowerment as a process of obtaining new resources for moving from a low agency level to a high one. These resources could be anything, such as education, material assets, and social media outside the family. These conditions allow women to obtain the goals they set for themselves (Qutteina, 2019). Women's agency could be different based on their social, economic, educational, and political parameters or even other conditions. A woman who is empowered in one area may not be empowered in another (Malhotra et al., 2005, pp. 74). Mishra used the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) of India to refer to the diversity of empowerment and authority in women. Mishra believes women's agency is implemented in a manner that leads to their empowerment or freedom in one single field (Mishra & Tripathi, 2011). Ezazi believes women's empowerment is a method of confronting the reproduction of patriarchal values (Ezazi, 2006). The World Bank defines agency as the ability to make effective choices and convert these choices into intended results; therefore, women must be able to use their resources in decision-making and depict their agency by effectiveness, prudent influence, management, and acceptable implementation results (Spreitzer, 1996). Freedom of action is another parameter of their agency. Women require freedom in public spaces to achieve desired results (Mahmood, 2001). Others believe women's agency includes the development of their capabilities in pursuing their goals even in difficult situations (Hee et al, 2018).

Therefore, considering all these definitions, which are decisive or effective choices? Perhaps no definition of the agency includes the group of women in this study because the agency was defined based on intentionality, independence, and authority, features that are usually not used for describing religious Muslim women (Burke, 2012). Maybe there has never been a dialogue between religious-traditional Muslim women of this region and the researchers of this field. The limited number of previous studies about Middle Eastern religious-traditional Muslim women shows how much sociologists have disregarded this subject. Not considering these matters has slowly cleared a path for other viewpoints from other sources and defied women's agency without considering and analyzing women's descriptions of their situations and everyday life, which allowed the dominant outlook to see all women as the same. A lack of care for local and indigenous theories keeps our information about the conditions of women in the Middle East at lower levels. There is not enough knowledge about the definitions of women's agency for Muslim women of non-Western conservative regions such as the Middle East (Yount, 2005; Qutteina, 2019). Just as Mahmood said, the women of these regions do not face only one norm (Shively, 2014), but they face a variety of norms and values, based on their societies, which might be completely different from the Western cultures and their impressions regarding subjects such as gender rules (Qutteina, 2019).

All of this shows that focusing on determining Muslim women's agency could have an important role in complex arguments and their development concerning gender in non-Western societies. Although these subjects are limited to stereotypical subjects such as Hijab and religious corrections (Sehlikoglu, 2018) all

are efforts to return to the unheard voice of women in analyzing Middle Eastern societies as active agents with lives that are much richer and more complex compared to previously available narratives.

This paper tried to continue this way by offering an alternative perspective on public and private life by taking seriously the daily lives and the agency of Muslim women in the Middle East.

Research Background

The Quiet Encroachment Theory in the Middle East

In recent decades, researchers have turned their attention to describing and understanding the agency of women with Gender-Traditional Religions. This subject started with the first of four waves in the late 1960s by male anthropologists and gradually moved towards fixing the biases of men in reporting and creating new data about women's activities, and has continued to this day. The first wave was under the effect of the Marxist feminist approach with an initial interest in the areas of power and status. For example, the pastime activities of women, such as gatherings, tea parties, and other formal or religious ceremonies were of interest during the 1970s. Such gatherings conducted and organized by genius Middle Eastern women were considered locations of exchange and empowerment.

The second wave appeared during the late 1980s and early 1990s and continued until the 2000s. This was the era of two important theoretical turns, which immediately affected the second wave. Postcolonialism was the first of these turns, and was created as a result of the trailblazing work of Edward Said (1978) and Talal Asad (1973). The increase of gender studies as a normative subject was the second turn, made possible because of the Histoire de la sexualité by Michel Foucault (1978). During this time, there were many studies about the women of this region, which not only helped the non-Western feminist theories but challenged and confronted racism, and played a role in completing the Postcolonialism feminist theory.

In this wave, western liberal thought tends to define agency based on activities of resistance against domination or social norms, rather than actions conforming to social norms and disciplinary frameworks. In reality, agency consists of two components: resistance against subjugation (Mahmood, 2005: 5; Bilge, 2010, Lazreg, 2013; Muhanna, 2020) and the individual's duality within a society grounded in the humanist idea of authority (Chapman, 2015). Butler[1] believes that women's agency is actualized under cultural coercion (Chapman, 2015). Liberal feminists perceive women's subjugation as resulting from legal and customary restrictions that hinder their participation in public spheres. This approach involves studying women's family and work lives in the context of different experiences of discrimination and gender stereotypes. This group attributes the persistence of men's authority to patriarchy, which they deem an inappropriate system. Their viewpoint is rooted in the ongoing oppression of women due to their gender and reproductive capabilities. Liberal feminists pay particular attention to issues such as motherhood, coerced interest in the opposite sex, rape, pornography, and domestic violence (Kandiyoti, 1996, pp. 4). The liberal feminist tradition connects the voluntary surrender and submission argument with false consciousness (Bilge, 2010) and considers agency as resistance against the dominance of men.

Some researchers analyzed the differences related to resistance by stepping away from narratives that only emphasized the oppression of women in the Islamic world (Werbner, 2018; Vintges, 2012; Gallagher, 2007; Abu-Lughod, 2002; Deeb, 2006). Some experimental studies[2] analyzed the resistance activities of women based on their relationships with family networks and using religious rituals. These studies claim this is how

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[1] Butler, T. (1998). Gender Trouble, Feminist and the Subversion of Identity, Londen: Routledge.

[2] Boddy, 1998; Macleod,1991; Singerman,1995

women resist the male domination of the patriarchy, while others[3] claim women have only compromised with the patriarchal system (Muhanna, 2020).

Mahmood's work pioneered this new thinking (Sehlikoglu, 2018). Mahmood talks about the movement of Egyptian women in her study and presents why Muslim women tend to surrender against the norms. She Mahmood challenges the liberal feminist theory and Western philosophy by doing this. She believes resistance is just an aspect of agency to avoid reducing agency down to resistance. Mahmood believes agency could be completely non-resistive (Bilge, 2010; Sehlikoglu. 2018) and believes breaking the norms is not the only way to freedom from domination. She believes women's agency should be seen as the capacity of activity instead of a synonym for resistance against social norms (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 153 & 157; Mahmood, 2001).

According to Mahmoud, women may easily submit to normative systems that are based on humility and submission. However, the submission of Egyptian women, who consider obedience to religious practices important in their daily lives and cultivate piety through this submission, should not be perceived as the same as passive submission. Through their education and intellectual excellence, which aligns with the desires of God, they have the potential and necessary tools to foster agency - meaning accepting a religion that, from a liberal feminist perspective, hinders women's freedom and consequently subjects them to oppression. (Mahmood, 2005, pp.31, 154, 34, 174; Mahmood, 2001).

While this movement has empowered women to enter Islamic education in institutions affiliated with mosques, their participation is a criticism against the structure. This is a criticism against the limitations of the established cultural narrative that supported the adherence and authority of men (Mahmood, 2001) while weakening the structure of male domination. Mahmood confidently showed that religious women's conformation of religious concepts contains a certain form of agency previously neglected in feminist theories (Sehlikoglu, 2018). Mahmood looks at this subject from Foucault's point of view. Foucault believes that as much as power is all-encompassing, there is resistance against it (Werbner, 2018). In reality, Mahmood created a new window through which researchers could closely examine and understand the agency of Middle Eastern women outside the confines of the liberal framework. Some researchers have embraced Mahmood's perspective on agency and have demonstrated how women, in patriarchal societies, liberated themselves from the norms of controlling gender discourse through their pious actions (Sadiqi, 2018; Muhanna, 2015). Mahmood's work was so influential that it led to the conduction of many studies regarding piety[4] and created the "Piety Turn" term (Sehlikoglu, 2018).

The fourth wave started in 2010. According to Sehlikoglu (2018), some researchers of this era moved beyond Mahmood's argument and piety by paying attention to aspects of agency that were less focused on their religiosity aspect. These aspects included the everyday joys of Islamic women[5], sports[6], dreams, and tendencies[7], and normal daily life[8].

Religious Muslim women of complex societies, such as Egypt, Iran, and Türkiye, face different norm systems and multiple layers of authority, such as their families, traditional religion, and society, that create contradictory desires in them (Shively, 2014). Giving up against one of these norms might create some

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[3] Kandiyoti, 1988, Early, 1993; Haj, 1992; Shalkomy, 2003; Johnson, 2006

[4] Bayat, 2002; Deeb, 2006; Hasan, 2009; Heryanto, 2011; Hitq, 2003; Huq, 2008; Huq and Rashid, 2008; Jones, 2010; Rozario, 2011; Soares, 2004; Tong and Turner, 2008; Weintraub, 2011; Widodo, 2008.

[5] Al-Qasimi, 2010; Altinay, 2013; Balasescu, 2007; Gökarıksel and Secor, 2010; Kılıçbay and Binark, 2002; Osella and Osella, 2007; Sandikci and Ger, 2007; Tarlo, 2010; Tarlo and Moors, 2007; Yaqin 2007.

[6] Benn and Pfister, 2010; Farooq, 2010; Hoodfar, 2015; Kay, 2006; Sehlikoglu, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016.

[7] Hasso, 2010; Menin, 2011; Ozyegin, 2015.

[8] Bayat, 2013; el-Aswad, 2012; Schielke and Debevec, 2012.

resistance against another set, leading to conflicts between these surrender and resistance conditions. In this kind of society, women simply do not face a single norm to live and act according to, but they are faced with multi-layer norm systems with contradicting requests. Therefore, people's actions can be seen as their agency in some situations and as something other than that in other situations. Religion and family can have a certain set of moral demands of women while society might have another set of demands, and the government might impose a third set. Therefore, their fights regarding gender roles and norms are framed according to (or against) a wide array of expectations. Resistance and surrender or independence and conformity are interwoven concepts for many Turkish women (Shively, 2014).

Rinaldo believes women's agency can use secular and religious sources alongside each other to promote critical discourses on gender. He suggests pious critical agency (PCA), which is the capacity for critical and public interaction with religious texts. PCA tries to attract the cooperation of women in general and political conversations about the meaning of religious texts by challenging the most common interpretations and resisting the current norms. He, unlike Mahmood, points out that this type of agency does not contradict liberal feministic ideals because of its critical aspect. Also, he believes Islam can be a source of women's agency (Rinaldo, 2014).

Some studies recognized women's religiosity as one of the most important factors for their lack of resistance against traditional identities because they see religion and religious beliefs as the most important factors of tradition. As was mentioned before, the traditional interpretations of religion emphasize the divine roles of mothers and wives alongside the critical efforts of women to have a successful marriage, gain the satisfaction of their husbands, and be obedient to them (Sarookhani & Rafat Jah, 2004).

The quiet encroachment theory by Asef Bayat was formed in this wave. Bayat talked about "The quiet encroachment of the ordinary": how pursuing a decent life becomes politics in the Middle East. And for the first time, this paper discusses "The Quiet Encroachment of Traditional-Religious Women in the Middle East".

According to his theory, the quiet encroachment of normal people is just like their silent, long, all-encompassing progress in search of survival and improving their lives. The important feature of quiet encroachment is its silent mobilization which is usually atomized and long-term while including periodic collective activities. They are not open and accelerated struggles, and lack clear leadership, ideology, or structural organization (Bayat, 2010, pp. 107). Quiet encroachment is not a policy of collective demands and protests, but it is a mixture of individual and collective direct struggles expressed in socio-political conditions of authoritarian rule, populist ideology, and strong family bonds (Bayat, 2010, pp. 110). However, quiet encroachment creates a reality for governments in the long term in which they are left with no option other than accepting this situation. Finally, the poor can enact important changes in their lives, urban structure, and social policies (Bayat, 2010, pp. 111). This focus on urban mass agency separates quiet encroachment from any other growing social change generally caused by urbanization. These activities of progress in life are sustainable and self-generating, but they are usually illegal and activists constantly face the risk of harassment, insecurity, and repression. Encroachment has the benefit of flexibility and versatility as a fluid and unstructured form, but it cannot contain legal, financial, organizational, or even moral crimes (Bayat, 2010, pp. 111). In general, Bayat sees quiet encroachment as the main strategy of groups without rights to reach their goals. They are women with individual conflicts, objections, and changes that are rarely noticed by others. Scott believes the health and security of these women depends on their anonymity. The nature of these conflicts and the voluntary silence of their opponents create a collusive silence to remove these different forms of daily resistance and progress from history (Scott, 2002, pp. 94). However, popular imagination has perceived the Muslim Middle East as unchanging and unchangeable, frozen in its traditions

and history. In Life as Politics, Asef Bayat argues that such presumptions fail to recognize the routine, yet important, ways in which ordinary people make meaningful changes through everyday actions.

This paper explored the boundaries that these women perceive between their dreams and goals, and their actual lived experiences. I found that there is insufficient knowledge about the meaning of women's agency for women living in conservative non-Western regions, especially in Muslim societies. Such regions adhere to a variety of norms and values that may be different from Western cultures, such as different gender roles, and perceptions of what is considered appropriate for women. Current measures of women's agency do not fully consider context specificity, historical influences, and stage of the life course. Furthermore, this paper explored what they show as certain distinct and unconventional forms of agency that may not correspond to prevailing categories and conceptual imaginations. The quiet encroachment of pious women in their everyday life may be silent, hidden, and slow but they strive to find ways to resources and opportunities, and also to gain internal independence while being conscious of what is going on in their current situation.

Methodology

This study aimed to find firsthand experience and an accurate description of agency in traditional Muslim women's everyday life. Data was collected through non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 50 women in Tehran (29 women) and Ankara (21 women). These women were selected from two groups: housewives and employees, taking into account the two variables of the economy and lower education (diploma and lower). The lower middle class refers to women who have a high school education and have had occupations such as kindergarten teacher, nurse, or secretary, and the lower-middle-class women to those with lower secondary education and service jobs or cooking, or their husbands have jobs such as bakery, simple worker, carpenter, etc. (referenced in this research). The income of some of these women in Tehran was less than $37 per month and in Türkiye, less than $100 per month, and the lower middle classes also had an income of a little more than this amount.

All the women were married, with some having no children and others having up to four children. The age range of participants in Tehran was between 28 and 51 years, while for Turkish participants, it was 28 to 60 years. Most of these women had households, were housewives, or had jobs as a cleaner, cook, nurse, and coach. Some of them also did work at home and earned a small income from it.

Furthermore, certain common criteria for selecting the religious participants were chosen, eliminating the need to explore individual beliefs. Examples of religious ethics included no consumption of alcoholic drinks, no abortions, no usury, and not attending mixed-gender parties. Examples of collective religious ceremonies comprised attending Salah al jama'ah, Jumu'ah, Quran reading sessions, and religious programs at mosques. Additionally, examples of obligatory religious behaviors encompassed performing obligatory prayers, fasting, Ghusl, and Zakat al-Fitr.

To select the participants, purposeful sampling and—due to the sensitivity of the issue and the samples—the snowball method was used.

Interviews in Tehran were conducted mainly at home and indoors such as in mosques, holy places, and in Ankara at work and in religious classes. The interviews began as a daily conversation, nothing too personal or general, and towards a more profound layer; towards themselves, their womanhood, their beliefs, their emotions, and dreams.

The sample size in this study depended on when data saturation was reached. Data gathering took place over one year in Tehran and more than 7 months in Ankara.

Ethical considerations were considered throughout the study, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before participation. The university's institutional review board approved the study.

All names are aliases.

Data

Desires and Wishes

Whenever there is any conversation regarding the desires and wishes of women in the Middle East, the researchers tend to lean toward sexual desires instead of the more general meaning of desires and wishes (Shalinsky, 1986; Massad, 2002; Joseph, 2005). However, women have stepped beyond such viewpoints in this study. Some wanted new spaces for their usual daily behavior where they could be heard, felt, and fulfilled in an effort to keep their desires, wishes, and dreams alive. However, an answer of some of these women to the question, what do you wish for yourself? expressed only stereotypical wishes such as having a good tomorrow, being a great wife, and sacrificing their own desires so that their children's wishes are fulfilled. Nevertheless, there were some women still pursuing their dream path and imagining a design of their future based on them. Malek, a 37-year-old woman, a janitor from Ankara, is one of them.

"I live by my dreams and wishes. I don't like being unemployed and wasting time. I love working. I make and sell purses if I have enough time. I chose to make purses because I could control everything. I want to get a shop when I have collected my money."

Rozieh is a 36-year-old housewife from Ankara who spent most of her time outside attending her favorite courses. She wanted to be effective but somewhere beyond the frame of their house. Even though, her husband was reluctant about this. She talked about her interests, about the elegance of Persian carpets, and in her imagination wondered about designing original carpets.

They were trying to go beyond the frameworks defined for them. The most positive part of these stories was their independence in their path of dreams which allowed them to guide a part of their lives based on their personal decisions.

The 32-year-old Raheleh had all of the following attributes. She was bold, energetic, and a full-fledged warrior. Her passion had died down after her marriage, but she was rebuilding herself. According to her, she was not educated but had many career opportunities; however, her mostly unemployed husband did not allow her to work. She loved studying. Before their marriage, her husband promised she could continue her studies in medicine, but he did not hold up his promise after their marriage. I think she could have become a great doctor. Matters such as giving birth to three children in a row, the unemployment of her husband, and being forcefully housebound for 13 years had taken away much of her power. She was not the same Raheleh, but this was a good starting place.

"My days are different. Some days I am home from morning to noon doing chores. I will plan for something fun outside the house if I have free time because I don't like staying home that much. (Laughing) I'm never home. I usually go to the gym in the afternoons every other day. I do different stuff when I'm home, usually sports or cultural activities besides the house chores. If I don't have any of these, I plan to take the kids out with the excuse of taking them to the cinema or whatever. If I want to have some time for myself in the summer, I go to the gym alone. Or if I have no plans, I go out alone on a walk, saying, don't bother me I'm nervous. I walk for an hour or two because it calms me down and renews my soul. " (Raheleh, 32 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

In my opinion, this is achieving a level of empowerment in a difficult situation. This is about how they use their mind, individual choices, and ability to behave independently in the face of the limitations and pressures of their everyday life so they can use their resources for decision-making and show their agency.

"I never reached any of my dreams. My husband didn't work for many years. I worked. All the money I made was spent on rent and the education of my two girls. My husband didn't do anything. So far, I have worked and tried myself. Now, I'm a strong woman who takes care of her own needs. I don't need anybody. I even help others." (Asla, 51 years old, Ankara, Service Worker)

Public Man, Private Woman

Although patriarchy is in all contemporary cultures and societies, it manifests in distinctive contexts and uses different appropriate tools based on the special cultural-social conditions to express itself. Many public and private sphere Muslim Middle Eastern countries are differentiated from each other based on the same definition. For example, the gender power mobility of Morocco has been based on the historical patriarchal environment where the public sphere is created based on male dominance, while the private sphere is known as an unofficial female environment. Therefore, women are widely limited to the private sphere (their homes) as the guardians of norms and traditional norms mixed with religion (Sadiqi, 2018).

Colonial treatment of Europe during the 19th century drastically changed the discourses and methods that determined gender boundaries. The dual public and private interpretations of confrontation with colonialism were mixed with older viewpoints to create a complex reality of Middle Eastern women. The difference between Occidentosis and Islamism led people towards the "public" and "private" terms (Thompson, 2003). Meanwhile, Middle Eastern and North African women created survival and empowerment methods against these stereotypes that saw them as victims, passive, traditional, etc. They presented their egalitarian demands at different levels. They changed their public sphere nature in this process and helped with the creation of civil societies in their countries (Moghadam, 2010). Bayat says, "The more women express themselves in public, the weaker the patriarchy will be" (Bayat, 2010, pp. 31). Still, many men and women believe women should work inside their homes and men should work outside. Raheleh is one of the women who emphasizes the importance of "women's knowledge" regarding the conditions of their society while challenging the traditional roles of women and them being housebound:

"Why does our society have problems now? Because for a period after the revolution, women were stuck in their homes. I'm sorry, but we were stuck making pickles, vegetables, stews, and this stuff. This is its result. Look at the current generation. The religious teachings don't say women should be like this. If a mother doesn't understand political matters, her children will also be ignorant. When a woman knows what is happening in her country, she can educate her children properly. When she understands what cultural poverty is, she can educate her children in a manner to work on the weaknesses we have in society." (Raheleh, 32 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

In other Islamic countries, such as Morocco, where women are obedient to men inside and outside their homes, men use the patriarchy to deprive women alongside different tools such as (Islamic or Legal) Fiqh to stabilize and institutionalize this gender-based hierarchy (Mir-Hosseini, 2003). However, this limitation of Hijab-wearing women in their public lives may lead to women accepting the rules and religious rulings of this Islamic patriarchal system instead of challenging it. These rules are mostly to legalize the implementation of modern patriarchal systems (Saktanber, 2009). Indeed, the position and hierarchy of the patriarchal structure, supported by traditional religion, aims to tightly control and restrict women's actions as much

as possible. However, it seems that the perspective of women participants towards such positions and hierarchies is changing. Mobara is one of these women. She believes there is no conflict between the social activities of women and religion or the actions of women in their homes:

"They think they have to force women to stay inside their homes; to stay in enclosed spaces. But religion never said this. A woman can stay in her home or stay outside; there is no difference." (Mobara, 37 years old, Ankara, Cook)

Traditional thought attributes women to the private sphere and men to the public sphere. Also, in the most extreme scenario, some women might not want to be seen by any men or see any men themselves, but most likely, this is their husbands' desire. However, I determined these women try to improve their capabilities based on the available cultural framework of their families even if they want to stay at home. These are women who manage all house responsibilities in the best way possible so that the other family members feel dependent on them. The precise analysis of the family structure and performance showed women's "indirect power" to advance their needs and wants in even the deeply patriarchal country of Morocco. Moroccan women see themselves as the guardians of the private sphere and the managers of their families (Rassam, 1980).

"I think I have authority, both in my house and in my mother's house. They gave me the feeling of telling us what we should do. It's a good feeling. It's good they listen to you. I see myself as a traditional woman because everybody needs me at home. They are women respected in their homes, and everything centers on them. They want me around even if they have nothing to do with me. I'm happy they never say we can take care of our work when mom isn't around. They are completely dependent on me and not just a maid." (Tayyibeh, 38 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Internal Transformation and Attitudes About Gender

"You are in our eyes and… Housewives are compassionate, devoted, and loyal to their husbands and homes… We know female birds' nests… You are the ones who educate healthy children… You guide them with lullabies, advice, and prayers. Men are happy and successful because of you; when they come home. They forget the exhaustion of their days, their anxiety, and the turmoil of their lives; they find calmness in you and sleep with happiness and satisfaction." (Arat, 1990). These were descriptions of women published in a Turkish magazine. They are stereotypical descriptions common in Islamic societies and patriarchal thoughts. These gender stereotypes recognize women as weak and inferior while confirming the words of Nietzsche, who sees women as creatures born ready to serve that only reach perfection in their inferior state (Groult, 2000, pp. 80-84). But what happens to women if they don't follow these definitions? Will others be disappointed, and will they no longer be good and exemplary women? I asked this question to nearly every woman from Ankara and Tehran I interviewed during this study. How do you look at yourself? And I received some interesting answers.

Unlike the claims of liberal feminists and current literature, gender stereotypes, manhood, and woman-hood are not determined by Islam, the Quran, or any other holy text in the Middle East, but they are affected by different elements such as the patriarchal structure, personal mindsets, personal experiences, and relationships with other family peers (Keddie and Aron, 1991; Kandiyoti, 1991; Adibi, 2006 quoted by Muhanna, 2020) with an important role in shaping the identities of men and women in the Islamic and Arab world (Muhanna, 2020). The patriarchal relations are still the basis for the feeling of identity and agency of contemporary women from all over the Middle East (Gallagher, 2007). However, Bayat expresses in his theory

that the existence of patriarchal viewpoints in Islamic countries casts a shadow over their religious belief and the policy determination regarding how to deal with women. These views are mostly fed by patriarchal roots and traditional interpretations of women. I believe knowing these views, even in a brief manner, helps to better understand their strong presence in Islamic societies.

The superiority of men to women in traditional interpretations comes from their perfection of reason and religion, foresight, the performance of religious rites such as Adhan, sermons, Iʿtikāf, Friday prayers, being selected as Prophets and Imams, a higher share in inheritance, and the acceptance of men's martyrdom (Tabarani, 2008, V.8, pp. 231; Jurjani, 2009, V.1, pp. 485; Fazil Miqdad, 1994, V.2, pp. 212; Sayis, 2002, pp. 282). Today's women can be examples for refuting each of these interpretations. Malek considers women more resistant and even smarter than men:

"I agree men have stronger bodies, but I don't agree when it comes to our minds and smartness. I feel women are smarter creatures. I believe women are more resistant to hardship and don't give up easily." (Malek, 37 years old, Ankara, Janitor)

Yasmil also confirms Malek's opinion:

"Maybe my husband has physical strength, but it's not like he can do things and I can't. You can't say who is superior to whom. We both do our things." (Yasmil, 35 years old, Ankara, Cook)

It wasn't like the women of Ankara or Tehran tried to answer my interview questions based on social expectations regarding gender, roles, relations, and authority, but they tried to find a place for their viewpoints alongside those definitions determined by society; therefore, how could you consider all women as a whole and generalize such stereotypes for them. Maybe the woman is a unified concept, but there are thousands of different women inside this concept that are fundamentally different based on their social class, stratification, ethnicity, and gender issues (Piran, 2007). Folia emphasized "personal and social activities alongside the activities related to their house affairs and tried to adhere to this. She believes women have some "other interests" and most care about "their good feelings" just like men and other women alongside their responsibilities regarding their homes, husbands, and children.

In reality, women think about themselves; they dream, study, have conversations in their gatherings, and talk about the men of their societies. All of these are signs they understand their gender mobility (Bayat, 2010, pp. 116). The desire of women to have a minimum of rights and presence in social spheres allows them to experience outdoor life or have money-making jobs away from monitoring and challenging male dominance. The viewpoint of women towards the world among these protected frames does not stop them; however, they lead women towards things they deem worthy.

"This is my opinion; a woman who only cooks and cleans the house is not a woman. A woman should have some side activities alongside her main responsibilities. She must have some entertainment. I don't accept women should only stay home. I say why there is a problem; you can take care of your family while doing things you like. I try to be the best wherever I go. I try to be the best in the classes I attend. I want everybody to see me with my Chador being the best in my painting or tailoring classes. Art is not only for women with poor hijabs. It can also be for religious women." (Maedeh, 37 years old, Tehran, Leader of a Choir)

Almost all participants from Ankara and Tehran had created a completely new image of the "perfection of womanhood." Their energy and effort in life were not fully dedicated to performing their housewife and

mother roles. They had reduced the entanglements of their mother and wife roles to spend more time on things they liked. But they still saw a good woman as a woman with faith and an exemplary mother and wife even when they would spend a large part of their time working or attending female gatherings, religious ceremonies, or spending time with other women outside their homes.

"I read books, go out to drink coffee, I rest my brain a little. I don't think about my problems and rest. I have the interpretation that this time is dedicated to me, and I want to make myself feel good." (Folia, 49 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

Have Your Sources

The patriarchy and political economy equally tend to decrease the demand and supply of women's labor. Women comprise only 20% of the salary workers in countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iran, and Türkiye. Middle-class and educated women might have more career choices, but working-class and less-educated women from low-income families have limited choices that are any informal, domestic, or irregular work. Maybe these women are not directly after more rights, participation in movements, creating coalitions, making movies, writing books, and performing complex feministic analysis, but they all question their rules and conditions while asking for a better situation and increased resources (Moghadam, 2010). However, what conditions do these spaces and resources provide that allow women to gradually change their current daily habits and move towards activities that break the daily structure? The answer is they gradually add and replace new patterns and trends silently without anything changing on the surface.

This shows women can challenge gender rules despite the pressures and limitations in front of them while having or obtaining the ability to balance their familial, personal, and individual responsibilities while maintaining their energy and increasing their ability by obtaining new resources for creating new spaces or continuing in the older ones. Maybe they have a range of jobs limited to titles such as cook, janitor, nurse, instructing in small mosques, or some small job in the safe spaces of their houses, but their access to economic resources such as a stable income and assets is what increases their bargaining ability inside and outside their homes (Kagotho & Vaughn, 2016).

They become able to monitor the resources that are the results of their work. They no longer need to depend on their husband to obtain their wants and wait for what might happen. Maedeh talked about her satisfaction with "monitoring her monetary resources" and the pleasant feeling of being able to follow her dreams:

"I pay for the classes I attend, like drawing. My husband will pay for them if I ask, but I like paying the cost by myself. I'm not satisfied with less. I want to learn everything. I want to have my own money to help whenever needed or do whatever I like. I don't want to beg my husband to attend so and so classes. Being able to do stuff for me gives me hope. Being able to provide what my children ask for. But if you don't have your own money, you must keep asking your husband for money to buy whatever. I had to do this when I didn't work." (Maedeh, 37 years old, Tehran, Leader of a Choir)

Just as Reyhan, Someira, and Malek said, accessing monetary resources, such as working, allows them to access valuable skills such as "self-confidence" and other powerful resources such as "monetary independence", "personality independence," and "increased individuality" to intelligently use according to their wants.

"I spent for the house and kids. But don't give all of my money to my husband. Sure, this is only for the needs of the house, but I will buy stuff based on my desires." (Reyhan, 39 years, Ankara, Janitor)

"I work here part-time. Sometimes I learn the Quran and Arabic. I generally like the atmosphere of this place and prefer to work here. This place develops my character, and I use the money I make for the house and myself." (Someira, 43 years, Ankara, Part-time service work)

"I feel like a self-confident person. I think I'm an active woman that works with high self-confidence." (Malek, 37 years, Ankara, Janitor)

Women with income have more power to enact change. It seems the effect of such income is mostly through increasing the economic share of women in their families (Kabeer, 2017) which creates "dependencies" for other family members that women, such as Asla, could use to their benefit.

"I think women are superior. I work and pay for the house expenses. I am the higher power in our house because I have all the responsibility. In our house, the children inform me of everything." (Asla, 51 years, Ankara, Service work)

On the other hand, having a stable income from sources besides work and effort such as "allowance or alimony" (mostly for women in Tehran) could be a source of independence.

"Independence is not just having an income. It means your husband pays your alimony and provides all your needs. My husband provides my needs." (Mahsa, 45 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Women use situational religious pieces of advice in such situations to have access to monetary resources alongside "freedom of choice" to follow their dreams and remain "calm housewives."

"You should spend as much as you want. I have money right now, but I will be limited if I want to work. I talked to people who worked; it was hard for them. They said they don't have time for their children in their lives. They must rush everywhere. I feel they don't enjoy life as they should. I don't enjoy working. I wouldn't work if I wasn't forced, unless it's a small job I enjoy. Otherwise, I'm not after working." (Shima, 35 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Women of low-income families with lesser education levels in Syria have a much harder time finding jobs compared to their middle or higher-class peers. These women tend to be much more conservative regarding the proper activities for women outside their homes (Gallagher, 2007). Tehrani women put more emphasis on this matter than their Turkish peers, partly based on their husbands' viewpoints and demands for not being in masculine environments. However, the familial norms changed based on the need for more income, the efforts of women to have monetary resources, their efforts in convincing men regarding their presence in safe working environments, and the creation of small home jobs. Employment creates dignity and distinction in their condition. The tendency of Ankara women to have jobs shows the change in women's situation and lifestyle because of development. Intra-family roles are fundamental cultural elements resistant to change. The tendencies of employed women from Tehran and Ankara about helping their husbands in house chores, responsibility-taking, more equal work division, and equality between men and women have been mostly the same. Among the participants, women from Ankara were working, looking for work, or dreaming of working, while some Tehrani women preferred to gain independence using their alimony. This could be because Iranian men prefer to work themselves even in the hardest situations having the assurance that their wives stay at home. Terrible social conditions, maintaining the respect of women for doing superficial

work that is below their dignity, and working in places where other men are present that might lead to illicit gazes are some possible reasons for married women not being able to work in Tehran. Some women who after working and having an income faced the disagreement of their husbands created their home jobs while others gave service to religious and devout women from their homes.

Being Effective, Management, and Acceptable Executive Results

Women can't gain familial or social positions in a society where physical capabilities, wealth, and social influence are the most important. Also, such a society is not ready for instantaneous changes in different areas, such as women's rights. In various interpretations, it is argued that Islam, through the revelation of the verse "الرِّجالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّساءِ"[9] delegate the leadership and management of the family to men. (This is because, according to the principle of mastery over property,[10] "الناس مسلطون على اموالهم" (Najafi, 1983, Vol24, pp. 138), as men were the owners of the property and responsible for providing for women's livelihood expenses, and naturally, the owner of the property has the right to manage expenses). Therefore, entrusting the management of shared life to men seemed reasonable and logical at a certain point in history (Ghabel, 2013, pp. 30), and it was not contradictory to the customs and traditions of Arab society, where men held a dominant position. Thus, the mentioned Qawwamiat in the verse, according to the meanings expressed by the interpreters, seems to imply management and responsibility, which, according to interpretations, appears to have been placed on men's shoulders, and women do not have rights in this area. Although such perspectives still exist in many households today, I heard conversations different from those interpretations between the lines. Most women talked about the effects of freedom of action and its effective and acceptable results. "The feeling of being effective" and "being supportive" made Yasmil believe she could be as useful to others as she is to herself.

> "I used to work part-time. But now I work full-time. I used to clean houses, so I had a job for one day and didn't have any for the other. Now, I work full-time here. Living life with only one person is a really hard job. I wanted to work because I wanted to support and be alongside my husband." (Yasmil, 35 years old, Ankara, Cook)

Mahsa and Maryam believed women could manage their home affairs and the responsibilities assigned to them outside the home in the best possible way. They used their resources for "decision-making" and showed their agency as acceptable "effectiveness," "prudent influence," "supervision over matters," and "management and executive results."

> "I am the financial manager of the house and try to be observant, but I don't know if I was good enough for it or not. We have a really small budget, and I try to manage that, but I think I could have been better. My husband suggested I should be in control of this; he said you look over it because this is our income and this is what we have to live with, so you should know. Our situation got a lot better when I understood and took control of our monetary situation." (Maryam, 40 years old, Tehran, Instructor of Exceptional Children)

> "Women should control the expenses. Men usually overspend. Women plan so they won't come up short on money. Women can manage houses much better. That is what I do." (Mahsa, 45 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

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[9]. Al-Nisa:34. Men are in charge of women

[10]. The people are masters of their wealth.

They want to play and affect decision-making, add to their family income, have savings for emergencies, help their husbands, and even save them from hardships.

"I have got myself whatever I wanted using my money ever since I went to work. After a while, I realized I was spending all my money. I should help my husband. I saw how satisfied my husband was. He said nothing about why you aren't helping me. But he is thankful for me because I'm helping. He might come short in some places, so I help him. Being able to do something is a really good feeling." (Nahid, 28 years old, Tehran, Nanny)

Social Media- Escape from Everyday Life

Female religious or non-religious communities for those free of daily chores is a great opportunity for women to be together for a while and step away from the repetitive environment of their homes and its big and small responsibilities while stepping away from the men's untimely isolation commands and prohibitions.

"We sit in the garden with my friends and watch our kids play. We go to parks together. Talk about the happenings of each day and our work. We complain about our men and calm ourselves down." (Yasmil, 35 years old, Ankara, Cook)

Such communities are limited, but they are windows toward a larger world. Although the talking in religious ceremonies is one-sided and these words are mostly accepted without any questions, doubts, or conversations even this "presence alongside people of the same gender" creates "a feeling of calm and empathy," "the experience of participating in religious ceremonies," and "gaining access to a solution for solving a problem" make a good, favorable, and pleasant environment for the participants even with all of their problems.

"These sessions allow me to know how my neighbors are doing. You can read the Quran in your home, but being in a gathering with my neighbors and being in public is important. We get to know how everybody is doing. We get the news of who went on vacation, who had house repairs, who is going to a proposal, and who has a pregnant daughter, but the most important part is just being in a public space. This is an environment of closeness and helping each other. When we had some house repairs, I would easily go to a neighbor's house to cook our food, or they would just bring some food for us. You get energy in these gatherings and just enjoy yourself." (Narges, 38 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

"We read books with our friends. We read political, novel, and psychology books and talk about them. We have a WhatsApp group to chat about these books when we have read them. I mostly read psychology books. You need to know this science to understand your family and other people. We learn solidarity and empathy through these books." (Safa, 30 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

There will be a friendlier environment and stronger bonds at the end of religious ceremonies and gatherings. The formation of these conscious networks, which might seem like passive networks, is the most important intermediary for creating collective identities (Bayat, 2010, pp. 129). They will "support" each other and "feel empowered" from being together.

"I spend time with my friends. We do social things together. We attend sports classes together. We talk with each other. Take pictures. Talk about house issues and whatever happens. We support each

other. This makes us happy. It gives us a good feeling. We help each other by talking about things we don't know much about to increase our knowledge." (Folia, 49 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

"I have a strong relationship with my friends, which is important to me. Meeting with my friends helps me with whatever I'm about to do. We talk. Read the Quran. I don't enjoy being alone. I like to share myself with my friends. That is enjoyable for me." (Malek, 37 years old, Ankara, Janitor)

"We have gatherings. We go out together. One of my friends has a Villa in Karaj. We plan and go there for the weekends. We mostly discuss our lives, husbands, and children. We found each other on the internet. We used to be on WhatsApp, but now, we're on Telegram. We knew everything about each other after a few years. We help with each other's problems. We console each other. We even know each other's husbands." (Hosna, 40 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Women in Tehran and Ankara use these gatherings for "becoming social," "higher performance," and even "competition"; these are stages for the emergence of their "talents and self-expression."

"I love these classes. There are the professors. We celebrate with them. We talk. I love these times. If God is somewhere, that is a good place for us. I encourage my friends to come here and learn the Quran. It's not the case that you can only be happy with your family or when you're alone. These gatherings are beautiful and necessary. We must learn many things and these classes allow us to express ourselves." (Sena, 46 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

These are environments for disrupting the waves around the gender circuit and "focusing on resistance," "gaining more experience," "socializing with your peers," and "meeting different personalities" for "learning and gaining higher-quality knowledge."

"We have cultural-social programs here. We get to know how others are doing. We shop from the charity bazaar. We make new friends. Share information. For example, learn cooking, sewing, or housekeeping from each other. I take my daughter to these Quran memorization classes, and we learn a lot of things. I memorized the Quran with her. This is my free time. This place is a blessing in disguise. I come here once a week. I come out of loneliness. I like to have gatherings with my friends and neighbors, so I come to this Hussainia." (Ziba, 38 years old, Tehran, Small In-House Work)

The formation of these conscious networks, which might seem like passive networks, is the most important intermediary for creating collective identities.

Decision-Making and Decision-Formation

The concept of rights is not tangible for women in the patriarchal structure, so what can you expect when it comes to choosing rights for being or not being? But also, I know reality has many different aspects. People are taking steps in the same structure. The decision-making skill requires much training and proper development space, but even these small steps show an effort in making executable decisions.

Deniz and Asli, 47 and 51 from Ankara, both emphasized "rationalism" and "decision-making" at their discretion instead of "mindless following." This viewpoint showed how much they were familiar with the importance of personal experience and knowledge in life:

"I have done whatever I wanted. I went wherever it was rationally correct. I don't let these things {my lack of freedom of choice} get to me. Who should I wait for? I used to be quiet. I wouldn't say a thing,

but now I'm not the same. I do things based on my intellect. If I tell myself I will do something, I will do it."

Some women, who have long believed that they were confined to a limited social status and lacked authority and influence in the family sphere due to traditional gender roles, have begun to make changes in their lives. These changes often occur after experiencing significant life events such as "the death of their husband" or "getting divorce". In the face of these transformative events, these women have embraced a new sense of agency and empowerment. They have taken it upon themselves to make "new decisions" that challenge societal norms and expectations. By stepping outside the traditional roles assigned to them, these women are asserting their independence and seeking to redefine their identities. They are no longer bound by the limitations imposed by societal expectations, and instead, they are actively shaping their own destinies. "During our times, women were imprisoned in their homes whether I was at my father's or husband's house. I wanted to be more useful if it was up to me. At that time, I thought I could not do anything, and everything was an obstacle for us: our fathers, mothers, and husbands. But now, everything has changed, and my will is in my own hands. I try to manage my affairs. It is not what I expected, but I try my best."

This shift in mindset and action is a testament to the resilience and determination of these women. They are breaking free from the confines of traditional gender roles and carving out a path that aligns with their individual aspirations and goals. They didn't stay at home. They attended Quran, crocheting, and any other courses they dreamed of. Sitting alongside other women and listening to new conversations created new motivations for them. They were happy because they were able to have a role in "making decisions and selections" about their destiny.

"I selected my husband. But we didn't understand each other afterward, and I separated from him because we could make decisions and select things. I have a will. I won't give up easily and try my best to solve my problems." (Marveh, 29 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

Most women referred to the God-given independence of their children in these interviews. Nobody talked about abortion. Women were not in control during such cases, and the birth of their children was destiny even if they were not ready and knowledgeable for having children or didn't even have any choice. However, some considered having decision-making, readiness, and right of choice for giving birth to one or even four children. In reality, their childbearing was under the management of women based on the time, location, and full will of women. Among these women, there was only one Tehrani woman who had "sterilized herself" after the birth of her third child just to prevent any other births because she believed her husband was using this method to keep her at home. "The transformation of marital and familial relationships and norms" alongside "the creation of new identities" for expressing wants and opinions were visible in all interviews. I believe this was due to the "discovery of new values in views" alongside "the new familiarity of women with their real position" that created resistance on their part in familial and social areas. Reyhan was one of the women who decisively expressed the subject of choice in the context of "individual assessment":

"Your feelings towards your husband are really important, but it shouldn't be in a way that you do whatever he wants. In many situations, you must act as you think, not as he wants." (Reyhan, 39 years old, Ankara, Janitor)

In the end, the agency comes from choice and the power of decision-making, and it does not arise from the stagnant water of force and coercion. Decision-making and monitoring can create an identity-making agency and increase women's self-esteem, but a lack of decision-making ability tires and discourages them.

"I hadn't seen my husband. They liked me and came for a proposal. Naturally, I liked to meet and know him before marriage. But it was God's fate, and I accepted it." (Yasmil, 35 years old, Ankara, Cook)

"Others liked and chose my husband. Because my marriage and pregnancy was not my choice, I don't feel I have selected him. Now, I don't care what happens." (Rozieh, 36 years old, Ankara, Housewife)

Decision formation is a concept that Women might want to but not be able to make and implement decisions directly, but there are other paths in front of them for forming decisions. In reality, this type of decision-making indirectly influences men's decision-making power because women plan the situation in a manner to express their intended subjects in the framework of men's decisions.

"If we're talking about the respect husbands give their wives, I make decisions, but I talk using my husband's tongue if I want to talk. That means after our consolation, and after I have convinced him, he is the one who expresses the subject." (Hakimeh, 28 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Some of them have accepted male dominance based on the available traditional views about the position of men to strengthen and stabilize their families but still follow and act upon their own decisions.

"I try to make my words heard and have the final say. I pressure him on this. But I never argue with him in front of the kids. That is how he puts my words in the frame of his decisions because a father must always have a strong character in front of his kids." (Mobara, 37 years old, Ankara, Cook)

Using their children as mediators, "using emotional relations," "inducing a sense of respect to the male roles," and showing the importance of their role as a husband and father are methods of decision-formation.

"When something comes up that I want to happen, I send my little daughter to say it to her father. It mostly works." (Fatimah, 40 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

This type of decision might have a lower level of importance, but the innovation and genius of women can turn them into a method of progress.

"We decide together. (Laughing) But I have the final say. I will have the final say even with force. We even argue sometimes. But most times, I feel right, not that whatever I say is necessarily correct; I prove that correctness, not myself. I have to prove it because I'm right. He sometimes agrees easily, but sometimes (laughing) I have to make my words heard however possible,. I don't want to break his heart, so I let him believe that he is the one making decisions." (Atefeh, 36 years old, Tehran, Kindergarten Instructor)

There were differences between the answers of Tehrani and Turkish women based on their understanding of mutual decision-making and shared roles. This difference might be because of the high expectation of Ankara women from their husbands in sharing decisions and understanding their situation. This is while Tehrani women were more after indirectly expressing their wants with policies and decision-formation.

Confronting the Reproduction of Patriarchal Values

Some women have considerably helped recreate the patriarchal cycle. Hamideh said she doesn't want her daughter to be too preoccupied with school. She believes girls gain success in life when they learn the principles and secrets of marriage as best as possible.

"What good is school! I learned math and just tired my brain; what good was it? These are not good for her. They must teach her life lessons at school. She needs to know how to handle her husband's family and how to handle her husband." (Hamideh, 40 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Daughters learn from their mother to be silent in front of their father, and their father teaches them to copy their mother in everything and be obedient, tame, and oppressed.

"My husband likes to have his way around the house. He wants to have power and dominance over his family. He does this so that his children will learn to obey their men when they enter their own lives." (Fatimah, 40 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Even with all of these, it seems the tides are changing, and this trend is shaken and invalidated. The door revolves around the same axis, but it is not as fluid as before. The authority, dominance, and patriarchy-based teaching gears are not as perfect as before and erode themselves like old and tired bones.

"I explain everything to my daughter. I order books for her. I make her go to a sports class. She must have some relief. She is always at home. I wasn't allowed to go out much. My mother would say I would get a lot of suitors because I'm tall if I go out. She would say it's bad if you go out now; others would say, look at her daughter, she is 13-14, and she is still playing with a swing. That's why I always stayed at home. I would crochet, I would sew. I learned these things really fast. Now, I don't want the same for my daughter. My house was in terrible shape before I got here. I told her to please clean the house up if she could. If not, I will come back and clean things up. I remember how my situation was and said no, I don't want my daughter to become like how I am from this early age." (Elaheh, 29 years old, Tehran, In-House Hairdresser)

Maybe some women have never experienced the power of struggle and the ability of encroachment, but they were able to give their dreams, beliefs, and knowledge to their children, just like the participants of a sprint relay, to plant what others never planted for them in the best possible manner for their children and the future generation hoping to find a new path for this cycle and start another loop with new gears.

"They were much more sensitive about girls back in the day. We couldn't go out and go to others' houses. We were even limited in going to university. We couldn't attend any university. My father was really strict. I got accepted into a really good field, but my father didn't allow me to attend because the university was far away from us. I won't be the same for my child. I will let her attend any course in any university, and I will support her myself. This was difficult for me, and I won't allow it to happen to my daughter." (Maryam, 40 years old, Tehran, Instructor of Exceptional Children)

"I try my best to make my children have this style in their lives. I think I was successful. It's a mistake in our society that we say I'm leaving this place, so let it remain dirty. We don't have the mentality that others planted for us to eat, so we should plant for others to eat. There is another dominant environment between us. I emphasize this for my daughter. These are things I would do if I could return

to life. I told her about the conditions I would create for myself. On the other hand, I talk about my expectations from my husband and life with my sons." (Narges, 38 years old, Tehran, Housewife)

Conclusion

There have been many talks regarding the lack of Middle Eastern religious-traditional women's agency and empowerment, but recent studies show these Muslim women have agency in different manners (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Deeb, 2006; Mahmood, 2005). There have been different definite and unconventional forms of agency and activity in the Middle East that have not received enough attention (Bayat, 2010, pp. 12). These are paths that do not necessarily align with the conceptual liberal feminist expectations and perceptions, which don't allow them to be "analyzed by the very same accepted frameworks used as limitations for studying women." (Friedan, 2015, pp. 25). Religious Muslim women of complex societies such as Egypt, Iran, and Türkiye face different norm systems and multiple layers of authority, such as their families, traditional religion, and society, that create contradictory desires in them (Shively, 2014).

Giving up against one of these norms might create some resistance against another set, leading to conflicts between these surrender and resistance conditions. In reality, agency and surrender are the two sides of the same coin for these women. One side is weakness and the other is strength. Not everything is completely hopeful, but they are not black and sorrowful. All the women named in this study showed they don't believe in their environment. They make their behavior and actions by understanding their environment and current conditions. They don't believe in stone walls and phrases such as they won't support us, they won't give permission, I can't, and any other easily convincing excuse.

We showed in this paper, however, that women only experience the environment of their fathers' and husbands' homes in the traditional view, but they challenge the outlook that women belong to the private sphere and men to the public.

In this research, we talked about low-income and educated religious-traditional Muslim women in this study. As I mentioned before, I tried to avoid any comparisons during this path because any two groups of women from any age group, different marital and divorce backgrounds with any number of children, if they were housewives or employed, and the fact which one of them progresses faster or slower was not important for me during this study. I believe everybody was trying to achieve the very same goal: a slow encroachment toward the path of a creative agency. Therefore, I see my study in the same group as the fourth-wave studies. I embarked on a challenging journey through the most difficult layers, considering the limited access of these women to monetary sources, their education in a patriarchal environment, and their development in a traditional and religious space. I should briefly mention that religious actions are a part of the activities besides any other daily action or activity of these women who participated in this study. They don't drown themselves in religion as an escape or go into a trance, just like the Zaar cult women or Sudanese women (Boddy, 1989; Mahmood, 2001), to escape their current situation.

They also experience cultural norms in their daily lives and indirectly challenge them without any violence or direct resistance. All of our efforts in this study were to give more clarity to the blurred image and negative stereotypes of Muslim Middle Eastern women, who are usually known as oppressed, poor, inferior, and subjugated, like by many other researchers (Davidman, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 1993, 2000; Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Mahmood, 2005; Gallagher, 2007; Rinaldo, 2014). Some evidence signaled the reluctance of sociologists to study in the field of traditional-religious Muslim women, especially when it came to low-income and education classes. Without a doubt, these women have different roles and situations based on their culture, economic, and social conditions regarding expressing their type of agency. Such studies in Muslim Middle Eastern countries will give us precise information about the views of these women regarding their agency.

Considering such stereotypes as Hijab or limiting women's agency to fields such as piousness will limit our view towards the creative manifestations of women's agency in daily life as much as an emphasis on the framework of resistance (Sehlikoglu, 2018). Based on the current descriptions, the obvious conditions of Muslim Middle Eastern women do not make it possible to ignore reality.

These women might not be familiar with feminist theories and the chaotic relationship between feminism and religious traditions; just like the situation of women in Türkiye who receive subordination labels from the secular parts of the society and resistance labels from the religious part when they want to surrender to God and follow his religious rulings (Shively, 2014). However, there are many ways for these women to consciously or unconsciously challenge, fight, resist, bargain with, or even bypass gender discrimination. The agency of these women is less individualistic. In other words, most of their daily activities are for their families instead of separate things for themselves. Still, they could create personal plans and a family-free environment for themselves in their daily lives. These women achieved this by getting involved in normal daily deeds that were retold in their stories. They used thinking, working, income making, participating in educational and artistic classes or friendship circles, singing, and other matters that were mostly done to express the identity of these women. Women can impose themselves on society as social activists using these very same daily creativities. They could change the passive views of gender mobility and dynamics, gain some credit for themselves, and partially improve gender views in families and society (Bayat, 2010, pp. 115-116).

Unlike the studies conducted in Qatar (Qutteina, 2019) to evaluate women's agency, most women in this study were after the management of affairs related to monetary matters of the family alongside their efforts for gaining the least possible financial independence in different shapes. They changed familial and marital traditions and were after creating new identities for themselves. The support of their husbands and families is not ineffective in empowering and retrieving their identities.

Women increased their access to resources: whether it was women who had outside activities, women who had a limited working and activity sphere but increased their in-house income-making activities due to the lack of their husband's permission, or women who provided their resources using alimony. Although reducing their sexual dependencies is difficult for these women, working prohibitions (for any reason) and limited access to resources can determine the position of these women in appearance. In such cases, unlike the limitations Gallagher describes due to the low education or lack of permission from their husbands in the women of Syria (Gallagher, 2007), it seems gender dependency patterns of each region could change by having access to more resources. These women can bypass the norms of their husband being the only provider, having more control over their income, and increasing their family's income using this method.

They are smart people looking for methods of resistance and progress amongst their observations and experiences, but everything takes shape in the frame of their thoughts and not by womanly politics that are mostly based on tears and deception. This is something constantly reproduced in other studies as if women have no other aspect for expressing their agency. The important fact here is that they don't exactly act and think according to the traditional patterns of religiosity or social, cultural, and religious expectations. They create environments and resources for their freedom of action to fulfill their wishes outside this determined obedient personality frame and make decisions as the active agent in the decision-making process after exiting their safe space and experiencing the joys of change. On the one hand, women might not be able to take part in decision-making directly, but they can indirectly affect men's decision-making power. On the other hand, they might have accepted male dominance and believed in it based on the influence of these traditional views and the embedded importance of men's positions in the family, but they could still follow and enact their decisions considering their genius and creativity by mediating their children, emotional

relationships, and instilling respect for their husband's role. The results of this study show that women are not weakened after the death, separation, unemployment, or disability of their husband, but they gain much more freedom of action in expressing their wants and desires while trying to rely on their abilities for living.

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