

**Deleuzian Conceptualizaion of “Agency”: Muslim Women Questions\***

*Deleuze’ın Felsefesi Bağlamında İrade Kavramı: Müslüman Kadına Dair Sorular*

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**Article Information / Makale Bilgisi**

**Article Types / Makale Türü:** Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

\* This article has been extracted from my doctorate dissertation “Affective-Relational Becomings: Contestations over Muslim Women’s Identities” (PhD Thesis, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA, 2018) / Bu makale “Affective-Relational Becomings: Contestations over Muslim Women’s Identities” başlıklı doktora tezim esas alınarak hazırlanmıştır (Doktora Tezi, Temple Üniversitesi, Philadelphia, ABD, 2018).

**Received / Geliş Tarihi:** 14 March /Mart 2019

**Accepted / Kabul Tarihi:** 03 June/ Haziran 2019

**Published / Yayın Tarihi:** 15 December / Aralık 2019

**Pub Date Season / Yayın Sezonu:** Aralık/December

**Volume / Cilt:** 23 **Issue / Sayı:** 2 **Pages / Sayfa:** 1009-1025

**Cite as / Atıf:** Aksel, Hesna Serra. “Deleuzian Conceptualizaion of “Agency”: Muslim Women Questions [Deleuze’ın Felsefesi Bağlamında İrade Kavramı: Müslüman Kadına Dair Sorular]”. *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi-Cumhuriyet Theology Journal* 23/2 (December 2019): 1009-1025.

<https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.540227>

**Plagiarism / İntihal:** This article has been reviewed by at least two referees and scanned via a plagiarism software. / Bu makale, en az iki hakem tarafından incelendi ve intihal içermediği teyit edildi.

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<https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/cuid>

Deleuzian Conceptualizaion of "Agency": Muslim Women Questions

**Abstract:** There are many studies about whether Muslim women are oppressed or emancipated by Islamic traditions. Some claim that Islamic traditions, such as the headscarf, oppress women while others want to prove that these women have agency when they perform Islamic traditions. This project aims to use a Deleuzian conceptualization of agency<sup>1</sup> and freedom that will enable us to examine multi-faced, relational, and spatial formations of Muslim women's lives. In other words, I apply the relational ontology of the France philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, to contestations over Muslim women. Through this relational ontology, I problematize the depictions of Muslim women solely based on religious frameworks in a pejorative way and want to explore alternative patterns in Muslim women's experiences and practices. Therefore, I use the Deleuzian conceptualization of agency and freedom to demassify the depictions of Muslim women as submissive beings based on their religious engagements. I suggest scholarly projects that will be attentive to the situatedness of Muslim women.

**Summary:** Based on the clash of civilizations framework, some western institutions depict a monolithic community of Muslims and use this monolithic depiction to prove the need to fight against Islam and Muslims. Muslim women become a focal point within this narrative since they are portrayed as an oppressed group by the Islamic traditions and Muslim men. For example, the headscarf as the marker of Muslim women's identities sparks discussions about whether it is oppressive or not. There are many studies on whether Muslim women are oppressed or emancipated. Some claim that Islamic traditions such as the headscarf oppresses women while others want to prove that these women perform their agency when they wear a headscarf. For instance, Saba Mahmood challenged this narrative by questioning the liberal conceptions of agency, freedom, desire, and resistance. Although these studies point out the necessity of historical and spatial analysis of Muslim women and their agencies, this issue requires further investigation and articulation.

In this project, I aim to use a Deleuzian conceptualization of agency and freedom that will enable us to examine multi-faced, relational, and spatial formations of Muslim women's experiences, desires, and practices. In other words, I apply the relational ontology of the France philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, to contestations on Muslim women. According to this Deleuzian ontology, the world is constituted of bodies. Every entity, biological organism, social structure, and abstraction is a body. Each of these bodies, whether it is a human or non-human body, material or immaterial, social or psychological construction, is produced by confluences of relations. Every aspect of the human body including its biological, mental, social, and psychological components is also constituted through multiple relations. Therefore, when we talk about a human subject, we refer to the assemblages of complex and multiple relations. This conceptualization of the body brings a new conceptualization of agency as well. This Deleuzian understanding of agency focuses on relations that produce the body. Since bodies are generated through the flux of relations, their capacities to feel, to act, and to desire in certain ways will change according to the relations they have.

Through this relational ontology, I suggest seeing bodies of Muslim women as complex assemblages of multiple elements constituted through flows of relations. This conceptualization problematizes the portrayal of Muslim women's embodiments exclusively based on a religious tradition. Experiences, practices, and desires of Muslim women, as well as their agencies, constraints, and capabilities, are produced through relational engagements with multiple elements such as socio-political discourses, familial relations, material availabilities, and economic conditions. In other words, their power to act is generated by relations with surrounding elements (bodies in Deleuzian ontology), whether these bodies are religious or secular, human or non-human, material or immaterial. Consequently, their bodies and forms of their agency are always remade through various elements which continuously connect and disconnect.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "agency" is used to refer to the capacity of acting or of exerting power.

I use this Deleuzian conceptualization of body and agency to problematize the depictions of Muslim women as a submissive group of women by their religious engagements. I aim to illuminate the multiplicities of constituent elements in their lives and suggest a fragmented and relational depiction of their agencies. Through the lenses of relationality, I explore what becomes invisible and left out in terms of depicting heterogeneous and dynamic experiences of Muslim women. For this purpose, I apply this Deleuzian perspective to an interview conducted in Capital City Women's Platform (Baskent Kadın Platformu) in 2018 for my Ph.D. project as well as some ethnographic observations in Turkey. Given the theoretical basis I propose, I aim an in-depth analysis of the data collected from this interview instead of a collection of a higher volume of data. In addition to the analysis of the interview, I use other resources such as ethnographic observations, material culture, and analyses of historical and political contexts.

By applying the Deleuzian ontology on Muslim women, I aim to pay attention to multiple and relational generative forces in Muslim women's lives. Specifically, I problematize the depictions of Muslim women solely based on religious frameworks in a pejorative way and want to explore alternative patterns in Muslim women's experiences and practices. To put it differently, I argue that Muslim women's experiences are relational, multi-faced, fractured, and particular. We should explore this multiplicity and relationality instead of assuming an imaginary singular category. Therefore, I suggest grounded scholarly projects that will be attentive to the situatedness of Muslim women. In this type of analysis, the task of the scholar should be to explore the multi-faced and situated subjectivity and agency of Muslim women that enable us to understand intertwined forms of oppression and liberation. We should stress the constant co-construction and re-construction of experiences and actions over marginalizing and categorizing identities.

**Keywords:** Religious Studies, Muslim Women, Turkey, Deleuze, Headscarf, Agency.

#### Deleuze'in Felsefesi Bağlamında İrade Kavramı: Müslüman Kadına Dair Sorular

**Öz:** Müslüman kadınların İslami gelenekler tarafından bastırılmış mı özgürlüğe kavuşturulmuş mu olduğuna dair pek çok çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmalardan bazıları başörtüsü gibi İslami geleneklerin bir baskı unsuru olarak görülürken, bazıları da Müslüman kadınların bu gelenekleri uygularken kendi iradelerini ortaya koyduğunu, dolayısıyla bu geleneklerin bir baskı emaresi olarak görülemeyeceğini savunur. Bu çalışmada, Müslüman kadınların hayatlarının çok yönlü, ilişkisel ve mekân bağlamında şekillendiğini incelememizi sağlayacak, Deleuze felsefesi bağlamında ele alınan irade ve özgürlük kavramlarını kullanmak amaçlanmıştır. Diğer bir ifade ile Fransız filozof Gilles Deleuze tarafından ortaya koyulan ilişkisel ontoloji Müslüman Kadın çalışmalarını sorgulamak için kullanılmaktadır. Bu ilişkisel ontoloji üzerinden, Müslüman kadınların dini söylemler çerçevesinde olumsuz resmedilmeleri sorgulanmakta ve bu kadınların deneyimlerine ve pratiklerine dair alternatif açıklamalar ortaya konulmaktadır. Böylece, Deleuze'in felsefesi bağlamında ele alınan irade ve özgürlük kavramları kullanılarak Müslüman kadınların dini katılım ve uygulamaları üzerinden pasif ve irade göstermeyen kadınlar olarak tasvir edilmesi sorgulanmaktadır. Müslüman kadınların durumsal uygulama ve deneyimlerini keşfedebilecek nitelikte akademik bir bakış açısı önerilmektedir.

**Özet:** Bazı batılı kuruluşlar medeniyetler çatışması söylemini temel alarak tekil bir Müslüman dünyası tarif edip bu tek tipleştirilmiş tarifi İslama ve Müslümanlara karşı mücadele etmenin neden gerekli olduğunu gerekçelendirmek için kullanmaktadır. Müslüman kadınlar İslam gelenekleri ve Müslüman erkekler tarafından baskıya uğrayan bir gurup olarak resmedildiği için, bu söylemlerde Müslüman kadınlara dair konular önemli odak noktalarından birisi olmaktadır. Örneğin Müslüman kadın kimliğinin sembolü olarak görülen başörtüsünün bir baskı unsuru olup olmadığına dair tartışmalar görülür. Müslüman kadının başörtüsü ile bastırılmış mı özgürleştirilmiş mi olduğuna dair pek çok çalışma da bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışmalardan bazıları başörtüsü gibi İslami geleneklerin Müslüman kadınları baskıladığını ileri sürerken bazıları da kadınlar başörtüsü kullandığında bunu kendi iradeleri ile yaptığını tartışır.

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Örneğin Saba Mahmood irade, özgürlük, istek ve direnme gibi kavramların liberalizm temelinde anlaşılmasını sorgulayarak Müslüman kadınlar hakkındaki bu söylemlere karşı çıkar. Bu çalışmalardan bazıları da Müslüman kadınların ve onların iradelerini kullanmalarına dair konuların tarihsel ve mekânsal bağlamda yapılması gerektiğini savunur. Her ne kadar bu konuda yapılan çalışmalar olsa da, bu konu daha fazla araştırmaya ve yeniden ele alınmaya muhtaçtır.

Bu çalışmada, bu konuyu çok yönlü, Müslüman kadınların deneyimlerini, isteklerini ve uygulamalarını ilişkisel ve mekânsal olarak ele alma imkânı vereceğinden, ilk olarak irade ve özgürlük kavramlarını Deleuze felsefesi temelinde ele alınmaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, Fransız filozof Gilles Deleuze'a dayandırılan ilişkisel ontolojik bakış açısı Müslüman kadına dair tartışmalara uygulanmaktadır. Bu ilişkisel ontolojiye göre, dünya bedenlerin toplamından oluşur. Her varlık, biyolojik organizma, sosyal yapı ve soyut yapı bir bedendir. Bu bedenlerin her birisi, ister insan bedeni ister insana ait olmayan bir beden olsun, ister maddi ister madde dışı olsun, ister sosyal ister psikolojik yapılar olsun, ilişkilerin akımı ile şekillendirilir. İnsan bedeninin biyolojik, zihinsel, sosyal ve psikolojik bileşenlerini içine alan her yönü de çoklu ilişkiler ile oluşturulur. Bu yüzden, bir insan öznesi hakkında konuştuğumuzda, aslında karmaşık ve çoklu ilişkilere dair konuşuruz. Bedenin bu şekilde ele alınması irade kavramının da yeniden ele alınmasını gerektirir. İrade kavramının bu bağlamda ele alınması dikkati bedenleri üreten ilişkiler üzerine odaklar. Bedenler ilişkilerin akımı ile şekillendirildiği için, bedenlerin belirli şekillerde hissetme, davranma ve istemeye dair kapasiteleri de sahip oldukları ilişkilere göre şekillenir.

Bu ilişkisel ontoloji temelinde, Müslüman kadınların bedenlerinin ilişkilerin akımı ile şekillenen çoklu elementlerin karmaşık bir araya gelişler olarak ele alınmalıdır. Bu kavramlaştırma Müslüman kadınların hayatının izole edilmiş dini gelenekler temelinde oluşmuş gibi resmedilmesini sorgulatmaktadır. Müslüman kadınların iradeleri, kapasiteleri ve sınırlılıkları kadar deneyimleri, pratikleri ve istekleri de sosyal-politik söylemler, aile içi ilişkiler, materyal yapılar ve ekonomik şartlar gibi çoklu faktörler ile kurulan ilişkiler üzerinden şekillenir. Diğer bir ifade ile bu kadınların belirli şekillerde davranmaya dair güçleri kendilerini çevreleyen bedenler ile kurdukları ilişkilere göre şekillenir. Bu bedenler dini veya seküler unsurlar olabilir, insan veya insana ait olmayan unsurlar olabilir, ya da maddi veya madde dışı faktörler olabilir. Sonuç olarak, Müslüman kadınların bedenleri ve irade gösterme şekilleri her zaman bir süreklilik içinde bağlantı kuran veya bağlantılarını koparan çeşitli elementler ile üretilmektedir.

Deleuze felsefesi temelindeki bu beden ve irade kavramlaştırmaları Müslüman kadınların dini geleneklerine salt itaat temelinde resmedilmelerini sorgulamak için kullanılmaktadır. Bu kadınların hayatlarındaki çoklu yapısal denebilecek elementlerin aydınlatılması amaçlanmakta ve onların iradelerinin parçalı ve ilişkisel bir şekilde anlaşılması önerilmektedir. İlişkisel ontolojik lensler aracılığı ile Müslüman kadınlar resmedilirken görünmez kılınan veya fotoğrafın dışında bırakılan dinamik ve heterojen unsurlar tetkik edilmektedir. Bu amaç için, Deleuze felsefesi temelinde yapılan kavramlaştırmalar 2018'de doktora çalışması için Başkent Kadın Platformunda yapılan bir röportaja ve Türkiye'deki bazı etnografik gözlemlere uygulanmaktadır. Ortaya konulan teorik bağlama daha uygun olacağından, bir gruptan ya da daha geniş bir çerçevede veri toplamak yerine, bu röportajdan elde edilen verilerin detaylı bir şekilde ele alınması amaçlanmaktadır.

Bu ontolojik bakış açısını Müslüman Kadın konusuna uygulayarak, Müslüman kadınların hayatındaki çoklu ve ilişkisel etken güçlere odaklanılması amaçlanmaktadır. Müslüman kadının yalnızca dini söylemler temelinde negatif olarak tanımlanması sorgulanmakta ve Müslüman kadınların deneyimlerini ve uygulamalarını anlamak için alternatif modeller olabileceğine dikkat çekilmektedir. Diğer bir şekilde ifade etmek gerekirse Müslüman kadınların deneyimleri ilişkisel, çok yönlü, parçalı ve muayyen olarak ele alınmalıdır. Hayal edilen tekil bir grup yerine, çok yönlülüğün ve ilişkiselliğin keşfedilmesine ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu yüzden Müslüman kadınların belirli zeminler temelinde anlaşılmaya çalışılması önerilmektedir. Bu tür bir analizde, bir araştırmacının amacı Müslüman kadını çok yönlü bir özne ve irade anlayışı

temelinde belirli zeminlerde keşfetmek olmalıdır ki iç içe geçmiş baskı ve özgürleşme şekilleri de anlaşılabilir. Müslüman kadının kimliğinin kategorileştirilmesi ve marjinalleştirilmesi yerine, devam edegelen şekilde deneyimlerin ve uygulamaların oluşum ve yeniden oluşumlarının üzerinde durulmalıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Bilimleri, Müslüman Kadın, Türkiye, Deleuze, Başörtüsü, İrade.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the clash of civilizations framework, the mainstream western media describes Muslims as a monolithic community and uses this monolithic idea of Islam to explain the behavior of all Muslims regardless of their varied cultural, socio-economic, and political contexts. Post-Muslim women, such as Irshad Manji and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who are supposedly insider or authentic Muslims, although they deny being a Muslim, have been instrumental in the construction of perceptions about Islam. These figures are brought into public attention by some western institutions despite the conceptual, historical, cultural, and geographic inaccuracies in their narratives.<sup>2</sup> The headscarf, as the marker of Muslim women's religious engagements, becomes one of the focal points in this narrative. There are many studies that focus on the questions of the headscarf such as whether these women are oppressed or emancipated or whether they have agency or they serve to the interests of their men. Some claim that the headscarf practices oppress women, or that they compromise the agency of those who veil.<sup>3</sup> Others argue that veiling should not be confused with the lack of agency. It is freely practiced by women, so it does not oppress and instead liberates its wearers.<sup>4</sup> While these discussions continue in academia, countries, such as France and Turkey, even imposed various bans on the headscarf to "liberate" headscarf-wearing women. The actors of this ban assumed that if they restricted the usage of the headscarves, they would help women realize how oppressive this Islamic tradition is. However, surprisingly, many of these women fought back against the ban.

Within this historical context, some feminist scholars such as Lila Abu-Lughod, Chandra Mohanty, Margot Badran, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Saba Mahmood challenged this narrative by analyzing different aspects of women's agency.<sup>5</sup> Some of these works use liberal conceptions of freedom and agency to problematize portrayals of Muslim women who as being shackled by the oppressive structures of Islamic traditions and being submissive, while some others question the usage of these liberal conceptions for the examination of Muslim women's lives. In both cases, these works focus on the conceptualizations of freedom, agency, and resistance and portrays Muslim women as active beings by challenging the depictions of Muslim women as passive beings. These feminist works refuse to depict the participation of Muslim women in male-dominated spheres as false consciousness and the internalization of patriarchal norms. They examine the ways in which women subvert, re-adapt, and resist dominant patriarchal structures in order to redeploy these structures for women's interests. They argue that it is not possible to draw a sharp division between resistance and compliance. Any real

<sup>2</sup> Saadia Toor, "Gender, Sexuality and Islam under the Shadow of Empire", *Scholars and Feminist Online*, accessed March 5, 2018, available at: [http://sfonline.barnard.edu/religion/toor\\_02.htm](http://sfonline.barnard.edu/religion/toor_02.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Alev Çınar, "Subversion and Subjugation in the Public Sphere: Secularism and the Islamic Headscarf", *Signs* 33/4(2008): 907.

<sup>4</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Reflections on Anthropological Relativism and Its Others", *Wiley* 104/3(2002): 786.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed discussions, see Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Reflections on Anthropological Relativism and Its Others", 783-790; Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles". *Signs*, 28/2 (2003):499-535; Margot Badran, "Between Muslim Women and the Muslimwoman", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24/1(2008): 101-107; Afsaneh Najmabadi, "(Un) Veiling Feminism", *Social Text* 18/3(2000): 29-46; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

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action mixes both resistance and compliance. By challenging the depictions of Muslim women as passive beings, these works aim to explore how women use potential resources in Islamic traditions to re-code women's own interests, therefore, they perform their agency.

Saba Mahmood particularly calls into question conceptualizations of agency, resistance, and desire by liberal feminism that become a resource for liberation projects of Muslim women. Mahmood points out that many studies fail to problematize the universality of liberal and progressive thought that supposedly frees women from a relationship of subordination and structure of male domination.<sup>6</sup> These liberal discourses assume an innate desire for resistance by referring to an assumption that all human beings seek autonomy and challenge social norms in the same way when allowed to do so.<sup>7</sup> In this conceptualization, the articulation of freedom, which gives the woman the right to enact self-determined interest, forms the object of feminist politics and theory in such a way that resistance becomes normative to feminism, as it is to liberalism.

Through an ethnographic account of a women's mosque movement that is a part of the larger Islamic revival in Cairo, Mahmood explores how women's religious participation within such public arenas is structured by a discursive tradition whose goal is subordination to a transcendent will. The pious subject that the mosque movement poses is not compatible with a liberal feminist scholarship because the mosque movement women practice ideals embedded within the tradition that have historically placed women within structures of subordination.<sup>8</sup> In the context of this movement, Mahmood suggests delinking women's agency from the goals of progressive politics and the concept of resistance against oppressive and dominating operations of power.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, we will be able to understand the meaning of women's agency from "within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment," in a way that allows women's agency to work in multiple ways, rather than as a form of resistance. Otherwise, as Mahmood discusses, a supposedly innate desire for resistance portrays Muslim women from an orientalist perspective only as oppressed, brainwashed, etc.

Through reference to Aristotelian ethics in a Foucauldian sense, Mahmood wants to apply Butler's performative ethics theory to understand the piety of Muslim women with some modification of the theory according to this particular context. In this sort of analysis of the subject, power is no longer a simple imposition of domination over others, but it is a strategic relationship of forces that produce new forms of desire, objects, and relations.<sup>10</sup> Mahmood addresses the necessity of historical analysis for forms of agency and points to the historicity of subjectivation. While Mahmood discusses the historicity of subjectivation of Muslim women, she focuses on Islamic traditions. For example, she examines the agency of veiled Muslim women based on the ethics of Islamic traditions which have been seen as a subordinating tradition.

In this project, I want to take a further step to problematize conceptualizations of Muslim women's agency. Therefore, I suggest paying attention to ever-shifting, dynamic, multiple, and fractured features of Muslim women's agency and practices instead of their religious traditions. In other terms, I refuse to see women's agency as primarily based on religious tradi-

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<sup>6</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 14. According to Mahmood, the normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory as well shows a liberatory character, which is "conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and submission," and excludes ethical and political site of human agency that "does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance."

<sup>7</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 5-10.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion, see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

tions, since this conceptualization gives a sense of an isolated group which is assumed to constitute a singular religious space. For this purpose, I propose a Deleuzian understanding of agency and desire as well as body and freedom. I then apply these Deleuzian conceptualizations to contestations over Muslim women.

According to this Deleuzian ontology, every entity or thing is a body, whether it is a human or non-human body, material or immaterial, social or psychological construction. Each of these bodies is constituted through confluences of relations. For instance, a human body, including its biological, mental, social, and psychological components, is produced through multiple relations throughout the course of life. Based on this relational ontology, I suggest seeing bodies of Muslim women as complex assemblages of multiple elements constituted through flows of relations. This conceptualization refutes to the portrayal of Muslim women's embodiments based on primarily a religious tradition. Rather, the constraints and capabilities of Muslim women, thereby their agency and desires, are produced through relational engagements with multiple elements such as social and political discourses, material availabilities, familial relations, and economic conditions. A religious embodiment might be only one element among many. In other words, forces of their agency and acquisitions of their bodies are generated by relations with surrounding elements (bodies in Deleuzian ontology), whether these bodies are human or non-human, religious or secular, material or immaterial. Consequently, their bodies and forms of their agency are always remade through various elements which continuously connect and disconnect. I use these conceptualizations to demassify the depictions of Muslim women as submissive beings solely based on their religious engagements. Through these lenses, I explore what is left out or unseen in terms of heterogeneous and dynamic experiences of Muslim women. I aim to examine the specificities and multiplicities of constituent elements and portray a fragmented and relational agency of these women. However, I neither present a new theory of agency nor do I claim to answer all questions about the agency of Muslim women. What I do is to open a space to talk about dynamic, fragmented, and multi-faced features of the agency of Muslim women.

### THEORY AND METHOD

The philosophy of Deleuze presents an idea of the world which is composed of relations between multiple bodies and the modifications of these relations. For this ontology, bodies are composed of "a series of flows, energies, movements, capacities, a series of fragments or segments capable of being linked together".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the body, including both biological and non-biological aspects, is not an entity, does not occupy a fixed position, and does not have essential qualities. To put it differently, instead of understanding the body as a "blank screen" stabilized, fixed, and inscribed on by social forces, Deleuze and Guattari offer an alternative understanding of the body as an elusive becoming.<sup>12</sup> Refusing the idea of the body as a unified and fixed entity, Deleuze and Guattari propose a conceptualization of the body as being linked to multiple bodies, human and non-human bodies, material objects, biological process, and social structures. The body is continual, heterogeneous, and unfixed linkages between bodies, materialities, objects, and structures, which are social, psychological, and biological coming together in conjunctions or breaking away through disjunctions.<sup>13</sup>

Given that dichotomous thought is commonly used in regimes of oppression and subordination, this Deleuzian ontology can be useful for a feminist inquiry to problematize the

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics", *Topoi* 12/2(1993): 173.

<sup>12</sup> Chris Shilling, *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 12; Clare Hemmings, "Invoking Affect", *Cultural Studies* 19/5(2005): 550.

<sup>13</sup> Annie Potts, "Deleuze on Viagra (Or, What Can a 'Viagra-Body' Do?)" *Body and Society* 10/1(2004): 19; Shilling, *The Body in Culture, Technology and Society*, 12.

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logic of binarization. In terms of deconstructing the legacy of foundationalist thought and humanism, this Deleuzian perspective stands with feminist concerns.<sup>14</sup> According to this ontological stance, the study of subjectivity, human experiences, and social structures should be attentive to bodies' relations.<sup>15</sup> This conceptualization sheds light on the subject and the experience of the person in context. The body's relational investments enable us to re-think the subject in particular milieus.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this Deleuzian understanding of the body is of great relevance to dissolve binarization imposed on Muslim women such as oppressed/liberated, brainwashed/emancipated or religious/secular.

In this ontology, agency and capacities of the body can be known only on the basis of its relations which are multiple and ever-shifting. Cameron Duff argues in his works on human development that capacities and capabilities of the body develop through the "transition in the body's affective sensitivities and relational repertoires".<sup>17</sup> Through relational engagements, an agency of the body to act, to desire, and to feel are produced and become the body's part. These conceptualizations of the body provide a new understanding of agency which is addressed in the next section.

Moreover, this approach is helpful to challenge the patriarchal vision of femininity that positions the woman as a complementary other of masculinity. Rather, women or men is conceptualized as beings in a constant process of existence. Feminist scholars, such as Elizabeth Grosz, inspired by Deleuzian ontology, want to produce a concept of freedom that is not understood primarily based on the elimination of constraints through the dichotomy of subversive/ repressive.<sup>18</sup> Freedom should not be primarily linked to the "choice" which refers to the independent selection of options available to women.<sup>19</sup>

I am aware that some feminists have reservations in terms of the applications of Deleuzian ontology to feminist endeavors. For example, Sophie Woodward and Kath Woodward question the efforts that undermine the category of women because this can make feminist projects difficult, even impossible. They see a collective group crucial for the political projects of feminism although uniting the diverse group of women can be a problem: "abandonment of a category of women who could speak as a collective 'we' at any point would subvert and destroy the politics of feminism".<sup>20</sup> According to this critical standing, the Deleuzian conceptualization of the body, therefore, the body of a woman undermines the political struggles because this conceptualization erased the identity and self-determination.<sup>21</sup> Braidotti also cites some of these reservations about a Deleuzian project by stating that "fluidity, non-being, liminality, and marginality, as well as a condition of symbolic exile, are part and parcel of women's history of oppression."<sup>22</sup> She points out these concerns with this statement: "only a subject who historically had profited from the entitlements of subjectivity and the rights of

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<sup>14</sup> Rosi Braidotti, "Nomadism with a Difference: Deleuze's Legacy in a Feminist Perspective", *Man and World* 29/3(1996): 307-308.

<sup>15</sup> Cameron Duff, "Towards a Developmental Ethology: Exploring Deleuze's Contribution to the Study of Health and Human Development", *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine* 14(6): 628; Lisa Blackman - Couse Venn, "Affect", *Body and Society* 16/1(2010): 21.

<sup>16</sup> Duff, "Towards a Developmental Ethology: Exploring Deleuze's Contribution to the Study of Health and Human Development", 624-630.

<sup>17</sup> Duff, "Towards a Developmental Ethology: Exploring Deleuze's Contribution to the Study of Health and Human Development", 629.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Duke University Press Books, 2010), 140.

<sup>19</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 147.

<sup>20</sup> Kath Woodward-Sophie Woodward, *Why Feminism Matters: Feminism Lost and Found* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 48.

<sup>21</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 168.

<sup>22</sup> Braidotti, "Nomadism with a Difference: Deleuze's Legacy in a Feminist Perspective", 310.

citizenship can afford to put his 'solidarity' into question."<sup>23</sup> Marginal subjectivities of women "cannot easily relinquish boundaries and rights which they have hardly gained as yet."<sup>24</sup>

Although these concerns rightly point out the risk that demassifying approaches can make productions of feminist projects difficult, like Grosz and Braidotti, I find the decentralization of binary and essentialist logic urgent. De-essentialization of binarization, which has been tools of women's oppression, particularly of marginalized women, is crucial to challenge some of the important tools of the patriarchy. For this purpose, I find concepts of the body and agency in Deleuzian scholarship relevant and potentially useful regarding the unhinging the essentialist visions about Muslim women. I argue that this Deleuzian perspective can provide analytical tools for the investigation of the agency as well as different forms of oppression.

Then, I apply this Deleuzian conceptualization of agency to an interview conducted in Capital City Women's Platform (Baskent Kadın Platformu) in 2018 for my Ph.D. project as well as some ethnographic observations in Turkey. Although I had nine interviews for my Ph.D. project, I deliberately use only one interview because the theoretical perspective used in this study requires an in-depth analysis instead of collections of a higher volume of information from more people. I call my interviewee Berna to maintain confidentiality through a pseudonym. Berna is a self-confessed feminist activist in Capital City Women's Platform (CCWP). She has a bachelor's degree, worked as state officer until her retirement, and suffered from the headscarf ban in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s.

To overcome some of the methodological challenges and to widen the point of view, in addition to my interview, I draw upon other resources such as ethnographic observations, analyses of historical and political contexts, and material culture. As Fox and Alldred do<sup>25</sup>, I believe that any data which can help to examine relations of Muslim women can be appropriated for a Deleuzian inquiry.

By applying my Deleuzian perspective to the data derived from my interview with Berna, I aim to challenge the habituated understanding about Muslim women and provide an alternative depiction. I particularly pay attention to the multiplicity of generative relations in her life. Specifically, I question the depictions of Muslim women as a singular group based on some religious frameworks and norms and explore alternative patterns of Muslim women's lives.

However, I do not claim to provide an understanding of Muslim women that applies to all times and places. Neither do I aim to discuss all historical and spatial relations for the construction of Muslim women's identities. Rather, I am concerned with questioning the depiction of Muslim women as a singular group. I address only some of the possible relations which I see as relevant in my case in order to open an alternative space to suggest a relational and multi-faceted understanding of their embodiments and experiences. Through the examination of various relations in a Muslim woman's life, I pay attention to alternative realities of Muslim women, which became vague, invisible, and pushed away from our attention. I argue that Muslim women's experiences are fractured, relational, multi-faced, and specific. Therefore, we need to explore this multiplicity and relationality instead of assuming an imaginary singular category.

<sup>23</sup> Braidotti, "Nomadism with a Difference: Deleuze's Legacy in a Feminist Perspective", 310.

<sup>24</sup> Braidotti, "Nomadism with a Difference: Deleuze's Legacy in a Feminist Perspective", 310.

<sup>25</sup> Nick Fox–Aldred Pam, "The Sexuality-Assemblage: Desire, Affect, Anti-Humanism", *The Sociological Review* 61 (2013): 778.

### 1. DELEUZIAN CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AGENCY

As stated, this ontological stance shifts our focus from the agency of a human being toward relations between human and non-human bodies.<sup>26</sup> This means that not only human bodies but all beings and matters have an "agential" capacity.<sup>27</sup> To put it differently, the agency is decentered from human agents toward the relations among multiple bodies, human or non-human bodies. As Currier argues, human bodies are elements of the assemblage and have an agency through its connection with other bodies.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, agency, as well as actions of individuals, are enabled by heterogeneous and multiple elements rather than being the result of the independent agential capacity of human being.

According to this formulation, the human being as the source of agency is replaced by relations of multiple elements which produce and re-produce the world. Since bodies are in a constant process of becoming through the flows of relations, capabilities of bodies psychologically, physically, emotionally, and socially change in this process of constant becoming. Fox sees this relational flow as "the single means by which lives, societies, and history unfold by adding capacities through interaction."<sup>29</sup> These flows of relations connect bodies, social, and material constructs, things as well as abstractions. As the result of the constant modifications of this relational flux, capacities of bodies to do something, to desire something, to feel, and to act change.<sup>30</sup>

This form of agency is different from both free will or resistance. It is a "socio-culturally mediated capacity to act."<sup>31</sup> Precedence is not given to individuals over contexts or to social structures over human bodies. Therefore, an intrinsic capacity is not attributed to a human being for free-will. Instead, there is an emphasis on dynamic and complex relationships between human and non-human bodies. In this regard, the agency of the individual is made possible through its relations with surrounding bodies. Human bodies mesh with events, abstractions, materiality, and other human bodies. Consequently, human agencies are made possible interactively and can work only within webs of their relations.

Fox provides an example of a Deleuzian agency which is not primarily attributed to the human body. Instead, all bodies, human or non-human, material or immaterial, social or biological, can have agential capacities through the flows of relations. For instance, human inquiry for creativity is made possible by relations of multiple bodies. The creativity of an artist, for example, a painter, is produced by the relations of canvas, past experiences, an artistic style, relationships with family, peers, colleagues, and other artists, concepts, social institutions, ideas, and socio-economic relations. Relations of these bodies produce the capacity for the artist's body to produce the painting.<sup>32</sup>

While flows of relations generate a productive capacity of bodies, they can also have restraining impacts on bodies. Some relations stabilize, fix, and restrain the capacities of bodies while others destabilize the existing habitus, subjectivities, dispositions, and thereby produce new agential capacities.<sup>33</sup> This concept reveals how stable units, constraining structures,

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<sup>26</sup> Nick Fox – Alldred Pam, "New Materialist Social Inquiry: Designs, Methods and the Research-Assemblage", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 18/4(2015): 399; Fox and Pam, "The Sexuality-Assemblage: Desire, Affect, Anti-Humanism", 778.

<sup>27</sup> Nick Fox - Alldred Pam, "Mixed Methods, Materialism and the Micropolitics of the Research-Assemblage", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 5579(November 2017): 3.

<sup>28</sup> Dianne Currier, "Feminist Technological Futures: Deleuze and Body/Technology Assemblages", *Feminist Theory* 4/3(2003): 336.

<sup>29</sup> Nick Fox, "Creativity and Health: An Anti-Humanist Reflection", *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness and Medicine* 17/5(2012): 499.

<sup>30</sup> Fox – Pam, "The Sexuality-Assemblage: Desire, Affect, Anti-Humanism", 773.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Ahearn, "Privileging and Affecting Agency", *Privilege, Agency and Affect: Understanding the Production and Effects of Action* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 240.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, "Creativity and Health: An Anti-humanist Reflection", 501).

<sup>33</sup> Tamsin Lorraine, "Feminism and Poststructuralism: A Deleuzian Approach", *The Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 277.

and identities are challenged, then new paths are created.<sup>34</sup> Stated differently, change is not produced by the subversion of stable structures by an autonomous human subject, rather, through the connecting and re-connecting of bodies.<sup>35</sup> These constantly shifting relations among bodies produce agency, and thereby, new capabilities and capacities for action.

As a result of this formulation of the agency, a new concept of freedom also becomes possible. Grosz suggests a concept of freedom which is in alignment with the concepts of body and agency in Deleuzian ontology. This form of freedom is not primarily seen as the elimination of constraint, instead, it is the ability to perform capacities of the body and to act according to the repertoire of the body.<sup>36</sup> Grosz calls this concept of freedom as positive freedom, which is not primarily linked to the idea of independent choice or selection of options. Neither does it refer to a primary connection between freedom and agency.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, freedom is "not a state one is in or a quality that one has, but it resides in the activities one undertakes."<sup>38</sup> The question is not about whether an individual is free or oppressed, but rather it is about whether the human body is able to act in accordance with its relations, repertoires, and dispositions produced by an on-going modification of relations among multiple bodies. Consequently, free acts are produced in accordance with the relations of the body. In other words, if the actions of the human subject come from his/her history and express desires, habitus, and dispositions of the subject, these actions are freely performed. As Grosz puts it, we are free if our acts spring from our relations, our whole being.<sup>39</sup>

Acts can be seen as being freely taken insofar as they spring from the repertoires of the subject, even if these acts are taken based on some traditionally subordinating structures. This formulation explains also how transformations and challenge of subordinating structures occur. The human being becomes through its relations, the subject is transformed by every new relation.<sup>40</sup> While the subject enacts her repertoire and history of relations, she never remains the same. She constantly becomes other than her previous self through changes in her relations. To put it differently, undermining of oppressive structures become possible through ever-shifting relations that produce indetermination and uncertainty. These unstable relations generate possibilities<sup>41</sup> to become something else.<sup>42</sup>

## 2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DELEUZIAN CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AGENCY FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

As addressed above, liberal/neo-liberal frameworks render individuals as autonomous, self-regulating, and rational beings who bear full responsibility for their lives. These frameworks narrate the freedom as the outcome of unconstrained and deliberative choices. Regardless of their conditions, subjects should exercise their agency and free-will over external structures. Feminist projects which use these frameworks focus on the moments of subversion and resistance in women's lives. It is believed that these moments of resistance and subversion reflect the capability for free and deliberate choices. However, the Deleuzian understanding of agency and freedom is based on relations of multiple elements. Therefore, agential capacities and forms of agency continuously change.

<sup>34</sup> Grosz, "A Thousand Tiny Sexes: Feminism and Rhizomatics", 176.

<sup>35</sup> Paola Marrati, "Time and Affects", *Australian Feminist Studies* 21/51(2006): 319.

<sup>36</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 140.

<sup>37</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 147.

<sup>38</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 152.

<sup>39</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 146.

<sup>40</sup> Grosz, "Feminism, Materialism and Freedom", 146.

<sup>41</sup> I do not mean that all changes bring liberation, instead, some changes might cause different forms of exclusions and oppressions

<sup>42</sup> Currier, "Feminist Technological Futures: Deleuze and Body/Technology Assemblages", 336.

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In order to articulate this conceptualization of agency for Muslim women, I examine an interview with Berna with whom I met in the Capital City Women's Platform (CCWP). Like other women I interviewed at CCWP, Berna also defines herself as a religious feminist. I aim to explore the relations of her body that have produced her self-identified feminism, which refers to her engagements with both the Islamic traditions and feminist legacy. I suggest seeing her religious and feminist thoughts and practices in relation to various elements in her life. She has connected with multiple bodies, including material, social, political, and familial, which produced her self-sense as a religious feminist. I want to address some of these bodies and her relations with these bodies in order to problematize the understanding of Muslim women's subjectivities primarily based on religious frameworks. I argue that neither her engagement with the Islamic tradition is stable nor is she emancipated solely by a feminist language.

To highlight some elements of her journey, I look into the narration of her life. For example, Berna experienced the headscarf ban in the 1990s when she worked at a university. After a long period of internal struggle, she took off the headscarf, until her retirement. She puts it: "I took my headscarf with me when I went to sign off the documents for my retirement and I left that building wearing my headscarf". Another element in her life that effected the capacities and desires of her body is her physical disability. According to Berna's recollection, she lost 60 percent of her sight. She used to wear the glasses called "telescopic," but these glasses, she said, were so troublesome that she had to quit graduate school. After her retirement, the doctors informed her about the new type of eyewear which became available in Turkey and which can much improve her vision. In terms of her relations with some material elements, at this point in her life, she and her husband bought a computer for their children that were a newly flourishing technology in Turkey in the 1990s. She narrates her journey:

These glasses were so comfortable compared to the earlier version. After I wore it, look I could read.... I was able to read a lot of things on that computer, online newspapers. It was so beautiful. I was sitting in front of the computer the whole day, without giving a chance to the kids. It was a real blessing, gave me a lot of confidence.

Berna, who had then suffered from her inability for the comfortable reading experience, met and connected with better medical technologies. The new glasses, the monitor, internet, online press, and longing for the comfortable reading experience produced her desire and capacity to read. In this intense period of reading, her body had also new relations with the body of information in cyberspace. Moreover, the traces of her experience with the headscarf ban influenced the type of information that she sought to connect with such as issues of freedom, Islamic ideals, democracy, which were on the front burner in Turkey in the 1990s for headscarf-wearing women. These multiple elements became a part of her extended body which was constituted of biological, psychological, social, and mental aspects of her body. These relations re-constituted new desires, capacities, ideals, and engagements. While she was looking for opportunities of social activism, her newly produced desires and capacities urged her in a particular direction. For example, one day she saw Hidayet Tuksal on TV who has been publicly talking on issues of women and Islam. She narrates this encounter:

I said, O God, what she said was the things in my mind. I googled her right away and found the CCWP's website. When I read their website, I was like, yes I agree with this, yes this is also for me. Then, I gave them a call and said can I come?

Hidayet Tuksal both challenged the headscarf ban and the male-centered Islamic traditions. Her appearances on TV affected Berna because her past relations produced certain inclinations such as the desire for reading, interests for issues of religion and freedom, and the pain produced by the headscarf ban. Because of her existing relations with these elements, her encounter with Hidayet Tuksal created new interest and desires, and consequently new capacities. Namely, her encounter with Tuksal connected her with CCWP and the feminist language adopted by CCWP. The first motivation for her struggle for women's rights was her desire to wear a headscarf against the oppression of the headscarf ban. However, she later became engaged with women's advocacy in a wider perspective in CCWP. She expresses how

CCWP affected her: "I became much more aware of problems experienced by different women".

To sum up, Berna's self-confessed feminist body was produced by multiple elements including products of technology, longing for the comfortable reading experience, and questions on her religious embodiments which were caused by the political atmosphere in the country. Relations of these bodies constituted Berna's capacities and desires for particular actions. She engaged with a woman inclusive understanding of Islam as well as fighting against many types of women's oppression. From a humanistic or essentialist perspective, this can be read as a performance of the innate desire for freedom against social and material constraints. Or this can be understood as the victory of feminist language against the oppressive structures. However, her capacity and desire to act against hegemonies both in secular and religious domains were produced by the very relationships she had with multiple elements. While many women watched Hidayet Tuksal on TV that day, Berna was the only person who had the desire to reach out to CCWP. In other words, when she began to use new glasses or she bought a computer, her intention was not to become a "feminist". Or she did not intend to act against subordinating structures. However, her journey ended up in CCWP as a feminist activist against oppressions that women in Turkey experience.

Therefore, Berna's body was "not the original and singular source of the will that is the motive force in."<sup>43</sup> Rather, she had a complex casual history. From the perspective of this post-humanism, the source of agencies and desires is relational flows. Therefore, the agency is not an intrinsic capacity to resist social structures. Then, the question is not about some oppressive structures of power such as discourses on secularism or Islamism. Instead, it is about the co-constitution of capabilities and restriction produced by multiple elements such as lack in material availabilities, political and religious discourses, and biological limitations.

To put it differently, while an essentialist ontological perspective aims to explore the actions of sense-making human agents, Deleuzian ontology stresses on impersonal and relational flows of various bodies.<sup>44</sup> Any element that the human subject had a relation with effects the capacity of the subject. Referring to an essential desire and an independent agential capacity of the human body oversimplifies the multiple and complex forces at play. In terms of Berna's story, her agency and desire for certain actions, such as fighting against oppressive structures, was produced by changing relations of her body throughout her journey. Berna's relation with each body created certain capacities for her and affected the way her relations with other bodies unfolded. In this sense, unlike the notion of the agency which relies on an autonomous subject confronted with social structures, Berna's agency was relationally produced by materiality, technologies, online media, the ban on the headscarf, and the legacy of feminism. Her body acted only within these particular webs of relations and produced her desires and capabilities accordingly.

In the case of Berna, the transformation of oppressive structures occurred through the series of relations that a feminist language was one of them. Movements of multiple bodies can also destabilize existing structures without any intention for resistance. Any endeavor and project of liberation need to be attentive to these various elements which are beyond the promotion of certain forms of acts such as intentionally produced subversive acts.

For instance, an ethnographic observation in a historical mosque in Istanbul, Sehzade Camii, illustrates the transformations of Muslim women's practices and embodiments in relation to multiple elements. Like other mosques in Turkey, this historical mosque is also governed by the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey. As in many other mosques, there is a very small section in Sehzade Camii devoted to women which are located at the back corner

<sup>43</sup> Samantha Frost, "Fear and the Illusion of Autonomy", *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham:Duke University Press, 2018): 162.

<sup>44</sup> Fox - Pam, "The Sexuality-Assemblage: Desire, Affect, Anti-Humanism", 774.

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of the extensive space for men. I was annoyed with this tiny women's section which was separated from the gorgeous main space by thick curtains. I was urged to protest the exclusion of women in this space, so I walked into space from which women were forbidden. After a while, four women in their 40s and 50s walked into the mosque and came to the central point in the building where I performed my silent protest. Their coats bespoke an urban underclass identity.<sup>45</sup> I believe that as many women who live in the poor neighborhood of this metropolitan city, Istanbul, their visit to this mosque was one of the rare moments in their lives that they could come to the central and touristic places of Istanbul. They began taking selfies and pictures under the huge shiny lamps in the mosque. They posted these pictures on their social media accounts while excitedly showing these pictures to each other. Then, the security guard of the mosque came and walked us all out.

These women challenged the gender line in the mosque by acting on the desire to post their presence in this landmark in cyberspace rather than by egalitarian thinking. This observation reminded me of my childhood memories when I was taken to the mosque in our neighborhood during Ramadan by my grandmother in a central Anatolian city, Konya. The women's section in this mosque was also carefully separated from the men's section, located on the mezzanine and covered by black curtains. When I curiously attempted to lift that black curtain, I used to be warned by women in the mosque that this was not appropriate. After the prayers ended, before they came out, these women were waiting for the men to depart until they made sure that there was no man left. The purpose was to render their bodies invisible to a masculine gaze.

Twenty years later, now, I witnessed women who wore long dresses and headscarves as women in the local mosque in Konya. However, unlike the women in Konya, these women did not hesitate to make their bodies visible, not only in the physical space of the mosque but also in cyberspace through social media platforms which they are visible to a wider population. These women's encounter with social media culture and smartphone technology reproduced their dispositions, desires, and actions. What motivated them to trespass the gender line was not the desire for equal representation of men and women or the desire to open a space for women in mosques. Instead, they were motivated by the desire to present their images on social media. In other words, they challenged and changed the traditional gender lines as well as religious dressing not through deliberate activism against the exclusion of women, but through their relations with material availabilities such as smartphones and social media culture.

Therefore, the transformation of existing structures in religious traditions might become possible through the encounters of women with non-religious elements without an intentional effort and organized resistance. This does not mean that Muslim women do not have organized resistance. "Kadınlar Camilerde" (Women are in Mosques), for instance, is a group of women who organizes meetings in different mosques in Istanbul and occupies men sections in mosques to demand more space for women.<sup>46</sup> Although mosques in Turkey are not close to being a women-friendly space yet, and though many women do not show any opposition to tiny women's sections, we can see transformations of women's perceptions about boundaries of gender which significantly changed lately. These transformations have been produced by multiple elements and have risen to challenge the boundaries of where women can be present or not as well as many other spaces of social life and online platforms.

### CONCLUSION

Based on Deleuzian ontological conceptualizations, I propose neither bodies nor their agencies are stable. Rather, bodies are constituted of a web of relations, and therefore, always

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<sup>45</sup> In our brief conversation later, I was told that they are living in Gaziosman Pasa, a poor neighborhood in Istanbul where the mostly recent immigrants from the Anatolian cities live.

<sup>46</sup> For the website of CCWP, see ("Hakkimizda," n.d.).

susceptible to evolvment, re-connections, and uncertainty that destabilize existing structures. To put it differently, transformations of bodies, practices, habituses, and subjectivities occur through new relations that reproduce the agency (capacity of the body to act in particular ways) for each body. Each body has the potential to change through flows of relations. This potentiality produces change. These ever-shifting connections among bodies are conceptual, temporal, and material that generate the capacity and capability for the agency, and so, the change.

Thus, I argue that we need to focus with greater attention to how the capabilities and the desires of Muslim women's bodies are reconstituted through their encounters with multiple bodies. For example, as discussed above, the women in the mosque in Konya displayed a keen desire to perfectly hide their bodies twenty years ago while the women in Istanbul preferred to have more visibility in the mosque in 2018. The second group of women wanted to post an ideal presentation of their veiled bodies in cyberspace, on the contrary the first group carefully hid their bodies. In other words, although both groups of women wear similar dresses such as long skirts and headscarves, desires, perceptions, and actions of their bodies did not remain the same.<sup>47</sup>

The cause of these transformations is that while they have been moving among multiple bodies including material availabilities, flourishing technologies, and new forms of social life such as social media, the ways in which they engage with the Islamic traditions did not remain stable. Their sense of modesty has been transformed with every relationship that they have and became different than before. Although they continued to use similar materials, namely similar headscarves and dresses, the boundaries of gender that these materials draw for them changed.

Hence, our focus should be on multiple relations that enable women to act in certain ways. Through these lenses of relationality, we are able to see various bodies, structures, policies, and materiality that limit their capacities instead of focusing on singular discourses such as Islam. We became aware of oppressive relations as well as those relations that increase their ability to perform in particular ways. This perspective demassify the imagined singular and collective identity of Muslim women in pejorative terms.

Therefore, I suggest grounded scholarly projects that will be attentive to the situatedness of Muslim women. What I propose is to recognize the spatial and situated experiences, desires, and agencies of Muslim women which are produced by shifting and dynamic interplay between multiple elements. In this type of analysis, the task of the scholar is to explore the situatedness of Muslim women that enables us to understand intertwined forms of oppression and liberation. I do not suggest that we should be blind to dominant discourses, policies or norms. However, I believe that, as Parker and Dales argue, "these dominant forces do not just trickle down to the level of the individual and determine her social relations."<sup>48</sup> Thus, I oppose the idea of macrostructures as the singular or prior source of subjectivation of Muslim women. I suggest an analytical framework that will help us to demonstrate the interplay between macro and microbodies. I do not deny forms of commonalities, but I want to emphasize a contextual and multi-layered analysis without prioritizing the macrostructures to the extent that the particular configurations become invisible. We should stress the constant co-construction, re-construction, and multiplicity of experiences and actions over categorizing

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<sup>47</sup> Secor points out the situatedness of religious embodiments of immigrant women wearing a headscarf in Istanbul. She examines these women's embodiments within the contexts of urban life, class, ethnicity, and gender roles. Because of their movement in urban spaces, these women negotiate multiple regimes of veiling. She pays attention to "how Islamic knowledge, veiling choices and urban space are mutually constituted through the lived experiences of migrant women in Istanbul" (Secor 2002, 19).

<sup>48</sup> Lyn Parker - Laura Dales, "Introduction: The Everyday Agency of Women in Asia", *Asian Studies Review*, 38/2(2014): 165.

and marginalizing identities. Such an analysis should be attentive to the flux of relations that produce their subjectivities, agencies, desires, and capacities.

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