

## Homes Becoming Religious Transnational Spaces: The Impact of COVID-19 Immobility on the Religious Activities of Migrant Muslim Women

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### Abstract

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 emergency, the marked division between the home and public space has been increasingly emphasized, and the concept of ‘home’ has become more and more connoted with the values of security and control. The question that arises is this: how did the ‘stay-at-home’ period affect (and continues to affect) the home-based life of migrant Muslim women and their collective religious practices? Drawing upon the narratives of Turkish Muslim women living in Northern Italy, the research reported in this paper focused on their frequency of religious participation both during the pre-pandemic period and during the ‘stay-at-home’ one by identifying how they adapted to online meetings, courses, or collective prayers. If collective religious activity in mosques for these women, in addition to spiritual support, was a remarkable opportunity for them to interface with public space, allowing them to retreat from the everyday family commitments of their home, virtual participation in religious events organized by both the country of origin and the diasporas created a highly transnational dimension for them in that same home. Considering Italy’s peripheral diasporic position, particularly in terms of religious organizations, in the Turkish diaspora in Europe, this expanded, albeit virtual, participation of migrant women is significant because it seems to give them the opportunity to reinvent the meanings of place and the migratory experience, about both their peers in Turkey and to those living in the diasporas, and to develop awareness about identity issues.

Keywords: religion, home, immobility, Turkey, Italy.

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## 1. Introduction

The emerging literature on homemaking in public spaces (Bertolani et al., 2021; Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2020; Eade, 2012) investigates the ‘domestication’ of non-domestic places through specific rituals and ways of doing that give those who frequent these places an overall sense of being at home.

In this paper, I reverse the research question and consider how homes expand their boundaries in a very specific context of immobility and produce a collective religious belonging in both emotional and practical terms. Specifically, I analyze the religion-making practices of Turkish Muslim women living in Northern Italy during the ‘COVID-19 stay-at-home’ period. I do so in light of Islam’s conceptualizations of space and gender and its practical rules that cover every aspect of daily life. Hence, the questions addressed by this paper are these: (1) how (and whether) the lockdown period transformed home/mosque boundaries and relationships for Turkish Muslim women; and (2) whether (any) transformation could have long-term consequences.

Recent research (Ince-Beqo & Ambrosini, 2022) has shown that migrants coming from Turkey consider Italy to be a peripheral diaspora, both because they regard it as a route to other European countries and because of the scant presence in Italy of political or religious diasporic organizations compared to other European countries where Turkey-related diasporas are well established. The perception of being in the periphery increases low participation in public life by migrant Muslim women compared to men and, in some cases, it fosters strong forms of familial control within the home.

Within this context, religion (or any other sphere not in conflict with the socio-familial position of women) becomes much more than religion for Muslim women since religious activities performed in places of worship are, in many cases, the only activity that allows them to participate in the dynamics of public life and interact with other people from their ethnoreligious community.

The extant research confirms that mosques, as well as being places that can provide spiritual support, are also social capital resources in the migration context for their frequenters (Lewis, 2006). Women develop stronger social bonds than men in mosques because they tend to be more involved in volunteer activities and holiday celebrations (Foley & Hoge, 2007).

My data confirm what the literature has reported regarding both the social support that mosques provide and the more frequent physical attendance of Muslim women at places of worship compared with men. Mosques, however, like all other out-of-home places, are not equally accessible to everyone; the data also demonstrate Muslim women’s struggles in accessing them. Regarding the use and understanding of space from the perspective of immobility, however, I

find that the feeling among Muslim migrant women that they are on the periphery in both migratory and diasporic contexts tends to be weakened by transnational and intra-diasporic virtual contacts that expand the boundaries of home.

In what follows, I argue that participation, albeit virtual, in the diasporic/transnational space through courses or meetings organized by the various representatives of the religious movement reveals to Muslim women the dynamics of a migratory experience more complex in its roots and developments. If Muslim migrant women can compare their own experiences outside the domestic/family-religious/public context in which they are embedded both with their peers in the country of origin and with those who live in other European countries, they are able to focus better on the boundaries of the spaces allowed to them and interpret the meaning of that feeling on the periphery.

Thus, in this period of immobility, while the physical boundaries of the public spaces reserved for Muslim women – spaces which even in ‘normal’ times always tend to be restricted – shrink, the domestic ones, in a virtual sense, widen. This enlargement is not only symbolic, i.e., due to the possibility of comparing one’s migratory and non-migratory experiences with others; it is also concrete due to the act of showing the intimate/domestic space to others and being seen by the other participants during the meetings. This is a particularly interesting aspect if one considers the organization of the domestic space according to Islamic doctrine.

The data for the research reported in this paper were collected between October 2020 and May 2021 through 15 video interviews with migrant Muslim women, both members and heads of the religious movement’s women sections in Italy and Germany. I also used qualitative data collected in 2016-2017 for my doctoral research to analyze migrant women’s understanding of space in the pre-pandemic period.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. It will first provide a theoretical background on homemaking and the migration experience and, subsequently, on gendered spaces and religion. Then, attention will be paid to research methodology and data analysis. Finally, the last section presents the conclusions.

## **2. Migration and changing understanding of home**

Home not only as a place but also a space inhabited by family, people, things, and belongings (Mallet, 2004), when it comes to migration, namely the abandonment of the place one calls home, becomes a fluid concept: it evokes a

sense of both inclusion and exclusion corresponding to both the internal and external worlds. This fluidity paradoxically accentuates the need to remake the home in the place where it is characterized by its absence, helping to overcome the dichotomy between inside and outside (Cancellieri, 2017) and restore the home, both as a physical place and as an identity concept, the experience of rootedness, albeit modified and revised.

Ideas of home among migrants are often shaped by memories of past homes because they are relational across time and space (Boccagni, 2014); in this process, images of future homes also shape their significance, bringing together the personal, political, and religious spheres. Migration thus has to do with a range of ways of remembering and (re)producing a home, no matter how physically remote it may be from a migrant's day-to-day life setting (Boccagni, 2014).

In light of what transnationalism (Basch et al., 1994; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007) argues, migrants, here in terms of homemaking, can maintain intense contacts and complex relations that link their societies of origin and destination together (see Bilecen (2015) for Turkish and Kurdish migrants' multi-sited homemaking experiences in Germany; see Sandu (2013) for the transnational homemaking experiences of migrant families in the UK). In this context, home, as 'a place of normality', is embedded not only in individual/subjective experience but also in relational, cultural, and socio-structural ones because the concept of 'home', in its relational and sociological sense, is able to capture the complex relations between individuals and social settings to which unique values and meanings are assigned (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020). As opposed to viewing home as a private sphere where one can retreat from the dynamics of public life (Mallett, 2004) migrant homemaking may involve and operate at different levels of belonging: local, national, and transnational (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2021). However, the resources available to migrants to reproduce these belongings operating at different levels and to appoint a place as home are distributed in deeply unequal ways (Boccagni, 2017). Moreover, their religious and sociocultural rules and/or expectations often determine access to these various contexts, particularly regarding gender and ethnicity (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2015).

### **3. Gendered spaces, religion, and migration experience**

This study explores the first aspects mentioned above, the use and definition of domestic space, in relation to the non-domestic spaces that surround it and with which it interacts. It focuses on the relationship between religion and gender in a period – COVID-19 stay-at-home – in which “the social

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and biographical significance of home is fully illuminated by its” *over presence*<sup>1</sup> (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020, p. 599). This focus also requires attention to be paid to the debate on (1) religion and place-making and (2) women’s -domestic and (non) use of space in relation to the cultural and religious codes in which they are embedded, particularly in the context of migration. Much of the focus in the literature on Muslim women’s use of space regards the gender-based division of space between the public and private spheres in Muslim countries (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001; Peshkova, 2009), the management of space in mosques according to gender (Maritato, 2017,) and the roles assigned to women in both spaces (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1999). Research also illustrates how Muslim women’s religious formation, identity-making, and belonging come about through the use of public religious spaces in the context of migration (Nyhagen, 2019).

The above-cited studies show that religions regulate not only the vertical relationship of believers with the transcendent but also the horizontal relationship among adherents as both the conduct of daily life and the use of time and space devoted to religious rituals. While not modifiable in some cases, these rules are still experienced differently and fit the context in which they are applied. In this mentioned diversity, gender is one of the most important social determinants in the definition and application of religious rules as well as the boundaries of spatial and temporal dimensions. In fact, women are given precise instructions on how they should move within discursive religious and physical spaces (Aaftaab, 2005).

Sunni Islam<sup>2</sup>, the religion to which the participants in my research adhered, has very precise rules on the use of domestic and public space for women and men, although, in each context of their application, such rules are interpreted quite differently. In the division of labor and duties by gender, Islamic doctrine propounds the concept of *fitrah*<sup>3</sup>, according to which “biology is destiny” (Kandiyoti, 2011). This concept is decisive for the gendered consideration of space and time given that it delineates the distinct responsibilities and duties of women and men: motherhood – and consequently care of the family – is God’s gift to women, while men are responsible for maintaining the family, actively participating in public life.

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<sup>1</sup> Italics mine. The original phrase is “the social and biographical significance of home is fully illuminated only by its absence or loss” (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2002: 599).

<sup>2</sup> The various branches of Islam are not mentioned here. I focus on Sunni Islam because the participants in my research were Sunni.

<sup>3</sup> Strictly differentiated natures divinely assigned to men and women.

The Islamic notions of *mabram*<sup>4</sup> and *na-mabram*, through which the rules of interaction between women and men are defined, are also fundamental to the division of space (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001). These notions state how a certain space must be shared. Based on Islamic law, they determine what clothing and behavior are appropriate in the interaction between women and men. This division with divine inspiration can be an easy way to justify reinforcing the presentation of Muslim women as victims, dominated by men, and increasingly forced to narrow the boundaries within which they can perform daily activities. Nevertheless, the literature shows that resources available to Muslim women can also become tools for agency<sup>5</sup> to create alternative discourses and spaces within their religious contexts,<sup>6</sup> as well as to redefine or challenge the boundaries of the public and private spaces dedicated to them (Marshall & Sabhlok; 2009; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2001; Gerami & Lehnerer, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1988).

The meaning attributed to a space is formed by subjective experience and collective values and norms, and this complex elaboration defines its boundaries and functions. Consequently, religion – in our case, Sunni Islam – and its gendered practices are crucial in delineating the boundaries of home and the partition of religious spaces. Peshkova (2009) argues that the conceptualization of domestic space as a unique, appropriate place for women to gather according to Islamic values and norms can lead to decreased interaction with strangers; home thus becomes a refuge to be protected from contamination by new forms of relationship. On the other hand, “while being enabled by this space” (ibid.), women’s religious commitment sacralizes the home, making them the bearers of not only the home culture but also the sacred one.

In the experience of migration, these relations may change. Becoming a religious and/or ethnic minority in the country of destination, as well as any interaction – or conflict – between the different groups, may challenge not only the established socio-cultural/religious rules but also the understanding of national or public/private boundaries. In fact, on analyzing the migratory

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Islamic dictionary, *Mabram* is the unmarriageable kin with whom sexual intercourse would be considered incestuous. Any man with whom a woman has a relationship that precludes marriage, is considered a Mahram to her and vice versa. *Na-mabram*, on the other hand, is a person so distantly related (by blood or otherwise) that marriage with him/her is lawful.

<sup>5</sup> Research (Erel and Reynolds, 2018 and Reynolds, Erel, and Kaptani, 2018) also shows how motherhood itself for migrant women with ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds in the UK becomes a challenge to the boundary between the public and private, creating new concepts and practices of citizenship.

<sup>6</sup> See Peshkova (2015) for Muslim women leaders and preachers in Uzbekistan, and Maritato (2016) for those in Turkey.

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experience in the light of religious belonging, the literature reports that migrants use religion to create places of belonging. They identify themselves with global religious communities grounded in particular national contexts or ones that extend beyond national boundaries (Levitt, 2003). Research also shows how migrant religion is institutionally expressed in the public sphere both for the creation of spaces for collective religious rituals and for socio-cultural aggregation and exchange (for institutionalized Islam in Germany and Netherlands, see Doornik, 1995; for Hinduism and its institutional organization in America see Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2008; for the Irish church in the USA and its political actions for immigrant rights see Levitt, 2003). These religious spaces are formed by responding to the normative, socio-cultural characteristics of where they are located and to the practical needs of those who frequent them. Hence, they have their own character regardless of the realities they refer to.

Gender is here again a lens through which to read how, generally, a place becomes a space: that is, a place experienced and practiced (de Certeau, 1984) through the meanings its frequenters ascribe to it and, specifically, how public/religious and private/domestic spaces are conceptualized and personalized by women in the migration context.

If immigrant communities are “arenas of change” (Smith, 1978, as cited in Predelli, 2008), they are particularly so for women in terms of use of and participation in domestic and non-domestic spaces through religious practices. Predelli (2008) argues that even though the gender-based segregation of duties and powers and the gender division of space in mosques continue to be a fundamental aspect of Islamic practices, the institutionalization of religion in the migratory context has led to some changes in gender relationships and regimes that are beneficial to women. This is the case in Norway, where there is a strong state advocacy of gender equity and support for Muslim women’s rights in public spaces, and the public funding system encourages the establishment of congregations (Predelli, 2008). In this regard, Italy and its management of religious minorities present a somewhat different set of circumstances.<sup>7</sup> While Islam<sup>8</sup> represents the largest non-Catholic faith

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<sup>7</sup> See Magazzini (2019) for the central role of the Vatican State in the recognition of religious minorities and church/state relations in Italy.

<sup>8</sup> Allievi (2003) argues that, as well as being a recent phenomenon, the Islamic migratory movement also has its intrinsic characteristics: the diversity of its countries of origin, the rapidity of its entry and settlement in the country, a higher proportion of illegal immigrants in comparison with other countries; and a wider geographical dispersion. Moreover, “Whereas Islam in Germany means mainly Turks, in Britain Indo-Pakistanis

community<sup>9</sup> in Italy, there is no official agreement stipulated between the State and representatives of the Islamic confession. Non-official recognition also determines the public appearance of places of worship and those who attend them.

Research on how migrant Muslim women<sup>10</sup> conceive and use public space shows that placing Islamic values at the center of social life can become a way for them to assert themselves in public life and not always be a form of ghettoization or self-exclusion (Pepicelli, 2017). It also shows how wearing a headscarf can become a symbol of religious belonging as well as a kind of resistance against the religious discrimination to which Muslim women are constantly exposed in public spaces (Frisina & Hawthorne, 2018). In this regard, however, Salih (2009) argues that the involvement of Muslim women in the process of making Islam public by mobilizing on their rights as transnational citizens leads to the creation of a sphere where ‘Muslim women’, their bodies, practices, symbols are either turned into objects of consumption to feed an orientalist Western idea of Islam or are used as political pawns.

#### 4. Research method and participants

The data for the research reported by this article were collected between October 2020 and May 2021 through 15 video interviews with Turkish Muslim women living in northern Italian cities (specifically Milan, Imperia and Como) where there are mosques run by the Milli Görüş (National Vision) religious movement, one of the largest Turkish diasporic Islamic organizations (IGMG), which has operated in Western Europe since the 1970s and has its headquarters in Cologne, Germany.

In many European countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Austria, where there has been a rooted Turkish

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and in France Maghrebis, in Italy, even with a big percentage of Moroccans, it is much more difficult to identify one origin” (Allievi, 2003, p. 146).

<sup>9</sup> Analysis of survey results shows that Muslims (about 1 million 574 thousand) accounted for 29.2% of the total number of foreign residents as of January 1, 2020 (ISMU, 2020). Moroccans comprised about 400,000 of this total, with the largely secularized Albanians comprising about 200,000, followed by Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Egyptians, Tunisians, Senegalese, and Turks (Ferrari, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> See Purkis (2019) for the gendered use of urban space by migrant women from Turkey in Milan, and see Ince Beqo (2019, 2020) for the migration experience and domestic space relationship.



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immigration presence since the 1960s, the Milli Görüş<sup>11</sup> movement runs most of the mosques, together with their women and youth sections; in addition to headquarters there are also several regional organizations operating in various European countries such as Italy.

The Italian regional structure started to provide Como-based services in coordination with the IGMG at the beginning of the 1990s. Branches were opened in Milan, Modena, and Imperia according to the needs and potential, and the activities were expanded. The *Milli Görüş Islamic Community, Italian Region*, a service organization, restructured to develop and disseminate its work further and launched the *Comunità Culturale Islamica Milli Görüş*, CISMIG, in 2011 (Official CISMIG website, accessed November 2021).

For the purposes of my research, along with interviews with the active members of the Milli Görüş movement, I participated in different religious activities held online, and I regularly followed the posts and news published on various CISMIG social media platforms. Many of the activities in which I participated went beyond the purely spiritual sphere and topics such as family relationships (with elderly family members, spouses, and parents), social solidarity, participation in public life by men and women, difficulties encountered in schools, etc.

The Turkish Muslim women covered in my research had actively attended CISMIG mosques before the pandemic and continued to participate in the virtual community by taking online courses and attending online meetings. They were either members of the second generation or had arrived in Italy through family reunification. All wore the hijab, and most were in their twenties or thirties. Their families, mainly from rural backgrounds in the Central Anatolia Region, arrived in Italy with the hope of crossing it to reach other European countries. The disadvantaged socio-economic conditions of Turkey had mostly stayed the same in Italy, especially after the financial crisis in 2008. In Imperia, the fathers and husbands of participants worked in the construction sector, while men in Milan and Como were primarily involved in the ethnic food sector. Many women did not go to school after the compulsory period, and most did not work; those who worked did so without a regular contract. They got married to men in their community at a young age. At the time of the interviews, all the women were married and had at least one child. They often lived in the peripheral areas of the cities.

My research did not have the ambition of illustrating all aspects of the daily life of these Turkish Muslim women. Instead, it sought to understand the interactions between different places (mosque or home) in the light of the

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter and Ortega (2014) for various case studies on Milli Görüş's presence in various European countries.

religious activity, looking in particular at how the lockdown period transformed the migration experience through the new transnational and diasporic contacts created in the virtual context.

## 5. Data analysis

### *5.1 What was the mosque for us? The understanding of space in the pre-pandemic period*

“(…) First of all, the mosque, which is a place where the five daily prayers are performed in congregation, still retains this function. But it also remains the center not only of religious education and learning but also of today’s educational training, where the social needs of Muslims are met, especially in our mosques. If we look at our mosques in Europe, we can say that they have begun to perform their basic functions again.” (Igm.org, accessed on 25/11/2021)

The mosque, or the space reserved for women in the mosque, was a particular place for the women covered by my research. It was outside their homes, but it was a place protected from outside contamination, as it is their home, where ethnic and religious identity was continuously reconfirmed since it was only for Turkish adherents of the “*Milli Görüş*” religious movement. In this hybrid position, the mosque offered them both the feeling of being at home and that of being able to attend a place where home is not. It should also be because the Sunni belief argues that women’s prayer at home is preferable to their prayer at the mosque; the more similar these two places are, the less this implied rule of Sunni doctrine is violated. Therefore, for these women the mosque, during the period when it was possible to go there without any restrictions, was a place where family and social practices were shared, discussed, and reproduced, as well as how it was done at home. In addition to being a place where “social needs are met”, the mosque was thus a context where women discussed how to raise children, the roles and responsibilities of women in the family, and how to deal with family problems. Furthermore, in terms of their experience in mosques, the concepts of home and homeland often became interchangeable for them, as S. (29) told me:

“Going to the mosque for me is like going home to Turkey, you know, the things you do, the things you share... (..) So many relatives, the women, the children all together...”

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Similar to what happens in other mosques (for the Egyptian case in Italy, see Ferrero, 2018), and with reference to the first quotation given in this section, in the migration experience, mosques become social gathering spaces, especially for women, for whom no alternatives exist. However, a context-specific analysis is needed to understand better the meaning attributed to the space (in this case, the mosque).

Most of the women participants in my research were born in Italy or had arrived in the country at a young age. Thus, apart from the relatively limited time spent in the home country, their religious practice was formed in a context of migration characterized by its peripheral position in the Turkey-related diaspora established in Europe. In some cases, their families were already sympathizers of the political-religious movement in the country of origin; in other cases, the families approached the movement in the migration context, seeing it as a safe sphere where ethno-religious identity could be maintained and transmitted. In each case, all the participants had witnessed the founding and evolution of the mosques in terms of both physical aspects (leased property, transition to ownership) and activities (Friday prayers, Koran classes, meetings for women).

...We saw the birth of our mosque; my father, together with others, founded it. (M., 32)

This participation made women attribute different meanings to this space. Collective religious and social activities in mosques for these women, in addition to spiritual support, became a remarkable opportunity to interface with the public space so that they could retreat from the daily family commitments of their homes.

(...) In the first years (of migration), my mother had nowhere to go; she didn't leave the house except in urgent and necessary cases (...) For us, instead, there was a mosque where you could go with the children and meet other women. (T., 26)

The way in which religion is conceptualized and practiced evolves, and in this process, there is a significant difference between having and not having a collective public space dedicated to religious and social practices. This is especially true for women with less access than men to public space. In the case investigated, religion was initially lived in a private domestic sphere. Yet, in this transition, it is institutionalized and hierarchized with gendered duties and responsibilities that go beyond the realm of pure spirituality. In this context, within a diasporic organization operating at the European level with precise

instruments and instructions for managing the ethno-religious aspect of immigrants, at the local level, women with specific skills and charisma have begun to assume leadership roles in the community. Some of them have become responsible for training young people and children, while some have specialized in women's religious education. An interesting point to analyze in this regard is how migration shapes commitment and responsibility within the religious community and how women are equipped with the organizational and participatory skills that may be lacking in their homes. This is especially true when families have moved closer to the movement in the context of migration; the mosque is closely linked to the migration experience and its associated challenges.

If I were in Turkey, I don't know how much time I would spend there (in the mosque) and how much commitment I would make (...) Not as much as I dedicate here. It's different here. (K., 30).

### ***5.2 Access is not for all: resources, accessibility and continuity***

The resources to reproduce and make the home – and home-like places – portable and experienceable are not distributed equally among migrants (Boccagni, 2017). In fact, many women reported that without a car or a driver's license and/or in the absence of a person who could accompany them, they could not go to the mosques and regularly engage in religious and social activities.

Interviews conducted four years ago also reported that in some small cities like Imperia, women and young girls are rarely allowed to participate in the religious activities organized in other cities, even if they are intended only for women. If Imperia is a peripheral case in Italy as far as the rate of participation in religious events is concerned, the person in charge of Italy working at the movement's head office in Germany confirmed that Italy, within the overall Turkish diaspora in Europe, was worrying both for the low interest in events and for the autonomous management of female preachers.

“As a movement, we always try to encourage our communities to invest in their own strengths to grow religious figures who know their own migration dynamics. So far, we have not been able to do this in Italy. The Italian context has always remained rather marginalized for participation and organization”.

The lack of a continued presence of female preachers still emphasizes the socio-familial aspect of mosques for those who can attend them regularly, often leaving their religious character in the background. In this absence, indeed, the coordination of religious activities is scarce and fragmented. Nonetheless, the mosque has significant importance in women's lives, as G.'s words confirm:

“Even washing dishes is nice in the mosque because you're not alone, you do it with others. And you can talk (you know), you can tell your things (...) we feel at home there, we feel good”.

### ***5.3 What has home become for us? Immobility and making home a transnational space***

For this study, I repeated some interviews after four years to understand how (and if) the situation regarding women's participation in and organization of religious activities had changed in the meantime and how the lockdown on religious activities was being addressed.

Religious activities went online during the lockdown, as did any other activity. Adapting religious activities to the lockdown caused some changes in conceiving both the migratory experience and living in the religious sphere in the migratory context. An important point concerns the use of devices and applications. Many women reported that before the pandemic, they were unfamiliar with using a computer or a tablet because of the space and responsibility reserved for them in the domestic sphere.

“Before, you couldn't stand before a computer or tablet; you were busy, no, no (laughing). You know now that no one can say to you, “Hey, what are you doing there?!” Because I'm listening to Hoca (preacher), no one can argue” (A., 35).

Meetings in the mosques were attended only by the migrant community of that specific city, when possible. Mobility between different mosques was relatively low, especially in Imperia. Furthermore, a shortage of economic resources due to small membership numbers prevented the hosting of people from the diaspora or Turkey. Thus, content and participation were very local. This “locality” can easily create moral pressure in a community where everyone knows everyone, making it difficult to expose the issues and difficulties faced in daily life.

The pandemic transformed religion-making from local to transnational. Online meetings brought together different members of diasporas present in

Europe and preachers in Turkey, as well as other Turkish migrants living in Italy. This virtual space involving many people from different migratory contexts seems to have expanded their communities' boundaries and allowed women to compare their experiences with others.

“There is a young Turkish girl who teaches the Quran reading courses; in addition to her reading skills, she is also a medical student; in a couple of years, she will become a doctor. She has been a very important example for our women, both for themselves and their daughters.”

The impossibility of comparing one's own migration experience with that of others creates, in some cases, severe isolation, particularly for women and young girls, and the positive experience of other diasporas broadens the view of one's experience, helping to reduce the isolation that creates restriction. The online meetings also included psychological assistance (provided by psychologists and religious people from Turkey) concerning family and parenting issues, with an emphasis on the difficulties encountered during the lockdown. A woman with coordination responsibilities said:

For them, they (online meetings with experts) were certainly an eye-opener; before, they only saw each other; with these meetings, they met many people to whom they otherwise would not have had easy access (...) they met people outside their closed circle. They also discovered different views on duties and responsibilities. (L., 34).

This enlargement is significant, particularly for contexts like Imperia, where isolation seems to be stronger than in other places. However, this enlargement is also crucial because not only is Imperia considered to be disconnected from the rest of Italy in regard to participation in and membership of a religious community, but Italy itself, particularly for second-generation migrants, is considered a peripheral diasporic destination compared to other Turkey-related diasporas in Germany or France.

“During the pandemic, we did everything (religious activities) on the computer; we had many connections from Germany and Turkey. For us, it was very important; we saw that young people in those countries, especially girls, are not forced to give up school and social life so as not to lose their culture or religion. There were Turkish girls born in Germany who studied medicine or law and who gave lessons in reading the Qur'an. There, we said, it is possible to do both”. (V., 39).

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When going to the mosque regularly was allowed, transnational ties and connections were not a significant part of the daily lives of the participants in the research; the mosque, in addition to being a place of faith, was a place where the sense of home and homeland was reproduced. Not being able to attend the mosque has undoubtedly detached Muslim women from the possibility of creating and maintaining social relations. But, amid this impossibility, virtual religious events organized by both the country of origin and by different diasporas in Europe have made for migrant Muslim women a highly transnational and intra-diasporic dimension in their homes.

However, in some cases, this dimension makes the boundary between public and private space ambiguous. In regard to visibility, the public and private dimensions of religious expression for women differ greatly. The veil is a significant measure in this expression, as each space requires a different mode of covering, which delineates the degree of intimacy to be established and the appropriate ways to interact in each context. Thus, an equally critical aspect would also be the (in)visibility of diversity behind the veil in the public space. In Islam, dress is an essential condition of gender membership (Ahmed, 1992), which justifies cultural and religious affiliation. Considering the scant access to public space in each case analyzed, participation in the collective practices of the mosque in the pre-COVID period gave Muslim women a chance to be publicly visible, although in a minimal space and time. During the pandemic, things changed. Public events in private spaces and the virtual introduction of unknown people into their homes changed Muslim women's use of private space, their homes, and how they presented themselves. They changed the positioning of the hijab; they put it on as if they were going outside.

“Until I heard the voice, I didn't know there was a man in that (virtual) room. I had the camera switched on, and the hijab was a little messed up, so you could see my hair. When I realized he was there, I immediately turned the camera off, and the next time, I had to keep it open. I tied my hijab like when I go outside”. (G., 35)

Furthermore, where they put the camera, they change the position of some furniture, photos, or any other personal objects to protect the privacy of their home. This interaction determines the use of the home's spaces based on the proposed activity and participants, making the boundary between private and public easily changeable.

## 6. Conclusion

Focusing on a particular religious and ethnic community, this study has explored the changing meaning of space for Muslim migrant women in a very specific immobility context. More specifically, the consideration of what it means to be “at home” in a period in which the word “home” has had a frequency and importance for everyone, migrant and non-migrant alike, has been analyzed.

The concept of home has been investigated in relation to another space that evokes a sense of familiarity with both home and homeland for these women: the mosque.

The mosque is a hybrid place, in terms not only of the activity carried out inside it but also of its location between the public and private. It is a place outside the home within which national and religious identity is continually confirmed, just as it is at home. However, in this context, (being able to go to) a mosque makes it possible to interface with public space, allowing migrant Muslim women to retreat from the daily family commitments of their homes. At the same time, amid the impossibility of attending the mosque because of the restrictions due to COVID-19, while the physical boundaries shrank more and more, the boundaries of the migratory experience became expendable. Involvement, albeit virtual, in the religious community of the country of origin, as well as in those present in diasporic contexts, sometimes makes these women aware of the different opportunities so far considered unachievable.

To fully understand migrant Muslim women’s use and conception of space in light of their religious and migratory experience, it is necessary to bear in mind both the characteristics of their place of origin in terms of social and religious codes and those of the context in which they are embedded. The consideration of Italy as a peripheral diasporic destination by both Turkish immigrants in Italy and Turkish diasporic organizations present in several European countries is a peculiarity to be considered because, in this feeling on the periphery, the exclusion is experienced more by women and young girls. For this reason, the broadening of boundaries (of the home, community, and experience) is essential for them.

Further studies could help determine whether the transnational dimension created at home will help migrant Muslim women create long-lasting bonds and allow them to expand their boundaries further. In addition, further research could aid understanding of whether Turkish religious and diasporic movements hitherto considered peripheral by the organizations to which they are linked will gain influence through the active participation of their members and decision-making structures in the relationship with the country of origin and other diasporic movements.



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