

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

Modern Türkiye’de Çok Eşliliğin Dönüşümü: Etnografik Bir Araştırma

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ÖZ

Bu araştırmanın amacı, modernitenin aile yapısı üzerinde oluşturduğu değişiklikleri göz önünde bulundurarak modern Türkiye’de çok eşliliğin nasıl bir dönüşüme uğradığını incelemektir. Çalışma ayrıca modern çok eşliliği pratik eden kişilerin kendi deneyimlerini farklı söylemler aracılığıyla nasıl anlamlandırdıklarını da göstermeye çalışmaktadır. Yüksek hızda şehirleşme, kapitalizm, dini ve seküler hayatlar arasındaki çatışmalarla örülmüş modern hayatta çok eşliliğin nasıl kavramsallaştırıldığı ortaya çıkarılmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu araştırma nitel araştırma yaklaşımlarından biri olan etnografik desende bir araştırma olarak yürütülmüştür. Araştırmanın verileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Katılımcılar, modern Türkiye’de çok eşliliği deneyimleyen altı kişiden oluşmaktadır. Veriler, söylem analizi yoluyla analiz edilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları, modern çekeşli evliliklerin içinde bulunan kişilerin bu durumlarını dini söylemlerin yanı sıra başka söylemlere de başvurarak açıkladıklarını göstermektedir. Ayrıca, bu kişilerin modern-romantik aşk ve evlilik söylemlerinden etkilendikleri görülmektedir. Buna ek olarak, bu tür evliliklerdeki kadınların liberal söylemden faydalanarak kendilerini özgür iradeli bireyler olarak tanımladıkları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aile, çok eşlilik, modernite, söylem, Türkiye.

Transformation of Polygamy in Modern Turkey: An Ethnographic Study

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore new ways of practicing polygamy in modern Turkey by considering transformation of family structure with modernity. It also elaborates on how people practicing modern polygamy in Turkey make sense of their experience at the intersection of various discourses. This study examines new forms of conceptualizing and practicing polygamy in modern life that is marked by high speed of urbanization, capitalism and the conflict between secular and religious lifestyles. It is conducted as an ethnographic study and semi-structured interviews are employed to collect data. The participants consist of six people engaged in polygamy in modern Turkey. The data are analyzed through discourse analysis. The findings of this research show that people practicing polygamy in modern Turkey resort to various discourses to justify and make sense of their experience along with the religious discourse. The study discloses that these polygamous people borrow certain terms and concepts from modern concept of love and marriage. It also reveals that these women make use of liberal discourse to describe their position in their marriage by depicting themselves as free-willed agents that look for their best interests and choose a life plan for themselves.

Keywords: Family, discourse, modernity, polygamy, Turkey.

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1. Introduction

Polygamy has conventionally been described in negative terms considering the inequalities, hierarchies and female oppression it has created between spouses. With the onset of the modern world marked by the ideals of Enlightenment and the rapid industrialization process, polygamy has come to signify an “uncivilized” world, even connected to primitivism by White man (Maillu, 1988). Nuclear family has become the ideal form of family during this period, which rendered other types of families including polygamous ones as invisible or marginal (Zeitzen, 2008). However, in the recent years, polygamy has been addressed from a new perspective inspired by the hot debates going on about polyamorous relationships and the criticism posed against mononormativity by numerous scholars. The critics attack the idealization of monogamous family in multiple ways by claiming that it is a social construction and labelling other types of relationships as pervert or negative seems to be in contrast with their understanding of modern liberalism (Crookston, 2015; Rosa,1994; Rubin,1984).

Turkey stands out among other Muslim countries as it completely outlawed polygamy with the Republican reforms and embraced secularism as one of the main principals of the new Turkish Republic. On the other side, considering its historical ties with Ottoman Empire and Islamic faith, we can argue that polygamy has been a part of Turkish culture, even though it has been practiced in small numbers (Doğramacı,1982; Duben & Behar, 2002). Although it is not legally recognized, a certain amount of people practice polygamy through religious marriages which is called as ‘de facto polygamy’ in literature. Unlike the traditional way of practicing polygamy that is mostly prevalent in the Eastern and Southeastern regions of Turkey, new forms of polygamy can be seen in other parts of modern Turkey, especially in big cities, where life is marked by high urbanization, neoliberalism, capitalism, secularism and the rising political Islam. These new forms give us clue about how the institution of family has been transformed over the years and affected the way polygamy is practiced and conceptualized in return.

Bearing these changes in mind, this study aims to explore how people practicing modern polygamy in Turkey make sense of their experience at the intersection of multiple discourses. The two connected questions that this article aims to answer are ‘what kind of discourses do people resort to justify their involvement in a polygamous marriage other than the religious one?’ and ‘what kind of terms and concepts do they borrow from other discourses that pinpoint the notion of modern love/marriage? The paper argues that modern polygamous marriages in Turkey are highly affected by the transformation of family over the years and they are practiced in a different way than how polygamy was practiced in the past. Furthermore, it argues that women engaged in polygamous marriages refer to many other discourses such as liberal, modern or capitalist etc. to make sense of their involvement in such relationships and justify their experience through them. Unlike the popular opinion, women do not just approach and understand polygamy from the religious perspective and they borrow certain terms and concepts from the discourse of modern love. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature on polygamy by shedding light on the new ways of conceptualizing it in modern life.

In the following section, there will be a review of literature on how polygamy has been approached and discussed by eminent scholars. It will be followed by elaborating on the research process including methodology and fieldwork. After that, a theoretical framework that is mostly based on polygamy and modernity will be given place preceding a section on the major findings of the research together with a final discussion.

2. Literature

Various scholars have investigated the notion of polygamy in different terms so far. It is seen that the early studies focus on how polygamy is practiced in certain cultures such as Mormons, African tribes or Arab countries etc. These studies draw a line between the civilized Western world with monogamous, nuclear family as the ideal form and the primitive world that allows for other types of family arrangements, especially polygamous marriages that is found oppressive for women and creating gender hierarchies between women and men by White man (Chamie, 1986; Harris, 1983; Maillu, 1988). In line with these studies, some eminent scholars have elaborated on multiple reasons why people would prefer to enter into a polygamous marriage by focusing on several factors.

While Lee (1979) maintains that people enter into a polygamous marriage based on two reasons; either for procreation/ production or for status and political ties, Zeitzen (2008) makes a distinction between polygamous marriages consummated for cultural and religious purposes. Furthermore, Al-Krenawi (2014) points our attention to another facet of these marriages and claims that having an emotional and sexual fulfillment can be another significant reason for these marriages. Last but not least, scholars highlight the prominence of economic reasons such as expanding the workforce, maintaining family wealth, having a male heir, care for children and widowed women as well as environmental reasons where tribal alliance and cooperation become vital in specific regions such as deserts and mountainous regions marked by scarcity, isolation and extreme weather conditions (Dwairy et al., 2006; White & Burton, 1988).

With regard to the Turkish context, most studies draw attention to the changing family structure in Turkish history. These scholars have examined how polygamy was prevalent in the Ottoman Empire and how the modernization process, initiated in the Tanzimat era and continued with the Kemalist reforms, transformed the Turkish family structure. As for polygamy in the Ottoman period, Duben (1990) and Dođramacı (1982) emphasize that it was not a prevalent practice during that period, only top officers or sultans could have more than one wife due to its costly nature. In their studies on Istanbul household in the late Ottoman period, Duben and Behar (2002) report that polygamy was an elite phenomenon, only 2.3% of men and 5% of women were engaged in polygamy.

With regard to the modernization of family structure, Kavas and Thornton (2013) point to the 19th century where new steps were taken to modernize the state and society through the efforts of Young Turks and the *Tanzimat Fermanı* (1839) (the Imperial Edict of Reorganization) and *Islahat Fermanı* (1856) (the Imperial Reform Edict). These contributed to the hybridization of old and new family conduct. Given these circumstances, some people were concerned about the whole modernization project and about losing their Islamic identity. Therefore, they tried to maintain some of traditional customs such as bride's money or religious marriages. In a Muslim country embracing secularism as one of the main principals of the state, polygamy stands out as a practice that delineates the blurry lines between the old and the new face of Turkish culture. Hence, there are significant studies done to investigate the concept of polygamy in legal terms that shed light on how polygamy came to be outlawed by the adoption of Civil Code in 1926 and its percussion in the social sphere. Apart from these, numerous scholars have investigated the relationship between religious marriages (*imam nikahı*) and polygamy in the secular republic of Turkey (Ergöçmen & Hancıođlu, 1992; Liv, 2014; Yıldırım, 2005).

Looking at these studies, we can observe that they dwell upon polygamy as a traditional practice loaded with negative meanings and connotations. They mostly assume that polygamy belongs to an uncivilized world and these marriages are subject to radical changes with the rise of globalization, industrialization and increasing power of the women's movement. As

Turkish studies on polygamy focuses on the traditional picture and certain regions of the country such as Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, it seems that studying polygamy in the context of modern Turkey marked by high speed of urbanization, neoliberalism and new discourses on belonging and identity would open up some space for gaining a new insight about the transformation of polygamy in today's Turkey. Exploring how people practice polygamy, especially in the big cities of Turkey relatively away from the traditional life is a new area of ethnographic research for scholars in Turkey and our contribution to the existing scholarship is to provide a recent picture of modern polygamy in Turkey by revealing how these polygamous people make sense of their experiences at the intersection of various discourses. Therefore, this study aims to explore how modern polygamy in Turkey is practiced and it contributes to the field by uncovering the intertwined relationship between modernization and polygamy in Turkey which stands out among Muslim countries with its secular state.

3. Method

Polygamy is a sensitive subject since it belongs to the private domain of these people practicing it. This study aims to uncover how modern polygamy is practiced in Turkey under the effect of various discourses. Studying polygamy requires detailed analysis and description rather than providing a quantifiable data and thereby, this study applies a qualitative approach which focuses on qualitative data collection methods such as interviewing, observation and document analysis in order to explore lived experiences, behaviors and emotions of a cultural phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Marvasti, 2004; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Applying a qualitative approach, this study is conducted as an ethnographic study. Ethnography can be defined as the study of a society, local group, or subculture as it exists by concentrating on and studying behaviors, symbols, and interactions among its members and how they convey meaning to these interactions in that social reality (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Ethnography gives us the chance to examine modern polygamy as a cultural phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants and within a cultural framework because the nature of the subject requires us to enter the daily lives of polygamous people and observe their interactions (Fetterman, 2010). People practicing polygamy in newly fashioned ways under the effect of modernization in Turkey constitute an individual culture with their norms, customs, challenges or clashes they encounter in their everyday life. Therefore, ethnography was chosen as a research design for this study.

Critiquing positivism, which mainly depends on empirical evidence, generalizability, and universal rules, is one of the philosophical ideas that has contributed to the growth of ethnography. Unlike the naturalists who defend that social world should be studied in its natural state without the intervention of the researcher (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2007), the philosophical hermeneutics developed by Gadamer helped us realize that, rather than capturing the social world, acts, and interactions on their own terms as independent of the researcher, the accounts given place in ethnographic studies reflect the socio-historical position, biases, and assumptions of the researcher (Howard, 1982). Since it is not an account of what is actually happening in that social environment but rather is influenced by the researcher's perspective, this critique altered the way we approached ethnography. It also served as a reminder that there is no single, consistent reality in the social environment we are studying because reality itself is plural and dynamic. Therefore, we should bear in mind that this ethnographic study is not devoid of the researcher's voice, too. This study also applies critical ethnography since it goes further than describing a situation or narrating what the researcher observes. For critical ethnography, it is significant to reveal relations and representations taking place in the social world, including hegemony and power relations. In

this type of ethnography, the researcher is not looking for an ultimate truth, rather she challenges general assumptions prevalent in that social environment by underpinning power relations and by being highly aware of one's reflexivity (Thomas, 1993).

The research for this paper is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with five women and one man that are engaged in polygamous marriages in Turkey. The data was obtained from participant observation and these interviews conducted between the years of 2020-2023. We used numerous different channels to recruit respondents for this study. We became members of several websites and forums on the Internet that are related to Islamic cultures. We have also contacted with various women organizations and religious institutions. For instance; officials from the Family and Religious Counseling Bureau of Presidency of Religious Affairs contributed to this study by providing their expert opinion about polygamy in Islam. We have reached a number of writers who have written books about conservative habitus and religious communities in Turkey. Finally, we spread the word among our friends, relatives and acquaintances to reach out these polygamous people.

Finding these people and convincing them to be a volunteer participant was the most difficult part of this study since they mostly prefer to keep their second marriages as secret or they just inform a very small social circle about it. Even if I could reach these polygamous women, some of their husband did not allow them to speak. Therefore, we had to cancel our interview on the last minute a few times. This secrecy involved in polygamous marriages gave us a hard time in finding a large number of participants and we had to limit our number of participants with six in the end. This is one of the significant limitations of our study.

There is one male and five female participants in this study. Among these, four of them are second wives whereas only one of them is the first wife in a polygamous marriage. They come from different age groups, education level and regions. They all live in the big cities of Turkey. They were grown up in a conservative habitus and except for one of the participants; they define themselves as a faithful person who tries to live in accordance with the orders of God. The table related to the participants of this study can be found below:

Participants	Age	Occupation	Marital Status
Ayten	60	Housewife	2 nd wife
Aysel	64	Housewife	1 st wife
İlhan	63	Party member Charity owner Contractor	Polygamous man
Sevim	38	Housewife	2 nd wife
Nihal	33	Secretary	2 nd wife
Merve	50	Housewife	2 nd wife

Before the interviews, questions were formed and three experts in the field gave their advice on it. We also applied to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Social Sciences Institution and got a permission to conduct this study since there were no ethical considerations related to it. When we reached the respondents, we informed them about the content of the study and that their participation was voluntary and they had a right to withdraw from the study as they wished. They signed the consent form and we have given them pseudonyms to provide their confidentiality. We conducted five interviews face to face and three interviews online. We had a chance to interview two participants twice. The interviews lasted 1.5 hours on average. The interviews took place in different settings. We could visit two participants at their houses. Besides, interviews took place at cafes, restaurants and a bureau of a political party. During these interviews, I had a chance to observe the daily lives of the participants since I could get into their houses, watch TV with them, had tea and casual talk. I could spend some time with their children and neighbors which provided me an opportunity to observe their daily interactions with their close circle. In addition, I could take some photos and collect small artefacts from the natural settings of the participants.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were sent to the participants so that they could read and leave out any part they would not like. Discourse analysis was employed to analyze the data obtained from the fieldwork and interviews. Phillips & Jorgensen (2002) define discourse as a specific way of understanding and talking about the world. Discourses enable us to generate meanings and construct the social world, however, they are not closed entities as they compete with each other to fix meanings and to transform the social and cultural world. This study derives from the critical discourse theory which highlights ‘intertextuality’ and claims that individuals make use of various discourses with underlying power relations among them (Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, tracking down the use of multiple discourses and how they are interrelated seems be important. Analyzing the discourse of the participants, it has been found that women engaged in polygamy refer to various discourses to justify their involvement in polygamy and to make sense of their experiences. Religious discourse provides them to picture themselves as helpless individuals before the commandments of God whereas the modern, liberal discourse gives them the opportunity to cultivate a pious self whose needs and desires can coincide with the demands and stipulations of the modern world.

4. Theoretical Framework: Polygamy and Modern Discourse

As a country where the majority of population is Muslim, Turkey is one of those countries where polygamy is practiced even in small numbers. We must visit the Islamic culture and literature to understand the roots of how polygamy is justified and practiced. According to Chamie (1986), depending on the nation and culture, the percentage of Muslim men who engage in polygamy in Arabic countries ranges from 2 to 12%. Numerous studies also indicate that polygamy is not a common practice in the majority of Muslim countries.

Regarding Islamic nations, the majority of people think that Muslim men are permitted to marry up to four wives concurrently. This view is based on various interpretations of Surah Al-Nisa, Verse 3, which addresses polygamy and reads as follows:

“If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four: but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them). Then only one, or (a captive) that your right hand possesses. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice” (Ali, 2001, p.26).

Thus far, this verse has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Although some academics interpret it as a prohibition on the polygamous customs prevalent during that time, others see it as total authorization to wed multiple women under any conditions. These inconsistencies in its interpretation allow us to observe that polygamy has been practiced differently in different Muslim countries up until this point.

Departing from these interpretations, we can see that polygamy has been justified as a halal practice approved by God in Qur'an and it has been a part of Turkish culture even though the number of people practicing it has been limited. Statistically, Gücük et al. (2010) claim that just 2% of Turkish men are polygamous. In their study, they cite from a number of studies carried out in these areas and reach the conclusion that polygamy is predominantly practiced in the Eastern and Southeastern regions, with a rate of 4.7–5%.

In Turkey, there are several reasons why polygamy is practiced. One could claim that people choose polygamy primarily for its associated benefits given the cultural and economic context of these communities. According to Yılmaz and Tamam (2018), living with extended family or in a strong community known as an aşiret is popular, particularly in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey. Having multiple wives in such a setting results in a larger family and more children, which might give polygamous men a certain level of authority or prestige. It may result in a feeling of prosperity and security. Infertility or disease of the first wife, or her inability to bear a male child, are other common reasons for polygamy. These include providing labor force for families who own or work on farms, helping with domestic labor, ensuring the healthcare needs of elderly people through their children, and fulfilling cultural requirements and beliefs. However, we must remember that in today's highly industrialized and urbanized culture, the majority of these justifications are no longer valid.

One could argue that the changes made to Turkish Family Law in 1926 broke the ties with Ottoman culture. The Kemalist reforms took drastic measures, outlawing polygamy with the adoption of Civil Code. Any individual who wishes to get married must first demonstrate that their previous marriage has ended, according to Article 93. Moreover, according to Article 112, a marriage is deemed null and void if one or both of the partners were already married at the time of the marriage's inception (Yıldırım, 2005). Polygamy was made illegal under this law, and those who violated it faced a two-year prison term. But as we can see, in the majority of situations in Turkey, these penalties are neither enforced nor obeyed.

Another tenet of regulating marriage in Turkey is the religious marriage (imam nikahı) and its relationship with legal enforcements and social acceptance. Although it is legally void, religious marriage allows people to get married unofficially and enter into a polygamous marriage since it is considered as something approved by God. With regard to religious marriages, The Turkish Statistical Institute's 2016 study on the composition of Turkish families found that the percentage of religious weddings has been declining over time. It should be noted, though, that for a variety of reasons, some people would to keep their religious weddings a secret from their families and the general public. As a result, it is impossible to pinpoint the precise number of religious marriages.

These numbers are quiet fascinating because they demonstrate how deeply ingrained religious marriage is in the nation. Strikingly, 97.1% of participants in this study, which was conducted in the major cities of Istanbul, Ankara, and İzmir, simultaneously have an official and religious marriage. This indicates that people continue to view religious marriage as a component of their culture or religious habitus even while they acknowledge and value the validity of formal marriage. The study states that the percentage of couples who are solely

married by law is 1.8% and the percentage of couples who are exclusively married by religion is 1.1%. The survey also shows that education, age, wealth, and geographic location all have an impact on the prevalence of religious marriage. Despite being prohibited by the Turkish Civil Code, religious marriages are de facto legalized through both social processes and legislative changes. To legalize the children born of religious marriages, for example, some extra-legal adjustments have been made (Ergöçmen & Hancıoğlu, 1992). Overall, it can be concluded that, both legally and socially, "imam nikahı"—religious matrimony—remains a part of Turkish culture.

It can be argued that polygamy has been transformed through the effects of multiple discourses and practices that came along with modernity. First, I would like to focus on what family has turned into by undergoing critical changes with the onset of industrialization and capitalism as the prevailing economic system. Later, I will move onto the discussion of how polygamy is being practiced, conceived and reinterpreted under the effect of various discourses that emerged with modernity.

Modern family that is based on love, affection and sharing feelings radically differs from premodern family that is marked by reason, cooperation and sharing duties. For this discrepancy, Horwitz (2015) highlights two important factors. First, wage labor made it possible for work and home life to be separated by capitalism. Families used to labor together on farms before and everyone contributed to the production of the household. However, the industrial system and wage labor that the capitalism system brought forth also meant that there was a clear division between the home and the workplace, which drastically altered the dynamics and composition of families. Second, it created an extraordinary amount of money, which allowed the family to abandon its economic role as their primary source of identity. As a result, the family took on new roles under these criteria, most of which had to do with emotional and psychological traits. With the rise of capitalism and industrialization, new modes of production were embraced which means that agricultural production was highly being replaced by the factory system and wage labor. Hence, we can say that more and more people began to work in cities which led to the fact that family as an economic unit has lost its validity. Instead, we have come to face a new definition of family that becomes the primary site of meeting family members' psychological and emotional needs, providing a shelter from the competitive, insecure outside world (Coontz, 2005). As a result, it can be argued that family signifies a private space filled with love and affection instead of serving economic activities and purposes now.

Besides these, modernity has changed the existing relationship between communities and families. One of the most significant outcomes of modernization on family is that it has given yield to the nuclear family as the ideal form of family where the members of a nuclear family gets isolated from their extended family or other members of their kin. Therefore, it can be deduced that family has become a private institution where the liberty of individuals is promoted more by narrowing down its bonds with the community and extended kinship systems.

As can be seen, a new conception of family has emerged with the onset of modernity and its concomitant effects. With these changes, it can be argued that the ideal family form turned into a monogamous, nuclear family arrangement. The hegemonic discourse in the Western thought embraced the Western monogamous norms borrowed from Judeo-Christian tradition as a sign of modernity and a universal value. Polygamy has come to be something that is belittled as an uncivilized act and many scholars now point that the underlying assumption

behind the Western criticism of polygamy is the idea of their superiority over other civilizations (Ikuenobe, 2018).

While opposing to polygamy, many liberal ideas contend that it is morally unacceptable to permit people to join into a contract that damages or enslaves them and violates their rights, even if we believe that women chose freely and voluntarily to enter into polygamous marriages (Okin, 1989). Consequently, liberals criticize polygamy on the grounds that it harms women and violates their equality. The hierarchical and uneven power dynamics that polygamy entails between men and women are another reason why it is seen negatively. It offers men unfair benefits and leads to an imbalance in the rights and freedoms enjoyed by men and women in marriage. In polygamous marriages, there is an unequal distribution of responsibilities and rights and benefits. That is why, polygamy is considered to be a discriminating practice that denies the right of women.

However, in the recent years, the condemnation of polygamy has become a matter of discussion by various scholars. To their mind, Western critiques of polygamy are at odds with their own understanding of modern liberalism, which places a great emphasis on respecting each person's right to self-determination and offering opportunities and circumstances to enable one to follow a life plan. Therefore, we can see the notion of polygamy has been revisited under light of these discussions. With the increasing popularity on the subjects such as polyamorous relationships, same-sex marriage and the criticism on mononormativity, polygamy has come to be seen through different lenses.

Among these criticisms, there has been emphasis put on mononormativity. Rosa (1994) maintains that under the cover of mononormativity, the social construct of monogamy is mostly left unsaid, clear, and undetectable. In contrast to the romantic ideal that is praised and exalted in monogamy, portrayals of other types of relationships in the media are scarce and typically center on the failure of these relationships eventually. According to Rubin (1984), mononormativity is a sex-negative paradigm which produces a hierarchy whereby some sexual behaviors are seen as constructive, appropriate, and beneficial, while others are seen as perverted and negative.

Another tenet of criticism on monogamy is that in popular culture, monogamy functions as a gendered framework within the patriarchal system (Galician, 2004; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Given that women are more likely to seek commitment and that their sexuality is primarily contained within romantic partnerships, monogamy is seen as more natural for them. Men are shown as naturally sexual creatures who thrive in "casual" relationships while having the potential to look for real love in the future.

According to Keller (2000), over the years, Western monoamorous exclusivity and fidelity in romantic love have received too much attention. Emotional exclusivity is necessary since monogamy has become a component of the romantic ideal in the modern period. Even while the romantic ideal of a single, lasting love is still widely held, serial monogamy has supplanted the social need for one lifetime commitment (Sheff, 2014). Moreover, Crookston (2015) asserts that patriarchy, not polygamy, is the root of these issues. Therefore, we need to understand that heterosexual monogamy also puts a great burden on women's shoulders because we live in a patriarchal society. Instead of idealizing 'monogamy' as a must in today's world, the oppressive nature of monogamy should be questioned and other types of relationships that seem to be mostly invisible or considered as marginal such as polyamorous relationships should be reappraised in the sense of female agency and autonomy.

Looking at these arguments, we can deduce that there are new questions raised on the idealization of monogamy as an intrinsic value of modernity. These lead to the discussion of

polygamous marriages and polyamorous relationships from a liberal discourse that seeks out freedom or autonomy these can bring to an individual's life rather than conceptualizing polygamy as a part of uncivilized or highly traditional societies and linking its practice with Islamic fundamentalism. In a nutshell, we can conclude that polygamy has been transformed over the years with the effects of changes in our everyday life in the modern world that is highly marked by industrialization, capitalism, urbanization, neoliberalism etc.

5. Findings and Discussion

In our study, we have tried to explore and understand the experiences of polygamous people in modern Turkey. Instead of focusing on the traditional ways of practicing polygamy, we aim to investigate how polygamy has undergone certain changes with the effects of multiple discourses that have a considerable level of influence in making sense of our lives today. It would be misleading to claim that the participants of this study approach polygamy from the point of liberal discourses that see it as a way of gaining individual freedom as supporters of polyamorous relationships mentioned above. On the contrary, the participants stick to the Islamic discourse strictly while justifying their involvement in polygamous marriages and they clearly distinguish themselves from those who lead their relationships in an illegitimate way before God.

On the other hand, we can also observe that the participants make sense of their involvement in polygamy through the use of multiple discourses, not just limited to the religious one. How they approach to their relationship and marriage seems to be on the same page with the concept of marriage that was born and consolidated by the concept of love emerged in modernity. First of all, we see that modern polygamous marriages are now practiced as monogamies side by side instead of two families living together under the same roof or close by. Unlike the traditional way, each wife has their own houses, living with their children and generally there is no or slight contact with the other family. They seem to lead their lives as in other monogamous families. In addition to that, we see that polygamous marriages are framed within a discourse of romantic love, especially by second wives. Love comes forward as a significant reason to justify second marriages and to accept to be a second wife for these women.

In our study, except for Ayten who was forced to marry her husband by her parents, second wives report to be in love with their husbands. With regard to the beginning of their relationship and how they accepted to be second wives, these female participants point our attention to their feelings for their husbands back then. Even though they knew that their husbands were already married and had children from that marriage, these women opted for being a part of polygamy and did not turn down the proposal of their husband. As for their acceptance, they refer to God's plan or destiny to underline that it was out of their control and things were meant to be in this way. On the one hand, they avoid taking full responsibility for their decision by resorting to destiny and God's willing. On the other hand, they also highlight the significance of love they felt for their husband in the beginning. The way they describe their feelings and how they listened to their heart can be interpreted as a way of justifying their involvement in polygamy by these women.

In addition to being used as a strategy to alleviate the social pressure on polygamous people, love also comes forward as a token of how modernity has shaped the way we approach to marriage, even a polygamous one. Unlike traditional polygamy that is generally pictured by obligations, lack of love and oppression, the participants provide us a new account of their practice. Through these interviews, we get to see that people practicing modern polygamy refers to various discourses while justifying and describing their experience other than the

religious one. Among these, marriage that is based on romantic love as a significant tenet of modernization reveals itself, too.

To illustrate the theme of love that comes to the fore as a maxim of modern polygamy, we can explore how these women make sense of their feelings. For instance, Sevim who has been married to her husband for about 13 years and has two children from this marriage complains about the difficulties and challenges of polygamy at many times during our interviews. She underlines that legitimacy and jealousy show up as the most prominent problems negatively affecting their lives and marriages. However, she keeps pointing to her feelings for her husband as the primary reason why she accepted to be a second wife and stays in her relationship. Although Sevim felt shocked to get a proposal from her husband back then, she admits that she could not stay away from him. She admired his personality as she found him trustworthy and charismatic. Besides, she was having bad days due to her father's absence and facing financial difficulties. Therefore, she was drawn to him day by day. At this point, she states:

“How on earth could I say yes to him? I didn't make any plans or have any objectives. I simply had faith in him. When it's meant to be, one's hands and mouth get tied—I refer to it as "nasip." There is nothing you can do.”

Sevim makes sense of her involvement in polygamy based on her destiny as a part of God's plan and her strong feelings for her husband back then. How she depicts her feelings seems to be in line with the concept of modern love and marriage since it is the foundation of their marriage and she felt like it was irresistible. She also adds that love they felt for each other made it possible for them to stand against the challenges of polygamy and to continue their marriage over the years. She believes that many women in polygamous marriages suffer from the lack of love and brutal attitudes of their husbands and she considers herself as a lucky woman to be deeply loved by her husband, thereby, being able to overcome setbacks of polygamy.

Likewise, Merve admits her feelings for her husband and cites as the primary reason to accept his proposal. Merve had married a Turkish person living in Belgium before she met her second husband. It was an arranged marriage and she confesses that she could not love him at all. A few years later, she returned Turkey and continued to live with her parents. Later, she met her second husband and she could not say no to him even though she knew that her husband was already married. About those days, Merve utters that:

“I was a highly emotional person. I needed someone to love me in those days. I desired to be loved by him. I felt a void after my divorce and there was a kind of family pressure on me. At that age, it is difficult to have awareness. I do not know but somehow I loved him.”

Similar to Sevim, Merve refers to her feelings as a way of justifying her engagement in a polygamous union and she believes that it was her love that kept her in that marriage. During our interview, she talks about multiple cases where she had to face great difficulties due to her being a second wife. She sadly admits that all her life she was overshadowed by her sister wife who held the upper hand in their relationship. During her marriage of twenty-three years, Merve had to live closer to her sister wife, even live under the same roof for about six years. Nevertheless, Merve points out that her love for her husband made her overcome these challenges. She had to put up with her jealousy, sister wife, in-laws etc. over the years since

she loved her husband very much and could not picture a life without him. Here again, we can observe how their marriage is marked by modern concept of love as something fundamental to their union.

Finally, I would like to visit the statements of Nihal whose relationship with her husband began as a love affair back then. Nihal confesses that both of them were married when they met each other. They became friends on social media at first and then they ended up being lovers in a short time. Over the years, Nihal got divorced with her ex-husband and started a new life with her two children. On the other side, her present husband could not divorce his first wife due to certain reasons such as financial problems about sharing their properties, children custody and social pressure coming from his parents etc. When faced with these challenges, Nihal preferred to stay in this relationship and they got married with a religious wedding, which rendered them as husband and wife in her mind. Although she keeps complaining about jealousy and other difficulties of polygamy, she underlines that she does not mind being a second wife and does not force her husband to get a divorce since she feels sure of her husband's love for her and they feel passionate about their relationship. Therefore, she does not care about other formalities and she agrees to wait for people in her husband's family to calm down and then officially get married when everybody seems to accept their relationship.

For Nihal, it was love that brought them together and made them stand against multiple challenges over the years. In our first interview, she draws a picture of a couple that is madly in love, found each other by twist of fate after all these misfortunes they had in their lives. She feels so sure about her position vis-à-vis her sister wife that she encourages her husband to make his first wife happy, too. That way, everybody can get rid of negative feelings and they can have a more peaceful life. Here, she surprisingly adds that:

“He ought to give me priority, but he shouldn't ignore her either. Particularly on special occasions. I should be the one favored. On Valentine's Day, I once requested my husband to get her some flowers, too. Of course, not the same flowers with me. However, I also want her to be content. My husband is happier when I do it, which is why he loves me deeply.”

As you can see, Nihal depicts her marriage as highly based on love and contrary to the popular belief, she feels content to be a second wife. Even though she does not deny the difficulties of being a part of polygamy, she seems to be able to tolerate them thanks to her big love for her husband and the way she is loved by him. Maintaining peace in both families and protecting children from chaos come to the fore as significant reasons not to disrupt the existing order in their lives. However, for Nihal, love appears to be the primary reason why she engaged in a polygamous marriage at first and why she accepts things as they are.

Going through these examples, we can deduce that the discourse of romantic love coming along with modernity seems to reveal itself in modern polygamous marriages in our study. As opposed to popular opinion on polygamy, these marriages are marked by strong feelings they have for each other and these women resort to ‘love’ as the main factor for accepting to be second wives and to be a part of a polygamous union. Like other monogamous couples, they underline how love can bring two people together and make them endure certain difficulties and sufferings in their lives. Therefore, we can argue that romantic love as a tenet of modern monogamous, nuclear family shows itself in modern polygamous marriages, too.

As noted above, the participants of this study who practice polygamy in modern Turkey refer to multiple discourses to make sense of their situation and justify their involvement in polygamy. Although they address the religious discourse that allows for polygamy in Islam to

give a rationale for their practice, other discourses such as modern, liberal or capitalist come into the picture while describing their experience. The fact that these women approach their practice of polygamy and negotiate their agency within it at the intersection of various discourses show up as the most valuable contribution of this study.

In addition to romantic love as a token of modern discourse, these women also make use of a liberal discourse while describing their experience and portraying the relationship with their husband. In our interviews, we could observe that some of these women resort to concepts such as pursuing a career, looking for one's best interests or having a personal space in their marriage. These concepts seem to be in line with the liberal discourse that aims to articulate agents that act on their free will, rational mind and have the right to pursue personal freedom. Similar to the ideal agent conceptualized in liberal discourse, some of the participants underline their need to have a personal space in their marriage and certain opportunities to pursue their goals that could become possible for them thanks to being a second wife.

Meeting the concept of 'part-time husband' was another illuminating moment of this research process. Outstandingly, two of the participants, Nihal and Sevim have touched upon this concept in their interviews without knowing each other at all. According to these women, being a second wife, thereby, being a part of polygamy can become empowering for a woman in some ways. Rather than making a full commitment and organizing your daily life according to their husband, polygamy can provide some space for these women to spend time by themselves and to pursue their goals in those times spent away from their husband. Since their husband has another family and has to spend time with them regularly, these women can have some time off their husband and get an opportunity to make use of their time as they wish. An absent husband can mean that these women have less burden on their shoulders in terms of housework and meeting the needs of their husbands. That would provide some free time to these women. In addition to that, these women confess to take advantage of the leverage they can have on their husbands due to their absence at home or not supporting their second wives at all times.

To begin with, we can have a look at the statements of Sevim who, as a second wife, reports to be happy to spare some time for herself when her husband is away from home. Although she underlines that she suffered from her jealousy in the early days of her marriage, she also admits that she could get used to it over time and now she has succeeded in taking advantage of those absent times. According to her, the fact that her husband spends certain days of the week in his other house relieves the tension between her and her husband. Sevim believes that they are both opinionated people, thereby, they tend to have more conflicts than other couples. However, when her husband spends time away from Sevim, they can have some personal space and reduce the number of conflicts in their daily lives. Here, she states that:

“If we lived 7/24, we would fight every day. He is a jealous man. If we lived together all the time, he would ask me to inform him about everything I do. I am not such a person. I cannot bear it.”

She concludes that they get on well when they spend time apart. She also points to her duties at home as a mother and housewife, and adds that having a part-time husband lessens the burden on her shoulders. As a matter of fact, she describes her husband as a fussy man who is quite sensitive about cleaning and organization of the house. With regard to his intervention in the house, Sevim states that:

“He's such a picky guy. He heads straight to the kitchen to open the refrigerator when he gets home. He opens all the kitchen cabinets. He questions why I changed an object's location if I do. When it comes to cleaning, he is delicate. I am anxious before

he arrives because I have to prepare everything—cook the meals, clean the house, etc. Additionally, he interferes with my motherhood and the way I raise my kids”.

Therefore, not having him around sometimes relieves her stress as a mother and a housewife. She is content with her free time when she does not have to serve her husband and she can feel less pressure of him. In addition to that, she maintains that she could get a university degree and now she is taking a pedagogical certificate to become a teacher thanks to her being a second wife. She admits that she could not have so much free time to pursue her studies if she was the only wife of her husband. Furthermore, she speaks of the ‘leverage’ she has over her husband as he feels guilty of not spending enough time with his family and leaving her with the kids alone at home.

Surprisingly, in our second interview, Sevim complains about a possible divorce between her husband and his first wife. She confesses that she got used to their life order over the years where she could spend her free time away from her husband while pursuing her goals and studies in her life. At this point, she expresses her concerns for her academic studies and a future career since she knows that she will not be able to do all of these if she becomes the only wife of her husband. Going through all these statements, we can observe that Sevim has adapted herself to a polygamous life over the years and she has learned to turn some disadvantages of her polygamous situation into an advantage for her.

While describing her situation as a second wife and how she manages to open up some space for her, she refers to a liberal discourse where she addresses herself as a free agent that has a right to pursue her goals and create herself a life plan. She prefers to portray herself as a rational being that seeks to attain her goals and to get utmost benefit in her current situation. Hence, we can observe that these women engaged in polygamous marriages make use of various discourses to express themselves and to describe their specific situation. Contrary to the popular opinion, they do not only resort to the religious discourse to justify polygamy and their involvement in it.

Another participant that underlines the freedom of having a part-time husband is Nihal who feels deeply in love with her husband and suffered from her jealousy in the early days of her marriage. According to her, spending some time apart from her husband and having freedom to act as she wishes in those times make their relationship work. Since Nihal’s ex-husband was highly oppressive and controlled her in all terms, she was relieved to get a divorce and live her own life as she wanted. Therefore, she feels in control of herself much more when she does not need to inform her current husband about everything she does and to consult him for the management of their house.

Nihal also points to the leverage she has on her husband since he feels guilty of leaving her alone and spending time in his other house. Thanks to this leverage, Nihal could have more freedom to do many things that she would not be able to do if she was the only wife of her husband. For example, she talks about the romantic gestures and surprises of her husband which she would not have if he did not feel himself guilty. In addition to that, Nihal believes that her husband would not tolerate certain things such as her wearing bikinis or décolleté dresses if she was the only wife. But now, he sees that Nihal can put up with being a second wife and she makes a big sacrifice for their marriage. Therefore, he shows much more patience with her and tries to romanticize their relationship as much as possible. About being a second wife, Nihal states that:

“I did not ask my husband to divorce from his first wife. I don't want to give up my independence and submit to him at home. That's why I am happy being the second wife and a part of polygamy; I didn't ask for an official wedding.”

We can see from these two instances that these women use a secular, liberal discourse in which the subject wants to follow her goals and aspirations in life on her own terms, free from outside interference. They articulate their stance on polygamy not just through religious language but also by utilizing vocabulary and notions developed by a secular, liberal discursive framework. They present themselves as subjects who want to live freely, achieve their objectives in life, and have space in their lives for themselves. Currently, it appears that having a part-time husband gives them some room to carry out these objectives.

To put in a nutshell, this study aims to explore the experiences of women engaged in modern polygamy in Turkey by putting emphasis on new ways and forms of practicing polygamy. As an ethnographic study that applies discourse analysis, this study finds out that these women make sense of their experiences and turn themselves into subjects through various discourses. While they resort to the religious discourse to justify their involvement in polygamy by using the words 'God's plan, meant to be, destiny etc.', they also refer to the modern, liberal and secular discourse in order to describe their situation and cultivate a conscious self in the end. It is seen that they borrow the notion of 'marriage based on romantic love' and 'freedom and personal space', which shows us that modern polygamy is closely intertwined with the hegemonic discourses of modern life.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the new ways in which modern polygamy is practiced in Turkey as distinct from the previous ways of engaging with polygamy. It contributes to the existing literature on polygamy by addressing the transformation of family under the effects of modernization globally and by revealing how polygamy interacts with these new forms and discourses surrounding modern life. It is seen that modern polygamy differs from the traditional one by exhibiting similar traits with modern, monogamous and nuclear families. Polygamies in modern life have turned into monogamies side by side rather than sister wives living in the same household and sharing their daily lives.

The findings of this research show that people practicing modern polygamy in Turkey refer to various discourses to justify their involvement in polygamy and make sense of their experience. We have found that these polygamous people do not just resort to the religious discourse to explain their rationale behind their polygamous life, but also they borrow certain terms and concepts from several discourses such as liberalism or the concept of love in its modern sense. It is found that while the participants depict their marriage and relationships with their husbands, they mostly refer to the image of romantic love in a marriage which emerged as a norm of ideal family by the onset of modernity. Furthermore, they depict themselves as rational, free willing agents postulated by the liberal discourse stressing the element of individual choice since they put forth the idea of part-time husband or marriage where they enjoy some of their time alone by turning it into an advantage for themselves. Due to these gaps in their marriage, these women can pursue their goals or a career in their lives, enjoy having a personal space and look for their best interests. They are aware that they would not be able to do these if they were the only wife of their husbands. Overall, this paper aims to elucidate the new ways of conceptualizing polygamy in modern life and opens up new space for further studies that can be done to explore the interactions between different discourses on family, polygamy and individuals.

Women engaged in polygamy has been conventionally discussed with the terms such as complete victims, enslaved, oppressed and subordinated. The hierarchical power relations between husbands and wives have been emphasized and these women are pictured as having no agency in their lives. On the other side, there are certain scholars such as Asad (2008) and

Mahmood (2005) that revisit the concept of female agency, especially of pious women. They point out that agency has been defined as the capacity or power to resist or subvert the norms, traditions and moral conducts. Instead, they propose that individuals can turn themselves into active subjects through docility and subordination. It can be quite empowering for pious women to submit themselves to God which seems to be quite oppressive in the popular opinion. This brings us to reconsider the agency of these women engaged in modern polygamy in Turkey and how they negotiate their agency within their marriages by applying to various discourses such as the religious one (it was God's plan) or the modern, liberal discourse (I need personal space or love is what brings us together). This study sheds light on new forms of practicing polygamy in today's Turkey and touches upon how these women situate themselves in the modern world. Although this study fills a gap in the existing literature by exploring modern polygamy, this subject needs to be explored more and studied from different angles. Along with the agency of women in modern polygamy, how polygamous men negotiate, attain or lose their agency can be further studied.

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