

# Analyzing the Spatial Patterns of Suburban Women's Everyday Life

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## Case Study: Marlik Town in Tehran Metropolitan Area

Un'analisi dei modelli spaziali della vita quotidiana delle donne nei suburbi

Caso Studio: Marlik Town nell'Area Metropolitana di Teheran

# Suburban town  
# Women  
# Marlik

# Città di periferia  
# Donne  
# Marlik

Il contributo mira a illustrare come le donne residenti nei sobborghi si relazionano ai vincoli ed alle opportunità presenti nei propri ambiti di vita in una prospettiva spaziale. Sulla base della teoria della strutturazione, le pratiche spaziali di queste ultime sono state considerate il risultato dell'interazione tra la loro agency e la struttura delle opportunità presente a livello metropolitano. Esaminando il caso della città suburbana di Marlik, si evidenzia che mentre le opportunità e le forme di supporto all'accesso a tali opportunità sono complessivamente limitate, si possono osservare differenze significative tra le donne. Al fine di analizzare l'interazione tra l'agency di queste donne e le strutture esistenti, è stata condotta una ricerca qualitativa: i dati sul campo sono stati raccolti attraverso interviste in profondità semi-strutturate, auto-etnografia e osservazione partecipante. I risultati mostrano che, in ogni settore della loro vita quotidiana le donne mettono in campo una varietà di strategie spaziali.

### Introduction

As defined within the framework of the Garden City Movement, one of the critical characteristics of satellite cities was to be economically autonomous. However, in practice, most of them have become dormitory suburbs. These settlements are criticised especially by feminist scholars such as Eli Zaretsky. He argues about the isolation and loneliness inherent in a life lived by many suburban women (wives) who spend their days, and nights, with a television set and their children (Tong, 1989, p. 68).

In fact, suburban areas represent the private sphere which is separate from productive work in a capitalist society; and women, especially housewives, seem to be confined in these areas.

The development of suburban towns in Iran can be traced back to the Land reform (1962-71) which caused vast migrations to large cities. According to G. Etemad et al., more than half of all migrations in the country until 1977 were directed to Tehran (2004, p. 78). This process along with the political centralisation under the rule of the Pahlavi Dynasty and the reliance of the country on oil revenue made Tehran the largest concentration of most economic activity and the largest market in the country (Madanipour, 1999). As a result, a significant part of the labour force lost the opportunity to reside within the capital. To solve this problem some new towns and settlements with affordable housing were built around the metropolis at a reasonable distance- and sometimes not- for daily commuting (Etemad et al., 2004, p. 152-3).

At the same time, after the 1979 Revolution Iranian urban society has experienced the increase of women presence in the public spaces and educational places (Fazeli, 2017). However, they still do not enjoy high levels of participation in “formal” social processes of the society: as evidence, we can refer to the constant low rate of women’s employment since the revolution. According to the Statistical Centre of Iran, in 2016 economic participation of women aged 10 and over was 14.9%, a rate that has not shown any significant increase in the last four decades. This situation seems to be even more dramatic in suburban areas, since these settlements are functioning as dormitories and do not offer any opportunity for economic participation, or in a more general sense, for integration in public life, especially to women who are spending their days in these towns.

The case study of this research is Marlik suburban town in the Tehran Metropolitan area. This town was planned and built during the 1980s according to a low-density pattern, and it offered single-family detached houses. In the following decade, Marlik was developed horizontally, and almost all its houses were transformed into apartments. This amount of housing supply led to even more migrations from different parts of the country, increased the population of the town drastically and caused higher cultural diversity among its residents. Based on what mentioned above, the limited facilities and opportunities of Marlik is in contradiction with two more recent phenomena: (1) the increased presence of the new generation of Iranian women that, abundant in cultural capital, are very different from the previous ones as were dominated by more traditional housewives lifestyle and (2) the increased cultural diversity among its residents- including women- that is a result of vast migrations.

In this context, moving from structuration theory this research aims to analyse how women of Marlik deal with these contradictions in their everyday life. The two key concepts of the study are agency and structure. The situation of women in a suburban town in Tehran Metropolitan area is considered as intersecting gender and spatial structures in this study, and their

characteristics and capabilities in their everyday life represent their agency. According to these definitions, this paper is going to explain how women deal with the constraints of living in a suburban town (Marlik) and how this confrontation is reflected in their spatial behaviours; and whether we can recognize any pattern in these daily spatial practices and whether these imply meaningful differences in women's individual capabilities and lifestyles.

### **Interactions between Structure and Agency**

Structure and agency are the two critical elements of so-called Structuration Theory advanced by Anthony Giddens (1984). The main characteristic of this theory is putting an end to the emphasis on either concept of subject (the individual actor) or structure (any form of societal totality) in the social sciences in favour of a more articulated understanding of the interaction between these two concepts in the form of social practices ordered across space and time. In the constitution of society, agency is defined as the "capability of people in doing things and producing effects regardless of their intentions" (ibid. p. 9) and structure as "rule and resources" in the form of "structuring properties... which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space" (ibid. p. 17). The relation of these two concepts in Giddens' theory has two main characteristics which bring up the structure as a non-determinant concept:

1. This relation is both enabling and constraining (ibid. p. 25). In other words, structure both enables and constrains the forms of agency that are possible (Dovey, 1999: 17).
2. Structure and agency are not separated and, rather than being external, structure is internal to the activities of individuals. It means that structures are constructed by agents (ibid.)

### **Spatial Structure and Everyday Actions**

Giddens has given a pivotal role to spatial relation by trying to analyse interactions of agents in the context which he calls the *situatedness* in time and space (Giddens, 1984: 110). A situation in this definition is opening and closing brackets in both space and time (Dovey, 1999: 18) and it is also framed by clusters of rules which help to constitute and regulate activities, defining them as actions of a certain sort..." (ibid.). So, space is a major element or aspect of the structural situation in which some forms of life and activities are enabled, and some others are constrained.

This non-determinant structuring capacity of space has been widely discussed by several other theorists from different disciplines too. One of the most comprehensive reviews of these discussions in architecture and urban design was proposed by H. Heynen (2013), who focused on the interaction between spatial and social constellations categorising them in three models. "Space as stage" is the third model in which the relations between social and spatial aspects of the environment are mutual. Two of the most prominent theories reviewed are of M. De Certeau and H. Lefebvre. She indicates that these two theorists "come close to an understanding of space as conditioning, structuring or framing social behaviours without really determining them" (p. 350).

According to their theories – and also as indicated by Giddens in *Modernity and self-identity* (1991)- individuals have choices in possible behaviour patterns which are enabled by the non-determinant. The outcome is definite spatial behaviours or actions through which individuals can reproduce or change the spatial structure.

### **Gender Structure and Women's Agency**

"Giddens' notion of structure should not be considered as physical" (Dovey, 1999: 17). Gender can also be considered as a socially constructed structure that is rooted in prescribed rules and norms about men and women's roles and behaviours. Based on this idea, B. J. Risman (2004) argues that in this structure, actors compare themselves and their options to those who are structurally in similar positions, and the structural power of gender lies here, because "as long as women and men see themselves as different kinds of people, then women will be unlikely to compare their life options to those of men" (p. 432) and this can lead to a structural inequality.

However, Risman does not consider the structure as a determinant concept. She defines action as a choice and as a function of interests, according to her social structure influences action in two ways: indirectly by shaping actors' perceptions of their interests, and directly by constraining choices (ibid.). However, influenced by Giddens, she also emphasises the transformative character of human action which leads to a recursive relationship between social structure and individuals (ibid). So actions can change the structure.

### **Suburban Settlements and Gender: Intersecting Structures for Women**

Neighbourhoods are believed by many scholars to be in direct relation with women, as women represent the concept of the everyday world (Smith, 1987). Since in gender structure men and women occupy different (and unequal) positions, as Risman indicated, their everyday time/space path would also be different. In certain capitalist societies, women are excluded from social production, and they are confined in the private sphere. According to Gilroy and Booth (1999), impacted by the hegemonic assumptions about the roles of men (wage earner) and women (housekeeping and childcare), the sites of production and those of reproduction have been gendered and this has justified their separation in space (p. 307). This spatial separation has been widely criticised by gender and feminist scholars and activists, particularly in suburban settlements which are believed to intensify the unequal position of women by putting them at a further distance from workplaces and other infrastructures. This separation does not influence only home-makers, since even working women, in order to manage their multiple daily responsibilities, have to spend much time to overcome this separation.

Sectoral approaches which emphasise the separation of activities has been indicated by Gilroy and Booth (1999) as one of the main reasons for this separation (p. 309). Based on structuration theory, they also believe that these areas are contexts in which the concept of everyday life can be used as a mainstreaming tool for developing a model to have spaces which do not constrain multiple roles of women. In this model, neighbourhoods are considered as

a spatial and temporal whole that integrate through certain infrastructures living, working, caring and relaxing (p. 322). This model provides an excellent example of social/spatial structures which has been reproduced based on the daily practices of women. Therefore, women are not considered as an entirely subordinated group against structural constraints and their everyday life can change social and spatial structures. Based on this theoretical approach, in the next sections, it will be shown how women's everyday life in the Marlik suburban town represents such interaction between the concepts of structure and agency and how it is reflected in geographies of women.

### Case Study and Methodology

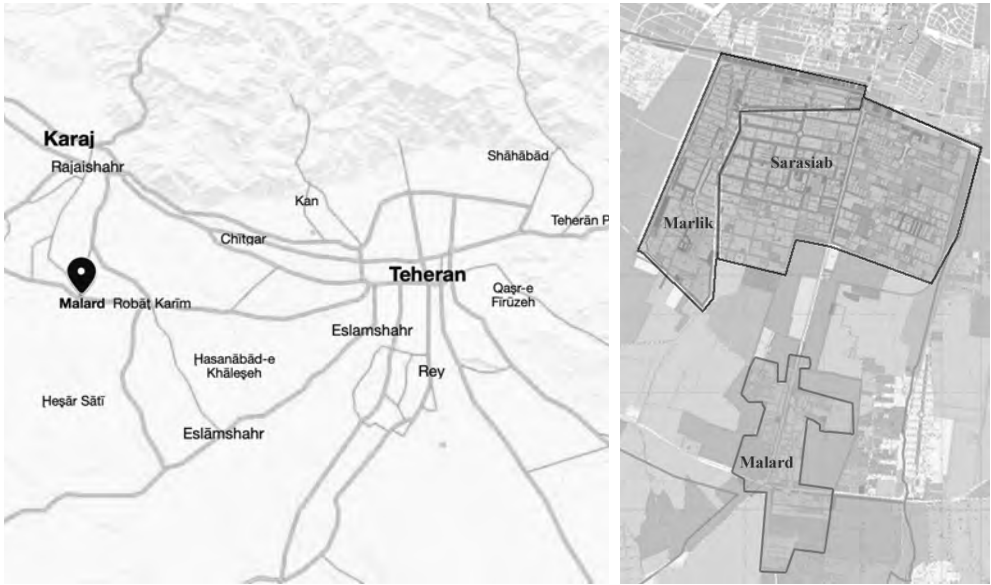
Marlik is a planned town constructed in the late 1980s for offering affordable housing to employees and workers who worked in nearby settlements. After a decade, along with Sarasiab- an informally constructed settlement- it joined Malard which is one of the most significant cities in the west of Tehran Province. Today Malard is a satellite city of both Karaj and Tehran.

Two main physical transformations occurred in Marlik after joining the municipality of Malard: it expanded horizontally towards the south, and the former single-family detached houses were demolished and replaced by apartments (since the tax on construction is a major source of income for municipalities in Iran). This procedure led to vast migrations toward the town and, as indicated in the Comprehensive Plan of Malard, recent immigrants form more than half of the population. So the majority of residents have different cultural backgrounds, including women.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (2010), for a total of 34220 women living in Marlik, home-makers, employed and unemployed women are respectively 17624, 2373 and 1067. Women are 46% of residents with academic education, and 79% of these educated women are between 20-34 years old. All these figures show a new generation of women born after the revolution who want to join the public sphere by leveraging on their cultural capital. To analyse the interaction between these women's agency and the existing structures they deal with in their everyday life, it was necessary to define the essential elements of everyday life. In this regard, two main factors have been chosen as the basis of this definition:

1- Women's interaction with the built environment: as indicated, since the main critique on modern urban planning from an everyday life perspective is the segregation of activities into functional zones (dwelling, work, recreation), these three main zones are chosen as elements which represent women's daily activities- respectively housekeeping and caring, working and spending free time- in urban spaces. The primary purpose is to understand how this structural segregation can influence those activities.

2- Women's social interactions: as underlined by prominent critics as Mumford's and Jacobs' social relationships are almost neglected in modernist urban planning. Social interaction cannot be considered as a wholly separate urban function since it can be found throughout all the activities at home, work



**Fig.1** Location of Malard. Location of Marlik in Malard, (comprehensive plan of Malard, 2011).

and public places. As a distinct activity, we can refer to purposeful collective activities taking place in associations, institutions and other contexts. In this paper, we consider both types of these social interactions.

This paper draws on a qualitative research conducted in Marlik in 2014, and different methods have been used for gathering data: (1) auto-ethnography, since one of the authors has lived in the town since she was 5 years old, one of the main resources was her self-reflection; (2) in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 women selected through a snowballing sampling technique mixing women from different ages, backgrounds and social status; (3) time-diaries as interviewees were asked to write down their detailed time-diary to find out their daily time/space path; (4) field observation used to explore women's spatial behaviours and tactics in some public places including local parks. These methodologies were integrated by a broad desktop review aimed based on the consultation of formal documents and statistics such as the comprehensive plan of the city, the Atlas of Tehran metropolis and data of statistical centre of Iran.

### Results

In this section, for each of 4 elements of everyday life (housekeeping and caring, working, leisure time and social interactions), structural situations are explained, and the women's behaviours within existing constraints and resources are described. This description helps to proceed to the next step which is recognising and analysing the patterns of behaviours. These patterns are in direct relation with the individual agency of women which refers to their capacity in dealing with their structural situation.

### Housekeeping and caring

Housekeeping and caring is a great part of home-makers' everyday life, and it requires different infrastructures and amenities in residential neighbourhoods. Madanipour (2002) indicates that construction of new towns in the suburban area of Tehran metropolis has responded to the interest of the private sector to invest and benefit from financial credits that were allocated to the construction of housing in these settlements (p. 190). It should be noted that the creation of urban amenities is not the main focus of real estate developers as profit-making mostly is, a circumstance leading to a significant shortage of such amenities in these settlements. Interviewed home-makers have indicated that their daily activities include shopping, strolling their children and taking them to schools and take care of the health of their family. However, present land use data of the town- according to the comprehensive plan of Malard- shows a significant shortage in health care and educational services. Also, women complained that the only service developed in the town is a shopping centre; it is interesting that they do not consider the abundance of commercial and shopping outlets as a positive aspect of their town:

“Marlik does not offer anything but stores... shopping centres don't offer a real opportunity while I can do most of my shopping anywhere else...”  
(Maryam 43 years old).

Land use	Standard per capita (m <sup>2</sup> ) (Shieh, 1996)	Existing per capita (m <sup>2</sup> ) (Comprehensive plan of Malard, 2011)
Education	4.4	1.06
Health care	1.7	0.01
Commercial	2.8	2.66

**Tab.1** Education, healthcare and commercial land use in Malard.

So learning about women's behaviour to fulfil these demands can be informative since it seems that their definition of accessibility is different from its formal definition:

#### a) shopping

The behaviours of women are not the same in their daily shopping and in buying more durable goods. Among women of Marlik, choosing the shopping centre is not accidental, or they do not merely do the shopping in the nearest commercial centres and stores since they pay attention to the factor of cost in their daily shopping and the factor of quality in buying clothes and furniture. Since the purchasing power of families in the town is limited, for buying groceries, most women try to find the cheapest stores or go to wholesale markets and weekly markets which are not necessarily located near home. Also, to buy clothes, furniture and any other durable goods, some women choose to go to shopping malls of large cities- as Karaj and Tehran- since it is believed that these centres offer more diverse and higher quality products.

“I don’t do my daily shopping in the supermarket next to our house, I have found a grocery store that sells some goods like sugar, grains and rice at a lower price...” (Fatemeh, 34 years old).

“I usually try to find cheaper centres; I buy our daily items from different stores, and even I prefer weekly markets and even hawkers because their prices are more affordable” (Maryam 43 years old).

“You can hardly find appropriate clothes in clothes shops of Marlik; there should be a market place in which at least 30 stores offer different models and qualities that you can choose among them. So I prefer to buy my clothes in Tehran” (Sara, 28 years old).

#### b) healthcare

Almost all women complain about the lack of specialists in Marlik. Even they are not satisfied with the only main medical clinic of the town. Gynaecology and paediatrics are two specialities indicated by women as the most critical medical needs of Marlik. Also, lack of public medical clinics in which they can benefit from their medical insurance is one of the main problems of women in Marlik:

“I cannot use my medical insurance here, even for a dental filling I have to go to Karaj. It takes too much time, and it is really difficult for me since my child is very young. I remember that the last time when I had a toothache, I had to wait a long time to have treatment” (Zahra, 40 years old).

Generally, it seems that the only solution for women is to use the clinics of Karaj and Tehran which provide better facilities for patients.

#### c) Education

Education of children is one of the most critical concerns of mothers in Marlik as they are unsatisfied with the number of educational centres and the quality of education.

“During the last 15 years, some transformations have occurred in Marlik; but its cultural and educational services have not changed yet! The only change is the construction of more streets and roads and an increase in the number of vehicles which facilitate our access to different parts of the town including schools!” (Akram, 38 years old).

In fact, Akram talks about the subjective distance that has been decreasing even though the actual distance is the same. Women also mentioned the lack of extracurricular classes in the town:

“There are some institutions in Tehran like the “Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults” which holds some useful and cheap courses for children like painting classes, etc.; we watch the advertisements on TV but they are unavailable for our children” (Somayeh, 28 years old).



Low quality of public schools and other existing educational institutions is another point indicated by interviewed women. Some believe that the presence of new immigrants or the enrolment of children who come from Sarasiab- the nearby informal settlement- in public schools can influence the upbringing of their children. To confront this situation women, have different tactics, and these tactics have a meaningful relationship with their financial ability. Some women consent to enrol their children in existing public schools of the town and some others who have a better financial situation choose private schools or try to find a better school in surrounding settlements like Karaj. For extra-curricular courses, some mothers who cannot afford the tuition or who are not satisfied with the quality of institutions, prefer to teach their children at home.

### Work

As mentioned before, 17624 home-makers, 2373 working women and 1067 unemployed women live in Marlik. Moreover approximately half of the educated residents of the town are women, and 80 per cent of them are between 20-34 years old, a figure that indicates their readiness to employment. However, the overwhelmingly residential function and significant distance of Marlik from large cities is the primary constraint for these women. According to the comprehensive plan of Malard (2011), there is no significant industrial or business centre inside or near the town and the primary job opportunity inside the town consists in becoming a clerk in local stores. So, it seems that almost all working women residing in the town either do not have academic education or at least do not work based on their academic background. For analysing the situation of women and describing their behaviours in dealing with the problem of occupation in Marlik, the access to job opportunities as a general problem for all suburban women and the concerns of working women in a suburban town should be taken into account.

#### a) Access to job opportunities

Women of Marlik have different situations concerning access to job opportunities. Among educated women, lack of employment is the main concern:

“There is no employment opportunity in Marlik except some mundane works like being a salesperson in a local store; there is no company or factory, so we cannot do any professional work” (Sara, 28, bachelor of accounting).

So, some of these women prefer to stay at home and wait for a chance to live in a large city in future. However, many of them struggle with finding a job mostly in Karaj and Tehran while women who do not have academic education usually try to find a job in the town. They choose an activity which is often uninteresting or inaccessible for men, so it is not necessary to compete with them. For example, they learn to work as a hairdresser or the gym instructor, or they consent to have jobs with lower salaries which are usually refused by men such as salesperson in stores and shopping malls, secretary and assistant in medical clinics. Alternatively, they use their home as their workplace as to not have to rent any other place, or if they have a private car they use it as a source of income:

“My husband used to disagree with me over my desire to work; but I resisted and began to teach handicrafts to women in our home; after saving money I became able to buy a car and use it as the car service of the primary schools” (Akram, 38 years old).

#### b) Concerns of working women

Working in Karaj and Tehran has its own advantages and disadvantage for women. Those who work in Karaj believe that salary and benefits in this city are limited as compared to Tehran while those who work in Tehran complain about their difficulties in daily commuting: the long distance, heavy traffics, inadequate transportation facilities and feelings of insecurity. Almost all these women prefer to leave the town and live in large cities.

“Working in Tehran generally imply better salary and benefits; for example, many companies in Karaj don’t provide insurance to employees; I was working in a detergent company in Karaj, our legal working hour was between 8 am to 5 pm, but we usually had to stay until 8 pm” (Mahsa, 27, a degree in accounting).

Married working women deal with another complication as they usually struggle to make a balance between work and housekeeping. Leila is a tailor in the town, and a significant part of their family expenses are being paid by what she earns, but her family members do not participate in household tasks efficiently. Most of these women do not pay for local services to be relieved of their home duties home such as taking care of children or cleaning home. The reasons to not do so can be categorised in three groups: (1) they do not need to be at their workplace at a precise time since they are not employed in corporations or factories making possible flexible timing arrangements; (2) their purchasing power is limited, and they prefer to save their money; (3) they still believe that being a home-maker and a mother is the priority of their life.

Of course, this does not mean that women do not use any public services of their town, but there is not a meaningful relationship between using these services and being a working woman. In fact, with the prevalence of apartments over single-family homes some previous household chores cannot be done inside residential buildings. However, it should not be neglected that access to good public services influences the daily routine of working women as, for example, access to safe, inexpensive and good kindergartens is an effective help for working mothers who have to carry out multiple tasks.

#### Spending free time

In Marlik, the amount of space dedicated to leisure is far lower than urban planning standards. Existing facilities include two main parks, a cycle track, few mosques, a public library, a cultural centre, private gyms and a private amusement park. By dividing leisure into two groups of cultural and recreational activities, a significant difference can be seen among women as most of the ones interested in cultural leisure do not use local services. These women fulfil their cultural needs- going to the cinema, taking part in cultural events

- by using facilities provided in large cities particularly Tehran or they prefer to stay at home and spend their time by reading books. On the other hand, women are very unsatisfied with recreational services of the town as in their opinion they are not sufficient to the population, they do not offer high quality and some of them are very expensive.

“Gyms do not have experienced instructors, they are dirty too. The amusement park is only for children, but it’s too expensive; why should I spend my money for such a place?” (Narges, 40 years old).

“Marlik does not have any place for different sports; there are only some gyms for body-building or martial arts; we do not have a basketball court or football pitch” (Maryam, 43 years old).

Regarding the lack of high-quality leisure facilities, women have different tactics for spending their free time. Some prefer to stay at home, or in case of going out they prefer to use recreational spaces of nearest cities and settlements.

“If you have free time in Marlik, you always ask yourself: “what can I do now?” there is no suitable place for spending free time. The only option is going to a friend’s home. Actually there are some parks but there are unsafe and girls can’t use their sports equipment, so you prefer to stay at home! But at some weekends I go hiking with some of my friends [in north of Tehran]” (Sara, 28 years old).

“I do not like parks of Marlik; they are only some green spaces without any facility; I go to Tandorosti Park (in Karaj) but not at weekends, because it is also so crowded which I do not like” (Maryam, 43 years old).

However, some women use recreational spaces of the town. For example, interviews show that women who have children, use local parks frequently as they have to take children because their apartments do not have open spaces. But they are not passive against barriers which constrain them in their activities. For example, field observations in the northern local park of Marlik showed that women have some spatial tactics against what can be called diffidence. The location of this park is shown in figure 3; it is a linear park along one of the main streets of Marlik (Ave. Parnian), and in the northern part of the park there is some play equipment for children which is marked by a red circle. Women’s behaviour in using this park have been observed several times and field observations showed that: (1) many women use the park only if in the company of family or friends; (2) they do not stay in the park’s dead parts that are out of social monitoring (see figure 3) while gathering in more lively places; (3) they are involved in unconscious gendered segregations as they sit where can they be easily seen by people in the street, yet having enough distance from the mostly young men walking.

Using a non-recreational place for spending free time is another tactic of women while they do not access to enough facilities. Fifteen interviewees



**Fig.2\_ 1-3\_ Gendered sitting arrangement in seats in northern part of park, 2014.**  
**4\_ The residential and commercial building adjacent to the park, 2014.**  
**5\_ Women prefer to sit in internal parts in south of park, 2014.**  
**6\_ Men walking along the park, 2014.**

indicated that one of their main leisure activities is shopping and wandering in shopping malls. The advantage of this type of leisure is its coincidence with the responsibilities of housekeeping.

#### Social interactions

Spatial changes in Marlik - the transformation from single-family to apartments- has led to vast migrations. This has weakened social cohesion among residents while women of new generation search relationships which are dissimilar to that typical of housewives. Relationships with neighbours were the most prevalent since the population was limited and single-family homes were the dominant form of residence, and alleys were one of the most important spaces for shaping this type of relationship. Interviews showed that women have their own ways to interact with others. Some who have relatives in the town, prefer to interact only with them. Most of these women are housewives.

“If you do not have relatives in Marlik, you will be depressed; most women live inside apartments and know nobody; here most residents are stranger for us, they have come from different regions with different lifestyles... I think we cannot trust people here, but our relatives” (Maryam, 43 years old).

Some who are old-time residents have mostly kept their relationship with their former neighbours.

“I interact with my former friends and neighbours; it is not logical to be in a close relationship with new neighbours; those years we did not have anyone in the town, so we became friendly with few neighbours around, we got to know each other well, we helped each other in difficult situations...” (Sima, 50 years old).

Some meet their friends out of the town; these women are mostly young and have found their friends in their education or workplaces in Karaj and Tehran.

None of my friends is here, and here there is no place to meet friends! We prefer to go to hiking or meet in a café, which is not possible here (Mahsa, 27 years old).

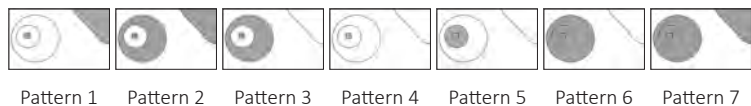
“Women who work in the town, have developed their social relationships in their workplaces. I have found nice friends at my workplace, we meet each other there” (Leila, 40 years old, tailor).

All these show that social relationships in the town are individual rather than being collective. Since interaction between neighbours has become fragile, there is no sense of community which bonds residents and make them do some collaborative practices related to their place of living. Thus there are many women who do not participate in social activities, and they do not trust existing institutions or charities. However, women who have social capital through their work, relatives or have resided for a long time in the town, engage in establishing loan funds or holding rituals. Equally, some mothers whose children are students take part in some school decision making.

### Patterns of daily behaviours

The results regarding women’s agency against spatial and gender structures in four main aspects of everyday life showed that: (1) they are not passive against constraints while having creativity in fulfilling their needs and demands and that, (2) such creativity, also depends on their different capabilities and lifestyles. Accordingly, women in Marlik can be distributed into two groups: the ones who interact with their place of living, and the ones who do not have this interaction besides in the case of necessities.

Beyond this dual division, a more precise recognition of behavioural patterns is needed. Since the context of this study is satellite cities or suburban towns, so the behaviours of women can be analysed based on the location of Marlik – as a suburban town – in the regional urban network and its relationship with other settlements, particularly large cities. According to the findings, we can identify four women’s main spatial levels in everyday life: home, town, surrounding large cities (as Karaj), the Tehran metropolis (figure 4). It means that the choice of women about where to do their activities determines their behavioural patterns.

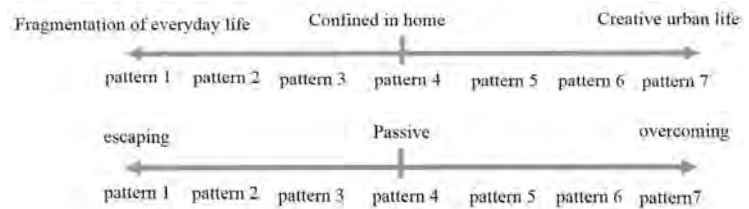


**Fig.3\_** Seven patterns of behaviours.

Such patterns cannot explain everyday behaviours of women in Marlik comprehensively as they should be understood as points on a spectrum. Grey areas are where women choose to fulfil their needs.

- Patterns 1 to 4 belong to women who cannot interact with the environment of their town; in contrast patterns 5 to 7 explain everyday life of women who have a meaningful relationship with their place of living.
- Patterns 1 to 3 describe the everyday life of women who prefer to address their needs (including leisure, work and social activities) in large cities; otherwise they stay home without engaging with the environment of the town. In pattern 1, there is an extreme contradictory condition in which women prefer a metropolis to live; indeed their everyday life is polarized between home and metropolitan space. Pattern 1 and 2 mostly represent educated young women, while pattern 3 show a lesser contradiction in which women can be satisfied to meet their needs in large cities like Karaj. The main tactic of these women against the constraints of living in a suburban town is “escaping”.
- Pattern 4 can be associated with the concept of “passivity” that represents the life of suburban housewives confined in their home and do not use the public spaces except for basic needs.
- Pattern 5 represents women who address all their needs in the town and use existing public spaces and amenities effectively; most of these women are old-time residents of the town or mothers who have to be active in public sphere for their children’s affair
- Pattern 6 and 7 comprise women with moving across different spatial levels and choose to do activities in the best places in their town and other accessible settlements. Interviews show that these patterns mostly belong to women who work in the town based on their skills.

In figure 6, all these patterns are shown in a spectrum which can be useful to understand the relationship between them:



**Fig.3\_** The spectrum of behavioural patterns of women.

### Conclusions

This paper aimed to show how women living in a suburban town of Tehran deal with the constraints imposed by gender and spatial structures. As discussed by feminist scholars, there are many home-makers in Marlik who are confined in their houses and excluded from the productive world. However, findings showed that suburban women could not be considered as forming only one group with similar characteristics and life-styles. While some housewives seem passive against the constraints of their life in Marlik, others can

transform existing structures. There are women of new generations who try to eliminate the difference between their structural positions and those of men through education and plan to leave the town to take part in the productive world which is centred mostly in the metropolis. There are also women who - despite being home-makers - are present in the public spaces of their town through their daily duties, recreational activities or their social relationships with other women. Finally, there are women who have developed their own business in the town, so they have an influential role in the local economy. The presence of all these groups in a small suburban settlement show, as suggested by structuration theory, the non-determinant nature of structures. Women with different capabilities behave differently in space. In particular, the most flexible pattern belongs to women who work in the town, have become able to engage with their environment through their work and are also capable of accessing resources and services provided in other cities. It can be said that these women have had the maximum use of resources of structures to overcome existing constraints. Finally, it should also be underlined the existence of a meaningful, complex relationship between the agency of these women and their social and cultural capitals, a relation that should be further studied in future researches.

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