An-Nisa' Journal of Gender Studies

OPEN ACCESS

ISSN 2086-0749 (p) 2654-4784 (e)

https://annisa.uinkhas.ac.id DOI: 10.35719/an-nisa.v19i1.207 Vol 19, No 1, (2026), pp. 17-32

# Reinterpreting Khadījah's domestic and social agency through Fatima Mernissi's gender perspective

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**Article Information**

Submitted: 2025-06-04
Revised: 2026-03-16
Published: 2026-06-26

**Keywords:**
Relational Agency; Islamic Feminism; Quraysh Boycott; Kinship Networks; Early Islamic History.

**Abstract:**

Emphasizing Khadījah's exemplary conduct and sacrifice risks obscuring distinctions between individual actions, kinship support, and social constraints in early Islamic history. This study examines Khadījah's agency within marriage during the early prophetic period and the Quraysh boycott. It adopts a descriptive–interpretive qualitative approach, using library research and document analysis of three classical historical works and six secondary sources. The materials were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke and interpreted through the lens of Fatima Mernissi's gender perspective. Interpretive credibility was pursued through source comparison, examination of relationships among historical accounts, and inferences calibrated to the strength of the evidence. Two themes emerged. First, within marriage, Khadījah's agency was evident in her moral reassurance of the Prophet Muhammad, her initiative in bringing him to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, and her acceptance of the prophetic message. Second, during the boycott, social restrictions impeded access to necessities. An account of wheat delivery suggests that Khadījah requested supplies, according to another figure's statement; relatives transported the grain, while others defended its delivery. Evidence of Khadījah's actions varies across episodes; supportive circumstances and experiences of hardship do not, by themselves, establish individual initiative. Overall, her agency is understood as relational, involving personal initiative, social support, and constrained access to resources. The study advances historically grounded gender interpretation by distinguishing individual action, relational support, and structural barriers, offering reflections for family education and religious counseling without idealizing women's sacrifice.

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**To cite this article (APA Style):**
Wahud, F., Ningsih, W., Malik, R. K., Awad, F. B., & Kafarov, E. (2026). Reinterpreting Khadījah's domestic and social agency through Fatima Mernissi's gender perspective. *An-Nisa' Journal of Gender Studies, 19(1)*, 17-32. https://doi.org/10.35719/an-nisa.v19i1.207

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesian women continue to face challenges in balancing domestic responsibilities and participation in public life. Cerrato and Cifre (2018) demonstrate that inequalities in the distribution of household responsibilities are associated with work–family conflict, although their study does not specifically focus on Indonesia. According to BPS (2025), the female labor force participation rate in Indonesia reached 56.42% in 2024, compared with 84.66% for men. Although women's participation increased from 51.80% in 2018, it remained 28.24 percentage points lower than men's participation. These figures illustrate disparities in economic participation but do not directly measure the distribution of domestic responsibilities. Within Islamic gender studies, examining women's historical experiences can broaden understanding of Muslim women's capacity to act (Samier & ElKaleh, 2021). Islamic history documents the contributions of Khadījah and ʿĀʾishah to religious life (Sulasmini et al., 2020). More specifically, Ernaeny et al. (2025) examine Khadījah's psychological support during the early prophetic period, while Rashidah (2019) highlights her exemplary role within marriage. This context underscores the importance of examining Khadījah's agency through historically reported actions, kinship support, and the social conditions that enabled or constrained her capacity to act.

Previous studies have examined Khadījah's contributions and the position of Muslim women through three approaches. First, historical and representational studies explore Khadījah's economic activities and commercial partnerships, her support for the early Islamic mission, the historical reliability of accounts concerning her marriage, and her representation in nineteenth-century French-language texts (Cevherli, 2022; Karim, 2023; Nafila et al., 2025; Sbaihat, 2022). Second, studies of marriage, family relationships, and literary representations examine Khadījah's moral support for the Prophet, marital partnerships, kinship networks, and her portrayal as an exemplary figure in Islamic family life (Lecker, 2017; Qadeer et al., 2025; Rahemtulla & Ababneh, 2021; Swastika & Wiyatmi, 2020). Third, Islamic gender studies address feminist interpretations of religious traditions, gendered ethical norms, critiques of patriarchy, women's economic rights, leadership, and empowerment across different social contexts (Al Mamun & Hossen, 2025; Ayubi, 2020; El Marwiah, 2025; Nurmila, 2025; Othman, 2006; Rahman, 2025; Susiawati, 2025). Although previous scholarship has critically examined selected historical accounts and offered feminist interpretations of Khadījah's marriage, greater analytical attention is needed to distinguish her individually reported actions from initiatives attributed indirectly, assistance provided by others, and the social constraints shaping her opportunities to act. This study contributes a source-sensitive thematic re-examination of Khadījah's agency within marriage and during the Quraysh boycott, distinguishing reported actions, relational support, and limitations of historical evidence before interpreting these patterns through Fatima Mernissi's historical-critical gender perspective.

Building on this research gap, the present study aims to analyze Khadījah's agency in two contexts of early Islamic history: marital life during the early prophetic period and the Quraysh boycott. It addresses two research questions: (1) How can Khadījah's agency within marriage be understood through accounts of domestic support, moral reassurance, initiatives to access religious knowledge, and acceptance of the prophetic message? (2) How do social restrictions and access to food through kinship networks during the boycott reveal both the possibilities and limitations of her actions? These questions are examined through thematic analysis of ḥadīth and sīrah literature, as well as relevant historical studies. Fatima Mernissi's historical-critical perspective serves as a framework for interpreting the findings within Islamic gender studies, particularly regarding the recognition of women's capacity to act and the

relationship between religious interpretations and social conditions. This framework guides a contextual reading of women's agency by distinguishing historically reported actions from the researcher's critical interpretations of social relationships and gender inequalities.

This study argues that Khadījah's agency in early Islamic history cannot be adequately understood solely through idealized representations of a self-sacrificing wife. Instead, it must be interpreted in relation to actions, social relationships, and historical limitations documented in the sources. Within marriage, her agency is reflected in her moral judgment, her initiatives to connect the Prophet's experiences with religious knowledge, and her acceptance of the prophetic message. However, not all forms of domestic support can be attributed to her individual actions, as historical accounts vary in the explicitness of their evidence. During the boycott, social restrictions affected opportunities for action and access to basic necessities, while kinship support illustrates how agency operated through relationships with others. Accordingly, Khadījah's agency is understood as a relational capacity exercised amid opportunities and structural constraints. Fatima Mernissi's perspective facilitates a critical examination of women's representation in religious history without presuming public leadership or explicit resistance to patriarchy that is not substantiated by the historical sources.

## METHOD

### *Research Approach*

This study adopts a descriptive–interpretive qualitative approach (Elliott & Timulak, 2021) and a library research design, applying document analysis to ḥadīth, sīrah literature, historiography, and secondary studies (Bowen, 2009). Rather than merely describing historical accounts, it interprets Khadījah bint Khuwaylid's agency in marriage and during the Quraysh boycott. Within Islamic gender studies, Fatima Mernissi's historical-critical perspective interrogates representations of women and religious interpretations that restrict recognition of their capacity to act (Mernissi, 1991; Rhomari & Edderaouy, 2025). This reading also considers the wider social contexts that shape women's position (Ennaji, 2022). The analysis distinguishes Khadījah's reported actions, others' support, and structural constraints while assessing variations in evidentiary strength. Previous scholarship on Khadījah's contributions provides comparative context (Riyadi et al., 2021). Mernissi's perspective thus serves as an interpretive framework without presuming explicit resistance to patriarchy or equal authority across all areas of life.

### *Data Sources and Collection*

This study examines nine works in two thematic findings tables: three classical historical works and six secondary sources. The classical corpus includes Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (ḥadīths 3 and 1590), the sīrah of Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955), and Ibn Kathīr's historiography (1998). Secondary sources comprise four articles: Rashidah (2019), Riyadi et al. (2021), Azizah and Muchtar (2023), and Keshavarz Beyzaei et al. (2023), as well as two modern biographical or historiographical works: Thahmaz (2015) and Mubarakpuri (2013). Selection reflected relevance to early prophetic experiences and the Quraysh boycott, particularly moral reassurance, access to knowledge, acceptance of the prophetic message, social restrictions, and food access. Units of analysis were passages describing Khadījah's actions, others' actions, and the social conditions that affected opportunities for action. Classical sources supplied accounts of events, while secondary works provided context and supported interpretation. Gender theory and contemporary scholarship cited in the discussion were excluded from the count of nine works.

*Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, with Fatima Mernissi's (1991) gender perspective as an interpretive framework. The process involved repeated reading, identifying relevant passages, coding, grouping patterns, reviewing and naming themes, and interpreting findings. Codes addressed moral reassurance, access to knowledge, acceptance of the prophetic message, kinship support, social restrictions, and access to resources. Two themes emerged. The first, Khadījah's agency in marriage, comprised four subthemes: domestic support; emotional reassurance through moral judgment; accessing knowledge through kinship networks; and affirmation of faith and continued religious support. The second agency during the boycott comprised two subthemes: collective pressure and restricted scope for action, and food access through initiative and kinship support. Interpretation distinguished her explicitly reported actions from others' actions and contextual conditions. Mernissi's perspective informed a critical synthesis of both themes, rather than a third empirical theme or an attribution of undocumented actions.

*Trustworthiness of the Data*

Interpretive trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation comparing ḥadīth, sīrah literature, classical historiography, and relevant secondary research (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). Document assessment considered provenance, event context, agreements and discrepancies, and intertextual dependencies (Bowen, 2009). Particular attention was paid to modern biographies repeating classical reports, since narrative agreement does not constitute independent historical testimony. Regarding provisions for the Prophet, the ḥadīth does not explicitly identify Khadījah as their preparer; indications that she requested wheat derive from another figure's statement in the sīrah. These distinctions separated reported actions, others' assistance, and researchers' interpretations. Mernissi's framework informed the interpretation of gender, not the validation of historical reports. Credibility, therefore, rested on source traceability, transparent attribution of actions, and restrained inference, without treating triangulation as a guarantee of historical truth (Morgan, 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

### Khadījah's agency in marriage: Domestic, social, and religious dimensions

Thematic analysis of ḥadīth reports, sīrah literature, and secondary studies indicates that marriage provided an important context for Khadījah's involvement in the early prophetic experience. The narratives examined reveal connections between domestic life, moral reassurance, the use of kinship networks, and religious commitment. However, the sources vary in how explicitly they describe Khadījah's actions. Some accounts directly report her statements and initiatives, whereas others primarily describe the conditions supporting the Prophet Muhammad's spiritual activities. Based on these distinctions, the analysis identified four subthemes: domestic support, emotional reassurance through moral judgment, initiatives to access religious knowledge, and affirmation of faith. These subthemes are understood as interconnected analytical categories rather than sequential stages in the development of agency. The thematic structure is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Thematic Analysis of Khadījah's Agency in Marriage*

| Subtheme | Evidence from the Sources | Analytical Interpretation | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Domestic support and continuity of religious activities | The Prophet Muhammad returned to Khadījah to obtain provisions before continuing | Marriage provided a material and relational context that supported spiritual activities. | Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth no. 3; Riyadi et al. (2021); |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | his spiritual activities in the Cave of Ḥirāʾ. | However, the ḥadīth does not explicitly describe Khadījah's individual actions in preparing the provisions. | Rashidah (2019); Thahmaz (2015); Mubarakpuri (2013). |
| Emotional reassurance through moral judgment | Khadījah responded to the Prophet's concerns following the first revelation by referring to his moral character and social compassion. | Khadījah drew upon relational experience as the basis for moral judgment and reassurance in a situation of uncertainty. | Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth no. 3; Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955); Rashidah (2019); Thahmaz (2015); Mubarakpuri (2013). |
| Initiative to access knowledge through kinship networks | Khadījah brought the Prophet to Waraqah bin Nawfal and asked Waraqah to listen to his experience. | Khadījah demonstrated initiative in connecting a family experience with a source of religious knowledge through kinship networks. | Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth no. 3; Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955); Thahmaz (2015). |
| Affirmation of faith and continued religious support | Sīrah literature portrays Khadījah as the first person to accept the prophetic message and as someone who reassured the Prophet when he encountered opposition. | Her acceptance of the prophetic message and continued support demonstrate Khadījah's involvement as a religious subject rather than merely a companion within marriage. | Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955); Ibn Kathīr (1998); Riyadi et al. (2021); Rashidah (2019); Thahmaz (2015); Mubarakpuri (2013). |

Source: Authors' thematic interpretation based on ḥadīth, sīrah literature, classical historiography, and secondary studies.

Table 1 demonstrates that Khadījah's involvement encompassed both supportive conditions and actions more directly reported in historical sources. Domestic support illustrates the relationship between marital life and spiritual activities, whereas moral reassurance and the meeting with Waraqah demonstrate Khadījah's capacity to respond to uncertainty through judgment and social initiative. The affirmation of faith extends this understanding by highlighting her involvement in accepting and supporting the prophetic message. These distinctions are important because each subtheme rests on historical evidence of varying strength and explicitness. Accordingly, the interpretation of agency explicitly distinguishes reported individual actions from the relational conditions that enabled them.

**Domestic support and continuity of religious activities**

A report in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (ḥadīth no. 3) describes how the Prophet Muhammad returned to Khadījah to obtain provisions before continuing his spiritual activities in the Cave of Ḥirāʾ. This episode is also discussed in Mubarakpuri's (2013) account of prophetic history, while Thahmaz (2015) describes Khadījah's involvement in supporting the Prophet's needs during his spiritual activities. Both works provide additional context for understanding the relationship between marital life and the material needs accompanying religious activities. However, al-Bukhārī's report does not provide detailed information about the division of domestic responsibilities or Khadījah's individual actions in preparing the provisions. Therefore, biographical accounts of Khadījah's support must be distinguished from what is explicitly stated in the ḥadīth. Analytically, the significance of this episode lies in the household's role as a material and relational context supporting the continuity of spiritual activities. This finding creates space to recognize the importance of the domestic sphere in religious experiences without equating the presence of supportive conditions with acts of agency that can be established through historical sources.

**Emotional reassurance through moral judgment**

When the Prophet Muhammad expressed his concerns following the first revelation, Khadījah reassured him by referring to his moral character, including his compassion toward relatives, those in need, and people experiencing hardship (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth no. 3). This episode is also retold by Thahmaz (2015) and Mubarakpuri (2013), who describe Khadījah's role in providing reassurance after the first revelation. Her response demonstrates that she not only offered emotional support but also drew upon knowledge gained through their shared life experiences as the basis for her judgment. From the perspective of agency, her actions reveal the capacity to understand a situation, formulate judgments, and express convictions independently. Marital closeness became a source of relational knowledge that she used to address uncertainty. Thus, Khadījah emerges as a subject capable of exercising moral judgment within the marital relationship. However, this episode does not, in itself, establish equality of authority across all aspects of household life.

**Initiative to access knowledge through kinship networks**

A report in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (ḥadīth no. 3) states that Khadījah brought the Prophet Muhammad to Waraqah bin Nawfal, a relative who was knowledgeable about scriptural traditions. This episode is also discussed in Thahmaz's (2015) biography of Mubarakpuri's (2013) account of prophetic history. During the meeting, Khadījah asked Waraqah to listen to the Prophet's experience, thereby creating an opportunity for clarification through Waraqah's religious knowledge. This episode demonstrates that Khadījah's support extended beyond interpersonal relationships to include initiatives that leveraged kinship networks. Analytically, her actions reveal the capacity to identify relevant sources of knowledge and connect family concerns with individuals beyond the domestic sphere. Khadījah's agency lies in her initiative to facilitate this access, rather than in the authority to provide the religious interpretation offered by Waraqah. Thus, kinship relationships served as social resources that facilitated women's efforts to seek religious knowledge.

**Affirmation of faith and continued religious support**

The sīrah literature originating from the tradition of Ibn Isḥāq and preserved through Ibn Hishām's editorial work portrays Khadījah as the first person to accept and affirm the Prophet Muhammad's message (Ibn Hishām & Ibn Isḥāq, 1955). Accounts of her acceptance of faith and support are also found in Ibn Kathīr's (1998) historiography and subsequently discussed in modern biographies by Thahmaz (2015) and Mubarakpuri (2013). These narratives link her acceptance of faith to her continued support as the Prophet faced opposition. Analytically, acceptance of the prophetic message indicates that Khadījah's involvement cannot be entirely reduced to marital obligations. She is represented as a subject who expressed religious conviction and provided religious support. However, historical sources do not fully explain her internal deliberations or the forms of authority she exercised within the early Muslim community. Therefore, her agency is interpreted through the acceptance of the prophetic message and the support described in historical narratives, without extending the conclusion to claims of religious leadership that are not directly documented in the sources.

Overall, the first theme demonstrates that Khadījah's agency within marriage was associated with domestic support, moral judgment, social initiative, and religious commitment. However, the strength of historical evidence varies across the subthemes. Her reassurance of the Prophet and her initiative in bringing him to Waraqah provide clearer grounds for identifying Khadījah's actions, whereas the episode involving provisions primarily

illustrates the domestic context that supports spiritual activities. This distinction positions agency as a capacity to be understood through actions and social relationships documented in the sources, rather than solely through the idealized role of a wife.

**Khadījah's agency during the boycott: Social restrictions and access to resources**

The Quraysh boycott provides a different context for examining Khadījah's agency. While the early prophetic experience illustrates moral judgment and initiative within interpersonal relationships, accounts of the boycott demonstrate how collective restrictions affected access to basic necessities and opportunities for action. Thematic analysis of ḥadīth and sīrah literature identified two subthemes: experiences of collective pressure and restrictions on the scope for action, and access to food through initiative and kinship support. These subthemes distinguish structural conditions that constrained action, indications of Khadījah's initiative, and assistance provided by others in meeting basic needs. This distinction is important to ensure that experiences of hardship are not automatically treated as evidence of agency. Findings concerning the relationship between social restrictions, access to resources, and historically reported actions are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**
*Thematic Analysis of Khadījah's Agency during the Boycott*

| Subtheme | Evidence from the Sources | Analytical Interpretation | References |
|---|---|---|---|
| Experiences of collective pressure and restrictions on the scope for action | A ḥadīth records the Quraysh agreement to restrict trade and marriage with the boycotted groups. Sīrah literature and biographies place Khadījah alongside the Prophet within the boycotted community, which experienced shortages of basic necessities. | The boycott restricted access to resources and opportunities for action. Khadījah's presence in these circumstances provides context for interpreting her involvement but does not directly explain all her individual decisions. | *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth no. 1590; Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955); Azizah and Muchtar (2023); Thahmaz (2015); Mubarakpuri (2013). |
| Access to food through initiative and kinship support | Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām brought wheat to Khadījah but was obstructed by Abū Jahl. In defending the delivery, Abū al-Bukhturī stated that the food belonged to Khadījah and that she had requested it. | The account provides an indication of Khadījah's initiative in obtaining food through relatives, although the delivery and its defence were undertaken by others. Agency is interpreted through the relationship between requests, access to resources, and social support. | Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955); Keshavarz Beyzaei et al. (2023); Mubarakpuri (2013). |

Source: Authors' thematic interpretation based on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the sīrah literature of Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq, and the secondary studies and biographies used in this research.

Table 2 demonstrates that Khadījah's experiences during the boycott involved two distinct but interconnected dimensions. The first concerns structural restrictions on trade, social relationships, and access to basic necessities. The second reveals indications of initiative in obtaining food through kinship networks, with the delivery carried out by others. Modern biographical literature provides additional context regarding the hardships experienced during the boycott, but does not always offer independent evidence of Khadījah's decisions. Accordingly, the interpretation of agency focuses on the relationships among opportunities for action, ownership of resources, barriers to distribution, and social support. This distinction

is necessary to prevent experiences of collective pressure from being automatically interpreted as evidence of individual action or public leadership.

**Experiences of collective pressure and restrictions on the scope for action**

A report in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (ḥadīth no. 1590) records the Quraysh agreement to restrict trade and marriage with the boycotted groups, while sīrah literature places Khadījah alongside the Prophet Muhammad within the boycotted community (Ibn Hishām & Ibn Isḥāq, 1955). Khadījah's involvement in these circumstances is also described by Thahmaz (2015), whereas Mubarakpuri (2013) discusses restrictions on food supplies and the difficulties of obtaining basic necessities during the boycott. These two modern works provide additional historical context concerning the pressures experienced by the Prophet's family, but do not, in themselves, constitute independent evidence of Khadījah's decisions. Analytically, this episode demonstrates that the capacity to act depends not only on individual resources but also on the social structures that determine opportunities to access them. Khadījah's presence amid collective pressure provides context for examining her involvement, but is insufficient to fully account for all her considerations and actions. Therefore, the significance of this subtheme lies in the relationship between structural restrictions and opportunities for action, without equating experiences of hardship with evidence of leadership or individual decision-making.

**Access to food through initiative and kinship support**

The account of Ibn Hishām and Ibn Isḥāq (1955) describes how Ḥakīm bin Ḥizām brought wheat to Khadījah, but was prevented by Abū Jahl before Abū al-Bukhturī intervened to secure the delivery. In his defense, Abū al-Bukhturī stated that the food belonged to Khadījah and that she had requested it. Mubarakpuri (2013) also recounts the wheat delivery, Abū Jahl's obstruction, and Abū al-Bukhturī's intervention but does not explicitly mention Khadījah's request. This difference between the accounts is important because the indication of Khadījah's initiative derives from another figure's statement in the account of Ibn Hishām, rather than from a direct description of her actions. The study by Keshavarz Beyzaei et al. (2023) offers a broader interpretation of Khadījah's contributions during the boycott crisis. However, the present study limits its interpretation to actions that can be traced within the episode concerning food delivery. Analytically, the episode illustrates the distinction between ownership of resources, initiative in obtaining access, and distribution carried out by others. Thus, Khadījah's agency can be understood as action occurring through kinship relationships and social support, without assuming that she controlled the entire process of obtaining or distributing assistance.

Overall, the second theme demonstrates that Khadījah's agency during the boycott was shaped by structural constraints, signs of initiative, and kinship support. Difficulties in obtaining basic necessities illustrate that ownership of resources does not necessarily guarantee access to them. Meanwhile, the wheat delivery episode suggests that Khadījah may have taken action by requesting assistance from her relatives, although the delivery itself was undertaken by others. Both subthemes underscore the importance of distinguishing the context of social pressure from individual actions reported in historical sources. Accordingly, agency is understood relationally and contextually, grounded in the strength of historical evidence rather than solely in sacrifice or presence in difficult circumstances.

**Synthesis of findings**

The two themes demonstrate that Khadījah's agency cannot be understood solely through her domestic role or through individual actions separated from their social context. During the early prophetic experience, her agency is more clearly evident in moral reassurance, initiatives to access religious knowledge, and acceptance of the prophetic message. In contrast, the boycott experience highlights how structural restrictions affected access to resources and opportunities for action through kinship relationships. These differences indicate that women's agency is relational and contextual, with its visibility depending on the available historical evidence. Thus, the findings position Khadījah as a subject capable of exercising judgment and taking initiative while also encountering social conditions that constrained her actions. These patterns provide a basis for further discussion through Fatima Mernissi's gender perspective, particularly regarding the recognition of women's capacity to act, the relationship between the domestic and social spheres, and structural constraints in representations of Islamic history.

**Discussion**

This study identifies two findings concerning Khadījah's agency in early Islamic history. First, marital life provided a context for the Prophet Muhammad's spiritual activities, while Khadījah's more explicitly reported actions included moral reassurance, her initiative in bringing the Prophet to Waraqah bin Nawfal, and acceptance of the prophetic message. The account concerning provisions does not directly identify who prepared them. Second, the Quraysh boycott restricted access to basic necessities. The account of wheat delivery suggests that Khadījah requested supplies, as indicated by another figure's statement, whereas the delivery and its defense were undertaken by relatives and other supporters. Both findings demonstrate that the capacity to act was associated with family relationships, access to resources, and social constraints. However, experiencing hardship does not, in itself, establish individual action. Accordingly, interpretations of agency must distinguish among reported actions, assistance provided by others, and researchers' interpretations based on the strength of evidence in each historical episode, without automatically equating social involvement with public leadership.

These findings are relevant to contemporary concerns regarding the recognition of women's contributions and unequal access to resources within Indonesian Muslim families. Kiram (2025) identifies inequalities in the distribution of domestic responsibilities, while Meilianna et al. (2025) examine the insufficient recognition of unpaid care work. Khadījah's moral reassurance demonstrates that women's contributions encompass judgment and initiative, not household responsibilities alone. The wheat delivery episode illustrates the distinction between possessing resources and being able to access them when distribution is restricted. From a gender perspective, critiques of restrictions on women help assess whether symbolic recognition is accompanied by opportunities for decision-making (Mernissi, 1991; Sahar, 2025). Research on Minangkabau women following divorce highlights the role of kinship support in enabling agency (Wan et al., 2024), as well as limitations in control over resources despite the community's matrilineal system (Jamilah et al., 2024). These comparisons do not equate different historical contexts but instead raise contemporary questions concerning recognition, effective access, and the social relationships that enable women to act independently or alongside others in everyday life.

Mernissi's historical-critical perspective helps question religious interpretations that overlook women's voices and initiatives (Mernissi, 1991; Rhomari & Edderaouy, 2025). In the findings on marriage, Khadījah's moral reassurance demonstrates her capacity to evaluate

experiences through relational knowledge, while her meeting with Waraqah illustrates her initiative in connecting family concerns to a source of religious explanation. However, the account concerning provisions describes supportive conditions without establishing that Khadījah personally prepared them. During the boycott, the statement regarding her request for wheat suggests an attempt to obtain food, although its fulfillment depended on delivery and others' intervention. These distinctions are important for critically examining interpretations of historical accounts that restrict women's participation (Mujtahid et al., 2023; Wijayanti et al., 2018). This study develops an understanding of agency as relational and socially constrained by interpreting patterns within the sources, rather than presenting it as a concept explicitly articulated by Mernissi. Thus, gender critique is combined with historical caution: Khadījah's actions are recognized without assuming complete autonomy or explicit resistance to patriarchy that cannot be established from the historical episodes examined here.

The principal lesson of this study is that appreciation of women should not rest primarily on the extent of their sacrifices but on recognition of their judgment, initiative, and opportunities to act. Khadījah's moral reassurance and her meeting with Waraqah demonstrate capacities extending beyond the image of a passive companion (Anis, 2019; Hamid et al., 2025b). Conversely, the episode concerning food illustrates that initiative does not necessarily entail full control when access depends on others. This interpretation encourages recognition of equitable family responsibilities (Wahyu et al., 2023) and the importance of emotional reassurance within family life (Kamarul Zaman et al., 2020). However, such recognition must be accompanied by attention to rights and social conditions (Houmine, 2024), including potential vulnerabilities within family relationships (Sharifnia et al., 2024). For scholarship, the methodological lesson lies in distinguishing historical evidence, analytical inference, and contemporary normative messages so that historical exemplarity does not become a source of certainty beyond the available evidence or an expectation of unlimited sacrifice.

Previous studies similarly highlight Khadījah's contributions but adopt different research emphases. Hamid et al. (2025a) analyze ʿāʾishah's account of Khadījah's support, whereas Hamid et al. (2025b) examine her intelligence and familial role. Nafila et al. (2025) emphasize her sacrifices in supporting the Islamic mission; Asdlori et al. (2025) and Kusaini et al. (2021) investigate her exemplary moral character; while Sbaihat (2022) examines representations of Khadījah in nineteenth-century French writings. The present study acknowledges her contributions but adopts a different analytical focus: how actions reported in historical accounts relate to social support and structural constraints, particularly when ownership of resources differs from the ability to access them. Within marriage, moral reassurance and the initiative to consult Waraqah provide clearer evidence of individual action than the episode concerning provisions. During the boycott, Khadījah's reported request for wheat must be distinguished from its delivery and defense by others. From Mernissi's perspective, this study complements biographical and exemplary accounts with an interpretation of relational agency that is attentive to evidentiary strength, without assuming that previous studies entirely overlooked social dimensions.

Both findings can inform the development of family education and social support initiatives, although the effectiveness of these proposals has not been tested in this study. First, Offices of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama*) could incorporate exercises in listening to partners' perspectives, joint decision-making, and negotiating domestic responsibilities into premarital guidance programs. This direction is informed by Khadījah's moral reassurance and initiative, rather than by an assumption that all aspects of her marriage

were demonstrably egalitarian. Second, religious counselors and community organizations could develop educational materials that distinguish among historical events, gender interpretations, and messages of exemplarity, thereby avoiding the portrayal of women's sacrifice as an unlimited obligation. Third, local governments and family support services could identify barriers to accessing assistance, clarify referral pathways, and involve both women and men in designing family support mechanisms. The boycott serves as a limited analogy concerning access to resources, not as evidence of equivalence between historical circumstances. Program evaluations could periodically assess women's participation in decision-making, the distribution of domestic responsibilities, and ease of access to assistance according to local needs.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Khadījah's agency in early Islamic history cannot be separated from family relationships and the social conditions shaping opportunities for action. Within marriage, moral reassurance, her initiative in bringing the Prophet Muhammad to Waraqah bin Nawfal, and acceptance of the prophetic message illustrate Khadījah's involvement as a subject capable of assessing circumstances and making decisions. During the boycott, the account of a request for wheat suggests an effort to obtain necessities, although its delivery and defense were undertaken by others amid restrictions on access. When both contexts are considered together, a pattern of relational agency emerges: individual actions are connected to kinship support, while ownership of resources does not necessarily guarantee access to them. However, the strength of evidence varies across historical episodes; supportive domestic conditions and experiences of collective pressure do not automatically establish Khadījah's individual actions. Therefore, interpretations of agency must distinguish reported initiatives, actions undertaken by others, and the limits of historical information in both contexts.

Theoretically, this study enriches the application of Fatima Mernissi's historical-critical perspective by offering an interpretation of women's agency that considers social relationships, structural constraints, and the strength of evidence in historical accounts. This contribution is interpretative rather than the formulation of a new theory or proof that Khadījah explicitly resisted patriarchy. Practically, the findings may inform family education and religious counseling by encouraging recognition of women's judgments, strengthening communication between spouses, and promoting an equitable distribution of responsibilities. The experience of the boycott also highlights the importance of support networks and effective access to resources. These recommendations are context-dependent and require independent assessment through measurable program evaluations before their effectiveness in contemporary Muslim family life can be established.

This study is limited to selected episodes concerning marriage and the boycott, as well as historical sources that do not always directly describe Khadījah's actions, motives, and decisions. Some indications of initiative derive from statements made by other historical figures, requiring cautious attribution of actions. The thematic approach also fails to comprehensively examine variations in wording, chains of transmission, or differences among historiographical traditions. Future research could compare different versions of historical accounts, investigate their transmission contexts, and extend the analysis to other episodes and female figures. Contemporary empirical research is also needed to assess whether family education approaches informed by this historical interpretation facilitate joint decision-making and improve access to support across diverse social contexts.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Gratitude is extended to colleagues and friends whose discussions and constructive suggestions contributed to the completion of this article. It is anticipated that this study will offer meaningful benefits and significant implications for the sustainability of women's empowerment in both domestic and public spheres.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any personal, financial, or professional interests that could potentially give rise to conflicts of interest.

**DECLARATION OF AI USE**

In preparing this article, the authors used artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to assist with translation, language editing, textual refinement, and argument organization. All AI-assisted outputs were reviewed by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the accuracy of the sources, analyses, interpretations, and scientific content of the article.

**FUNDING STATEMENT**

This research was conducted without financial support from any institution or external funding source.

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

**Fitria Wahud**: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Writing Original Draft. **Widya Ningsih**: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Writing Original Draft. **Rif'atul Khoiriah Malik**: Formal Analysis; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. **Faizah Binti Awad**: Formal Analysis; Resources; Writing Original Draft. **Eldar Kavafrov**: Formal Analysis; Supervision; Writing Original Draft.

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