

**WOMEN'S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AGING:
FRAGMENTS OF DAILY LIFE FROM A SENIORS CENTRE**

by

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN’S LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AGING: FRAGMENTS OF DAILY LIFE FROM A SENIORS CENTRE

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Supervisor: Associate Professor Hülya Adak

Anahtar Sözcükler: Everyday life, Aging, Gender, Body, Ethnography

This thesis focuses on the aging experiences of a group of women residing in Istanbul, aged between 60-83. The research participants, who live in their own houses and spend their daytime in Şişli Municipality’s Seniors Centre, have different biographies and configurations of economic, social and cultural capitals; yet the socialization in the same setting provides a commonality of daily life experiences. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, the research explores how the old age is given meaning; how different aspects of life such as the bodily changes, health, beauty and clothing, domestic life and housework, intimacy, loneliness, ethnic and class differences are experienced and narrated by the participants.

Institutional space plays an important role in the research: Women’s narratives point at the it as an ordinary part of their daily lives and Seniors Centre constitutes the actual space hosting and shaping the fieldwork performance. The boundary between private sphere and public life gets blurred in the narratives and the political attachment produced in the institution can be conveyed by the participants along with very “personal” issues. The study pays attention to the Seniors Centre which is constructed as “a unique institution” in a context where the right-based social policies are weak.

This study states that later life is a part of the gendered experience by listening to old women’s life stories, by sharing their everyday “nagging”, gossip and jokes in context. The ethnography not only traces women’s relations to each other, but also their relations to the researcher

intruding their lives are discussed, and the researcher is made visible. This thesis aims to make a humble contribution to the literatures on aging and gender in Turkey.

ÖZET

KADINLARIN YAŞLANMA DENEYİMLERİ: BİR EMEKLİLER EVİ'NDE GÜNDELİK YAŞAMDAN KESİTLER

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Anahtar Sözcükler: Gündelik Hayat, Yaşlanma, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Beden, Etnografi

Bu tez, İstanbul'da ikâmet eden ve yaşları 60-83 arasında değişen bir grup kadının yaşlanma deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Kendi evlerinde yaşayan ve gündüz saatlerini Şişli Belediyesi Emekliler Dinlenme Evi'nde geçiren katılımcıların biyografileri ve sahip oldukları ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel sermaye biçimleri farklılıklar göstermekte, ancak gündelik hayatları bu mekândaki sosyalleşme yoluyla ortaklaşmaktadır. Çalışma, katılımcı gözlem sürecindeki çeşitli karşılaşmaları ve kadınların derinlemesine görüşmelerde paylaştıkları kişisel anlatıları temel alarak yaşlılık kategorisinin nasıl anlamlandırıldığını sorgulamakta; beden, sağlık, güzellik ve giyimin, ev hayatı ve eviçi emeğin, mahremiyetin, yalnızlığın, etnik ve sınıfsal farklılıkların katılımcılar tarafından deneyimlenme ve aktarılma biçimleriyle ilgilenmektedir.

Anlatılarda özel alan ve toplumsal hayat iç içe geçmekte, mekân üzerinden üretilen politik bağlılık da kimi zaman aile hayatı kadar söz konusu edilebilmektedir. Çalışma, hak temelli sosyal politikaların zayıf olduğu koşullarda “bir ilk” olarak öne çıkarılan Emekliler Evi'ni hem anlatılarda geniş yer tutması, hem de alan çalışmasının yürütüldüğü mekân olarak süreci doğrudan şekillendirmesi sebebiyle detaylı olarak incelemektedir.

Bu çalışma kadınların hayat hikayelerine, şikâyet, dedikodu ve şakalaşmalarına kulak vererek, yaşlılığın da kadınlık deneyiminin bir parçası olduğunu hatırlatmak niyetiyle yola çıkmıştır. Alan çalışması yazıya dökülürken, kadınların kendi aralarındaki yakınlık ve çatışmaların olduğu kadar, araştırmacıyla ilişkilerinin de görünürleştirilip yönetsel soruların sorulmasına önem verilmiştir. Ortaya çıkan etnografiyle, Türkiye'deki kadın araştırmalarına ve yaşlılık çalışmalarına toplumsal cinsiyet ve yaşlılığın kesişim alanından mütevazı bir katkı sunulması amaçlanmaktadır.

*To my grandmothers,
Gönül and Neclâ*

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INTRODUCTION

“Good morning, those who are getting up in years! Those who say “*I’ll never get old*”! Those living their lives to the fullest! Those who say “*Here I am, in this life*” partaking in its sorrows and joys, tears and laughter; good morning! Applauding hands, good morning to you too! Good morning, my dear doctor!”¹

“Doktorum” (“My doctor”) is a morning TV show tackling a different health problem² in each episode. Most of the audience in the studio are women, and the camera shows them loudly applauding while Zahide Yetiş (one of the two hosts of the show who is not a doctor) is welcoming them with the words quoted above. Today’s theme is “healthy aging”: The issue is discussed with two guest doctors and two old women. The first woman is Şerife Fenerci, a “103 year old young girl” as portrayed in the show; and the second one is the famous Turkish actress Yıldız Kenter.

As a part of the structure of this episode, Şerife Fenerci is representative of how cheerfulness affects one’s quality and longevity of life. She provides a knowledge grounded on her experiences and her daily life; which is partially conflicting with medical knowledge, but still valued. Her vivacity and joy of life are advised -with her regular physical exercises- to “those who wish to be like her”. Fenerci does not have a special diet and is taking pride in

¹“Günaydın yaş almış olanlar! “Asla yaşlanmayacağım ben” diyenler! Hayatı dolu dolu yaşayanlar! Acısıyla tatlısıyla, gözyaşıyla kahkahayla; “Hayatta ben de varım” diyenler, günaydın! Alkışlayan eller, günaydın! Günaydın sevgili doktorum!” Doktorum - Sağlıklı Yaşlanma 07.02.2011." *YouTube*. YouTube, 04 Mar. 2011. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

² Themes addressed in the show are not only illnesses or injuries, but they include a wider range of topics such as “disciplining children without beating and punishments”, “cleaning your home hygienically”, “healthy fruit and vegetable shopping” which pertain to the disciplining and regulation of everyday.

eating what she wants: Eggs, lamb chops or gray mullet. When one of the guest doctors asks her if there are any medicines that she is regularly taking, she answers “Why shall I take medicine every day? Did it (the medicine) do any good to the pharmacist?” It is claimed in the show that “Fenerci’s physical age (“beden yaşı”) is 103, while her psychological age (“ruh yaşı”) is 33”. Zahide Yetiş asks her questions about her beauty and praises her, sometimes treating her like a child. A woman from the audience half-jokingly comments that Fenerci looks younger than the host, who seems to be in her forties.

This episode of “Doktorum” is an epitome of some discourses regulating old age: Geriatric knowledge and tips for achieving an ever-youthful appearance are combined with a tone addressing an especially *female audience*.³ Yetiş remarks that aging is a crucial issue for women; asking Kenter about her secrets to remain “fit”, and Fenerci about her beautifully combed white hair and her manicure. Starting from the opening of the show, women are reminded that their “biological clock” is ticking; and they are interpellated to take action in order to “age well”. The episode shows how “aging, fighting against aging and living longer” are reconfigured as matters of public debate in late modernity (Özbay, Terzioğlu and Yasin) and “conscious individuals” are expected to responsibly pick the suitable “remedies” among often contradictory knowledges. One has to be concerned about aging *in certain ways*.

I was also concerned about aging *in certain ways* before making it my research topic. I was catching myself -while I was stuck in the public transport, for instance- trying to guess how old the people around me were: “Are the old couple who just got on the bus *old enough* to stand up and give them my seat? That woman sitting next to the window, is she in her fifties, or is she a sixty-something *looking younger than her age*? Is that her natural hair color?” This research was inspired in the first place by this sort of “boring” everyday thoughts, and by my own anxieties about aging and loneliness that accompanied them.

In this research, I did not focus on media representations of old women, on the popular discourse of anti-aging or on “population aging”, but I chose to start with empirical data

³ Ruddick writes “successful aging assumes a “feminine” aspect in the ideal that the good elderly woman be healthy, slim, discreetly sexy, and independent” (quoted in Calasanti and Slevin, 3). “Anti-aging” or “successful aging” are discourses which first and foremost address women (though the expectations of discreet “sexyness” or “independence” may not directly apply to the Turkish context).

produced on a local setting. My particular interest lied in learning about women’s aging experiences by discussing with them the very “mundane” aspects of their everyday lives. By bringing women’s narratives into the picture, I tried to understand aging from their standpoint. It is my hope to make a humble contribution to the gender studies literature in Turkey with this ethnography preoccupied with the intersection of gender and age. Studying “old age and masculinity” could be an equally important contribution to this literature; however, it is not the task of this thesis to explore men’s lives.

Lives of old people (of both genders) constitute an under-studied topic in Turkey, especially in terms of old people’s own narratives of their daily lives.⁴ I argue that research on aging has to be pursued by adopting micro perspectives, by looking at later life in its intersection with class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality; and it has to move beyond the problem-based surveys of social gerontology.⁵ By saying this, I do not suggest that the macro level analysis has to be abandoned altogether. Still, even though this type of research is important in order to understand the big picture or to develop adequate social policies; I think that it tells us very little about *the actual lives and daily negotiations of old people*. I am interested in what remains necessarily ignored when we limit the respondents’ answers to supposedly “multiple” choices and I believe that “the history’s surplus, the microcosmic, often disdained and disregarded contents of everydayness”, as put by Harootunian (165), deserve our attention.

⁴ Cohen (1994) states that “the angry claim that aging constitutes a neglected domain, which will be explored through the research at hand” is a common trope in geroanthropology. This “missionary” trope, he argues, hides the interests of the researcher and the generational differences; whereas the data that one collects is contingent on who s/he is. Bearing this warning in mind, I am trying to write reflexively about my position in the field in this research. Though I am pointing at a lack of academic interest, I am not casting a salvatory role to my work.

⁵ Şadiye Dönümcü’s writing constitute an exception, albeit not-academic, to the lack of narratives: Dönümcü has worked as a nursing home director for years and she shares her experience in social work by contributing with her articles to Bianet, an alternative news website. She also has a book entitled “Dokunsan Kırılan, Dokunmasan Kuruyan İnsanlar” (2012), consisting of the portrayals of the nursing home residents with whom she was closely acquainted, a humanist collection of stories and memoirs which may interest people working on later life.

One might ask, “Why are the lives of the older women supposed to be different than their male counterparts’ lives?” Though some authors claim that identities move towards “de-gendering” in later life (Silver); I argue that *gender matters* in the old age as well, and that it continues to shape one’s lived experience. The changes brought by the age may alter and complicate our gendered experiences, but they do not replace our selves by new, de-gendered ones. The fact that old women are not seen as sexual beings in later life can partly relieve women of everyday sexual harassment for instance, but can we interpret this as “de-gendering”? Or, can we straightforwardly argue that old women and men share the same experiences, because they are equally marginalized in an agist society? Our gendered selves are molded by our biographies; and gender is embedded in our bodily dispositions, or in the very “ordinary” fact of being either “somebody’s wife”, or a “widow”, or a “spinster”. I am following in this research a growing literature that pays attention to *old women’s particular experiences* (see Twigg, Calasanti&Slevin and Arber, for example), to their daily negotiations and meaning-making processes.

Susan Sontag writes, in a famous 1972 essay, that women doubly suffer as they age because of being oppressed by sexist and agist practices at once. Describing different standards of male beauty such as “the fragile beauty of the boy” and “the rough beauty of the adult man”; she remarks that contrary to men, the beauty standards are extremely constricted for women. Sontag writes

The single standard of beauty for women dictates that they must go on having clear skin. Every wrinkle, every line, every gray hair, is a defeat. No wonder that no boy minds becoming a man, while even the passage from girlhood to early womanhood is experienced by many women as their downfall, for all women are trained to continue wanting to look like girls.

Simone de Beauvoir, another important figure who wrote about later life in “The Coming of Age” (1970), comments that women's ageing experiences are mostly invisible, and the rare accounts which are available (mostly in form of autobiographies) belong to privileged women. In her search for old identities, she aims to expose society’s ambiguous attitudes towards the old people and to demystify resilient stereotypes.

The academic literature on women’s later years also denounces the invisibility of experiences that Beauvoir writes about, and it broadens Sontag’s argument by maintaining that

old women suffer from a “lengthening list of oppressions” (King). These include economic hardships, social isolation in urban settings (that are not planned according to the needs of elders), being subject to the culturally dominant “gaze of youth” (Twigg 2004), as well as chronic illnesses and disabilities. Old women are expected to be “modest” while “keeping their bodies in check” and “not letting themselves go”. They are categorized as an “unproductive” population; and even if they continue to handle housework, spousal carework or grandparenting, their work remain *invisible* as it was before, in the earlier periods of their lives. Marital status affects their living conditions, and widowhood makes them even more vulnerable among the old population (see Arun and Arun’s study of Turkish elders). The list can be continued and detailed, though the experiences of old women are best understood in context: Migrating to a different country at 60 may drastically alter one’s experience of later life, or an individual residing in a luxurious nursing home may have little in common with a peer who is cared by her children. Moore and Kosut remark that “depending upon one’s economic and social capital, the body may be increasingly malleable and protean” (6). I postulate in my writing that aging and later life are experienced in a diversity of ways that are shaped by unequal power relations, and in order to narrow down the focus, I direct my attention to a space which permits women to socialize outside the domestic space.

As the initial curiosity for this research is provoked by everyday encounters, it becomes appropriate for the fieldwork to be located in an “everyday setting” which is an ordinary part of the elderly participants’ lives. The gendered data used in this thesis consists of the narratives collected in a *Seniors Centre* opened by the Municipality of Şişli in Istanbul. The proximity of the center to where I live makes it a part of my everyday trajectories and unsettles the conception of field as a “distant place” from the researcher’s home. My interest lies in learning about women’s aging experiences by talking to them on diverse topics such as their bodily changes, health, physical appearance, family, friends and intimate relationships; and in exploring how they are spending their days between their homes and an institutional space dedicated to *seniors*.

This institution has a “unique” character as there is a number of nursing homes (owned by the state, foundations, individuals, etc.) in Turkey, yet spaces serving as socialization centers for the elderly residing in their own homes are not developed within the scope of social

policies. Because an understanding of *right-based social policies* is not fully established (Buğra and Keyder); the “unusual” service provided by the local government is constructed as “a gift” that ameliorates the lives of the old people. The institutional space becomes important element in the research for at least two more reasons: It is, firstly, a prominent discussion topic in the interviews as it has an important place in the daily lives of the participants, and in the formation of a sense of belonging. Secondly, it is the very place where the fieldwork encounters and interviews are realized, and it houses and shapes the research process.

Şişli Municipality Seniors Centre will be explored in detail in the first chapter of the thesis. In the rest of this introductory chapter, I am attempting to a couple of tasks. First, two important approaches that informed me for the study of “age”, *social constructionism* and theories of *embodiment* are briefly explained. Then the conceptual tools that helped me to shape and analyse the fieldwork data are introduced. The chapter is concluded with the presentation of the participants and some reflections on research design.

Researching Later Life: Social Constructionism and Embodiment

We come to know “old subjects” or “old populations” through social and historical practices. Age is a social construction, and chronological age is given meaning in order to “to determine when individuals can engage in certain activities, for example consensual sex, and their eligibility for particular state and welfare benefits, for instance the state pension” (Maynard, Afshar and Franks). Bourdieu (1978) incisively asserts that the boundary between youth and old age is drawn through the power struggles. By classifying people according to the age groups, the boundaries that define where each group *should act* are fixed. For instance, Socialist Feminist Collective of Turkey draws attention to a court case where the indemnity was set based on the view that “the likelihood for a woman to get married while she is 41-50 years old was only 2%”.⁶ The court was on the side of the feminists, deciding that a single woman would not be able to subsist by herself. However, legal authorities were also assuming that women could not build any relationships after age 40, restricting the eligibility for

⁶ “Yargıtay: 41 Yaşındaki Dul Kadının Evlenme şansı Yüzde 2.” *Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif*. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

marriage (and thus, for sexuality) to younger women. Social constructionism is relevant in de-normalizing a judgment that, in this case, works to regulate female sexuality.

However, by limiting ourselves to social constructionism, we may run the risk of conceptualizing *disembodied* old people in our writing. The reluctance to tackle the bodily is already inherent in gerontology because of its problem-solving bias, and its preoccupation with the social organization of age. Also, emphasis on the body can be understood as denigrating, as if it was reducing old people to their body. Twigg argues that feminist theoretical approaches have the potential to bring back the body in the studies of later life. There are other ways of talking about the aging body than biological determinism and “narratives of decline” (Twigg 2004), through which we may try to understand pain, chronic illness and disability, the changing pace of bodily movements and of everyday tasks, etc. Twigg argues that “traditional gerontology (...) in avoiding the subject of the body, has effectively handed the topic over to medicine, but in doing so, has lost a central part of its subject matter” (60).

Wainwright and Turner (2004) concentrate on the narratives of aging ballet dancers for whom physicality is an important element of identity; “upon a series of epiphanies such as aging, retirement, and injury that all, potentially, require the dancer to become reflexive about their habitus” (103). The habitus mentioned here can be defined as the taken-for-granted movements of the dancer’s body, “a balletic bodily habitus” (105) that is disciplined through schooling, institutional environment and shared professional values, personal investment to a career as a dancer, etc. I find it relevant to quote here the reason for Wainwright and Turner to concern themselves with the embodiment, without delving into the details of their ethnography. They write:

We do not deny that the representation of the human body is culturally defined and socially produced, but we argue that, for example, pain and injury can only be understood sociologically by taking human embodiment seriously. Old age is socially constructed, but the experiences of the constraints of aging are also a consequence of physiological and biological changes (107).

Thus, we need an approach which takes into account *the lived experience* of the body while also considering *the operations of power/knowledge* which, for instance, depict the elderly as a homogeneous group draining state's resources. In his review of anthropological studies on aging, Lawrence Cohen (1994) sets a theoretical/methodological agenda for the works to come. He suggests for the researcher to adopt

a phenomenological focus on experience, embodiment and identity, a critical focus on the rationalities and hegemonies through which aging is experienced and represented, an interpretive focus on examining the relevance of the ethnographer's age to the forms of knowledge produced.

Cohen's statement thus summarizes a complicated task, underlining the importance of both social construction and embodiment, adding an indispensable reflexivity from the part of the researcher to the picture. In this research I tried to keep these in mind, examining both the social construction of the Seniors Centre and "seniors", and the embodied experiences of women.

Conceptual Tools

It is sometimes preferred in the literature on later life to describe people as "older" instead of "old". In this study I am using both words interchangeably, though I am trying to stick with the word "old" (Calasanti and Slevin; Sandberg). Even if it is difficult to define "old people" as a category, using the word "older" instead of "old" does not solve the categorization problem; it just "reinforces the midlife-norm". The stigma attached to old age does not disappear by "renouncing differences between old and other ages" (Sandberg, 13).

I'm using the word "narrative", defined "as a means by which individuals translate knowing into telling" (White quoted in Elliott 127), to refer to women's interview accounts. These stories are produced as "joint actions" in the interview situation, with the cooperation of a conversational partner, the researcher (Plummer quoted in Elliott).

I am also making use of Bourdieu's concepts in order to convey the positions of women in relation to each other. Bourdieu broadens and complicates the Marxist notion of class by introducing new types of capital which are as 'real' and effective as the material properties (i.e. economic capital) in explaining the power relations between the actors. Each actor engages in a series of different *fields* with the configuration of capital that s/he holds at a given moment. The amount of capital, its relevance to the field (its relative 'value') and convertibility into other kinds of capitals determine the actor's position within that specific field and more generally, within the social space. "The kinds of capital, like the aces in a game of cards, are powers that define the chances of profit in a given field" (Bourdieu 1985, 724). Cultural capital (which can have different namings such as the 'religious capital' or 'political capital') is usually acquired through education and can be exemplified as the access to knowledge, to the making of taxonomies, etc. Social capital, on the other hand, is the access through the relations of kinship or friendship to the holding of power. The distribution of capitals and the hierarchies established by these cannot be easily changed; as they are:

- embodied by the actors; inherent in their everyday practices through tastes, inclinations, life-choices that Bourdieu calls their *habitus*.
- historically held by certain groups in the society, transmitted from one generation of the family (or from the cadre of any other basic institution) to the other.

I am also drawing on a symbolic interactionist framework while analyzing the fieldwork conversations where meanings are effectively produced and negotiated.

Research Participants

The fieldwork for this study was carried out between the months of March and September of 2012. Basic methods of investigation were interviewing and participant observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 women. Before each interview, the purpose of the study was explained and oral consent of the participants was obtained. Withdrawal was allowed at any time. The duration of the interviews changed between 15-90 minutes, depending on the participant's health condition (some health problems such as

asthma or hearing impairment hindered the interviews from being long) and her willingness to contribute more by revealing her stories. I also interviewed the director of the institution, Türkân Çakar. That interview was done on a later phase, so I could use information gained from the “seniors” to frame the questions that I asked the director (DeVault and McCoy 30).

The interviewees’ ages varied between 61 and 83. They were all living in Feriköy, with the exception of three women who were living in Kurtuluş Son Durak, Pangaltı and Halide Edip Adivar Districts. They either were housewives, or retired from occupations which were in the traditional female areas of nursing, tailoring, etc. They usually explained their economic status as “modest” or “average”: They asserted that they did not have too much, but what they possessed was enough for them; and that they were thankful for not depending on anybody. Those who were the owners of their flats or who were residing in a flat belonging to a family member (Nadya, Perihan, Ayşe, Gülnaz) were considerably better off than those who had to think each month about the rent (Selda, Özlem, Melahat, Fahriye). The latter group was spending a big portion of their pensions for the rent and having financial difficulties.

As an indicator of capital, there were only two people who talked about going on vacations: Şake and Ayşe. Şake mentioned going to Bozcaada and enjoying the cold water of the sea there; while Ayşe was planning to travel abroad with Europe tours and she was also spending a couple of months each year in her summer house at the Aegean coast. In contrast to these two participants, several of the others were concerned about their daily exigencies. When a friend of hers had asked her why she was more regularly coming to the Seniors Centre during the winter, Özlem had answered that she was “reducing the heating expenditures by not staying at home.” Another day, as I was finishing an interview with Melahat, she had started to complain about a woman who had not paid her debt on time.

Melahat: Scumbag!

Pınar: What happened?

Melahat: I’m talking about that one over there... One day she was broke and asked me for money. God knows, I didn’t have any money, I only had 10 Million (she uses to old currency to say 10 Lira). I said “Take this child, I have 10 Million”. She said that she would give it back the following day. It’s been a month since! Today she told her husband to give her 10 Million, and she brought me the money. I also need it, right?

Melahat: Didn’t she have any money before?

Pınar: Why wouldn't she? Her son just came from Europe. (...) How can one forget his debt? Could I forget it if I owed you money? Impossible, impossible... My son is unemployed ("*Çocuğum geziyor*"), I'm a tenant, I can barely subsist. Electricity, water, phone; it's barely covered. It's a big money for me, my child. (...) She doesn't care about it. She's been coming here, eating and drinking, I was seeing it. I could only tell her today, I need the money too. Her son came from Europe, doesn't she have money?

Melahat was one of the economically vulnerable participants: She and her husband İskender were usually eating the snacks that she was bringing from home (such as bread and cheese) and they were buying their bread from Halk Ekmek everyday. Because she had observed how she was spending her money at the Seniors Centre, Melahat was concluding that she did not care about paying her debt; whereas that money was important to her. It can be deduced that even though they were sharing the same space and expressing their economic status in similar terms, there were discrepancies between women's incomes and their consumption patterns.

Reflections on Research Design

Most of the times, when I went to the main hall of the Seniors Centre for interviewing a new person; I talked over a cup of tea with some of the other women that I had already interviewed. As these informal conversations or just watching what was happening around me were providing great insight about the dynamics of everyday life, "generating more stories and descriptions" (Diamond), I started considering participant observation as a relevant method at some point. In addition to spending time in the main hall with women; I participated in the weekly percussion workshops as a member of the audience, followed the activities of the Municipality of Şişli on the internet in order to collect documents, and attended events such as the press statement introducing the municipality's +65 Campaign (a project aimed at prioritizing old people in the queues of shops, banks, theatre and cinemas, etc.). "The field continuously opened up" as I got interested in the "institutional nexus that shapes the local" (Grahame quoted in DeVault and McCoy 18).

In the beginning, most women resisted to be interviewed. The people that I could convince were sometimes mocking this behavior by saying: “*They’re not old, these fellows! They do not want to get old!*” Nazife remarked, when I asked her to suggest a few candidates for me: “*You could talk to all of them, they’re all nice; but they’re getting scared when they hear the word ‘old’*”. Following this feedback I changed the way that I was formulating my research topic and started to tell that I was doing a research about the everyday lives of women “who were above 60”, which also was a fair description. In addition, I preferred the word “hanım” (lady) to “kadın” (woman) after I was corrected by Şake:

Pınar: I’m doing a research about the everyday lives of women who are...

Şake: Of *ladies*, you mean. Yes, go on...

Pınar: Yes, of *ladies* who are above 60.

The use of the word “hanım” implied respect in this context. Veiling the female sexuality that the word “kadın” is considered to evoke, it was more appropriate for addressing an age group that was culturally associated with asexuality and dignity.

Şake was a very judgmental participant and she commented that my little fieldwork notebook was too flimsy, which I replaced in the following days by a bigger, “serious-looking” notebook. There were other participants criticizing my appearance, such as Melahat who was not happy with the little piercing on my nose. My fieldwork performance was thus shaped throughout the research process, both in terms of speech and of physical appearance, by interactions with the participants.

The participants were usually calling me compassionate names such as “sweetheart” (canım) or “my child” (yavrum, kızım) which evoked our age difference. After asking about my studies or my future plans, they were telling me about their grandchildren who were from my generation. Sometimes I was also mistaken as a grandchild: One day, as I was sitting with Nadya, a woman who had just come near us asked her whether I was her granddaughter or not. Another time, I had approached Şake who was talking to the director of the institution to say goodbye, as I had to go home. The two women smiled and said that I was the “daughter of the household” (“*evimizin kızı*”). Following Sandberg, I believe that reflecting on the role of the *young student* or *the daughter of the family* can made the researcher “sensitive to how aged

and gendered relations permeated the research encounter” (73). In my case, it was also the traditional family structure which molded the relations between us. As the institution was conceived as a “second home” to the elderly, it was plausible to assign the role of granddaughter to me. Concordantly, my questions or remarks were informed by my past observations of my grandparents’ lives, bearing the traces of my own family environment.

I had initially decided to make unstructured interviews by asking a very broad question such as “Can you tell me about your everyday life?”; but I later had to adopt a hybrid method as I was frequently encountering statements like “Ask dear, so that I can tell...” “Are you going ask any other questions?”.⁷ Sirman remarks that women may have difficulties in formulating accounts of their lives when they are not provided with a plot: Not everybody has pre-established, structured “life stories” to be revealed in the interview situation. I argue that this point was also valid in the case of an inquiry on everyday life. The participants were not used to give reflexive accounts of their everyday practices by using the first person singular, and I constantly had to come up with new ideas and questions in order to elicit talk. In the end, I was helped in some of the interviews by a set of questions that I was keeping at hand. In other interviews, the participant guided the process and I listened to her without intervening, and I asked follow-up questions when she was finished. The participants usually emphasized conjugal and familial aspects of their lives, told about their children or gave details about the universities where their grandchildren were studying or the cities where they had done their military service. When they were asked to introduce themselves they usually preferred chronologies marked by birthplace, work and marriage as they did not have pre-established life stories.

Last but not least, it is important to add that I was not an impersonal and distant researcher: I was disclosing personal information such as the city where I was from or whether I had a boyfriend or not when women were curious about these. As I was warned that old age could constitute a “sensitive topic that is difficult and emotional for the participant to talk about” (Corbin and Morse), it was important not to force the participants to talk about issues that they were avoiding, or to carefully change the topic when they feel overwhelmed after telling about their losses or loneliness.

⁷ “Sor da söyleyeyim kızım...” “Daha soracak mısın?”

CHAPTER I: THE FIELD

Aging is an issue that is frequently brought up by Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in his speeches dealing with "population aging".⁸ According to Erdoğan, Turkey can prevent the approaching "threat" of an aged population and stay economically competitive in the global arena by maintaining a young, "active" labor force. In Erdoğan's speeches, adequate social policies and employment opportunities that would be required for "the well-being of nation" in the envisioned case of population growth are never discussed. Justice and Development Party points at the family as "the principal caring institution" both in the party program and in the state officials' discourse (Buğra and Keyder 31), and though the government makes some legal amendments that are beneficial for women, the lack of social policies is largely compensated by operationalizing the family (Bora). Looking after the needy; be they temporarily or perpetually in need, old or disabled, makes part of women's responsibilities. The place where the social services should be compassionately provided is assumed to be the family household and, the pensions are paid to families, in women's bank accounts. Though this policy can be interpreted as recognizing women's invisible care labor, it also serves to consolidate their place in the domestic sphere as 'natural caregivers' and to reduce public service expenditures. Erdoğan appeals to families for protecting their elderly, alluding to stereotypical descriptions of Western societies' "neglected elderly citizens":

If the family loses its holiness, erosion starts in societies. The elderly have to be looked after by their families. Younger generations have to benefit from the experiences of the elderly. Social state has to care for people who dedicated their years to their country. However, we attach great importance for the elderly to be cared in family. (...) We sometimes hear stories about an old citizen dying, and the situation is discovered weeks after, when the smell pervades the neighbors' apartments. We do not want to be such a nation. I personally would feel deep sadness to be the Prime Minister of such a country.⁹

⁸ Population aging is a global trend related to increasing longevity and sustained falls in fertility. Graphically, the classical population pyramid -where the young base is wide and the older peak is smaller- takes a rectangular shape with a rise in the percentage of people older than 65 and a relatively uniform distribution among age ranges. This statistical phenomenon is always framed by alarmist knowledge (Katz) when it is covered by the mainstream media or represented in the official social policy.

⁹ "Başbakan'dan Yaşlılara Müjde!" Sabah.com.tr. 10 Nov. 2009. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

The “disintegrated Western family” is opposed to the “traditionally strong and compassionate” Turkish family. Sensationalist images of lonely old people circulate in Erdoğan’s talks, and people are called to reclaim their family values.¹⁰ These official discourses do not recognize the heterogenous nature of aging and work to “render [it] more manageable, simplified and subject to control” (Biggs and Daatland, 2). Similarly, in policy-making different “problem” groups such as the youth, the elderly and the disabled are put in the same category, and their particularities are overlooked (A. Alkan 142).

Because the provision of well-developed services are scarce and a right-based approach to social policy is not established, even the minute improvements in social policy are framed as “gifts” to the citizens, and not as citizenship rights. Seniors Centre constitute an exception to the family-oriented social policies discussed above and it changes the geography of the everyday life for old people who have access to it.

In this chapter, this exceptional place which is Şişli Seniors Centre is described in terms of its location and its different spatial components. In this section, I also attempt to see the different ways through which the institutional space was gendered. Second, in the light of an interview with the director and of several narratives from the old people; I examine how the Seniors Centre is constructed as a warm, home-like place offered by the mayor Mustafa Sarıgül and I argue that the space works as “a zone of contact”. Third, my own story of becoming a part of the institutional representation is shared. In overall, the chapter aims at locating the fieldwork data in its institutional setting, and also at drawing attention to the power dynamics that produce this setting.

¹⁰ It is crucial to remind here that individuals who are not part of nuclear, heterosexual families are by definition excluded from this picture.

1.1 Introducing the Field

Şişli Seniors Centre¹¹ (Şişli Emekliler Dinlenme Evi) is located on Baruthane Avenue of Feriköy, a busy avenue full of little shops and restaurants. It is a four-story institution build for the purpose of serving as a place of social and cultural activities for retired people. It is different from a nursing home in that people spending time there dwell in their own places. The building also houses the main office of the Women’s Assembly of the Municipality of Şişli. Because of its central position and the constant flow of people using the building, it does not look like a “quiet” institution cut off from the public life; on the contrary, it is a very lively place. When percussion classes are taking place for instance, music can be heard from the street. I remember one occasion when the institution was visited by “consulates’ wives” (“konsolos eşleri”) living in Istanbul: The percussion group played in the courtyard that day, and passengers on the street were stopping to watch the performance through the fences.

The centre had first caught my attention with its courtyard packed with elderly people, as I was looking for a flat to rent in the neighborhood in the summer of 2011. Back then I had thought that it was a nursing home for retired teachers (it should have looked like a middle-class place to me), but then I learned that the place was only open during the daytime. When I decided to do a research on women’s aging experiences, I chose to come here not only because of its vicinity (15 minutes to where I lived), but also because it had provoked my curiosity with its uniqueness. Also, I had thought that women frequently going there would have, along with differences, a certain commonality of experiences taking shape within institutional relations (DeVault and McCoy 2006).

The building is entered by the little courtyard, which is always populated by the elderly during the warm days of summer. The below photograph, which is borrowed from the municipality’s website, is probably taken in autumn, judging by the emptiness of the courtyard, the grayish weather and the clothes of the passengers on the sidewalk. When the weather starts getting colder, the chairs are pulled inside; to the big, rectangular hall. You can get in this main hall from one of the two doors on your right side. The one on the right would

¹¹ Emekliler Dinlenme Evi is translated as Seniors Centre in this research, as the word “senior” is also a euphemism that stresses the retired (“emekli”) status of the citizen.

take you directly in the middle of the hall, whereas the one on the left opens to the counter where at least two employees would usually be working. On the counter, you can see a notebook where the additions are kept, with the names of the frequenters and little crosses marking the number of teas or coffees that they ordered. Tea, coffee or toasts are prepared here and served to the people sitting in the hall. The toilet and the coat hanger are also on this left side of the room. The rest of the hall is occupied by people gathered around tables, talking among themselves, reading newspapers or sitting silently.

There is another room on the ground floor, a smaller one, reserved to those playing cards. It is placed on your left when you are in the courtyard, and it is the only corner of the institution where it is permitted to play games, so it has its own frequenters. If you enter by the door which is in the middle of this game-room and the big hall, stairs would take you to the upper floors.¹² The first floor has the same, big rectangular hall, used by groups of men sitting together. On the second floor there are two rooms used for activity classes such as hairdressing or wood painting. They are locked except for the scheduled meetings. Finally, the fourth floor is the main office of the municipality's "Women's Assembly". Because it is spacious, it is used on Tuesdays for percussion workshops: A paper is then hung on its door, which changes its purpose as the "Percussion Classroom".

¹² It falls outside the scope of my analysis to examine the correspondence between the planning of the building and its purpose of the socialization of the elderly. However, it is important to note that the building did not have an elevator, which would make the access to the upper floors very difficult for the old and/or disabled people.



Figure 1: Şişli Municipality Seniors Centre (From Şişli Municipality's website)

The main hall was the place used by almost all my informants: Some of them preferred to stay there even when the weather was warm. Because the people using the institution were dispersed in the courtyard and in the main hall in warm days, it would be more comfortable and tranquil inside. The middle door would be left open then, and pigeons could enter in the hall a bit to grab the seeds casted for them.

When I went to Seniors Centre for the first time, I was looking for someone from the administration in order to get the necessary permissions for doing a research. I was quite shy and I just waited next to the counter until I could have eye-contact with a man who seemed to be working there. The hall was warm and crowded, and it smelled like tea. They told me to come back the next day to meet Türkân Hanım, the director. The next day Türkân Hanım listened to me attentively, took notes and said that I could do my research there. She promised to introduce me to the crowd and said that they would not talk to me if was not introduced by her. She was very busy that week, so she told me to find her the following week. When she finally had time to introduce me; we rushed from her office down to the main hall together,

and she announced that she had brought “a very nice young one who would talk to them and ask them questions”. I stayed there for a couple of hours that day, going from one table to the other through the U-shape. This was my first time in the main hall.

1.1.1 Discovering the Other Rooms and the Gendered Usage of Space

Months passed before I bothered to discover the other rooms of the institution. One day when I sat down at my desk for writing a spatial description, I realized that I was only familiar with the main hall and the courtyard, as I had done my interviews there. I had been at Türkan Çakar’s office for a few times and entered in the game room only once, for a couple of minutes. When I had interviewed Türkan Çakar she had mentioned about a second hall, but I had never been there. I decided to find a tour guide.

Türkân Çakar, the director of the institution, had told me the room in the first floor was provided as an additional hall, because the ground floor was insufficient for the people and that the elderly who wanted ‘to rest only’ could use the other one. I asked one of my informants (Selda) about that hall with the purpose of hearing an insider’s description of it. She suggested to go see the place together instead, saying “At least we would be of some service”. When we went upstairs accompanied by another woman friend of hers, she rigorously pushed the door, saying “*We’re here!*”¹³ with a joking, mannish tone. We were entering the men’s zone and although women’s entrance was not *banned*, her brief performance was pointing to the transgression of an unwritten boundary. The place was less crowded and less noisy compared to the main hall. Selda told me that the place was generally used by men, however I could also sit there to read a book or to study if I wanted to. I heard her telling to the other woman: “Türkân Hanım says that we can sit there if we’re a group of four women...” As we were leaving, she was also saying her that the hall was full of the shopkeepers located in a certain part of Kurtuluş. Another day, as we were going downstairs together after the percussion class, I asked Özlem about the use of the second floor. She also confirmed that it was used by men, but added that there were a few women using it before. She then went on to say that the men spending time there were really wealthy, that they owned buildings, but that they were coming there for the free tea which was offered twice a day.

¹³ “Heyt, biz geldik!”

These brief expeditions in the second floor taught me that places were best understood when one is guided by the people actually experiencing these on a daily basis, and also that the usage of space was related to gender differences, social milieu, etc.

Besides the gendered use of the whole building, the U-shaped seating arrangement of the ground hall had its own gendered distribution of people. Starting from the counter, it was occupied by women all along the wall. Turning the corner, there were ‘male’ tables along the shorter wall and in the other corner. There are very few women in these tables: Only one of my informants, Fahriye, was sitting there near her partner. After that ‘male’ corner¹⁴, in front of the big windows, there were groups of women again. Once I discussed this spatial division with Melahat:

Pınar: So when you’re coming here with your husband, you’re sitting with the others ladies and he sits apart. Why is it so?

Melahat: What else can it be? I wouldn’t sit with men.

Pınar: Is it better to sit with ladies?

Melahat: Yes.

Pınar: How is it better, like, is it better to chat?

Melahat: Of course, what shall we do with men? With men whom we don’t know? Isn’t it so?¹⁵

Sometimes, when she was together with her husband Iskender, they were sitting at the very end of the line of women, and after Iskender the male line was starting.

¹⁴ One of my informants, forgetting that I was only interviewing woman, had advised me “*to talk with the gentlemen on the corner*” (“*Şu köşedeki beylerle konuşun aslında...*”), reflecting the gendered usage of the space in her words.

¹⁵ Pınar: Eşinizle beraber geliyorsunuz, siz hanımlarla oturuyorsunuz, o ayrı mı oturuyor? Neden öyle?

Melahat: Eh, ne olacak? Erkeklerle oturmam ben.

Pınar: Hanımlarla daha mı güzel olur?

Melahat: Evet.

Pınar: Sohbet mi daha güzel olur?

Melahat: Tabii, erkeğinin ne işimiz var? Tanımadığımız erkeklerle... Değil mi?

The place was gendered in two different ways: First, it was “gendered according to the gender associated with the different kinds of activities which occur[ed]” there (Rendell, Penner and Borden 101). Municipality’s “Women’s Assembly”’s main office was in the top floor, the people who were visiting the place were women (such as consulates’ wives or people from the Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey - KAGİDER). These visits were stemming from the association of emotional care of the elderly with women, and contributing to the ‘home-like’ ambiance. By gathering the women and the elderly under the same roof, the structure of the family was replicated in the spatial organization. Second, the place was divided, through use, into women’s and men’s zones. The main hall had its gendered seating order, while the first floor was only used by men.¹⁶

In the following part of this chapter, the narrative on the Seniors Centre employed by the director of the institution and the standpoint of the women whom I interviewed will be explored. The similarities between these accounts could be interpreted as the internalization of official discourses by the elderly research participants. However, I argue that the narratives are interlacing and complementing each other, rather than following a unidirectional path from the local authorities towards the seniors. They together contribute to a public sphere which is not “cold, rational and mechanistic” as it is usually posited in the descriptions of public space, but one which is “created and maintained via the performances and discourses of intimacy” (H. Alkan 111) and with affective investments.

¹⁶ Besides old men and women, a young girl (Sema) was also regularly coming to the Seniors Centre, to spend time in the main hall. She was sometimes getting very angry at the people around her and swearing aloud; sometimes sitting at a corner, speaking to herself. I had observed that some of the women were very affectionate with her: Nazife, for instance, was talking patiently to calm her down when she was upset. One day, when I offered some biscuits to her, she seemed scared and rejected it. Nazife intervened and she convinced her to take one, telling that I was a sister to her. On that day they were talking among themselves and Sema was inviting Nazife to her home, saying “You’ll come like a dog!” (“Köpek gibi geleceksin bize!”) They were both laughing at this unconventional invitation. I asked two times about Sema in the interviews: First to Melahat and second to Gülnaz. They both told me that she was “sick”, and Gülnaz added that she had been sexually abused.

1.2 Discursive Constructions of Seniors Centre

1.2.1 Complementary Accounts of the Director and the Participants

It was hard to catch Türkân Çakar for an interview, as she was busy all the time. We could not make an official appointment in order to meet; but when she told me that she had some spare time, I used this opportunity to turn my recorder on.

Interviews with municipal agents may leave the researcher with some kind of disappointment, as these figures usually have formal, pre-established statements echoing each other. Türkân Çakar’s responses to my interview questions were very similar to what she was saying to news reporters to present the Seniors Centre,¹⁷ and to Mustafa Sarıgül’s speeches about the old people of Şişli. However, one can make use of these statements along with other documents as “texts working to fix an official discourse” (H. Alkan 8). I am interpreting my interview with Türkân Çakar as an entry into the official representation of the institution, which did not have any informative booklets.¹⁸ The Facebook page was not giving much information either, as if the name (Şişli Belediyesi Emekliler Dinlenme Evi) was telling enough by including the institution’s purpose and location. This page was being updated frequently with photos and videos of the “happy seniors of Şişli”¹⁹ and short captions giving information about the activities. The knowledge produced in the institution relied on *face to face interactions*; and everyday practices were mediated by *familiarity* rather than expertise: When I asked Türkân Hanım if there was a therapist in the institution who could guide me in my interaction with the old people; she said that there were not any therapists, but that she knew all the people personally, and that she could help me with my questions.

¹⁷ Seniors Centre had appeared in the news and the percussion group had played in a television show on TRT.

¹⁸ Türkân Hanım told me that they was planning to prepare such a booklet to give information and to commemorate the seniors who had deceased throughout the 12 years of the institution.

¹⁹ “Şişli’nin mutlu emeklileri” is the name of a photo album from the Seniors Centre’s Facebook page. In all the photos in the Facebook page, happy faces of the elderly and the companionship are emphasized. These are usually group photos, showing women sitting in groups, playing games, or laughing. Individual portraits are rare and are reserved either to people having specific characteristics or to people engaged in leisure activities.

I started the interview by asking Türkân Hanım about the foundation of the institution:

Pınar: What was building was used for, before the Seniors Centre opened?

Türkân Çakar: There weren't any buildings here, it was an idle space. It was a vacant lot with nothing on it. There was something like a shack, but a real shack, made of four walls only. There, substance addicts used to spend the night. But everybody was complaintive about it. I myself was living very close, in Gediz Street. I was feeling anxious while passing by here at night, after 1 AM. Also, a heavy smell of urine... They were using it as a toilet because it was idle. Such a space it was.²⁰

In the director's sensual narrative, a vacant land associated with threat and bad smell is transformed into a safe and sterile home-like place through the mayor's intervention. Because she used to live in a nearby street, this is also the story of her experience of feeling intimidated when she had to pass by the 'ground' of fear late at night. The "past histories of association" that link, in this case, fearsome situations with drugs and homeless people generate the empty lot's affective description (Ahmed 2004, 63). The abject smell of urine invades the neighborhood, threatening the boundaries of the subjects. The mayor's idea, however, eliminates this sensuous contact about which people were complaining; and a warm refuge for the elderly replaces a repulsive lot.²¹

Then, the place opens in 2001, after Mustafa Sarıgül is elected mayor. The foundation is illustrated with a story:

When Mustafa Sarıgül becomes mayor -you might know from the media that he's a very energetic mayor- he sees, as he's walking around the quarters, an old man ("*yaşlı bir amcamız*") sitting at 7:30 AM in a mosque's courtyard. "What are you doing here, sir?" he asks. "Son, my wife is supposed to have guests today. I left the mosque and went home to have breakfast, she said 'Go out of my way, go to the coffeehouse or to somewhere else!'. I thought to myself that if I went to the coffeehouse, they would bother me every two minutes to have another tea. I can't pay that money. The weather is cold, I can't stay outside. I'm sometimes going inside the mosque, sometimes

²⁰ Burada bina falan yoktu. Önceden burası atıl bir alandı. Boş bir arsaydı, hiçbir şey yoktu. Baraka gibi bir yer vardı ama bildiğin harbi baraka, dört duvar. Orada da madde bağımlıları geceleri konuşlanıyorlardı; ama buradan herkes şikayetçiydi. Ben de karşıdaki Gediz Sokak'ta oturuyordum, gece saat 1'den sonra ben buradan geçerken şöyle bir tedirgin geçiyordum. Kaldı ki bir ağır idrar kokusu... Boş alan olduğu için binaların etrafına tuvaletlerini yapıyorlardı. Öyle bir alandı. (Int.with the director)

²¹ It is also remarkable that the narrative hides the substance addicts' story and their next destination to spend the night, after having lost their shack, remains unknown.

staying in the courtyard; that's how I'm spending the day." An idea strikes the mayor's mind. "There should be a seniors' home", he says.²²

A peculiar aspect of this narrative was that it was told differently by Mustafa Sarıgöl, in the press statement introducing the +65 Project. The face-to-face encounter between the ordinary citizen and the mayor remained the same in both stories, however in Sarıgöl's version the mayor was ringing the door of an old woman in Paşa District, in order to ask how she was. The woman was telling plaintively that she had a husband getting bored and depressed inside, and that there was nowhere he could go:

Mustafa Sarıgöl: One has to look beyond instead of getting a swelled head... I was a mayor candidate. I was visiting the neighborhoods. It was 9:30 AM, I rang a door in Paşa District. I said, "How are you mother, are you well?" "I'm not well, my child," she said. "Your brother (*meaning her husband*) is inside; he doesn't have anywhere to go." The person that she was talking about was a 70 years old uncle of ours (*amcamız*). "If he goes to a coffeehouse he has to pay, also there is cigarette smoke, he can't stay there. If he goes to a shop to sit with the shopkeeper, the shopkeeper would wait for him to go as soon as possible, because he has to do business. He doesn't have anywhere to go," she said. I said: "If I am elected mayor with your votes, God willing, I'm going to found a Seniors Centre in Paşa District and in many others corners of Şişli. "Will you?" she asked. "I promise," I replied, and today we really are the municipality who cares the most for the retired and old, in the history of Turkish Republic. (*The audience is applauding.*) (*Press statement for the "+65 Campaign", recorded by the researcher*)²³

²² Ancak Mustafa Sarıgöl Belediye Başkanı olduktan sonra -çok hareketli bir belediye başkanıdır bilirsiniz basından falan da- mahalleleri falan gezerken bir gün sabah yedi buçuk civarında bir caminin bahçesinde oturan bir amcamızı görüyor. Diyor ki, "Bey sen burada ne arıyorsun?". "Evladım" diyor, "yengenin misafirleri gelecekmiş, camiden çıktım, eve gittim, kahvaltıyı yaptım, bana dedi ki 'ayak altında dolaşma, yürü git nereye gidiyorsan. Kahvede mi oturursun, nerede oturursan otur.' Düşündüm, kahveye gitsem her dakika yanıma gelip 'Çay iç, çay iç, çay iç!' diyecekler. Ben bu kadar parayı çaya veremem. E soğuk, bir yerde oturamam. Biraz camiye giriyorum, biraz bahçede oturuyorum, günü böyle geçiriyorum." Başkanın aklında bir ışık yanıyor. Diyor ki, "Bir emekli evi olması lazım". (Int.with the director)

²³ Kimse ne oldum dememeli, ne olacağım demeli. Belediye başkanı adayıydım. Mahalleleri dolaşıyordum. Saat dokuz buçuktu, bir evin kapısını çaldım Paşa Mahallesi'nde. Dedim ki: "Anacığım nasılsın, iyi misin?". "İyi değilim yavrum," dedi. "Ne oldu teyze?" dedim. "Bak," dedi "abin içeride oturuyor" dedi, "gidecek bir yeri yok"dedi. 'Ağabeyin' dediği yetmiş yaşında bir amcamızdı. "Kahveye gitse" dedi, "para vermesi lazım, sigara dumanı var,

The mayor claimed to act according to people's needs because of his intimate knowledge relying on face-to-face relations (H. Alkan 108). Both stories quoted the words of the people in a theatrical way, they re-enacted the encounter. However, both stories put male socialization in the center: "Wives" were assumed to socialize through their meetings in private spaces, while "husbands" did not have any places to go.

According to the information provided by Türkân Hanım, the institution had 2882 registered members and there was 300-350 people were stopping by the building every day. I had observed that there were many Armenian women regularly coming to the institution. When I asked her about the Armenian elderly and about the iftar meals that were offered in Ramadan, (because Armenian participants had also expressed their contentment of those meals in the interviews) she answered:

The fact that the majority here is composed of Armenians rises from the demographic structure of Şişli. There are many retired people living here, and as a consequence they are coming here. We're calling the iftar tables *Love Meals (Sevgi Sofraları)*. It is important in *Love Meals* to share our food with our neighbor. Yes; Armenians, Kurds, Alevi, there are many of them here and they share the food. Those who fast come here, and those who don't too. But they're coming to share a loaf of bread. This is to say, "We're the people of this land, we break the bread with each other". We call these dinners *Love Meals* rather than iftar tables.²⁴

Institutional discourse and practices were positing different 'cultures' as entities gathering around the same table for the "Love Meals", in harmonious coexistence. Çakar's statement

yapamıyor. Herhangi bir esnafın yanına gitse 'Ben emekliyim' dese, esnaf da iş yapacak. İstiyor ki emekli bir an önce gitsin, oturmasın orada. Gidecek bir yeri yok," dedi. Dedim ki "Ben, inşallah Allah'ım bana kısmet eder de sizlerin o güzel oylarıyla seçilirsem, Feriköy'de Paşa Mahallesi'nde ve Şişli'nin birçok noktasına Emekliler Dinlenme Merkezi'ni yapacağım". "Yapar mısın?" dedi. "Söz veriyorum" dedim, "yaparım" dedim ve gerçekten bugün huzurunuzda Türkiye Cumhuriyeti tarihinde Şişli Belediyesi olarak emeklilerimize ve yaşlılara en fazla önemi veren belediyeyiz (*alkışlar*). (Mustafa Sarıgül, Press Conference)

²⁴ Burdaki Ermenilerin çoğunlukta olması Şişli'nin demografik yapısından ileri geliyor, çünkü burada oturan, ikamet eden çok sayıda emeklimiz var. Onlar da dolayısıyla buraya geliyor. İftar sofraları dediğimizde biz iftar sofralarına *Sevgi Sofraları* diyoruz. Mühim olan *Sevgi Sofraları*'nda komşumuzla yiyeceğimizi paylaşmak. Evet, burada Ermenisi, Kürdü, Alevisi; burda pek çoğu bulunuyorlar ve o insanlar birlikte sofraları paylaşıyorlar. Oruçlusu da geliyor, oruç tutmayan da geliyor. Ama bir somun ekmeği birlikte paylaşp geliyorlar. Bu da nedir, "Biz bu toprakların insanıyız, lokmamızı paylaşır yeriz". Yani iftar sofrasından ziyade *Sevgi Sofrası* diyoruz. (Int.with the director)

was significant for it was “accommodate[ing] diversity and generat[ing] a defining discourse, a legitimate reality that [was] difficult to step out” (Biggs and Daatland 3). Though my question was based on the Armenian community, her answer was including a list of the ethnic and religious groups, portraying them as if they were “‘enriching mosaics’ for the culture of the larger society” (Bal 7). “Love Meals”, a naming borrowed from the Armenian community’s Madağ, was adapted to this multi-cultural discourse by the municipality, and its particular connotation was changed to fit the institutional representation.²⁵ Sharing one’s food was emphasized in this piece of narrative; however the generous offer to share the meal was not coming from either of the constitutive parts of the neighborhood: They were sharing the gift presented by the local power holder.

While we were talking about the frequenters of the Seniors Centre, Türkân Hanım also made a distinction between the people who were coming with the purpose of joining a specific activity and those who were regularly spending their time in the main hall. About this second group, which included several of the research participants, she said:

There is an ossified group of lonely people here. People who had lost their spouses, whose children can’t afford to look after them or are living abroad. They are 100-150 people, even the chairs where they sit are fixed, and they don’t give their places to anyone. You must have seen them downstairs... They always sit at the same point; they look out the window from the same point if they have to. But that place belongs to them, you can’t move anybody and if they find somebody sitting on their places “Get up” they say, “I’m sitting there since years, that place belongs to me”. And unless they don’t leave, that chair belongs to them; they appropriated the place to this extent.²⁶

Seniors Centre was constructed as an institution where the seniors were granted a place to spend the final period of their lives. “The elders of Şişli” were not random people and their

²⁵ Madağ or “Sevgi Sofraları” are feasts organized in the Armenian community, in order to raise money for institutions such as churches and schools. Formerly a religious ritual, it had become a part of the Armenian social life (Göksu Özdoğan, et al. 2009, 51).

²⁶ Buranın artık kemikleşmiş bir kimsesiz kadrosu var. Yani eşi ölmüş, evladı yurtdışında yaşıyor veya burada, ona bakacak durumu yok. Onlar da yaklaşık bir 100-150 kişi kadardır, oturdukları sandalye bile bellidir, kimse kimseye vermez. Aşağıda görmüşsündür. Hepsi aynı noktada otururlar, gerekirse aynı noktadan hep dışarıyı izlerler. Ama orası onlarındır, kimseyi kaldıramazsın. Eğer geldiklerinde birisi oturuyorsa da “Kalk,” der, “ben yıllardır orada oturuyorum, orası bana aittir”. O burdan gitmedikten sonra onun o yeri ona ait, öyle de sahiplenmişler. (Int.with the director)

cultural capital was emphasized. They belonged to this place, and the place belonged to them. Moreover, the director's narrative attributed the practices involved in social work to the benevolence and compassion of the mayor:

We're here for their peace; because Mustafa Sarıgöl wants them, first and foremost, to feel safe and peaceful here. That's why we're together here with the capricious ones, resentful ones, uneasy ones, with all of them. Here we have a retired nurse, retired men of letters, seniors who recite poetry, painters. We always publish it on Facebook; there are some of our seniors who paint very well. There is a very nice friendship here, a different kind of atmosphere. There is, here, the boundless happiness of people who live alone, because they came here guided by their loneliness.²⁷

The relation between the figure of the mayor and the services for the seniors was found in the older participants' accounts as well. Perihan was one of the people who were answering all my interview questions by placing them in the context of the Seniors Centre. When I asked her whether she was happy about her daily life, she said "Whoever isn't happy is ungrateful!" She then explained that there were some others who were complaining and who "still not happy" about the services of municipality:

As if he (*Mustafa Sarıgöl*) was obliged to invite us... No, he isn't! *There is no other mayor who takes one thousand people to Edirne each week, to eat liver.* Not with people's money, not with your own money, with Sarıgöl's money, he wines and dines people. Then he puts them in the buses and brings them home. There's this kind of comfort here. (...) He brings school children... He buys devices for the disabled people's legs. Which mayor, tell me, is doing such a thing? Give me only one name. [The Municipality of] Bakırköy would also do, but it would only send the bus, nothing else. This one carries the people, provides the food for for all of them, and makes them visit places. You're drinking the water, eating your meals and fruit, and come back home two days after. Who else did such a thing, please show me.²⁸ (Perihan)

²⁷ Ama biz burada, onların huzuru için buradayız. Çünkü Mustafa Sarıgöl ilk başta onların huzurunu ve burada kendilerini güvende hissetmelerini istiyor. Bu yüzden kaprislisiyle, küskünüyle, huzursuzuyla, hepsiyle birlikteyiz. Burada bizim hemşire emeklimiz var, edebiyatçımız var, şiir okuyanımız, ressamlarımız. Hep yayınlarımız Facebook'ta da, çok güzel resim çizen emeklilerimiz var. Burada güzel bir dostluk var, farklı bir atmosfer var. Yalnız yaşayan insanların engin mutluluğu var. Çünkü buraya yalnızlığın ışığında geldiler. (Int.with the director)

²⁸ Yani, mecburi götürcek gibi. Hayır! Hiçbir belediye başkanı görülmemiştir ki Sarıgöl gibi, her hafta bir Edirne'ye götürüyor, orada ciğer yediyor, bin kişiye. İnsanlardan değil, kendi paranla değil, Sarıgöl'ün para, yediyor içiriyor. Ondan sonra otobüslere koyup evlerine

Other participants' accounts were similarly charged with expressions of gratitude for the local power holder. The place was sometimes called "Sarigül's place" ("*Sarigül'ün Yeri*") in the interviews. Even in the first day when I went there, while I was trying to meet people whom I could interview, a woman who was talking very little had said that the mayor was "a man to be prime minister" ("*Başbakan olacak adam*"). The peculiarity of the accounts that will be quoted below was that they were voiced as responses to general questions such as "How do you spend a regular day?" or "Are you happy with your daily life?":

I don't know whether we're enjoying retirement or enduring its hardships, but we're spending time here. I thankful to Mr. Sarigül, he opened this place for the retired; I found out about it by coincidence. I heard about this place and came here, I'm happy to be here with its odds and ends. (...) We're good despite everything *because Mr. Sarigül gives us great importance. He's doing the best that he can. I'm pleased to be here, I mean.*²⁹ (Fahriye)

We're eating, drinking, *our mayor comes, he visits us, talking and getting along with us. He says, "Do this that way, do that this way"...* We're good here; we have our head, a woman. She's also nice, she directs us. They're taking us to trips; we went to Kumburgaz and stayed for two days and nights.³⁰ (Nazife)

The mayor, Şişli's mayor, he's someone who respects the elderly. Moreover, he includes us in activities, takes us to trips, picnics, boat trips. He makes efforts for us; he

getiriyor. Bu kadar rahatlık burada. (...) Okulları götürüyor. Engellilere makine alıyor ayaklarına. Hangi belediye başkanı kardeşim böyle bir şey yapıyor? Bir tane deyin ki, filan. Bakırköy de yapar ama otobüs yollar, başka bir şey yapmaz. Bu hem yolluyor, yemeğini yediriyor o kadar insanlara, gezmelerine götürüyor. Sularını içiyorsun, yemeğini, meyveni yiyip iki gün sonra evine geliyorsun. Hangisi yapmış, bir tane gösterin. (Perihan)

²⁹ Şimdi de emekliliğin sefasını mı, cefasını mı bilmiyorum, burada geçiriyoruz. Eksik olmasın, tesadüfen burasını da, Sarigül beyefendi açmış, emeklilere... Sonradan öğrendim burasını ve geldim, ufak tefek şeyleriyle burda da memnunum. (...) Her şeye rağmen çok iyiyiz. *Çünkü Sarigül Bey bize çok ehemmiyet veriyor. Bize elinden geldiğince herşeyi yapıyor. Memnunum yani burada olmaktan.* (Fahriye)

³⁰ Yiyoruz, içiyoruz, başkanımız geliyor, bizi geziyor, bizimle konuşuyor, anlaşıyor. "Şunu şöyle yapın, bunu böyle yapın," diyor. Yani çok iyiyiz burada müdürümüz de var, kadın. O da iyidir bize, idare eder. Bizi gezilere götürüyorlar, Kumburgaz'a gittik kaldık iki gün iki gece. (Nazife)

doesn't treat us unjustly. Because he respects and protects us, he invites us everywhere.³¹ (Selda)

Our director is also a nice girl, Mrs. Türkân. A very nice girl, we're pleased with her. We didn't have any problems throughout the years. If we weren't happy, people would complain to the mayor. Nothing like this happened, which means that everybody's pleased.³² (Perihan)

Mrs. Türkân is a great director, a very intelligent lady. She's so rational. *Our mayor is unequalled, in the first place.*³³ (Nadya)

I'm very content, God bless Sarıgül, I'm very content. I'm very very content. That's it, my child.³⁴ (Melahat)

The informants were practicing their 'older' selves in this institution on a daily basis; and because this place -like many other services of the municipality- was directly associated with the omnipotent figure of the mayor, they were all talking about him with a couple of sentences at least. When they were plainly asked to tell about an ordinary day of their lives, the informants were talking about their habit of coming to the Seniors Centre and their contentment about it.

In the institutional representation, not only the foundations of the place, but all the activities and services in the Seniors Centre were expressed as "gifts from the mayor". To give an example, cookies that were served with the afternoon tea, on a rather calm day of the main hall, were photographed and shared in Facebook page of the institution as a "surprise from the mayor":

"Our mayor Sarıgül had a surprise for our seniors today. They happily had their afternoon teas with the cookies and cakes offered by our mayor."³⁵

³¹ Başkan, Şişli Belediye Başkanı geliyor, bir sürü yaşlılara çok saygı eden bir başkan. Artı, bize etkinliklerde yer veriyor, gezilere götürüyor, piknikler yapıyor, deniz gezileri yapıyor. Bize emek veriyor, mağdur etmiyor. Çok da gözetip kolladığı için bizi her yere davet ediyor.

³² Yöneticimiz de iyi bir kızcağız, Türkân Hanım. Çok iyi bir kız, ondan da memnunuz. Şimdiye kadar kaç senedir bir şey görmedik. Zaten memnun olmasak hemen başkana şikayet ederler. Öyle bir şey olmadığına göre, herkes memnun. (Selda)

³³ Türkân Hanım da çok güzel bir idareci, çok akli başında bir hanım. Çok mantıklı. *Başkanımız bulunmaz zaten.* (Nadya)

³⁴ Çok memnunuz, Allah Sarıgül'den razı olsun, çok memnunuz. Çok çok memnunuz hem de. İşte öyle kızım. (Melahat)

Another “gift” was the expeditions organized by the Municipality. These expeditions were also told and praised by the participants, as it will be explored in the following chapter. Let me quote Türkân Çakar’s description of these interviews here:

Our municipality has social and cultural expeditions. In these social and cultural expeditions we’re taking our seniors to places that they probably wouldn’t be able to go. I can assure you that we took people 87% of whom had never seen Uludağ. They visited the place by staying two nights, they ate their meals, they enjoyed Uludağ and said “Could we even imagine coming here? But we did come!”. They were that happy. Remember that in Turkey’s conditions 82% of the retired people had never been to a movie theater. At least 67% can’t afford to buy a newspaper. When you give them these opportunities, they get socialized with the world. And when they get socialized, they can hold on to life very differently.³⁶

Activities such as going to a vacation, regularly buying newspapers or going to a theatre play are related to one’s economic as well as social and cultural capital. It is difficult, if not impossible, for most old people to afford a vacation, to organize it and to travel alone. Şişli Municipality gives these people a gift beyond their dreams by taking them to Uludağ. Face-to-face experience is backed by statistical knowledge in the statement quoted above, and the elderly of Şişli is constructed as a lucky minority among Turkey’s seniors who possess very little social capital (Arun).

In the Seniors Centre, middle class identities were reproduced by attaching them to the market through the practice of consumer regimens. Hotel stays, meals or therapeutic exercises

³⁵ “Bugün Başkanımız Mustafa Sarıgül’ün emeklilerimize bir sürprizi oldu. Bu günkü beş çaylarını başkanımızın ikramı olan kurabiye ve pastalarla birlikte mutluluk içinde içtiler.” (Seniors Centre’s Facebook Page)

³⁶ Sosyal ve kültürel gezileri var belediyemizin. Bu sosyal ve kültürel gezilerde emeklilerimizi belki de hiç gidemeyecekleri yerlere götürüyoruz. İşte bir Uludağ’daki otelde, diyebilirim ki rahat bir şekilde yüzde seksen yedi Uludağ görmemiş insanları Uludağ’a götürdük. Orada otelde iki gece konaklayarak gezdiler, yediler, Uludağ’ın tadını çıkardılar ve dediler ki “Biz buraya acaba gelmeyi hayal edebilir miydik? Geldik!”. Böyle de mutlu oldular. Düşünün ki Türkiye şartlarında emeklilerimizin %82’si hayatları boyunca sinemaya gitmemiştir. Çok rahat %67’si evlerine bir gazete alamıyorlar. Bu emekliler bu fırsatlar tanınca hayatla sosyalleşiyorlar. Sosyalleşince de tabii ki hayata tutunmaları çok daha farklı oluyor. (Int.with the director)

such as percussion workshops or ‘laughter yoga’³⁷ were not about providing individuals with their primary needs. Offering people a hotel stay has very different connotations than getting them supplies or coal for the winter. While the provision of supplies contributes to the household, hotel stays of yoga exercises are more about “being and belonging” than they are about “having or possession” (Liechty 34). The mayor was giving importance to face-to-face encounters with the residents of Şişli, had close connections with the minority groups³⁸, and was deploying a prolific symbolic language playing with his family name which meant a “yellow rose”³⁹.

The prominence of the mayor did not solely originate from good campaigning and promotion. It is important to clarify here that mayors becoming prominent figures in the national political arena was also a *structural fact*. Ulaş Bayraktar states that processes of decentralization in the post-1980 period had altered the local governments’ restricted potential. However, because the local government system were not including citizens’ participation or a balanced distribution of authority in decision-making (between the mayor and the council specifically); mayors had emerged as powerful actors whose influence could even be felt in the national political scene.⁴⁰ Also, right-based social policies concerning old people were

³⁷ The ‘laughter yoga’ was an interesting example of the activities organized by the municipality. It was taught during a big picnic, and a group of “seniors” were laughing in unison, followed by the instructions of a trainer. A common leisure activity associated with family life was thus transformed into a performance worthy of being screened in the evening news.

³⁸ Vasken Barın, one of the Deputies of Sarıgül since he first came to power in 1999, is Armenian. Sarıgül frequently participates in the events organized by the Armenian community and this multiculturalist approach is mentioned as a part of his “Şişli Model in Municipalism” (“Belediyecilikte Şişli Modeli”).

³⁹ An example to the symbolic language is the use of yellow objects such as artificial yellow roses given to women on Mother’s Day, yellow scarves worn by the percussion group on performances, yellow tableclothes, etc.

⁴⁰ Bayraktar writes: [T]he de facto transformation of the local governmental system does not seem to solve the question of Turkish local democracy since the improvement of administrative and financial autonomy as well as functional capabilities of local governments seemed to be coupled with the overwhelming influence of powerful mayors. The competencies and resources transferred to the local level were not distributed equitably among different organs of the local governmental system. Thus, central government’s overseeing and

narrow in scope as it is already stated, and they did not include participation in the urban life or socialization.

1.2.2 Seniors Centre as Contact Zone

Scott et al. (2002) write that states establish their practical hegemony through “naming”. In the case of Seniors Centre, the gaps left ‘unnamed’ (and thus, ‘unclaimed’ and left anonymous) by the state are appropriated by the other power holders that assume the strategies of naming. Sarıgöl consolidates his hegemony by carving out a space, naming it as a “Seniors Centre” (Emekliler Dinlenme Evi) and emphasizing the unique character of the institution in every occasion. The mayor deputy Kahraman Erođlu states in a newspaper article that the centre has provided “a space in life” for the seniors (“*Emeklilere hayatın içinde yer açtık*”), in the sense that the elderly have left the narratives of decline and death by joining the public life.⁴¹ The “space” in his statement can be read both in the sense of the actual space of the Seniors Centre and in the sense of a symbolic belonging, “a contact zone” (Linke).

An affective public is shaped by face-to-face encounters and gifts; by photos of happy elderly people and local power holders personally caring for them. It was not a coincidence that Mustafa introducing the +65 Campaign on Senior Citizens Week by saying “*a very emotional and meaningful project*” and that Türkân Hanım had described the Seniors Centre in our interview as “a place where *emotions are intensified*, where the separation from one's past is alleviated, where one gets re-involved in social life; a point where one makes a connection between the past and the future from her very place.”⁴² Linke writes: “Emotions

control of municipal functions and resources seems to be being gradually substituted – though not entirely – by *the hegemonic empowerment of local executives in the personality of mayors* (Bayraktar 2007, 64; my italics). Mustafa Sarıgöl was one of the actors who was challenging CHP leader. He was introducing the +65 Project as “an implementation that would spread from Şişli into different parts of Turkey”⁴⁰ or naming his administrative strategies as “Şişli Model in Municipalism” (“Belediyecilikte Şişli Modeli”).

⁴¹ "Müzikle Tanıştılar İkinci Baharı Yaşıyorlar." *Sabah.com.tr.*, 22 Feb. 2011. Web. 12 Jan. 2013.

⁴² Burası biraz duyguların yoğunlaştığı, geçmişten kopukluğun giderildiği, sosyal hayata yeniden entegre olunduğu ve oturdukları yerde de biraz geçmişle gelecek arasında bağlantı kuran bir nokta konumundadır. (Int. with the director)

possess a formative power, an embodied agency, which is at least in part constituted by the existential ground of being: lived experience” (Linke 207).

Gülnaz: I’m thankful to Sarigül, he takes us to trips, to hotels, we’re staying two days and nights. The hotel has a pool, a Turkish bath, a sauna. Food is great, served three times a day. It’s a splendid hotel in Kumburgaz.

Pınar: You’re not paying anything, right?

Gülnaz: We’re not. Sarigül made an agreement, or maybe he has a partnership, we can’t know about it. At breakfast, the food is abundant. At lunch, great food; you can get in the line and take whatever you want. At dinner it’s great too; tea, coffee, Nescafe, milk, juices... It is great.⁴³

So far, I described the location both physically and in terms of use. I argued that an affective bonding was taking place in the institution and political sentiments were formed through sensual memories. As Linke states, "political worlds have a tactile, sensory and emotional dimension", "a corporal grounding" as it can be found in Gülnaz’s narrative quoted above. In overall, the empty lot occupied by substance addicts was transformed into a different kind of contact zone, where the “happy seniors of Şişli” were located. This chapter will be concluded with my personal story of becoming a part of the institutional representation, as “a student interested in the problems and hopes of elders” of Şişli.

1.3 Becoming a Part of Institutional Representation

I had a breakdown during the summer of 2012 whereas I had to proceed with the research. I had finished half of my interviews by that time; still I had a lot to do in terms of fieldwork. When I finally went back to “the field” in September, I managed to convince some women who had not want to be interviewed in the beginning. As I was sitting at their table, setting my voice recorder, one of the employees who worked in the tea house (Zeynep Hanım)

⁴³ Sağ olsun, yine derim, Sarigül bizi gezmelere götürüyor, otele götürüyor, otelede iki gün iki gece yatıp kalkıyoruz. Otelin havuzu var, hamamı var, saunası var. Yemek o biçim, sabah öğlen akşam, şahane bir otel. Kumburgaz'da. (Başka hanımlar da bahsettiler...) Tabii. Şahane otel. Çok muazzam bir otel. (Hiçbir şey ödemiyorsunuz...) Ödemiyoruz, Sarigül anlaşma yaptı, belki de ortaklığı var, onu bilemeyiz. Orada sabah kahvaltısı, kuşun sütü eksik. Öğlen o biçim yemekler, sıraya dur, ne istersen al. Akşam o biçim, çay, kahve, nescafe, süt, meyve suları, o biçim... (Gülnaz)

precipitated to tell me that I was not allowed to interview people, and if I had permission Türkân Hanım would have informed them. She asked me to leave even though women had consented to answer my questions. I was supposed to get Türkân Hanım’s permission again, when she would be in her office. By that time, women did not seem to be disturbed by my presence anymore; they encouraged me not to give up by saying that I could easily handle the paperwork. “I’m leaving, I need to get permission again,” I told Melahat. “Go get it then, my child!”⁴⁴ she exclaimed. “*Sarıgül would give you permission,*”⁴⁵ said Nazife. Some of them were surprised by the fact that I had encountered such a problem after spending so much time there. As I was leaving, I explained the situation to Şake who was sitting in the courtyard. “*Tell them that you’re my man, next time,*”⁴⁶ she said.

The next day I went to see Türkân Çakar with a paper giving detailed information about my project and the methodology to be pursued. I also wrote all my personal information even though she had already noted these when we had first met on March. Türkân Çakar was in the middle of a meeting with a group of women; she welcomed me warmly and said that I could resume my interviews. She also said that she wanted to take some pictures of me with the people downstairs if I was planning to stay for a couple of hours. These photos were supposed to be shared on Facebook, and also sent to administrative units as a document showing that a research was carried in the Seniors Centre.

I went downstairs to the main hall and did a short interview with Gülnaz. Because most of the women were on a trip to Edirne, the room was quite calm and the television was on. I stayed for a cup of tea after the interview, and shared with her the biscuits that I was always bringing in my bag. When Türkân Çakar came, more than an hour later, I thought that she would take a photo of me with Gülnaz. She said, unexpectedly, “Let’s take a picture of you with some new faces” and we went to the courtyard where she asked me to sit with two old men. Realizing that I was not looking like a researcher/student; “It would be better if you had a notebook and a pen on your hand” she suggested.

⁴⁴ “E al kızım!” (Melahat)

⁴⁵ “Sarıgül sana izin verir.” (Nazife)

⁴⁶ “Bir daha sefere benim adamım olduğunu söyle.” (Şake)



Figure 2.2: Posing as "student" with two old men (Photo taken by Türkan Çakar and shared in the Seniors Centre's Facebook Page)

I went inside to get my interview questions from my bag. One of the men figured out that the photo was being taken for promotional reasons and started to tell me about his daughter who was a commercial photographer. Because I could not really decide what I had to do, I was looking at Türkan Çakar, but she warned me saying “Don’t look at the camera, pose as if you were in a conversation!” I started to tell the two men about my research while she took two photographs of us. I talked a bit more with them after she was finished, thanked them and went back inside.

I could intervene by clarifying that I was solely working with women, and add that I would prefer to be photographed with a person that I had actually interviewed. However, I did not have the time to ponder over this at that moment, and also I was curious about the institutional representation where Türkân Hanım would choose to put me. All the women that I had interviewed were the frequenters of the Seniors Centre and their photos were published

several times on the Facebook page of the institution. Instead of taking a picture on the spot, while I was interviewing one of them; the director had chosen to vary the representation of the people (or of the “faces”) that the institution was reaching and she also had documented a student who was interested in old people’s problems. The photo was also contributing to the discourse of intergenerational communication that was valued by the Centre. However, neither the people with whom I was photographed, nor the caption which was supposed to put it in the context were giving true information about my research process. My university’s name was wrong and my thesis was mentioned as a ‘term paper’:

Our University Student: This friend of ours who is studying in Istanbul University had done her term paper last year about retired people’s expectations from life. This year she’s with us again in order to prepare her homework about our elderly’s problems and expectations.⁴⁷

After our interview, Türkân Hanım wanted to have a photo of us, so we posed, sitted in front of her office desk. Türkân Hanım removed her bag from the desk to have a cleaner background and asked whether the little flags (of the Turkish Republic and the Municipality of Şişli) were visible in the composition. She also asked me about my own observations, and I told her that women were happy about having a place to socialize. She suggested that I wrote a short report of my research in Turkish, “one that could be published on the internet and could even be shown to Mustafa Sarıgül”.

I was bounded by the permission of the director in order to interview the people, when one of the employees did not recognize me I had to leave the field without doing any interviews or I was asked to write a report about my impressions of the Seniors Centre. One time, when I was just passing by the institution I went in to say hello. Women asked about when my work would be finished. Then Neziha asked whether I was seeing the mayor once in a while. When I replied that I was not, she strongly recommended me to visit him and that would pave the way for a good positions for me. She said: “Take my word seriously and go see him, he would help you a lot”. All these events and observations taught me that doing

⁴⁷ Üniversite öğrencimiz: İstanbul Üniversitesi’nde okuyan bu arkadaşımız geçen seneki dönem ödevini emeklilerimizin yaşamdan beklentileri üzerine hazırlamıştı. Bu sene de yine yaşlılarımızın günlük hayattaki sıkıntıları ve beklentileri üzerine hazırlayacağı ödev için bizlerle. (Seniors Centre’s Facebook Page)

fieldwork in an institutional setting meant to find oneself trapped in power relations. I was surveyed and documented, contained in the institutional representation.

CHAPTER II. ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

This chapter includes two parts: In the first part, the main issues that are discussed in the interviews are analysed, quoting women's narratives as much and detailed as possible. Some of the issues discussed in this part, such as the physical appearance, were opened to discussion by my questions; while topics such as intimacy, health, sexuality and ethnic differences were brought by the research process.

In the first section of this part, the ways that age was given meaning in the interviews are discussed. An exceptional account from Özlem and a dialogue from the percussion workshop in which I participated as a guest accompany this section. Then, the participants' daily lives which are divided between the Seniors Centre and their homes are explored in terms of neighborhood relationships, housework, the meaning of home, etc. The third section focuses on hair and clothing; and also on the participants' preoccupation with my body and appearance. The fourth section discusses "the intimacy" and gathers different comments from the participants that touch upon the romantic and sexual relationships. The fifth section summarizes how ethnic and religious differences were articulated during my research. The sixth section deals with the ideal of 'productivity' which works as an indicator of 'positive' aging; while the last section gives a picture of the aftermath of interviews as a relaxed and self-reflexive moment for the participants.

In the second part of the chapter, two hostile encounters that occurred during the interviews are shared, and used as an entry point for a discussion about distinction.

Resistance

From the first day on, my requests to make short interviews about their everyday lives were rejected by several women. I had hoped that they would confide in me as I was introduced to them by the administrator Türkân Hanım, whom they all knew and appreciated. In the first table that I approached after she had left the room, women smilingly asked me if I was a doctor. When I said that I was not a doctor but a student doing research about aging, their smiles disappeared and they declined to participate in the interviews. They did not

specify any reasons for their reticence even though I asked them, and responded by telling me to ask my questions to *Hemşire Hanım* (Fahriye)⁴⁸, that she would talk to me. These refusals were discouraging me; I was questioning my skills and regretting my decision to do fieldwork in an institutional setting rather than doing separate, individual interviews.

This initial situation changed little by little, as some participants introduced me to their friends who also agreed on doing interviews. This did not mean, of course, that I was accepted and trusted all the time. First, the people of the Seniors Centre were not a harmonious group in solidarity. There were conflicts and moments of hostility between women, and becoming “friends” with some of them could mean to be disliked by others. Second, even in cases that they were accepting to participate, women were approaching me cautiously. Still, I believe that the suspicion or the lack of trust also had ethnographic relevance. Salamandra formulates an important advice to the researchers facing similar problems:

If the goal ethnographic writing is to elucidate facets of the societies about which we write, to explore different experiences and expressions of our common humanity rather than illustrate the social skills and popularity of the ethnographer, then aversion and conflict should be central. Antipathy is as relevant as empathy. A closed door can be as telling as an open one, a snub as significant as a kiss (Salamandra 65).

Let me return to the “field” in order to illustrate what I mean by cautiousness: One day, as I was explaining the purpose of the interviews to Perihan, Gülnaz and Sabiha; Sabiha made a joke saying that I was making people sign a paper. The two other women did not understand that this was a joke: They got confused as their friends sitting next to us were also asking them about me at that moment, and also because the hall was noisy. Perihan said, quite nervously, that she would not sign anything. I had to put them at ease saying that I did not need their signatures. Sabiha was both laughing and telling the others that she was the one who had invented the story about signatures. When I met with Gülnaz for a recorded interview a couple of days later, she also reminded me that she would not sign anything. Because she was anxious about being defrauded, that joke about signatures had stuck in her mind. This showed that my informants would not want to sign consent forms if I were asking them to do so, and that the

⁴⁸ Fahriye was usually called “hemşire hanım” by the others, which was a polite form of addressing someone who was a nurse (hemşire). Later I realized that the women had sent me to Fahriye because of the latter’s willingness to talk about her life and her interests such as literature.

suspicion was never totally abandoned. On the other hand, Sabiha was the only person who had volunteered to participate in my study without being asked first: As I was getting ready to go home after concluding the interview with Perihan, she stopped me saying “What about us?”⁴⁹ On the background “Is it even possible that she misses something that I have?”⁵⁰ was murmuring Perihan. As Sabiha had a respiratory problem affecting her speech, she was also commenting while I was talking to her that what she was saying was incomprehensible.

Later I discussed with Özlem the reasons why some women were resisting the interview, and learned that the institution was being used as a pool by people who were conducting surveys and getting paid for each form that was filled. She told me that recently she had accepted to fill a questionnaire about inlay (*parke*) even though she had never cared about it, just because a student had asked her to help them. “*What’s in it for me?*”⁵¹ she said. Both I and people filling questionnaires were introducing ourselves as students; and though their reason to do so was to explain their restricted budget, the fact that I did not have commercial interests did not distinguish me from them. Özlem was also a member of the Justice and Development Party that was texting her quite often; and she remarked that she was not removed from the party lists though she had resigned her membership. This conversation incited me to question the position of the researcher as one of the various agents asking people’s opinions. Why should people’s perception be different of the person who wanted to learn their opinions for an academic study, instead of a political campaign or commercial survey?

Özlem also reminded me that I was not the only researcher in the field: There was another young woman who had introduced herself as a psychology student doing “a research about madness”. That day I was busy doing a recorded interview with Özlem, so I had not had a chance to ask this person about her work or the amount of time that she was planning to spend in the Seniors Centre. I could only see that a woman who was upset about being questioned on madness harshly declined her. Though I never ran into her again, her presence

⁴⁹ “Bize yok mu?”

⁵⁰ “Bana olur da ona olmaz mı?”

⁵¹ “Bana ne faydası var?”

was another clue that people spending time in the institution could frequently be disturbed for research purposes because they were convenient.⁵² “*She asks whether there are any mad people in my family... I am mad myself! You should see me when I get angry!*” complained Özlem, even if she had participated in the other researcher’s study as well. The difficulties in entering the field showed that with little symbolic capital I did not necessarily have “supremacy” in the field over the commercial surveyors. If encounters are, following Sara Ahmed “meetings (...) which are not simply in the present” and which “reopen past encounters” (8); the participants were meeting me with memories about other strangers asking them questions, and with suspicion of being of defrauded, mocked, etc.

2.1 Women’s Narratives

2.1.1 Aging Identities

In this section, I will discuss how age was enacted, given meaning and significance (Laz 1998) by the informants in the fieldwork encounters. These encounters are conducive to different interpretations and performances of age, as they offer a dialectical pathway where participants make use of different resources (their bodies, media imagery, anecdotes from their lives, or the interview itself) to talk about age. The fieldwork encounter becomes the site where the aged subjectivities are effectively produced (Sandberg 2011, 79).

Almost all the informants (except for Şake, Ayşe and Selda) referred to ‘the elderly’ as an age category including them: They said that old age was difficult unless one had a carer (Melahat), or that the young people did not like the old (Nadya). When their friends did not want to participate in the interviews, they made sarcastic remarks about them such as “*They aren’t getting old, these folks*” (Nadya, Nazife). However, when they were asked whether they were regarding themselves as old or not, they sometimes situated themselves differently. As identity is always constituted and reconstituted in dialogue with the other; people’s

⁵² Gilhooly writes: “Justice also requires that classes or groups of people are not exploited for research purposes. *This includes people living in institutions.* The case for justice is not quite the same as voluntariness in consent. It would be unfair if certain groups were used repeatedly for research because they were convenient” (Gilhooly 213-214; my italics). I believe that her warning apply to Seniors Centre too, as the people there can be perceived as having a lot of spare time and used as a pool for various inquiries.

identification with an age category was open to negotiation even during the same conversational flow. When there was a mismatch between their performances and the acts associated with the category that they were assumed to belong, the answers were getting more interpretive and complicated:

Perihan: I wouldn't do anything for the street. I got old myself, for whom I shall do something? It's the others who should do things for me. *They should do things for me, I'm old.*

(...)

Perihan: I'm doing the housework at home, and then I'm going to bed. I'm an old woman, *I'm not young. I'm eighty years old.*

Pınar: You don't look like you're eighty...

Perihan: No I don't. It is even harder to tell when I'm standing. (*She is a robust woman wearing a pair of jeans.*)

(...)

Pınar: Do you consider yourself old?

Perihan: *Come on, would I keep pace with you like this, if I were old?*⁵³

In the conversation cited above, age is negotiated in interactional practice. I find Perihan's last remark especially telling; because it implies that the enunciator cannot be old if she is engaging in a conversation with a woman who is two generations younger than her; while most of the others around her are avoiding the interview situation. This is her 'performing self' to which she refers: When she's standing, or in dialogue with a younger person; she is not "acting her age" (Laz 1998) and it cannot be said that she is old (i.e. passive, disabled, cut-off from the outside world). According to her interpretation, she resists the old age stereotypes by accepting the challenge. As the researcher, I am also "doing age" in this conversation: I'm telling her that she looks much younger than her chronological age suggests.

⁵³ Perihan: Sokağa hiçbir şey yapmam. Kendim de artık yaşlandım, kime ne yapayım? Herkes bana yapsın. Herkes bana yapsın, ben yaşlıyım.

(...)

Perihan: Evde ben ev işi yaparım, sonra da yatar uyurum. Ben yaşlı kadınıym, genç değilim ben. Seksen yaşındayım ben.

Pınar: Seksen yaşında göstermiyorsunuz...

Perihan: Göstermem, ayakta olsam hiç göstermem.

(...)

Pınar: Kendinizi yaşlanmış kabul ediyorum musunuz?

Perihan: Yok canım! Yaşlansam böyle *kıtır kıtır* seninle uğraşır mıyım yani?

The participant uses this comment as a resource in her turn, and adds that not only her ‘static’ appearance behind a table, but also her bodily presence in general do not display her age.

While Perihan was playing with categories, in another interview, Melahat was rather surprised that she was asked such a question:

Pınar: Do you consider yourself old?

Melahat: Of course, dear! I’m 83 years old. *Am I little, my child?*⁵⁴

Like Perihan, Melahat also had answered me with another question, as if the person that she was depended on my judgement as her Other (Tidd 2004, 111). She was situating herself in relation to the younger people or to a younger self; concluding that she was old (i.e. not ‘little’ anymore). For her, ‘old age’ was not a category that could be contested, and her chronological age was demonstrating that she was old.

In Arife’s account, the age was constructed on the basis of a person’s acts again and a distinction illustrated by a recalled memory was made between “performed age” and “chronological age”:

Arife: I’m more than seventy years old. I’m maybe eighty. But they tell me not to say it. I’m walking, a little exercise... My knees ache, I suffer from low back pain, I’m walking a lot.

Pınar: Is it any good?

Arife: Without that I would be paralytic, in bed. I got quite old. I went to Eminönü, there was a couple... I don’t have my dental plates, that’s why I’m babbling a bit, excuse me. There was a couple, they got in the car. The wife sat next to me, her husband was standing. The wife asked me how old I was; I said that I was 60, approaching 70. Her husband shouted at me, as if he was beating me, “Shut up, don’t lie!” I laughed; I said “Why would I lie to you?” “Really? Don’t tell your age to other people, you’d be touched by evil eye. You’re dynamic, young.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Pınar: Siz kendinizi yaşlanmış kabul ediyormusunuz?

Melahat: Tabii kızım, 83 yaşındayım! Küçük müyüm kızım?

⁵⁵ Arife: Varım yetmiş geçiyorum. Seksen oldum belki. Ama bana diyorlar söyleme. Yürüyüş yapıyorum, biraz hareket. Dizlerim ağrıyor, belim ağrıyor, çok yürüyüş yapıyorum.

Pınar: İyi geliyor mu?

The man in the bus had pointed to a mismatch between Arife's acts and her age written on paper. He had advised her not to disclose her chronological age; because the mismatch was a chance about which strangers could get jealous. It should be added here that Arife was never giving the exact years that the major events in her life had taken place. She was illiterate, and when I was asking her how old she was at the time of a particular event she was not answering. Similarly, she was ever exact about distance and time: Though I had repeatedly asked her how long it was taking from her home to the Seniors Centre (she was living in another neighborhood), she had left the question unanswered. That was another reason, I presume, that she was giving an approximate age ("*Varım 60'ı geçiyorum.*") instead of directly saying her chronological age.

In Gülnaz's account, old age was associated with increased dependency on others and disability rather than with the "later life" in general. Her interpretation of old age was corresponding to the "deep old age" as it is termed in social gerontology (Twigg, 2004). When I asked her memories concerning her family members' later life, she did not evaluate the question in terms of everyday experiences of these individuals and responded that none of them had needed long-term care:

Pınar: When you were still with your family members, how was their old age?

Gülnaz: They didn't get very destitute either. They weren't taken ill and [unheard]. My husband's leg was amputated 8-9 years ago in Etfal (*Şişli Etfal Hospital*). I stayed with him for two years. He had gastric bleeding, kidneys with medicine (*probably meaning that the medicine that he had taken had damaged his kidneys*); there was a tumour in his stomach, it was cancer I mean. He wasn't dead because his leg was amputated; he used to smoke a lot. We suffered, I mean. My dad was ill, my mom looked after him, he was ill for two months. My mom's body blistered because of cardiac condition, we stayed in the emergency department together. Who is supposed to look after her? I am. I have a brother but he was a wife and such... She stayed in the emergency room in Etfal for 15 days; the blister was gone with blood serum. We came back home, she was

Arife: O olmasaydı ben şimdi felçtim, yataktaydım. Bayağı yaşlandım. Eminönü'ne gittim, karı koca... Dişim yok zor konuşuyorum ha, onun için öyle biraz saçma konuşuyorum, kusura bakma... Karı koca girdi arabaya, karısı yanıma oturdu, kocası ayakta kaldı. Karısı bana sordu, yaşın kaç dedi, ben de dedim "*Yaşım 60, 70'e geliyor.*" Kocasını bir bağardı bana döğör gibi "*Sus, yalan söyleme!*". Güldüm, adama dedim "*Sana bir borcum mu var yahu?*", "*Yemin et! Söyleme yaşını. Nazar değer. Hareketlisin, delikanlısın.*" (*Gülüyor.*)

okay. After a month it was swollen again, it was blistered. We called a doctor to her home. She passed away after 15 days.⁵⁶

Gülnaz had frequently recourse to medical discourses during our interview: The most detailed parts of her answers, where she was continuing her story without waiting for me to ask another question, were the parts about illness and its medical treatment. She was also evaluating age in terms of self-sufficiency. For her, people would not be considered old until they were “virtually incapacitated” (Maynard, et al. 2008):

Pınar: Do you regard yourself as old?

Gülnaz: No, I don't. Because I can handle everything myself, for better or for worse... There are such people here; I'm looking at myself and see that I'm much better than them. Right? But when somebody looks at me, they would think by my appearance that I'm good, but it's not the case, my health condition is bad.⁵⁷

Gülnaz was comparing her physical and mental faculties to the others around her, and because she was evaluating her performance to be better than them, she was not identifying as old. However, she was also remarking that she was not as healthy as people might think. Where was she locating her ‘self’ than? Probably somewhere in the continuum between the forged categories of “old” and “young”; bearing traits from both (i.e. self-sufficiency of the earlier life and some illnesses brought by the old age).

Nadya was situating herself in a distinct group than the youth and talking about an antagonism between the two groups (expressed as “us” and “them”), a generational conflict:

⁵⁶ Pınar: Aile büyükleriyle yaşarken, onların yaşlılıkları nasıldı?)

Gülnaz: Onlar da pek böyle düşmediler yani. Öyle yatağa düşüp de [duyulmuyor] etmediler. Benim eşim 8-9 oldu, bacağı kesildi, Etfal'de. İki sene onun yanında kaldım. Mide kanaması oldu, böbrekleri ilaç, midesini kitle yaptı, kanser yani. Kesildiğinden ölmedi, sigara çok içerdi. Sigaradan, yoktu, sigaradan bacağı kesildi. Çektik yani. Babam rahatsızdı annem baktı, babam vefat etti, babam da öyle iki ay yattı. Annemin de kalpten dolayı vücudu su topladı, ilkyarımda yattık beraber, kim bakacak, ben bakacağım. Erkek kardeşim var, onun da karısı var, bilmem nesi var. 15 gün Etfal'de ilkyarımda yatmıştı, serumla, öyle sular gitti. Eve geldik, iyi. Bir ay sonra tekrar şişmeye başladı, yine su topladı. Eve doktor çağırdık kendi evine. 15 gün sonra annem de vefat etti.

⁵⁷ Pınar: Kendinizi yaşlanmış kabul ediyor musunuz?

Gülnaz: Kabul etmiyorum. Çünkü her işimi yaptığıma göre ama iyi, ama kötü... Neler var burada, bakıyorum, ben onlardan çok iyiyim diyorum. Değil mi? Ama görünüşüme bakan iyi bir şey zanneder, ama yok, rahatsızım yani.

I have an older sister. She has a daughter and a grandchild. Don't take it personally, but young people don't like the elderly. She doesn't even give enough importance to her mother. She doesn't give importance to me either. I'm going there to see my sister, staying for 2-3 days and coming back. (...) She has a daughter and a grandchild. But they don't like us, they're getting bored.⁵⁸

At another instance, while we were talking about the representations of old people on television, she was using sensationalist media imagery as a resource for 'doing age'⁵⁹:

Nadya: I wonder if you've watched it, during the holidays an old couple are waiting for their children. (*Imitating the woman in the commercial*) "Sir, they didn't come."

Pınar: It was a candy advertisement, right?

Nadya: It's a holiday; they're waiting for the doorbell. Their children are supposed to come and kiss their hands. "They didn't come." "They'll come..." That had grieved me lot. They waited, but the children didn't come. They (*the children*) were on vacation.

Pınar: But they always use such sad moments in advertising...

Nadya: They do, but that's also the actual situation. Yes, that's the situation. Everybody's going away for holidays. (*Lowering her voice*) The daughter of the woman sitting next to me... It was their holiday; they're Jewish, the children were gallivanting all the time, they only went to one dinner together. She was all alone at night and during the daytime she came here. I don't know whether she would tell you, if you make her tell, it's heartbreaking.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ablam var. Kızı var, torunu var. Üstüne alınma ama gençler yaşlıları sevmiyor. Annesine bile fazla önem vermiyor. Bana da vermiyor. Gidiyorum 2-3 gün ablamı görüp geliyorum. (...) Kızı var, torunu var. Ama gençler sevmiyorlar bizi. Sevmiyorlar, sıkılıyorlar. (Nadya)

⁵⁹ Kent Şeker. Advertisement. Youtube 04 Jan. 2013. 04 Jan. 2013
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VR3UMgWRmw>>.

For another instance of the use of elderly for the advertisement of the same product, featuring Turkey's oldest person, see: Kent Şeker. Advertisement. Youtube 04 Jan. 2013. 04 Jan. 2013
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9pPhLJrSF4>>.

⁶⁰ Nadya: Bayramlarda, bilmiyorum izlediniz mi, bayramlarda karı koca ihtiyarlar evlat bekliyorlar. "*Bey, gelmedi, bey.*" (...)

Pınar: Az önce bahsettiğiniz şeker reklamıydı, değil mi?

Nadya: Bayramda. Karı koca hazırlandılar, kapı bekliyorlar karı koca. Evlatlar gelecek ki onlara, el öpecek diye. "*Bey, gelmediler.*" "*Gelirler hanım, gelirler...*" O bana çok acı vermişti. Beklediler ama gelmedi evlatları. Tatildehydiler.

Pınar: Ama reklamlarda hep bu üzücü anları kullanıyorlar mı?

Nadya: Çok gösteriyorlar ama durum bu. Tabii durum bu. Herkes tatile gidiyor. (*Sesini alçaltarak*) Bu yanımdakinin kızı, bayramlarıydı, Musevidir, gezdiler tozdular, bir yemeğe

It should be added here that this conversation was triggered by a question that I had asked about the scant representation of old people on television. Nadya had commented that old people would not be able to handle it (“*Beceremeyiz*”) and said that even Suna Pekuysal had left at a certain point. She then remembered this commercial, and drew a correspondence between the couple on the commercial and her friend to explain the neglected status of old people.

Like Gülnaz, Nadya also departed from her observations about others when she was evaluating her own condition:

Nadya: Some old people are really destitute (*düşkün*). My speech is powerful. If you ask something to this lady (*secretly pointing at the woman sitting next to her*), she can’t finish the answer, she can’t tell something. There are people who lose their speech ability. I never had difficulties in expressing myself or in understanding others. Eighty is quite an old age.

Pınar: Do you relate this to your health condition?

Nadya: No, no. It’s about the personality, the character. Those people were the same when they were young, too.⁶¹

She related her performance to her personality or to an inner self which was not affected by the passing of the time. Her last sentence quoted above made her account ambiguous though: If the people who lose their speech ability were the same when they were young, was she solely comparing her personality to theirs? Or, was she implying that the inherent differences were aggravated by the aging process?

The last account that will be mentioned in this section is a literally more ‘theatrical’ performance: Fahriye was famous with her memory and her interest in literature. The first day when we met she was devouring a book by Soner Yalçın, “Efendi”. She also liked reciting poems had she had learned throughout the years. In the interview, she told me that she had

gittiler. O geceleri yapayalnız kaldı, gündüz de buraya geldi. Söyler mi bilmiyorum, söyletse içerler acısı.

⁶¹ Nadya: Çok aciz yaşlılar var. Konuşma tarzım da kuvvetli. Şimdi bu hanıma birşey sorun, yarı yolda kalıyor, anlatamıyor. Anlatma güçlerini kaybedenler var. Ben hiçbir zaman ne anlamakta ne anlatmakta güçlük çekmedim yaşıma göre. Seksen yaş az bir yaş değil.

Pınar: Sağlıkla ilgili mi peki bu?

Nadya: Yok yok. Karakter, yapı o. Gençlikte de onlar öyleydi.

written a *nazire* (a witty reply) to Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı’s famous poem about “being in the middle of the life at the age of 35”. Her reply was entitled, “78 Years of Age, Not the Middle of the Road but the Beginning of the End”. She also recited a poem by Namdar Rahmi Karatay, the title of which can be translated as “Too Little, Too Late” (“*Geçti Bor’un Pazarı*”):

Where are you days of youth?
Joys, honors and fame we looked for, where are you?
Our dreams were raised high, before contracting into none
Belated to life, I carry on to nothing

Can they know if you are a gem? Out of question.
Who will bow to this destitute?
To this master of none.

Make it to the treasures timely
Consume them night and day
Maturate without an injury.

Otherwise you will be excluded
Your immaturity will keep you down
Belated to life, I carry on to nothing.⁶²

Fahriye read with compassion what was otherwise a crude poem about old age. Besides being illustrative of her cultural capital, the poem was Fahriye’s statement about old age, though she had read and memorized it in the earlier stages of her life. She was used to reciting poems; her videos of her performances were shot and shared in the Facebook page of the institution as an old and cultivated woman with a retentive memory, which countered the negative stereotypes of old age. In the interview, while she was reciting a poem about getting old and marginalized; she was also displaying her memory and talent, and getting praised by the researcher.

In the cases cited above women were giving different meanings to age in accordance with their performances. Sometimes they were not categorizing themselves as ‘old’, but they

⁶² See Appendix II for the original version of the poem. I’m indebted to Selim Karlitekin for translating it to English.

were not positing to be ‘young’ either: They were remarking, based on some everyday performances and interactions, that they were not conforming to the stereotypical assumptions; or putting their differences forward to resist the demeaning effects of homogenizing classifications (Blaikie 2004). Interactions with other people, media imagery or poems were used as resources to give meaning to the age. I find it important to reiterate that the emphasis here is not that people can choose identities as they wish. People are restricted, in their strategies of “doing age”, by the determining role of institutions and resources (i.e their configuration of economic, social, cultural and even physical capital) (Wainwright and Turner). Thus, “patterns of behaviour, thought and expression” are “both ‘relatively unpredictable’ but also ‘limited in their diversity’” (McNay). Also, people may not reflect on age and like Melahat’s straightforward answer, they can ground their statements on the dichotomy between the young and the old.

I will now turn to Özlem’s narrative, where the major life events were not experienced ‘appropriately’, ‘on time’. She expressed this nonconformity by objecting to my questions, arguing that *she did not know how it was like to be an old woman*. Then, a struggle on identities from the percussion workshop will be conveyed.

2.1.1.1 “How is it like to be a 55 year old woman? I don’t know.”

Özlem had gotten married very young, when she was only 14 years old. Her age on the identity papers was changed for this marriage and her parents had to sign a permit. It was not a forced marriage, however it had resulted in 10 years of domestic violence that she was putting as “the years that she did not want to remember” or as “the time that was stolen from her life”. She was sometimes developing metaphysical explanations for her decision to get married when she was 14:

Nobody would believe in me if I talk about magic here, but it happened to me. My mother-in-law made me eat an apple and then I said to my mom that I would get married, no matter what.

She was 24 when she had divorced her husband. Throughout her life she had lived in different places, especially after going to Germany as a Turkish guest worker. At some point she had started earning money as a singer and continued working in clubs until 1996. She still

had a beautiful voice and was a member of the percussion group of the Seniors Centre, occasionally singing in concerts and events. Though Özlem was not giving a detailed, chronologically ordered account of her years after the divorce, she was telling some stories about her darkest times: The story of beating cervical cancer at a time when the disease was quite unknown in Turkey or the story of how she was saved after a suicide attempt. She had never had a family life and was not close at all with her three children who were born during her first marriage. She was explaining this lack of communication with the fact that she was also a child when she had become a mother and that she was very oppressed by her husband's family: "I could not give something that was not offered to me in the first place" she said, referring to love and affection. As her life had been full of exceptional ups and downs, she was always saying that *she did not know* about motherhood, or old age: The course of events did follow a conventional path, so she did not know how one was supposed to act or feel in certain situations:

I became a mother of four (*one of her children had passed away*) but I raised none of them. Because I didn't have the conditions to raise them. *I was a child, always a child.* But they didn't let me live my childhood either. I couldn't experience being a newly married girl (*gelin kız*) because of them; neither the pregnancy nor the postnatal period (*lohusalık*) I could experience. I was only getting pregnant, and giving birth.⁶³

Now I'm a child again. These are my most beautiful days. My friends know this too, I'm always telling. These are my most beautiful days even if I'm almost 69. I don't remember the times when I was 45 years old, or 35, or 50... I was on stage. I performed for 20-25 years.⁶⁴

I don't know how a woman is like when she is 55 or 65, I'm a child right now. I don't consider myself mature, I can't. Because I didn't live. I took my graduation certificate (*from the junior high school*) after getting married. (...) That's why I don't know; how

⁶³ Dört çocuk annesi oldum, hiçbir çocuğumu da ben büyütmedim. Çünkü büyücek gibi bir ortamım olmadı; ben çocuktum, daima çocuktum. Ama bana o çocukluğumu da yaşatmadılar, bana gelin kız nasıl olur onu da yaşatmadılar. "Lohusalık nasıl olur"u bilmem, hamilelik nasıl olur bilmedim. Sadece hamile kalıyordum bir de doğuruyordum. (Özlem)

⁶⁴ Şimdi ben yeniden çocuğum. Benim en güzel günlerim bugünler. Bunu benim arkadaşlarım da bilir, bunu her zaman söylerim. En güzel günlerim benim bugünlerim, ki yaşıma 69'a geliyor. Ne 45'ini hatırlıyorum, ne 35'ini hatırlıyorum, ne 50'sini hatırlıyorum. Sahnelerdeydim. 20-25 sene kadar sahnelerde kaldım. (Özlem)

is it like to be a 55 year old person? I don't know about this. I'm a child since the day I knew myself.⁶⁵

Because she had not (or could not) conform to normative expectations about a woman's life (marriage, motherhood, family life etc.) Özlem was expressing the *she did not know* about these.

I don't know about the period between 13 and 23, they stole that from me. Then, as I told you before, I spent my life working. I had very beautiful memories and very bad ones. I don't know how my life was when I was 35, because I was too busy; I was busy earning a living. What happened when I was 45, how the menopausal period is for a woman; I did not get it either. I only remember using to pour water on concrete and lying down in water; because I had a fever. I used to pour a bucket of water on concrete and lie down in it. And then I used to get sick, eventually. Otherwise I couldn't extinguish that fever in my body. It completely ended when I was 54.⁶⁶

Because Özlem was not regarding her biography as 'representative' of women's experiences, she was asserting that "she did not know" the conventional script. The only experience that she was sharing was a 'purely' bodily one; she was telling about the hot flushes of the menopausal period which, she thought, was shared by other women. Also, she was identifying with children as she was not regarding herself as mature. She was appropriating the popular correspondance drawn between the children and the elderly, in order to talk about a certain freedom brought by the later life.

⁶⁵ Yani kadın 55 yaşında nasıl olur, 65 yaşında nasıl olur, şu anda ben bir çocuğum. hiçbir zaman kendimi olgun görmüyorum, göremiyorum. Çünkü yaşamadım. Ben evlendikten sonra gittim diplomamı aldım. (...) Onun için bilmiyorum, insanlar 55 yaşında nasıl oluyorlar acaba? Ben bunu bilmiyorum. Kendimi bildim bileli çocuğum. (Özlem)

⁶⁶ Zaten 13 yaşından 23 yaşına kadar hiç bilmiyorum, çaldılar benden. Ondan sonra da söylediğim gibi zaten o hayatım benim hep çalışmayla geçti. Çok güzel anılarım oldu, çok kötü anılarım oldu. (...) Hayatım bu. 35'imde nasıl geçti bilmem, çünkü çok meşguldüm, ekme paramı kazanmakla meşguldüm. 45'imde nasıl oldu, yani menapoz dönemi nasıl geçer bir kadının, onu da anlamadım. Sadece hatırladığım, betona suyu dökerdim, suyun içersine yatardım; ateşim çok olurdu. Betona bir kova suyu devirirdim, o suyun içine girer yatardım. Ondan sonra da tabii ki hasta olurdum. Başka türlü yani vücudumun o ateşini söndüremezdim. 54 yaşında da zaten tamamen bitti. (Özlem)



Figure 2.2: Percussion Workshop (Taken from the Seniors Centre's Facebook Page)

2.1.1.2 At Percussion Workshop: “Stop saying ‘the young ones’ all the time!”

We have percussion classes here. It’s our music therapy class. We wanted to rehabilitate them by making music, to relieve them, to do therapy. If you ask the reason why it’s percussion, it’s because when they beat [the instruments], they get rid of the negative energy here and they go home relieved.⁶⁷ (Türkân Çakar)

The above description belongs to Türkân Çakar, the director of the institution. When I had met her for the first time, I had asked her whether the Seniors Centre had a psychologist. Her answer had been negative, but she had told me that they were applying music therapy with

⁶⁷ Perküsyon kursumuz var. Bu da müzikli rehabilite kursumuz. İstedik ki müzik yaparak onları biraz rehabilite edelim, biraz rahatlatalım, biraz terapi yapalım. Neden perküsyon dersenez, çünkü vurdukları andaki verdikleri enerjiyle burda o negatif enerjilerini atarak evlerine gidiyorlar. (Int. with the director)

percussion classes.⁶⁸ This was not a formal music therapy though, and the director was attributing it a therapeutic quality because the bodily dimension it included. The percussion group was greatly contributing to the promotion of the Seniors Centre. They were playing in the garden when the institution had visitors, participating in television shows or visiting other institutions to give concerts.⁶⁹

I participated in the percussion workshop on a week when it was very crowded: There were students from Kemerburgaz University who had joined the regular members of the class. This cooperation was part of a civic involvement project named “My Travel Companion” (“*Yol Arkadaşım Projesi*”), aiming to strengthen inter-generational communication. It is important to clarify that the students were coming to Seniors’ Centre as a part of a course requirement. Thus, their voluntariness and companionship was required and mediated by their university. It was their second week with the group and they were still trying to get familiar with their instruments and with the group’s established repertoire. I was a bit worried that I would only hear some awkward exercises during one hour, however the instructor Okay Akder succeeded in getting everybody to play together with his teaching skills and patience.

I was ten minutes late and everybody was seated as a circle when I entered the main office of the Women’s Assembly, which was used on Tuesdays for the percussion workshop. Almost 40 people including the university students were in that spacious hall. The student group was mixed in terms of gender, however in the Senior Centre’s core group there were only three men. Because women were the overwhelming majority, the instructor were addressing to the group as “*Ladies!*”, when he needed to silence the goblet drums in order to make himself heard.

⁶⁸ When I clarified myself, telling her that I was worried that my questions could make some people nervous or hurt them, she said that I could ask her about the people and that she personally knew them.

⁶⁹ It was possible to follow all these performances of the percussion group from the Facebook page of the institution. In one of the videos from that page, the percussion group was playing in an entertainment show in TRT, accompanied by deputy mayor Kahraman Eroğlu, who was also a folk musician. In one of the photo albums they were playing for the “consulates’ wives” who were visiting the institution and in another one they were visiting a nursing home in Düzce Municipality.

As I was looking for a place to sit I saw one of my interlocutors, Ayşe, and I precipitated towards her. She was not playing anything; she was just sitting in the back to watch the rehearsal. She told me that only the man who was playing saxophone was professional and all the other people had learnt to play by attending these classes. The repertoire was varied; folk songs such as *Silifke'nin Yoğurdu* and *Atabarı* were played as well *The Pink Panther Theme* and *Quizás, Quizás, Quizás*.

Most of the participants were housewives who were coming each Tuesday for this workshop. Youngest ones seemed to be in their late 30s. One of my interlocutors, Özlem, was in the group. Viktorya, whom I had tried to convince for an interview was also there. Tambourines, goblet drums, drumheads were used by the group. There was an instrument scarcity because of the newbies, so some instruments were being handed around. Towards the end of the workshop, the instructor was thinking about a way to train the university students so that they could catch up with the old members of the group. Because Kemerburgaz University was very far, students could only come on Tuesday with shuttles. One of the old members said:

Then do not rehearse with us next week *hocam*, so we could cook at home and such...
(*Everybody laughs*)⁷⁰.

This joke reflected the gendered character of the group and also that the members were not working outside the household. If they were not coming to the workshop they would be busy with domestic work. Meanwhile, Ayşe whispered:

Ayşe: See the lady over there? She's Viktorya, she's 81 years old. See how she's playing, she gets pleasure out of it...

Pınar: Is she 81 really?

Ayşe: Yes, she's 81 years old. I never saw her without make-up, not even one day.

Pınar: Yes, and she dresses very elegantly too. I know her from downstairs...

After the rehearsal was finished, I saw Ayşe was talking to Viktorya, pointing towards me. I approached towards them, Ayşe was telling her that we had just praised her for her joy of life and beauty.

⁷⁰ Siz de gelecek hafta bizi almayın hocam, biz de evde yemeğimizi filan yaparız...
(*Gülüşmeler*)

Okay: So, next week I'll train the young ones for one hour, starting at 2 PM. You'll come at 3 PM at we'll continue all together. Please don't come at 2 PM, because I have to practice with the young ones...

Woman from the Group: Stop saying 'the young ones' all the time! (*Everybody laughs, including the woman.*) He's making us old! (*To the women next to her*)

Okay: Then how should I call them? Newbies? This doesn't suit either. (*Somebody from the group suggests 'inexperienced'.*) Okay, let's say 'inexperienced' then.⁷¹

What is interesting in this 'struggle' over the naming was its being centered around the potential name of the group of university students. The instructor had never addressed the others members of the group as 'old', but the interpellation of the students as "the young ones" was anticipated as a threat by them, as

it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its 'identity' - can be constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993) (Hall 1996, 4).

If the students were addressed as the young (or the new) ones, the others would either be "the old" of the dichotomy. In that situation they would not be addressed as "the old" because people would be too polite to avow this naming, but they would still be appointed to that muted category. Women preferred to switch from the criteria of age to that of 'experience', because they were able to claim their symbolical capital when the focus was on experience. Experience, along with wisdom, was a positive trait associated with old age. They were thus not put in a position of 'lacking'; it was the students on the contrary who lacked experience.

2.1.2 Daily Life between Home and Seniors Centre

Though it is stated elsewhere that "the discussion of the private world of older women inevitable centres on the home" (Russell 1999), participants of my research had accounts

⁷¹ Okay: Önümüzdeki hafta gençlerle bir saat fazladan çalışma yapacağım, ikide. Siz üçte geleceksiniz, hep birlikte devam edeceğiz. Lütfen ikide gelmeyin, gençlerle ayrı çalışacağım...
Perküsyon grubundan bir kadın: Sen de "gençler, gençler" deyip durma şöyle! (*Herkes gülüyor.*) (*Yanındaki kadınlara*) Yaşlı yaptı bizi!
Okay: Tamam, nasıl söyleyelim o zaman? 'Yeniler' desek... O da olmuyor. (Gruptan biri 'deneyimsizler'i öneriyor.) Tamam, 'deneyimsizler' diyelim.

circulating between their homes and Seniors Centre, as their daily lives were spatially and temporally divided between the two. The main hall was like a second home to them: They all had their fixed places to sit and they were occupying the chairs around them with bags and coats, for their friends who were supposed to come later in the day. Some of them were coming alone; some were coming by their husbands and partners (Selda, Melahat, Fahriye). Sometimes they were joined by their children or grandchildren. When asked about other places that they enjoyed going, they were usually mentioning their relatives' (siblings, children, etc.) homes, thus 'private spaces'. Women were explaining the reasons why their public life was limited to the Seniors Centre with economic hardships and health problems.⁷² Also the city where we were living was not planned according to the needs of old people (it was not an 'age-friendly' city) and it was offering them very few opportunities of socialization. In this section, women's narratives about their homes and also about the Seniors Centre will be analyzed.

It should be remembered, before the accounts, that the ones who most regularly benefited from the Seniors Centre were the people living in nearby streets. Having to pay for the public transport, or to walk in rainy or snowy weather were discouraging old people about going outside their homes. Also, for some women like Arife and Gülnaz, public transport was not facilitating the access to the Centre either. One of them living in Halide Edip Adivar District and the other in Pangaltı, they would have to walk (first to the nearer bus stop, and then to Seniors Centre after getting off) even if they decided to use public transport. Gülnaz for instance was expressing that she was staying at home in rainy and snowy days, because she was scared of falling down. By showing me a scar on her shoulder, she stated that she had fallen on the ground a couple of years ago and had had an operation; so she would not risk her health by going out in stormy weather. However, when the Centre was near the home it was almost becoming an extension of it, balancing its isolating effects.

⁷² This was not always interpreted as a limitation by the informants themselves. In her account, Perihan said that she was being invited to other places by her acquaintances, but that she still preferred to go to Seniors Centre because she was really used to it. This fragment of her account will be analysed elsewhere; but her emphasis that she knew people who were in high positions and that she could benefit, if she wanted to, from other opportunities of socialization is worth mentioning here.

Only Arife talked about going to parks and socializing with other women there. Because she did not have a fixed place in the Seniors Centre, she was looking for alternative places. She said that when she was absent for some time, the women that she had met in the parks were getting worried about her and asking if she was all right. Fahriye talked about going to the meetings of Jehova's witnesses. She had learned about them from someone who used to come to Seniors Centre and was happy to join the meetings twice a week; because they were very welcoming and she had an interest on discussions. Also, the meeting place was very near.

2.1.2.1 Home, Neighbors and Socialization in Seniors Centre

Home had ambivalent meanings in the accounts of my research informants. They sometimes referred to its restrictive 'four walls' and constructed it as a place of isolation and loneliness which distressed them. The comment that the neighborhood relationships were not as strong as they used to be was repeated in several interviews, and this was also contributing to the picture of home as the place of isolation:

Nazife: [...] the old faith, the old neighborhood relationships, the old friendships do not exist anymore...

Pınar: Don't you host guests at home?

Nazife: No, not many. My son is visiting, my daughter is visiting. My neighbors are seldom coming, that's it. There aren't many people. *The old neighborhood relationships are gone my child, they don't exist anywhere.*⁷³

Gülnaz: The family living below me has a sweet young daughter, like you. When I go there, she always says "Aunt Gül, please don't go". She doesn't study and sits with me. Then her mother gets upset, "Go studying!" she says, and she's right. I don't go to their place often, I'm showing consideration; I also sent two children to school. I don't go there often. (...) In the basement there is a young married couple of your age, I only

⁷³ Nazife: [...] Eski inanç, eski komşuluk, eski arkadaşlık yok.

Pınar: Eve gelen gideniniz var mı?

Nazife: Yok, kimse yok. Oğlum gelip gidiyor, kızım gelip gidiyor. Komşularım ara sıra geliyor, işte öyle yani. Fazla kimse yok. Eski komşuluk yok ki yavrum, eski komşuluk hiçbir yerde yok.

ring their doorbell when we have to pay the building expenses. “How are you, are you okay?”, I hug the woman, that’s it.⁷⁴

The old neighborhood life which were mostly reproduced by the efforts of women were changed in relation to the changes in women's activities at home and in paid employment and these changes “have combined with rapid urbanization to erode the cohesiveness that characterized traditional neighborhood life” (Mills 2007). The familiarity had thus become “the subject of nostalgia” as it is stated in the accounts above.

In contrast to these accounts, Nadya was not complaining that the neighborhood relationships were weakened, but she was expressing that she had no energy and will to maintain those relationships anymore:

Nadya: So many friends and acquaintances I had... I have, uhm, Parkinson or Alzheimer? (*Showing me by a movement of eye the slight trembling of her right hand*)

Pınar: Parkinson it is.

Nadya: I have Parkinson. I can neither prepare a coffee or tea, nor bring it to the guests. Also I severed my ties with people. I used to love people a lot... When I used to host them in my place (*kabul günü*) I had to borrow chairs from the neighbors, for the chairs in my place were not enough. But now there isn’t anybody, I severed my ties with people. I’m getting bored (*of people, of meeting them*). I don’t like having guests and I don’t like visiting other people. But it’s my personality, not everyone would be like me maybe, I don’t know. Maybe it’s because I had to put up with too many old people, hosted too many guests: My husband was a very sociable man.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Benim altımın bir kızı var lokum gibi, sizin gibi bir kızı var, ben gittiğim zaman "Gül Abla, ne olur gitme", dersini bırakıyor yanıma geliyor. Bu sefer annesi ona kızıyor "Dersine bak" diye, haklı. Çok çıkmam, düşünürüm yani, ben de iki evlat okuttum. Pek gitmem. Benim altım boş, mirasçı. Bodrumda var sizin gibi genç karı koca çalışıyorlar, anca otomatik parası olduğu zaman kapılarını vururum. "Nasılsınız, iyi misiniz", hanımıyla öpüşürüm, o kadar. (Gülnaz)

⁷⁵ Nadya: O kadar çok dostum, ahababım vardı ki... Bende, şey, Alzheimer mı Parkinson mu? (*Bakışlarıyla sağ elindeki hafif titremeyi işaret ediyor.*)

Pınar: Parkinson.

Nadya: Parkinson var. Ne kahve pişirip misafire getirebiliyorum, ne çay. Hem sonra, insanlardan koştum, çok insan severdim. Kabul gününde komşulardan sandalye alırdım, kâfi gelmezdi evimin sandalyeleri. Ama şimdi kimse yok, insanlardan koştum. Sıkılıyorum. Misafir gitmeyi de sevmiyorum, misafir kabul etmeyi de sevmiyorum. Ama bu benim

One might ask the reason why Nadya was bothering to come to Seniors Centre as she was repeatedly saying that she had severed her ties with people and that she was easily getting bored. The answer is, I argue, that the Seniors Centre was providing her with a space where she could spend time without necessarily having to talk (differently from visiting a neighbor) or serve tea to the others (differently from hosting guests). Individuals who belong to neighbor networks host each other in their homes on a circular pattern which guarantees the continuity of the social bonds: The exchange is never concluded by a payback, but it's always kept alive.

The responsibility of visiting frequently enough to demonstrate membership in the community and the ways of visiting with other women (talking, reading coffee fortunes, drinking tea, eating, helping prepare food or interacting with children, or keeping company while someone does chores) are important characteristics of mahalle life. Doors are always open to a visiting komşu (neighbor), and visitors come without calling first. *Komşuluk* is related to the cultural value of preferring to be with people over being alone, and depends on women staying at home during the day while their husbands are out, although komşuluk is also sometimes done by employed women in the evenings or weekends. (Mills 2007)

Seniors Centre, however, frees Nadya from her gendered duties to be a 'perfect host' or an 'appropriate guest', from the labor of the reciprocal bonds: "Severing her ties with people" means, in her narrative, to quit this kind of sociality. However, Nadya was in Seniors Centre almost every day except when she was visiting her sister. There she could sometimes talk with the women around her, sometimes remain silent. Sometimes, after asking how I was and how my school was going, she was immediately returning to read her newspaper: I was realizing that she did not want any company that day. Thus, the institution was providing her with a more 'indifferent' kind of socialization.

Whether they were expressing nostalgic longing for the old neighborhood ties or were not finding the will in themselves for maintaining these relationships, Seniors Centre was articulated as a place where the old women were quite happy. They attributed a therapeutic function to it and posited it as a place where they could escape to:

karakterim, her yaşlı böyle olmayabilir, bilmiyorum. Veyahut ben çok yaşlı çektim, çok misafir kabul ettim, eşim çok muhiti olan bir insandı...

We're spending our time here. *Otherwise I wouldn't be able to stay at home, I'd lose my head.* It's nice here; my friends are really nice people.⁷⁶ (Gülnaz)

I'm coming here, what can I do? Winter is coming now; I won't be able to come. Nowadays there aren't any neighbors my child, back then they used to come over to eat, to have tea. I used to host them, they used to invite me. Now there aren't any people around, they don't care about us. *I'm staying at home, feeling sad for my husband, feeling sad for my son who passed away at a very young age, I'm going mad. I'm getting out, coming here.* From now on the weather will be rainy, the winter's here. What can I do? (...) I'm feeling sad, I'm crying. "I grew up an orphan, and now I'm left an orphan again," I say.⁷⁷ (Arife)

In both accounts the institution was offering a relief from the bitter feelings of loneliness and grief. In Fahriye's account, Seniors Centre was emerging as a new opportunity to enjoy public life, at a time when old habits of socialization had vanished from one's daily life because of budget restrictions:

My place is near; I'm not paying for the transportation. Before my husband's death we used to get together with friends and go somewhere; cafes and music halls were cheaper back then. But right now I can't afford the transportation. I'm a tenant, I couldn't buy a house, I couldn't buy anything. But I'm not complaining. *I would be a distressed woman if this place didn't exist. But I'm not getting distressed, I'm coming here. We're sometimes laughing, sometimes disputing.*⁷⁸ (Fahriye)

At another point in the interview, she was putting the same idea in more pejorative terms:

We used to meet with friends and go to Cevahir (a shopping centre), to Beşiktaş, to the seacoast at Ortaköy... Now I can't do any of these. People who spent their money carefully back in the day are doing these; but I couldn't use it carefully. Now I'm

⁷⁶ "Burada vakit geçiriyoruz. Yoksa evde duramam, kafamı üşütürüm. Burada iyi oluyor, arkadaşlarım çok iyi." (Gülnaz)

⁷⁷ "Buraya geliyorum, ne yapayım? Bundan sonra da kış, gelemem. Evde komşu yok şimdi kızım, eskiden toplanıp bana geliyorlardı yemeğe içmeye, yapardım, çay... Onlar beni çağırırdı. Şimdi komşu yok, kapımızı açmıyorlar. Evde oturuyorum üzülüyorum, kocama üzülüyorum, oğlum gitti genç yaşında üzülüyorum, kafayı yiyeceğim. Ben de çıkıyorum buraya geliyorum. Bundan sonra yağmur, kış geldi. Ne yapayım? (...) Üzül, ağla. Ağlıyorum, diyorum yetim büyüdüm yine yetim kaldım." (Arife)

⁷⁸ Şurada da, evim de yakın, yol parası vermeden... Çünkü eskiden arkadaşlarla birleşirdik, kocam ölmeden evvela, bir yerlere giderdik. O zaman gazinolar, kafeler ucuzdu. Ama şu anda yol parası ödeyecek param yok. Zaten evim kira, ben bir ev filan alamadım, hiçbir şey alamadım... Ama şikayetçi de değilim. Şu anda burası olmasaydı ben sıkıntılı bir kadın olacaktım. Ama sıkılmıyorum, buraya geliyorum, kâh kavga ediyoruz, kâh gülüyoruz. (Fahriye)

confined to here anyway, I can't go there because the carfare is too much. (...) I don't have any other social activities. I'm living like a plant. Except books, books and television, we don't have anything.⁷⁹

Özlem was also stating that she preferred the Seniors Centre to her home, because she had an opportunity to socialize there. This was also satisfying 'the child' that she expressed being:

If I stay at home, I'm alone. We've got neighbors too, but it's not the same as here. I'm coming here since seven years; here you at least talk with someone, then with another, maybe you fight and live you second, third childhood. (...) We're getting angry at each other, we're shouting. Why? "Why did you pull my table? Why did you sit on my chair?" Nothing else. This is childish and I like it. Because I'm a bit heady (*cazgır*), they can't answer me. I always find a way to prove myself right.⁸⁰

2.1.2.2 Life in One's Own Place

Home was not always articulated as a place of confinement, but also as "one's own place"; and the informants were expressing their thankfulness for having it. Especially when they were asked questions such as "What are the aspects of your life that you are happy about?" they were expressing their contentment about "not being needy". Considering this thankfulness about living in one's own place (either as owners or renters of their flats), home was also the site of "safety, individuation and privacy" (Young 2005) and as I will analyze below, of competence. Gülnaz for instance was pleased that "there were nobody that bothered

⁷⁹ Arkadaşlarımla buluşup bir Cevahir'e gidiyorduk, Beşiktaş'a gidiyorduk, sahilde Ortaköy'e gidiyorduk... Ama şimdi bunları yapamıyorum ben. Yapan arkadaşlarım var. Parayı zamanında dikkatli kullananlar yapıyorlar. Fakat ben yapamadım, ben dikkatli kullanamadım. Şimdi buraya ben mahkumum zaten, oralara gidemiyorum çünkü yol parası çok. (...) Başka hiçbir sosyal faaliyetim yok. Ot gibi yaşıyorum. Kitaptan başka, kitap ve televizyondan başka hiçbir şeyimiz yok. (Fahriye)

⁸⁰ Evde olsam yalnızım. Hani tamam mahallede de komşumuz var ama burası gibi olmaz. ben buraya yedi seneden beri geliyorum, hani sen azından onunla konuşuyorsun, öbürüyle konuşuyorsun, öbürüyle konuşuyorsun, olmadı kavga yapıyorsun, tekrar ikinci - üçüncü bir çocukluğunu yaşıyorsun. (...) Şimdi yeniden çocuk olduk. Çünkü birbirimize küsüyoruz, birbirimize bağıyoruz. Nedeni ne? "Sen benim masamı niye çektin, sen benim sandalyeme niye oturdun?" Başka bir şey yok. Bu nedir, bu çocukluktur. Bu da benim hoşuma gidiyor. Biraz da cazgır olduğum için hiçbiri de bana cevap veremez yani. Herşeyde üste çıkarım. (Özlem)

her at home”, and she once referred to her home as a ‘nest’ to go back in the evening. The only drawback was the steepness of the street where her home was located:

Pınar: Do you like your home?

Gülnaz: I do, I’m comfortable. There aren’t any bad people in my place, our neighbors are very nice. Neighbors aren’t visiting each other anymore though, you know, in Istanbul. Everybody minds their own business. I love my place but that hill (*leading to her home*) is very steep. I’m going up that hill very difficultly, because of my heart I guess. I can’t sell it, my sons are heirs. I have two sons, one of them is married and the other one is single. The second one wouldn’t object but maybe the married one would, because he has a wife... I wouldn’t do anything, because they’re heirs.⁸¹

Home and neighborhood were sometimes treated with their practical benefits in the accounts. Melahat was responding my questions concerning her feelings about home in terms of economic urgencies:

Pınar: Are you pleased with your home?

Melahat: Yes, yes. *But we’re tenants.*

Pınar: You said you’ve always lived in this neighborhood, since 32 years. Do you like it here?

Melahat: *Of course I do, why wouldn’t I like it? At least my children made it. My younger son has four more years for retirement, that place [Jet Turizm] is closed down and he can’t find a job now. That’s it, dear. We’re going on, we’ll see how far...*⁸²

Melahat had come in Istanbul from Sivas in 1980, with her two sons and his husband who had then worked as a door guard in Emek Movie Theater until he was retired. The

⁸¹ Pınar: Evinizi seviyor musunuz?

Gülnaz: Seviyorum, rahatım. Evimin içinde öyle kötü insan yok, komşularımız çok iyi. Ama gidip gelme yok eskisi gibi tabii, biliyorsun, İstanbul’da. Herkes kendi şeyine düşmüş. Evimi seviyorum fakat o yokuş çok kötü. Yokuşu çok zor çıkıyorum. Kalbimden dolayı herhalde. Satamam, mirasçı çocuklar var. İki oğlum var, biri evli biri bekâr. Bekâr bir şey demez de, belki evli olan, karısı var, onun için... Mirasçı olduğu için bir şey yapmam.

⁸² Pınar: Evinizden memnun musunuz?

Melahat: Tabii tabii... Kiracıyık ama kiracıyık.

Pınar: İstanbul’ a geldiğinizden beri bu mahalledeymişsiniz, 32 senedir. Seviyor musunuz burayı?

Melahat: Tabii seviyorum, niye sevmeyeyim ki? Çocuklarım hiç olmazsa kurtardı, küçük oğlumun dört senesi var emekli olmasına, işte ora (Jet Turizm) kapandı, çocuk iş bulamıyor. Yavrum öyle işte. Öyle gidiyoruz, bakalım nereye kadar gideceğiz...

reasons behind their migration were unemployment and economic hardships. That is why she was associating her current neighborhood with the employment opportunities that her sons had found in Istanbul.

Fahriye was another informant with whom I talked about the economic hardships. In a fragment from her interview quoted in the previous section she was telling that she had not been able to buy a house of her own and that being a tenant was putting her in a precarious economic situation. However life had brought a new “friendship” for her: She was co-habiting with a gentleman that she had met in the Seniors Centre:

I have a friend, I’m living with him. I’m relatively better off. It was 180 TL last month, I paid 90 and he paid 90. (*Otherwise*) I wouldn’t be able to pay for it; I wouldn’t be able to live there. But it’s better with a friend. He’s 84 years old; he’s playing cards inside (*showing me to room where it is permitted to play cards*). (...) My children also agreed, my son met him and said that there weren’t any inconveniences. It isn’t nice to be alone. It’s better now; he’s painting, it’s very nice. I can’t say that we’re sharing (*the activity of painting*) but I enjoy looking at it when it’s finished.

As it will be also quoted in the section about intimacy, Fahriye had opened her home to a new person in later life. This relationship had partly relieved her financial problems (and probably those of her partner, too) and also it had changed her daily habits in her private space:

He only wants to listen to music on TV. There’s another TV in the back room, but the sounds are jumbled. I used to watch political debates, I can’t watch them anymore. It would be good if we could watch together and share our opinions. He only paints and listens to music. I’m reading, and when I’m fed up I turn the other television on.⁸³

2.1.2.3 My Story with Nadya: Home, Personal Objects and Gift-Giving

This section is an interlude concentrating on a particular participant’s narrative and on a gift exchange between us. This interlocutor is Nadya, one of the first people in Seniors

⁸³ Televizyonda da yalnız müzik olsun istiyor. İçerdeki televizyonda da karıştıyormuş gibi geliyor. Ben eskiden siyasi şeyleri seyredirdim, oturumları. Onların hiçbirini seyredemiyorum. Mesela onu birlikte seyretsek de birbirimize şey yapsak, fikirlerimizi söyleyebilsek o çok iyi. O resim yapıyor, bir de müzik dinliyor. Ben de kitap okuyorum, kafam kızdığı zaman öbür tarafı (*diğer televizyon*) açıyorum. (Fahriye)

Centre who accepted to tell me about her life. She had a powerful speech, and unlike some of the women whom I always motivated to talk more by asking new questions, Nadya told about her life story in a quite personal way, without expecting from me to provide a plot. Here I will only touch upon her comments regarding the places where she had lived and her current home.

Nadya was an Armenian woman from Sivas. She described her family's former home in Sivas as a "*big, beautiful house*". When they came in Istanbul following the economic hardships caused by Wealth Tax (Varlık Vergisi) of 1942, they had to rent "*a little, lousy place*" until they could afford to buy a house. The flat where she was currently living was inherited from her husband. She was saying that she would be unable to live by her pension (600 TL) if she were not the owner of her flat, and was praying her husband's soul for providing her with good life conditions. As it is mentioned in the above section, Nadya was telling in her narrative that she was a very lively person before her husband's death, that she had had a lot of guests; but losing her loved one and getting old had changed her. On the first day that we met, we had this conversation:

Pınar: Maybe next time we can do a recorded interview, so that I can ask you some detailed questions...

Nadya: *I don't have any details, because I'm living alone.*⁸⁴

According to the description of her usage of her home that was included in our recorded interview, she had not only withdrawn from the social life, the space that she occupied in her private space had also shrunk after she was left alone:

I have a room in the back with my television and couch bed; I'm spending my time there. I'm eating in a tray, it doesn't get dirty. I used to love having guests, people were visiting, I was so vivacious. But old age and widowhood ruined me. Cupboards are full of plates, there are French plates in my place; but I'm heating my soup in a graniteware pot, putting in my table and eating in it. (*At this point her voice is trembling and I'm getting very worried that she would cry.*) For lunch, I'm heating my food with a graniteware plate, put the rice or pasta in another one, it goes like this. It is so hard.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Pınar: Belki gelecek sefer kayıt alarak konuşuruz, o zaman daha ayrıntılı sorular sorabilirim...

Nadya: Hiçbir ayrıntım yok, çünkü yalnız yaşıyorum.

⁸⁵ Zaten arkada bir odam var; televizyonum, çekyatım, orada oturuyorum. Tepside de yemeğimi yiyorum hep, kirlenmiyor. Çok severdim, misafiri olan, gelen-giden, hayat dolu bir

These words were incited by my questions about the housework: Nadya was telling that because she was using very little space in her flat, it was not getting dirty very easily. There was also a cleaner who was coming every month; she could afford to pay for this service unlike most of the other women. She was only using a part of her home, as if the others parts were occupied by her losses. As home was the site of preservation for objects as well as for memories, and Nadya was explaining that being lonely was emotionally very hard, despite its practicalities:

Nadya: Look, what I'm always saying is that loneliness is very bitter, but it's also very good. It's bitter; can you understand what I mean? But it's good, you go to sleep when you want to, get up when you want to, there's nobody who would be disturbed when you go toilet at night. There is nobody who would say "Ugh, mom! Ugh, auntie! Ugh!" You can do whatever you want to. That's good. But it's bitter. I'm coming here... There was a white-haired, do you remember her?

Pınar: I think I do...

Nadya: Aida... She also told you about herself, she said that she had two sons. Poor woman, she passed away in a month's time. That made us really sad. She deceased nine days ago. We've been sitting next to each other since three years, it really grieved me. We lost her.⁸⁶

The negative aspects of 'home' were related to her losses, while its positive aspects lied in its simplicity that she had put as 'not having any details'.

kadındım. Ama hem yaşlılık hem dulluk hayatı söndürdü. (Anneannem de aynısından bahsederdi, küçük bir kaptı ısıtıp yediğinden...) Büfeler tabak, Fransız tabakları var evimde. Ama emaye bir kaptı çorbamı ısıtıyorum, onunla önüme getiriyorum ve onunla yiyorum (Sesi titriyor). Öğlenleri emaye bir tabakta yemeğimi ısıtıyorum; yanında pilav, makarna varsa onu ayrı tabağa koyuyorum, öyle geçiyor. Çok zor. (Nadya)

⁸⁶ Bak, ben ne diyorum hep, yalnızlık çok acı ama çok da güzel. Çok acı yalnızlık, anlayabildiniz mi ne demek istediğimi? Ama güzel, istediğiniz saat uyuyorsunuz, istediğiniz saat kalkıyorsunuz; tuvalete kalkınca duyan yok, rahatsız olan yok. "Üf be teyze, üf be anne, üf be!" diyen yok. Yalnız, ne istesen onu yapabiliyorsun. O güzel. Ama acı. Yalnızlık acı. Buraya geliyorum. Burada bir beyaz saçlı hanım vardı, acaba hatırlar mısınız? (...) Ojen. Yazdırdı o da, iki oğlum var dedi. Bir ayın içinde kadıncağız vefat etti. Çok üzdü bizi o. Dokuz gün oldu daha vefatına. Üç senedir, o çok sene, ama üç senedir yan yana oturuyorduk, bana çok acı verdi. Onu kaybettik. (Nadya)

In my interview with Nadya, she was telling me that life conditions had molded her to have a tough, *manly* personality. As I was also planning to ask her about physical appearance and womanhood, I thought that this could be the right moment to link our conversation to the issues of bodily change. “What about the looks,” I asked, “that young woman usually spare a lot of time for?” She riposted:

Oh, don’t even ask about it! (*When I was young*) I had my lipstick and eyeliner all the time, I used to put on rouge, darken this beauty mark, and wear décolleté dresses... I was a very chic woman. Let me show you my engagement and wedding photos. (*She pulls out photos in a plastic envelope out of her little bag.*) This is me, aged 16, from the year when we came in Istanbul. This is my older sister, this is me here. This is my engagement photo and this is from my wedding. I was a chic, well-dressed woman. These earrings, my father didn’t allow me wear them (*during the ceremony*), I took them of and put in my pocket...⁸⁷

Especially one of those photos looked very beautiful to me, and I asked where it was taken. “It was taken in Foto Galatasaray,” Nadya said. That name was familiar to me, because there had been an exhibition of Maryam Şahinyan, photography artist and owner of the famous Foto Galatasaray. I got really excited and told Nadya that I knew about the artist, because a young curator had recently selected some photography from her archives for an exhibition, and also a book was published.⁸⁸ She had not heard about it, but she got very curious. Thinking that the exhibition was still on, “But I can’t go anywhere,” she complained, as she was scared of falling down. “It’s already finished anyway,” I said, “but I think I can bring you the book”. That week I went to Aras Publishing House to get a copy and brought it to Nadya. She was really happy, we looked through the pages of the book together and she said that she would read the texts at home. Actually she had also hoped to find a photo of someone from her family in the book, maybe a photo of her father; “Because he used to go to

⁸⁷ Nadya: Hayat bizi erkek karakterli yaptı. Güçlü yaptı.

Pınar: O arada genç kızların çok vakit ayırdığı giyim, makyaj...

Nadya: Aa, onu hiç deme! Ne rujum, ne kalemim; bu ben siyahlanır, allıklar sürülür, açık dekolteler giyilir... Çok süslü bir kadındım. Dur sana nişan - nikah resimlerimi göstereyim. (*Küçük çantasından, plastik bir zarfa konmuş fotoğraflar çıkarıyor.*) Bu on altı yaşında, İstanbul’a geldiğim senenin resmi. Bu ablam, bu ben. Bu da benim nişan fotoğrafım. Bu da evlilik fotoğrafım. Süslü, giyimli, şey bir kadındım. Daha bunlar da babam müsaade etmezdi, o sallama küpelerimi çıkarttım, cebime koydum.

⁸⁸ "FOTO GALATASARAY." *SALT: Foto Galatasaray*. Web. 13 Jan. 2013.

Şahinyan's studio a lot," she said. She commented that the majority of the photos in the book were photos of children and of families with children.

That week I could not go to Seniors Centre again. When I went there the following weekend, I approached Nadya to ask how she was. Her face saddened, and said that she had a little gift for me and she had been carrying it every day to the Centre, but she had left it at home that day because I had been absent all week. The woman sitting next to her confirmed: "*She brought it every day!*" I said that I was very sorry to hear this, and that I would definitely come the following day again.

My gift was a porcelain tea cup and an old dessert fork. "It's not something big, I brought that from home. I thought that you would remember me while you're having your morning coffee with this cup, and you can eat your cake with the fork," she said. She added that I had made her very happy, because she had been reading the book in the evenings throughout the week and it was all about her memories, the people that she had known, the places where she had lived. I find it very relevant that Nadya did not give me something new, but something from her home. As I had given her something related to her life story and her memories, she had reciprocated my gift by giving a piece of herself, something from her 'home'.

Nadya had read the book at her home, surrounded by the objects that sometimes grieved her, but which were also founding her sense of self. She was a collector of items: The photos in her little bag were bearing her stories (and those of her family) and the cup that she had given me belonged to the same personal history, it had been a part of her home, and now it was a part of mine. Iris Marion Young's view that the different meanings of 'home' have been understood without quickly dismissing it as a place of exploitation and/or privilege is relevant here. Also it is significant that all this discussion was incited by talking about how the participant used to look like before, and followed by *a story of the earrings in her pocket*. Twigg writes:

Garments or photographs give access to who we were at a particular time. We also recognise change in our lives by means of changes in dress: what I wore then and no longer do. The chronology of styles is thus part of how life stories are told (S. Woodward, 2007) (as paraphrased by Twigg, 2009).

My story of exchanging gifts with Nadya, I think, was instructive on a methodological/theoretical level too: It had taught me how material objects were giving access to memories and opening up the interpersonal communication between the researcher and the participant.

2.1.2.4 Housework and Care

It was common that most of the informants, while they were telling about an ordinary day, were saying that they were doing the housework in the morning before coming to the Seniors Centre. They might have retired, however the tasks to be accomplished at home had not finished, as

for women the boundary between paid work and the home is extremely blurred and (...) the idea of ‘retirement’ is itself a gendered concept because it ignores the unpaid domestic, caring and emotional work that older women continue to do (Maynard, et al. 2008, 70).

Even if they were still handling the housework, they were not capable of doing it with its old pace, as fatigue and other health problems were slowing them down. They rarely reported to be able to afford paying a cleaner.

Pınar: Are you doing the housework yourself?

Fahriye: I do, but I’m messy now. (*We both smile at this remark.*) I’m not that clean, dear. I mean, I can’t handle everything the way I like it. I’m still doing it, though. For instance, whereas everybody else is cleaning the windows every two weeks, I’m cleaning them once a month. Back then, when I was younger, my husband’s financial situation was good. I was also working when I got married for the second time, but it (*the financial situation*) was good. A cleaning lady used to come every week; she was taking care of it back then. Now I need a cleaning lady more than before, but there isn’t anybody. I’m obliged to do it (*the housework*); my financial situation doesn’t allow me (*to pay a cleaner*). I’m doing it myself even if it’s hard, but until when can I keep on?⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Yapıyorum ama pisim artık. (Gülümsüyor.) Çok da temiz değilim efendim. Çok şey yapamıyorum, yani herşey istediğim gibi olmuyor. Ama gene de yapıyorum. Mesela bir camı herkes 15 günde bir silerse ben ayda bir siliyorum ancak. Eskiden, genç şeyken kocamın maddi durumu iyiydi, ben çalışıyordum ama ikinci evliliğimi de yaptığım zaman, iyiydi. Her hafta kadın geliyordu, o zaman kadın yapıyordu. Asıl şimdi kadına ihtiyacım var. Şimdi yok...

In the daily routine of Fahriye, the cycle of the domestic work had widened (she was repeating the same tasks with longer intervals than the ‘conventional ones’) and this was expressed as ‘dirtiness’ compared with other women’s performances. Other informants also talked about being able to do housework only slowly, piece by piece and ‘imperfectly’.

Gülnaz’s account was especially significant in this respect, because she was still assuming all the responsibility of domestic labor despite her age and her health problems. She was living with her unmarried son who was 40 years old, but who was described rather like a child (“*Uslu bir oğlum var*”) in her narrative:

Gülnaz: I’m getting up in the morning, I’m doing the housework if I want to, leaving it if I don’t, and I go out. Nobody interferes; nobody tells me what to do. I have a well-behaved son, he doesn’t disturb me, and I don’t disturb him. He first belongs to God, then to me.⁹⁰

(...)

Gülnaz: I told my younger son: “A room wouldn’t be enough to keep your clothes.” I washed his clothes, you wouldn’t believe: Fifteen t-shirts, all getting dirty at the same time. I’m putting them in the washing machine. Still it’s not enough; he brings more, “Take this, mom”.⁹¹

(...)

When my son takes a bath, he’s going to the bathroom, one of his socks is left there, he asks “Where did I put the other one?”. He’s untidy, very untidy. “The bathroom is over there” I say, “and here is the washing machine”. Let’s say something happened to me in the street, let’s say I suddenly died... Somebody comes home, I say “Put it in the machine before they see”, but he doesn’t, it stays there.

Pınar: How old was he?

Gülnaz: He’s forty. He’s not a kid anymore, you cannot slap on his mouth for education...

Mecburum ben yapmaya, maddi gücüm de buna müsait değil. Fakat zor gele gele, kendim yapıyorum; ama ne zamana kadar? (Fahriye)

⁹⁰ Sabah kalkıyorum, evimin işini yapıyorum, istemezsem yapmıyorum, kapıyı kapatıyorum çıkıyorum. Karışanım yok, konuşanım yok. Uslu bir oğlum var, o bana karışmaz, ben ona karışmam. Önce Allah’ın, sonra benim. (Gülnaz)

⁹¹ Küçük oğlumun, “Bir oda yetmez senin bu eşyana,” dedim. İnanmazsınız tişörtlerini yıkadım, tiril tiril 15 tane, hepsi birden kirleniyor. Atıyorum makineye. O yetmiyor arkadan bir daha getiriyor “Al anne” diye. (Gülnaz)

Pınar: I thought he was younger...

Gülnaz: No. This morning I shouted at him. He first belongs to God, then to me. God forbid that I should see him in pain...⁹²

It must be added here that Gülnaz was very concerned about her son's future and she was almost sure that he would not be able to take care of himself alone. Her son was not willing to get married, and Gülnaz was thinking that he would be miserable in case she died, because he was not contributing at all to the domestic work. She wanted him to have a family, "How far one can keep hanging around?" she said.⁹³ Her case could be an illustration of how mothering was "recognized as lifelong commitments to care, love and providing hospitality" (Maynard, et al. 2008, 88). In the first section of this chapter, I had quoted Gülnaz's statements about self-sufficiency: She was not regarding herself as old because she was competent. It can be argued that while Gülnaz was did not need "constant care" as an old person, she was constantly caring for her son by accomplishing the household tasks.

Selda was one of my relatively younger interlocutors (63 years old) and she was married to a man who was older than her. Her husband was suffering from cardiac disease and his situation had gotten serious a couple of years ago. Now he had recovered (they were coming to the Seniors Centre together every day) but he needed to be cared. Because they had a bankruptcy story, their economic condition was not good.

Selda: There is an old, respectable man at home: My husband. I'm dedicated to him; my life is with him from now on. (...) If you ask me whether I would work or not, it's unlikely for me from now on. I have a husband waiting for me at home. There aren't any carers; I'm supposed to look after him.

Pınar: Is it hard to do the housework?

⁹² Gülnaz: Oğlum yıkanıyor, banyoya giriyor, ayıptır söylemesi, çorabı orada, "Öbürünü nereye koydum?"... Dağınık. Çok dağınık. Diyorum ki, "şurada banyo var, şurada çamaşır makinesi". Hadi bana bir şey oldu sokakta, öldüm gitti. "Eve birisi geldi, onu orada görene kadar makinenin içine at" derim, atmaz, orada durur.

Pınar: Kaç yaşındaydı?

Gülnaz: Kırk yaşında. Çocuk değil ki ağzına bir çarpasın.

Pınar: Daha genç sandım...

Gülnaz: Yok. Sabah ona bağırdım yani. Önce Allah'ın, sonra benim. Allah acılarını göstermesin.

⁹³ "Gez gez nereye kadar?"

Selda: Of course it is, after a certain age. It's not like before. I'm doing part of the cleaning today and part of it the next day. One day a week, like a cleaning woman, I'm cleaning the whole place. Moreover, I'm enjoying it. Because there is nothing else to do, it's the economic conditions. If the conditions are better you can hire a cleaning woman once a month; we're doing it sometimes, when we need.⁹⁴

Other participants talked about their health problems when they were asked about the housework:

I'm doing it slowly, piece by piece. Because I have asthma, I have diabetes...⁹⁵ (Nazife)

Paying, giving this (*making a gesture with her hand to imply money*) is not easy. Right? 100 TL, 125 TL per day. I'm doing what I can do, whether it is good or bad. I'm not that rigorous (*titiz*) either.⁹⁶ (Gülnaz)

Pınar: Do you have difficulties in doing the housework?

Arife: Yes I do. I'm a very clean person, I can't do it like I used to, I'm sick. I have diabetes, I hypertension. I'm sick, I'm not well.⁹⁷

Melahat: I'm doing it myself. We're doing it with great difficulty (*düşe kalka*), my son also helps. He does. We're taking care of ourselves, my child.

Pınar: You don't have somebody who helps? A cleaner I mean...

Melahat: No, we're doing it ourselves. I can't spare money for that, how would pay a cleaner? It's difficult, but what can I do? I'm hardly getting by...⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Yani benim yetmiş altı yaşında evde, senin ellerinden öptüğün bir amcan var, eşim, onunla endeks olmuşum, hayatım bundan sonrası onunla geçiyor. (...) Ha bu saatten sonra çalışır mısın? Benim için çok zor. Çünkü evde beni bekleyen bir eşim var. Bakımı yok. Yani mecburum ona bakmaya. (Selda)

⁹⁵ Eh işte, yavaş yavaş, ağır ağır. Çünkü astımım da var, şekerim de var. (Nazife)

⁹⁶ Vermek, (eliyle para işareti yaparak) bunu vermek kolay değil. Değil mi? Gündelik yüz lira, yüz yirmi beş lira. Yaptığım kadarı, iyi kötü. Çok da titiz de değilim. (Gülnaz)

⁹⁷ Pınar: Ev işlerinde zorlanıyor musunuz?

Arife: Zorlanıyorum. Çok temizim; yapamıyorum eskisi gibi, hastayım. Şeker var, tansiyon var. Hastayım iyi değilim.

All the narratives emphasized that the domestic tasks were handled with difficulty due to age, and that it was not possible to employ a paid domestic worker because of economic hardships. It is important to remember that none of the women had daughters or other female relatives in their household and this was causing them to undertake almost all the responsibilities themselves.⁹⁹

2.1.2.5 Ghost of the Nursing Home

All the women contributing to the research were ‘competant’ in terms of accomplishing their daily tasks. Because they were all able-bodied and none of them needed constant care, they were continuing to live alone or with husbands, partners and children. In some cases such as Gülnaz’s situation cited above, they were also keeping to provide care for their adult children. None of them were looking after their grandchildren, but they were being visited by them.

They were all stating that they were not needy (“*Kimseye muhtaç değiliz çok şükür*”). However, if dependency is not conceptualized only in the context of long-term care, they were all depending on relatives or friends to some extent. Martha Nussbaum points out that

all people in all societies are in need of care. Even so-called ‘normal’ and ‘able-bodied’ adults rely constantly on care provided by others in the fabric of their lives: people who cook meals and tend the home, providers of regular health care, people who prepare the external environment so that it is safe and conducive to ordinary functioning. At times during their lives the ‘normal’ have more acute needs for care: during an illness, for example, or after an accident. (Nussbaum 2004, 275)

⁹⁸ Melahat: Kendim yapıyorum. Düşe kalka yapıyoruz, oğlan yardım ediyor. Ediyor, kendimizi idare ediyoruz kızım.

Pınar: Yardımcı birisi gelmiyor...

Melahat: Yok, kendimiz yapıyoruz. Ben yetiştiremem ki, yardımcıya nasıl para vereyim? E tabii, zor oluyor ama ne yapayım? Ben anca geçim sağlıyorum.

⁹⁹ It cannot, of course, be assumed that the household requirements would be necessarily undertaken by other women if the informants were living with family. However, their responses can be compared with other case studies where the informants who were “living with family felt ‘completely retired’ because daughters-in-law were taking on the responsibilities of cooking and housework” (Maynard, et al. 2008, 70).

The informants were depending on *the moral economy of kin* in case they needed care (Maynard, et al. 2008, 73-95). Nazife was telling that her daughter and her son had come to care for her when she was ill, and that they had brought food from restaurants. For Şake, Luiz and Anais -her old friends from Baruthane Street, who were also coming to the Seniors Centre regularly- had cooked during a recent illness, and they had also accompanied her by staying over for a couple of days.¹⁰⁰ Despite the fact that she was complaining about her children and especially about her daughter-in-law a lot, Arife expressed that her youngest son was always keeping an eye on her. Thus, saying that “one did not depend on anybody” meant to say that one did not need help from people outside the moral economy of the kin and from the state. In her account Gülnaz was emphasizing the economic self-sufficiency:

Pınar: Which aspects of your live are you happy about?

Gülnaz: I mean, *not being in need*, this is the thing that I appreciate the most, that I’m happy about. Not opening my hand I mean (*like a beggar*), not being in need. Days go by, even if they’re monotonous.¹⁰¹

Some of them said that they did not have many belongings, but that what they had was enough for them (“*Bize yetiyor*”). In case they would need extensive care, their children were supposed to protect them.

I argue that these affirmations about being competent and not destitute were also related to the negative images of nursing homes in the media and to the news about elderly abuse. Living with family was the culturally acceptable way of life for old people; supported and reproduced by media imagery, and by JDP’s discourse of social policies. Living in an institution meant that one had a ‘bad family’ that left her *to the mercy of* the strangers or of the state. This was contributing to the negative, feared picture of the nursing homes, a picture in which the informants were not willing to imagine themselves:

¹⁰⁰ These women were not relatives but life-long friends from the Armenian community of Şişli. Still, the relation between them can also be included in the moral economy of kin, as for minority ethnic communities in particular, “the idea of ‘the family’ goes beyond those who might be regarded as just ‘immediate’ members”(Maynard, et al. 2008, 77).

¹⁰¹ Pınar: Hayatınızın memnun olduğunuz yönleri neler?

Gülnaz: Yani muhtaç olmayayım, en beğendiğim, memnun olduğum şey. Elimi açmayayım yani, muhtaç olmayayım. Ama yavan, geçiyor yani.

Pınar: How did you use to imagine old age when you were young? Were you scared?

Melahat: “God forbid that we should be in need”, I used to say. This was my prayer, dear. I didn’t have anything else, my child. “God forbid that we should be in need, God forbid that we should depend on sons and daughters.” My sons are dutiful though. Especially my younger son, he would never leave me. They both say: “If one of our shoulders is aching, we would still carry you on the other”.

Old age is good if you have a carer, my child. If nobody looks after you, it’s difficult. Thank God, my children are looking after me. Thank heaven for my children! Did you understand child?

Pınar: What do you think about nursing homes?

Melahat: My children say, “As long as we’re alive we wouldn’t leave you to those kind of places”.

Pınar: You have your children, but what about people who don’t have children or whose children cannot look after them?

Melahat: It’s difficult, very difficult my child. My older son now lives in Bakırköy, my younger one is with me. He always says “Don’t worry mom, I’ll take care of you until I die, and if I die...” “God forbid, my son, that you die before me!” I say. Isn’t it true, my child?¹⁰²

In another interview, after telling me that she was still doing the housework without any professional help -albeit slowly and ‘imperfectly’- Fahriye added:

I can keep doing it (*the housework*), if I survive, for two more years at most. Then I’d probably need a helper: I don’t know what the State’s condition would be then, what it would provide for us. If I can’t manage, then I’d go to a nursing home. I don’t want to be in a nursing home, it’s ‘peaceful’ (*‘huzurlu’*), but... It’s peaceful for the world, but I

¹⁰² Pınar: Gençliğinizde nasıl düşünürdünüz yaşlılığı, korkar mıydınız?

Melahat: Yok yok, “Allah,” diyordum “ele avuca bırakmasın yaşlılıkta”. Hep duam buydu kızım. Başka bir şeyim yoğudu yavrum. Allah ele avuca bırakmasın, “Oğlum, kızım” dedirtmesin. Gerçi oğullarım hayırlıdır. Hele küçük oğlum, hiç beni kimselere vermez. Ama ikisi de, “*Bir omzumuz ağrırsa birinde taşırık, bir omzumuz ağrırsa birisinde taşırık*” derler. Yaşlılık iyi de bakanın olacak kızım. Bakanın olmazsa zor. Çok şükür benim çocuklarım bakıyor bana. Çok binlerce şükür çocuklarıma. Anladın mı yavrum?

Pınar: Bakım evi, huzurevi gibi yerler hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

Melahat: Benim çocuklarım diyor ki, “*Ben ölmedikten sonra seni oralara koymayız,*” diyor.

Pınar: Sizin çocuklarınız var ama çocuğu olmayan ya da çocuğunun durumu olmayan birisi için...

Melahat: E zor, çok zor yavrum. Benim çocuklarım şimdi büyüğüm Bakırköy’de oturuyor, küçüğüm yanımda. Her zaman der ki, “*Ana hiç merak etme, seni ben ölene kadar (bırakmam), aha ben ölmüşüm ne yapayım,*”, “*Allah korusun yavrum, benim üstüme bir avuç toprak at*” diyorum. Öyle ya kızım, değil mi?

don't have to experience it, I think. It's obligatory in a country, it's necessary, obligatory for a social state. However it's an exigency to live there and it's best to live in my own home as long as possible. One cannot stand other people making decisions for them, in old age it's even harder to stand. But when you go there, the place has its own rules and regulations. And not everybody shares the same cultural level there, caretakers and suchlike... They would try to exercise control in their own way or treat you as 'old' or 'loony' ('*bunak*'). If you use a wrong word, you'd immediately be called a 'loony'.¹⁰³

Fahriye had similar worries of being despised as a 'loony' in the Seniors Centre too:

Even here it happens, among friends. When you're good, you're good. "Nobody begs you to come here", I say. "Don't come, madam, if you're not pleased with us. With our way of talking, with our life, with our stuff... Don't come then, this place is made for us". There are some of us who got retired younger, I'm referring to them. "This place is made for us. Find yourself another place, please. We're content here".

The age limit for housework that Fahriye set for herself was 80. She was not expecting to be cared by her son after 80; and she was the only informant in my research who was considering the nursing home as a viable option for the future, even if she was expressing a strong preference not to live there. She also had brought this topic up without being questioned about it, differently from all the others. She feared of losing her autonomy and sense of agency; institutional life's rules looked oppressive to her. In addition, she was worried about being with (and especially cared by) her class "others". The unwanted situations that she mentioned involved symbolic violence (of the unfair treatment by people "who don't have the same cultural level") rather than physical abuse. In the context of the Seniors Centre, she was also complaining about the attitudes of the younger ones: The same possibility of being called a 'loony' existed there too (this time by her generation "others"); however Fahriye was reclaiming the institution as a space dedicated to "them", implying people of her age. Thus, although she was stating that nursing homes were social policy requirements, she was opting

¹⁰³ Onu da yani, yaşarsam ancak iki sene daha yapabilirim. Ama ondan sonra bir yardımcıya ihtiyacım olacak herhalde. Bilemiyorum o zaman da devletin durumu ne olur, bize ne verir. Yapamazsam o zaman huzurevine giderim. Huzurevini istemiyorum, orası "huzurlu", ama... Dünya için huzurlu, ama yaşamam şart değil, ben öyle görüyorum. Bir memlekette olması şart. Lüzumlu, bir devlet için, sosyal bir devlet için çok şart. Ama orada yaşamak da mecburiyet, mümkün olduğu kadar kendimce evimde yaşamak en güzeli... Ne olursa olsun, insan başkasının kendi için karar vermesine de dayanamıyor, yaşlanınca hiç dayanamıyor. Ama oraya gidince oranın kuralları var, kaideleri var. Sonra orada kimse, herkesin orda kültürü bir değil, bakıcılar filan. Orada kendilerine göre baskı kurmak, sizi 'yaşlı' veya 'bunak'... Orada yanlış bir kelime kullansa, size hemen 'bunak'... (Fahriye)

for staying at her home and coming to the institution on a daily basis where she had the feeling to be recognized as an individual; she was maintaining her selfhood as an autonomus agent who makes her own decisions.¹⁰⁴ She was attached to her home as “‘the place’ that best support[ed] an independent identity” (Russell 1999, 52).

Selda’s views were also positive about nursing homes as a service that had to be provided. However she was formulating this as an issue which was not pertaining to her life:

I think it’s very healthy, I wish more places of this kind would open. Because there is a great need for that kind of places; nursing homes, old age institutions. Let’s say that a building like this (*Seniors Centre*) was reserved to the old people as a nursing home, I would be very happy. There should be more than a few known places such as İzzet Baysal or Darülaceze, I would support this. And when one goes there they should immediately accept, *because we have our old people just like we have our young ones*. I would evaluate this positively.¹⁰⁵

This narrative was looking at the nursing homes as a societal issue and it was rather impersonal, as if the informant was expressing her position for a public opinion poll. Old people were seen as “a population”, using a generalized discourse (similar to the institutional discourse of the *Seniors Centre*) with the pronoun ‘we’.

2.1.3 Appearance: Clothing and Hair

One of my motives in choosing to work on old age was to talk about the bodily change with the participants. Later, my fieldwork experience showed that it was very difficult, at least for me, to gather self-reflexive accounts on the body. However, it was always possible to talk about clothing as an everyday bodily practice, oscillating between generalizations of “how an old lady ought to look like” and more personalized accounts of the participants’ own clothing

¹⁰⁴ It is important to remind at this point that Fahriye was an informant who had a ‘life story’ that had unfolded as our interview had progressed; and she had told it without waiting for me to ask questions. Hers was a very individual and reflexive account; she was explaining her opinions about different subjects, commenting on her past decisions, etc.

¹⁰⁵ Çok sağlıklı bulurum onu, daha çok açılmasını isterim. Çünkü çok ihtiyaç var böyle yerlere, huzurevine, yaşlılar evine. Şişli’de, atıyorum Feriköyü’nde, böyle bir binayı dinlenme yeri yapmışlar yaşlılara, çok mutlu olurum. Sadece belirli yerler, İzzet Baysal, Darülaceze, buna benzer yerler olmasın; daha çok olsun. İsterim bunu. Gidildiği zaman da hemen kabul edilsin isterim çünkü gencimiz olduğu kadar yaşlılar da var. Sağlıklı bakarım. (Selda)

habits¹⁰⁶. Thus, rather than insisting on ‘intimate’ accounts which required a self-reflexive look on physicality, I decided to look at clothing in its interplay with body (Twigg 2007, 291).

It was common that when I was asking them about self-care, beauty and clothes; women were talking about “being neat” and “knowing how to dress appropriately” (“*nasıl giyineceğini bilmek*”). The latter phrase was generally employed by women with middle-class backgrounds, in order to imply that they possessed the knowledge of certain dressing codes and that they were capable of “meet[ing] the standards required by the moral order of the social space” (Twigg 2007, 295). They usually talked about the color and the cut of the clothes when they were asked to explain the notion of propriety further. Neatness was the more general, minimum requirement; and its use meant that one was maintaining a ‘presentable’ social appearance. Twigg writes:

Lapses of dress, like stains, visible food marks and gaping buttons, do not just offend against the performance norms of the social space, but signal a social and moral decline that may threaten a person’s capacity to remain part of mainstream society. In the context of old age (...) the erotic evaporates, to be replaced by the untidy and derelict. Older people are thus caught within an altogether harsher moral climate in relation to dress – harsher at least if they do not want to accept the reduced and changed identities that such sartorial failings signal – a climate that disciplines and judges their bodies more strictly than those of younger people (295).

Thus, the participants were careful about their clothes and saying that they were dressing neatly all the time. Though clothing choices were changing according to the class backgrounds and individual biographies, ‘neatness’ was a common sensibility.

In her interview, Nazife was stating that she had not been able to care for herself when she was young because of the economic restraints of founding a family. She was expressing a desire to look beautiful, while also finding the beauty of old age ‘illusiv’, as if it was trying to conceal the aged self:

Pinar: Do you think that one’s worries about her looks change over the time, as she gets older?

¹⁰⁶ I got an initial clue that clothing could a topic stimulating the talk about body when I doing a preliminary interview with my father's almost eighty year aunt. She was complaining that she could not pick the right sized clothes when she was shopping. Her posture had changed with old age, her back was stooped and this was making very hard and painful for her to try the clothes on in the store. She was finding later, at home, that the clothes did not fit her.

Nazife: It doesn't change, it increases even more. You want to be young, you envy youth, you observe it... Maybe I didn't do much when I was young, but when one gets old she desires everything. *You want to be neat*, "let's dye my hair properly"... I dyed it, did you see? I got highlights. (...) *You want to be good, healthy*. Of course it cannot compare to youth, but we don't want to acknowledge this. (...) When we were young we didn't strive too much, we were beautiful. We were young. We didn't even put a lotion. Something for the lips, some rouge, done! We were beautiful women. But it's gone now.¹⁰⁷

Nazife had gone to the municipality's hairdressing school for getting her hair dyed. She told me that it was 25 TL, cheaper than a regular hairdresser which would cost her around 60-75 TL.

Nazife: *One should dress appropriately for her age*, that's what I think. It should be plain. If you wear too much beads and stuff it's inappropriate, absurd. I'm not young to wear fussy accessories. We didn't do it when we were young but now we regret it. Back then we didn't have money to spend on these, we were raising children. We got our children engaged, married. We had grandchildren and we bought things for them. Now I have asthma, I have a sour throat and asthma...¹⁰⁸

In the above passage, Nazife abruptly starts to talk about her health problems because she makes an association between youth, beauty and health, as opposed to old age and decay.

Pınar: You were very elegant on the press statement though (*Mustafa Sarıgül's press statement introducing the +65 Campaign*).

¹⁰⁷ Pınar: İnsanın görünüşüyle ilgili kaygıları yaşlandıkça azalıyor mu sizce, değişiyor mu?
Nazife: Değişmiyor ki, daha çok artıyor. Genç olayım diyorsun, gençliğe imreniyorsun, gençliğe heves ediyorsun, bakıyorsun. Belki ben gençliğimde yapmadım ama yaşlanınca insanın canı herşeyi istiyor. Temizlik istiyorsun, "Saçımı güzel boyayayım"... Bak ben boyadım görmedin mi? Röfle yaptırdım. (...) Yani öyle, heves ediyorsun, iyi olayım diyorsun, sağlıklı olayım diyorsun. Tabii ki gençlikteki şeyleri geçmiyor ama biraz üstümüze mal etmek istemiyoruz. (...) O zaman zaten bakmıyorduk ki kendimize doğru dürüst, güzeldik. Gençtik. Bir krem bile sürmüyorduk yani. Bir dudağımıza, bir allık, tamam. Güzeli kadındık. Ama şimdi kalmadı onlar.

¹⁰⁸ Yaşına göre giyineceksin yani ben öyle düşünüyorum. Sade. Öyle çok boncuklu moncuklu öteli berili giyersen ayıp olur, abes düşer. Genç değilim ki ben herşeyleri takıp takıştırırım. Gençlikte yapmadık ama şimdi de yapmadığımızı pişmanız. O zaman elde avuçta yoktu o kadar yani alamıyorduk, çoluk çocuk büyüttük. Çocuk evlendirdik, çocuk nişanladık. Torunlarımız oldu, onlara aldık. Şimdi de işte astımım var. Boğazlarım ağrıyor ya işte astımım da var. (Nazife)

Nazife: I had a blouse and trousers, that's all. We were elegant but nothing to exaggerate. No matter how elegant we are, *the age gives us away*.¹⁰⁹

Gülnaz also talked about the relation between clothing and economic power:

Gülnaz: I like clothing, I like it. I would like to wear a new garment everyday. (...) Sometimes there is a very wealthy person, but we're saying "Look at the way she's dressed". Is this what you're asking about? (*It is not, but I am encouraging her to proceed anyway*.) I'm saying, and somebody else can also say, "If I were in her place, each day I would wear something new". Because she has 'this' (*making a gesture meaning money with her hand*).

Pınar: Can you describe what you don't like in this person?

Gülnaz: I don't like the way she's dressed. It's not dirty but it's shabby (*'şaldır şuldur'*). (*We're both laughing*.) It should be like this, with that wealth (*drawing a vertical line with her index finger and thumb*). I'm a tailor, but I stopped now. My eye is gone, my arm is gone...¹¹⁰

Gülnaz told me that a friend of hers was helping her out to dye her hair as she could not reach out back because of her shoulder.

Fahriye told me that she was altering her old clothes and still buying some good quality garments when she had the money. Her habit to sew clothes and adapt the older ones had initially started after her second husband's bankruptcy. Back then, it was the husband who was sewing clothes for his wife, and she still had the same sewing machine today. Fahriye was also cutting her own hair and dyeing it.

I have a young grandchild; she buys something and wears it for a couple of times, then she doesn't like it anymore. They give it to me. But always good quality clothes... Back then I used to buy -because my husband's financial situation was good- clothes from quality brands, from big stores. When my husband went bankrupt, "I'm gonna

¹⁰⁹ Pınar: Basın toplantısında çok şıktınız...

Nazife: Bluz giydim, pantolon giydim o kadar. Başka birşey giymedim. Öylesine şıktık yani, öyle aman aman değildik. Yaşımıza göre ne kadar şık olsak, yaş insanı ele veriyor.

¹¹⁰ Gülnaz: Giyimi çok severim, her gün yeni bir şey giyeyim isterim (...) Mesela onda çok para var ama şunun giyimine bak diyoruz, o bakımdan mı soruyorsunuz? Halbuki diyorum ben onun yerinde olsam, ben de başkası da diyebilir, her dakika bir şey giyerim. Bu var çünkü (*eliyle para işareti yapıyor*).

Pınar: Neyi beğenmezsiniz mesela?

Gülnaz: Giyimini beğenmem. Pis değil ama *şaldır şuldur* bir şey! (İkimiz de gülüyoruz.) Artık, o varlığa, böyle olması lazım (*hava düz bir çizgi çekerek 'kalem gibi' işareti yapıyor*). Ben terziyim, ama şimdi değil, bıraktım artık. Göz gitti, kol gitti...

buy bad clothes” I said. Back then I didn’t have the grandchild either. He said, “Don’t ever do that”. In İstiklal Avenue, next to Lebon Patisserie, I had my tailor. He was very famous at that time, Ömer Yangın; he was the best women’s tailor in Istanbul and he used to dress us. My suits were made by him. He (*her husband*) was his nephew. He said “I saw how it was cut and sewn” and he sewed very pretty things for me. Also, I was going to Akhisar (*her native city*); there were great tailors in Akhisar. For instance a coat from 17 years ago, it’s so beautiful... Yesterday I wore a suit, everybody liked it a lot. And I’m capable of adapting them (*the clothes*); they changed shape so many times...¹¹¹ (Fahriye)

Fahriye’s narrative was giving references to her consumer dispositions: She used to buy from once well-known stores and she was dressed by the best women’s tailor of Istanbul. Even though her economic situation had changed, she was still able to maintain a clothing style that was praised by her friends.

She’s sending to me anoras, cashmire clothes; I’m thankful. If I can use my money carefully, I’m not buying cheap clothes either. As they’re getting deformed easily, you can’t use those for a long time. I don’t buy cheap clothes. If I’m giving it to someone else as a gift, then it’s okay.

My shoes are old-fashioned, they’re old. When I had bought them from Nişantaşı I had paid 145 Liras I think. This is the final year, I’m gonna throw them away. Back then we used to buy from Lion in İstiklal Avenue. Everything used to be expensive; but we were staying in the hospital, we weren’t spending money on food either. How would you spend the money? Buying bags and shoes...¹¹² (Fahriye)

¹¹¹ Genç bir torunum var, bir tane birşey alır, 3 gün giyer beğenmez, o bana kalır. Ama hep kaliteli şeyler. Sonra, eskiden ben hiçbir zaman, kocamın maddi durumu iyi olduğu için, marka alırdım, giderdim büyük mağazalardan alırdım. Fakat sonra kocam iflas edince alamam, dedim ki “kötü şeyler alayım”. O zaman torun da yoktu. “Sakın öyle bir şey yapma” dedi. İstiklal Caddesi Lebon Pastanesi’nin dibinde terzim vardı -o zamanlar çok meşhurdu Ömer Yangın, bir numaralı kadın terzisiydi- onun yeğeniydi. Ömer Yangın Bey bizi giydirdi. Tayyörlerim ona aitti. Kocam dedi “Ben gördüm nasıl yapıldığını, biçildiğini” ve bana çok güzel şeyler dikti. Sonra, Akhisar’a gidiyordum ya, Akhisar’da çok iyi terziler vardı. Bir palto, mesela 17 sene önceki palto o kadar güzel ki. Dün bir tayyör giydim, herkes çok beğendi. Bir de onları değiştirmek elimden gelir, kaç kere şekil değiştirmiştir. (Fahriye)

¹¹² Angoralar, kaşmirler; eksik olmasın o gönderiyor. Ben de paramı dikkatli kullanırsam ucuz şeyler almıyorum genellikle. Çünkü hem deforme oluyorlar, hem az kullanıyorsunuz. (...) Ucuz şey almam. Birisine vereceksem hediye, o zaman olur... Pabuçlarım da demode, eski. Ama ben bunu Nişantaşı’ndan aldığım zamanlar o zaman 145 liraya mı ne almıştım. Bu sene son, atacağım. O zamanlar Lion’dan alırdık, İstiklal caddesinde. Herşey pahalıydı, ama biz hastanede yatıp kalkıyoruz, yiyecek masrafımız yok, o yüzden para kalıyor. Nereye harcanacak, çantaya pabuçlara. (Fahriye)

Even though she could not buy from prestigious stores anymore, Fahriye was accomplishing to conform to her social milieu by using her granddaughter's good-quality clothes or modifying her old ones.

Perihan's account was emphasizing that she knew how to dress appropriately, while also positing that she was "not dressing according to her age". Thus, she was both creative in terms of style and not too far from societal norms. In fact, it was her knowledge about social boundaries that was permitting her to have an individual style. She was also making an association between respect and clothing, saying that she was "changing accordingly" when she was invited to the activities of the municipality:

When I go somewhere I dress very elegantly. But here, it's rather like a school. *I'm dressing neatly of course, it's required to be neat*; but everybody wears a regular blouse to come here. But when we go somewhere else we change, we become more flamboyant. I don't dress according to my age, *but I know how to dress appropriately*. I dress very well, but I know how to dress appropriately. When we go to a meeting I show great respect. Sarigül invites us and we attend, then we change accordingly.¹¹³ (Perihan)

When she says that she is not dressing according to her age, Perihan probably refers to "pale, drab colours and loose, shapeless forms underwrit[ing] invisibility" (Twigg 2007, 302) and asserts that she does not wear these.

Melahat, on the other hand, was concerned with the more practical requirements of everyday life and she gave more straightforward answers to my questions as usual (similar to her answers about 'age' and 'home'). Laboring and consuming for her appearance were habits belonging to youth, a completed period of her life. She did not want to care about these anymore, for old age had other priorities such as 'not being needy':

Melahat: Of course, you cannot keep doing what you were previously doing (*in terms of appearance*)...

Pınar: Why?

¹¹³ Ben bir yere gittiğim zaman gayet güzel giyinirim. Ama burada, şey gibi, okul gibi. Temiz tabii, temiz olmak şarttır, herkes bluzunu giyer gelir. Ama bir yere giderken tabii değişiyoruz. Daha böyle frapan oluyoruz. Benim yaşıma göre giyinmem ben, ama bilirim ne giyeceğimi. Çok güzel giyinirim ama bilirim ne giyeceğimi. Ama saygım sonsuzdur toplantıya gittiğimiz zaman. Sarigül çağırır gideriz, o zaman değişiriz, ona göre. (Perihan)

Melahat: How can you keep doing it? Before we used to doll ourselves up and gallowant. *Now it's gone. I can't find it in my heart to go anywhere, and can you believe it, I don't have a desire to wear anything.*

Pınar: How did you use to wear your hair before?

Melahat: I used to have a chignon, I liked it a lot. My hair was long and I used to wear it as a chignon. Now I gave everything up, sweetie. *(Melahat has pretty short, white hair.)*

Pınar: Maybe it's easier like this... When did you get it short?

Melahat: I'm like this long since. I'm not dyeing it either.

Pınar: It's nice though...

Melahat: Enough... We lived. We lived our youth while it lasted. From now on, God forbid that we should be needy! That's the important part for us, isn't it?¹¹⁴

Similarly, Arife did not show any interest in talking about clothes, but said in the interview that she was a very neat person. Another time, when I was having tea with her, she told me a story related to clothing's social implications in Seniors Centre. Arife was the only woman with a headscarf among my informants. She was knotting it under her chin, in a more 'traditional' style. She did not have a fixed place to sit in the main hall and complained of the other women nagging her about the place where she sits. She told me that some of the women had once said that it was not possible for her to sit among them, because she had a headscarf ("*Sen kapalısın, aramıza gelme*"). To express her feelings in response to this attitude, she said that *she has always been dressing very neatly, always wearing the headscarf and that she never had dyed her hair*, showing me the white hair which was barely visible under the

¹¹⁴ Melahat: Tabii canım. O şimdikini, evvelkini yapamazsın ki kızım.

Pınar: Neden?

Melahat: Evvelkini nasıl yapacaksın ki, evvelce giyinirdik kuşanırdık, gezerdik tozardık. Şimdi, yok yok. Hiçbir yeri gönlüm istemiyor, hiçbir şeyi de, inanır mısın, giymek istemiyorum.

Pınar: Saçlarınızı nasıl yapardınız eskiden?

Melahat: Saçlarımı topuz yapardım, çok severdim. Uzundu, böyle topuz yapardım. Şimdi herşeyden vazgeçtim ablacım.

Pınar: Böyle daha rahat oluyordur. Ne zamandır böyle?

Melahat: Epeydenir böyleyim işte, saçlarımı da daha boyamıyorum.

Pınar: Böyle güzel...

Melahat: Yeter... Yaşadık. Yaşadığımız kadar gençliğimizi yaşadık. Bundan sonra Allah ele avuca bırakmasın yavrum. Önemli olan bize o, değil mi?

headscarf. Emphasizing on the continuity of her appearance and her tidyness, she was reacting against her marginalization.

There were other women emphasizing continuity, but from a different position. These women told that they were continuing to maintain a modern feminine style. Ayşe, who was 61 years old, explained that aging had not made any changes in her habits:

I'm continuing to dress as I used to. There's no change, I'm trying to be well-groomed (*bakımlı*). But maybe, if I used to wear short skirts and such, I changed those. More appropriate for my age... *And when I'm saying "appropriate", I don't mean "I have to wear black, this doesn't suit me" kind of thinking.* I'm trying to be well groomed, as much as I can. I do most things on my own but I go to the hairdresser too, I didn't change those habits. (...) Maybe there's something brought by the working life, a routine. When I was going out on the street I always used to think "I have to be well-groomed; everything has to be complete"; and this goes the same.¹¹⁵ (Ayşe)

Pınar: Do you think that one's clothing habits change over time?

Selda: I never had an obsession like that, because I'm a woman who gets a lot of looks (*"çok bakılan bir kadını"*). I was always a pretty woman and people always stared at me. It doesn't matter whether I wear cotton (*basma*), flannel or silk: They would all suit me! That's why I didn't have any complexes; "Would you wear red?" Yes, I would. I would wear now, too. "Would you wear deep décolleté dresses?" No. That I didn't wear when I was young either and I wouldn't now, because Turkish society doesn't allow this. *That's why I both protected and lived.*¹¹⁶ (Selda)

Selda's narrative had a hybrid form here, pointing to her modesty created in the intersection of the discourses of traditionality and modernity. She conformed to the ideal of

¹¹⁵ Ben aynen devam ediyorum. Hiçbir şeylik yok, bakımlı olmaya gayret ediyorum. Şöyle olabilir, eskiden daha minidir filan giyiniyorsam onları değiştirdim yani. Daha yaşıma uygun, ama yaşıma uygun derken yani "Siyah seçeceğim," yok "Bu bana uymaz" falan diye düşünmüyorum. Bakımlı olmaya da gayret ediyorum. Olabildiğim kadar. Çoğu şeyi kendim yapıyorum ama kuaföre falan da giderim, onlarda bir değişiklik yapmadım. (...) Belki çalışma hayatının getirdiği bir şey var, rutin var yani, sokağa çıkarken "Bakımlı olmam lazım, herşeyin tam olması lazım," diye düşünüyordum; böyle de devam ediyor. (Ayşe)

¹¹⁶ Benim öyle bir takıntım olmadı çünkü ben çok bakılan bir kadını. Hayatım boyunca hep hoş bir kadın oldum. Hep bana bakıldı. Basma da giysem yakışır, pazen de giysem yakışır, ipek de giysem yakışır. Yani onun için öyle bir kompleksim olmadı, "Kırmızı giyer misiniz?", giyerim. Şu anda da giyerim. "Çok dekolte giyer misiniz?", hayır. Onu yıllar önce de giymedim genç yıllarımda. Şimdi de giymem çünkü Türk toplumu buna müsait bir toplum değil. *Ondan dolayı hem korudum, hem yaşadım.* (Selda)

the Republic as a woman who knew how to act. Her last sentence expresses that she had found ways to be attractive without standing out by transgressing traditional society's 'sensibilities'. However, she did not specify any objects in that sentence: What was "both protected and lived"? The verb 'to live' is intransitive, however 'to protect' is a transitive verb that requires *an object*. Following Iris Marion Young, I argue that it is the participant's body that is ambiguously pointed here. Young writes:

a woman frequently does not trust the capacity of her own body to engage itself in physical relation to things. Consequently she lives her body as a burden, *which must be dragged and prodded along at the same time as protected*. (quoted in Frost 2001)

Thus, Selda had both inhabited her body and protected it against criticism, sexual abuse, stigmatization, etc. Without crossing the boundaries of respectability, she could manage to get looks not *in an appropriate way*.

Şake's narrative that will be conveyed below also deals with 'tradition' and rejects the constraints that it is said to impose on women's lives.

2.1.3.1 "This neither suits my profession, nor my personality"

One of the participants of this study, Şake, was a hairdresser. She had referred to herself as Baruthaneli, meaning that she had grown up together with other women that she was sitting together during the interview¹¹⁷, in the avenue where the Seniors Centre is today located. Throughout her life she had provided healthcare in intensive care units, run beauty parlors, worked for women as well as for men. She had also done a TV show on a health channel, and she told me that she had even hosted a guest from Kars following that show: A young woman who was preparing for her wedding but who was not able to wear high-heeled shoes because of her callosity problem had come to find her, and she had healed her feet. Then she showed me Luiz who was sitting next to her:

Şake: And she's a very old model of mine. She's my model, with her hair. She has done modeling for me and I won a prize with her hair; it was very beautiful back then. Then there were (*other contests in*) Ankara, İzmir; but my father didn't allow me to go. It didn't use to be like today. One couldn't say "I'm going mom, see you!" like that, I

¹¹⁷ Ben doğma büyüme buralıyım, Baruthaneliyim. Onlar da buralı. Komşu olarak, mahalleden. (Şake)

mean. But I won the prize here. Then I went to London for design courses. (...) Two years ago I went to America; there I had a certificate of achievement. I have my cousins there. I'm consoling myself with these (*certificates and prizes*), with photos and such, sweetie.

Pınar: Are you still cutting and dyeing you hair yourself? (*She has blonde hair with a touch of pink*)

Şake: I'm cutting my own hair. I can't trust my friends because they're cutting it very short; and I don't like short hair. But I'm getting it dyed. When it's shorter, I'm dyeing it myself.

Pınar: What about your manicure?

Şake: I'm getting it done, always by my students. They would all do, none would object.

Pınar: Were there any changes in your habits as you were getting older?

Şake: (*A bit uncompromisingly*) Why should there be? (*Ne âlâkası var?*)

Pınar: But it happens sometimes, people try to adjust themselves by saying "I can't do this or that anymore"...

Şake: Yes, "What would I do with this after this age", "It's not necessary for me"... This happens, our traditions bring this. This doesn't, of course, suit my profession or my mentality. But lots of people have this.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Şake: Bu da benim çok eski mankenimdir. Benim mankenim, saçından mankenim. Mankenliğimi yaptı ve bunun saçıyla, çok güzeldi zamanında da, birinciliği aldım. Sonra Ankara, İzmir çıktı ama rahmetli babacığım göndermedi. O dönemde de böyle serbestlik yoktu, "Hadi ben gidiyorum anne, Allahasımarladık" diyemiyorsun yani. Sonra burada aldıktan sonra Londra'ya gittim. Londra'da şov şeyi aldım, dizayn dersi aldım. (...) Amerika'ya gittim teşekkür aldım geldim, iki sene evvel. Orada kuzenlerim var benim, baba tarafı, Oraya gittim bir teşekkür aldım geldim. İşte onlarla da avunuyorum böyle, resimlerle bilmem nelerle avunuyorum canım benim.

Pınar: Hala kesip boyuyor musunuz saçınızı?

Şake: Ben kendim keserim saçımı. Saçımı kendim keserim. Arkadaşlarıma itimat edemiyorum çünkü çok kısa kesiyorlar, ben de kısa saçı sevmiyorum. Ama boyama filan gidiyorum. Kısa olduğu zaman kendim boyuyorum.

Pınar: Tırnaklarınızı?

Şake: Onları yaptırıyorum, talebelerim benim, hepsi talebelerim. Yapıyorlar. Kime gitsem yapar. Hiç itirazım yok.

Pınar: Zamanla alışkanlıklarınızda değişiklikler oldu mu?

Şake: (*Hafifçe sertleşerek*) Ne alakası var?

Pınar: Ama oluyor bazen, "uygun olmaz" diyen...

Şake had a different relation with the labor involved in self-care, because it was her profession. She was able to take care of her appearance through a social network and skills related to her occupation. She even had styled Luiz's husband's hair for a contest. Hair and manicure were important aspects of her identity and she also challenging the normative expectations by her physical appearance. She was individually portrayed in the Facebook page of Seniors Centre with her distinguishing manicure and rings.

2.1.3.2 White Hair and Piercing

It was peculiar that all women were commenting on my appearance, hair or clothes. When they were realizing that I had a lot of white hair, they were always advising me not to pluck those because then they would multiply. While I was interviewing Fahriye, a younger woman sitting at the same table said: *"Look at this; she has white hair at this young age"*. Fahriye protected me by saying that "it was not important" and that I could dye it later if I wanted to. Another day Gülnaz explained that the white hair was not related to age, that it was rather genetic (*"O yaşa bakmıyor, genetik o."*). Viktorya, whom I could not convince for an interview, lovingly criticized my fringe because it was covering my eyebrows. I had a story about my appearance with Melahat too: Even she was expressing that she had no desire to labor for her looks, she had a desire to guide me about the way I was supposed to look.

I was turned down by Melahat in my first trial to ask for an interview. Without even listening to the topic, she had said *"No, I'm old, my child. I can't. I'm old!"*. Despite my efforts to explain that old age was what I exactly wanted to learn about, it proved impossible to persuade her that day. However, she showed the tiny piercing on my nose and said "Why on earth did you put that on your nose? It is such a pity!" The next time I was going to Seniors Centre I took the piercing off, first time after years of wearing it. I approached her, asked how she was; and told, showing my nose: "See, I took it off because you said so. Now, can you please spare me some time so that I can interview you?" She smiled: "Okay, okay. Come, sit down and ask what you want to ask..." At the end of the interview, she commented that I had asked good questions and that it was also a right decision to take the piercing off because "it

Şake: Tabii tabii, "Ben bu yaştan sonra ne yapacağım?" "Bana lazım değil"... İşte bu neden oluyor, bizim geleneklerimiz bunu getiriyor. Ha tabii, benim mesleğime göre, benim kafama göre değil bu. Fakat çoğu kimselerde var...

“was ruining my beauty”¹¹⁹. After that day I did not wear the piercing when I was going there, because I did not want Melahat to see me wearing it. The piercing, like the words that I was refraining from using, was omitted from my fieldwork performance. However, as I was regularly dropping by the institution just to say hello, it came a day when I completely forgot about the piercing. Melahat’s smiling face quickly changed when she saw the the little silver dot on my nose:

Melahat: You had taken that off, now you’re wearing it again!

Pınar: (*realizing at that moment that I had the piercing on my nose*) I... I kind of missed it. Maybe I can wear it sometimes...

Melahat: It’s ruining your beauty... Take that off! It was very beautiful when you didn’t have it. Why did you put it again?¹²⁰

While Melahat was rebuking me for the piercing, her husband Iskender was chuckling at my panicked face, another woman whom I did not know was asking why I had that, and Nadya who was sitting next to Melahat was saying “I like it, don’t take it off, I like it”. I was surprised at the latter’s reaction, but I later presumed that she probably was trying to shield me from Melahat’s insistence, as it would not be *appropriate* for Nadya to interfere in my appearance.

Diamond writes: “Putting one’s body on the line as a part of a research project seems to give rise to discovery in one’s body of relevant data” (2006, 59). Besides the corporal memories gathered from the field such as the songs emanating from the radio or a particular smell, the researcher’s body can be scrutinized or it can incite discussions as in my case. Besides their preoccupation with my clothes and hair; all the interview accounts about clothing and hair informed me about the participants’ individual lives, the historical periods that they shared and their experiences of aging (Twigg, 2009). Clothing was a topic that could be discussed with everybody; and their views were giving clues about society’s norms about old people’s appearance, their negotiations with these norms, etc.

¹¹⁹ Bak şurani çıkartmışsın ne güzel oldu. Güzelliğini mahvediyorsun. Yazık değil misin? Haydi sana şimdi verdim. Her şeyi söyledim sana. (Melahat)

¹²⁰ Melahat: Onu çıkarmıştın, yine takmışsın!

Pınar: Ya... Biraz özledim de.

Melahat: Güzelliğini mahvediyorsun. Çıkar! Ne güzel çıkarmıştın, ne taktın yine?

2.1.4 Intimacy

All of the twelve women that I interviewed had been married at some point of their lives; two were still married, the others being widowed or divorced. Three women had been married more than once. Nazife had been married three times for instance; she had lost her first two husbands and divorced from the third. Fahriye was living together with a partner.

Some women talked about romantic relationships as an issue which was not pertaining to their lives anymore. In those cases, they gave me advice about marriage or they criticized the way that people were getting married these days. Still, a couple of them addressed these issues and they constructed their selves as individuals who could still get married or have relationships. Fahriye and Özlem, for instance, talked about the things that they would not be able to tolerate in relationships using the first person singular. Sexuality was mentioned only once, by Fahriye again, as it will be quoted below.

2.1.4.1 Having a “friend”

From the first day on, there were implicit comments about the romantic relationships that were being established in the Seniors Centre. When I was sitting with Nadya the first day, I saw a man selling cheap socks in the main hall. I asked her if pedlars were frequently coming in there. She confirmed, and then said that the place could be summarized as five homes (*beş hane*): A home for elderly (*ihthiyarhane*), one for ‘lunatics’ (*tumarhane*), one for commerce (*ticarethane*), one for gambling (*kumarhane*) and one more home that she was censuring, implying a ‘whorehouse’. Another day I was interviewing Melahat, and I was curious to understand if new friendship bonds were being established in the institution, because I had observed that some of the women had already been lifetime friends and neighbors before coming there. When I asked her the question, she thought that I was implying ‘a significant other’ by ‘friend’ and gave me an interesting reply:

Pınar: Are there any people who met each other here and became friends?

Melahat: There are. Yes... Let's not talk about this. A truly dignified person never gets vulgar, and a vulgar person never gets dignified. I'm saying this, and you can understand what I mean.¹²¹

The use of the word 'friend', for her (and for other informants of her generation), works to imply pre-marital relationships which are not supposed to involve sexuality. Melahat did not want to gossip by giving names or telling stories, still she was hinting at something that she thought was immoral.

I still do not know whom these women were implying or if they were talking about any specific people at all. The only relationship about which I heard in the Seniors Centre was Fahriye's 'friendship' with his partner. This was narrated to me both by Fahriye herself, and by the director of the institution. As I was finishing my interview with the director and thanking her, a woman from the Women's Assembly who was listening to our conversation since 5-10 minutes had interrupted:

Woman: Did you tell about those who got married?

Türkân: Oh yes, we have those who got married here... Downstairs there is a retired Jew (*Yahudi emeklimiz*), a 93 year old gentleman. Him and our aunt Fahriye (*Fahriye teyzemiz*), a retired nurse, have a beautiful friendship. They moved in together by getting the consent of their children; uncle Ishak (*Ishak Amca*) was moved to aunt Fahriye's place for instance. That is to say, sharing at this age is very beautiful, maybe the biggest happiness.¹²²

In the context of the institutional representation, new companionships between the old was something to be mentioned, it was a sign that people were still finding love ('*living their third spring*' as it was sometimes metaphorically said) and making decisions concerning their happiness thanks to the institutional space that was permitting them to meet each other. Even though Fahriye's relationship was not an official marriage but rather a partnership (or co-

¹²¹ Pınar: Burada tanışıp arkadaş olanlar oluyor herhalde?

Melahat: Oluyor. Orayı geç... Orayı geç. Doğru adam eğrilmez, eğri doğrulmaz. Öyle diyeyim ki anlayasın.

¹²² Ah evet, evlenenlerimiz var burada. Aşağıda şimdi Yahudi emeklimiz var, yaşlı bir bey 93 yaşında. Onunla 84 yaşındaki Fahriye teyzemiz, hemşire emeklisi, çok güzel bir arkadaşlık yaşıyorlar. İkisi de çocuklarından izin alarak evlerini birleştirdiler. İshak Amca'yı Fahriye Hemşire'nin yanına yerleştirdiler mesela. Bu nedir, bu yaştaki paylaşım çok güzel, belki de mutluluğun en güzeli yani. (Int. with the director)

housing); it was normalized as ‘a marriage’ in the institutional representation; and it was also emphasized that the consent of their children was involved.

Fahriye was open about the relationship, she referred to Ishak as ‘my friend’ (*‘arkadaşım’*) and told me how her life had positively changed after him. Her financial situation had ameliorated because the expenses were covered together, and she was happy about sharing the time spent at home with someone else. She was also the sole participant to talk about sexuality, albeit briefly. As she was describing me her partner she said that he was a talkative and funny person, sometimes even ‘too much’. “I’ve always been a serious woman actually,” she said “I can’t bear too much joking around.” It appeared that her partner’s jokes had mostly a sexual content, as she smilingly commented: “One’s sexual power can decrease with age, it’s more than normal. But is it necessary to make jokes about it all the time?” Fahriye was talking about the romantic relationships as an issue pertaining to herself, to her current relationship. She was saying, for instance, that she could not stand being oppressed or that the decisions have to be taken together in the relationship. If her ‘friend’ was asking her not to do something, such as “not having contact with a male friend”, he had to explain his reasons for demanding this; only then she could act accordingly.

For Özlem, living alone was a choice. It was still possible to get married; however she was saying that she was not looking for someone anymore, because it was impossible to find a person who could fulfill her criteria:

Sometimes my friends talk about a friend (“arkadaş”) or a boyfriend (“boyfriend”)... Are you kidding me, I would beat the man up in a couple of days. There aren’t people to live with anymore, if women pay close attention, there aren’t any. Look at the marriage shows! “Do you have a car? Do you have a salary?” If marriage is based on commerce, it’s better to stay without one. I’m a very sensitive person; I can’t find anybody like myself. I’d like him to take me to dinners, to bring me flowers sometimes; I’d like to celebrate special days together, to go outside together. I’m capable of doing anything, I can prepare great dinners. I’m from Adana, I cook the best food. If you want to drink, we drink together. Provided that I can’t find such a man, it’s better to close everything down (“sen herşeyi kapat”), live your life alone, sometimes go shout at people, get discharged.¹²³

¹²³ Bazen arkadaşlarım derler, hani bir arkadaş ya da ‘boyfriend’... Kardeşim git, ben adamı iki günde döverim! Zaten beraber yaşayacak insan yok artık, eğer kadınlar dikkatli bakarsa, hakikaten yok. Hele şu evlenme programlarına bak! Yok efendim “Senin araban var mı, senin

2.1.4.2 “Nothing to Hide”

When I was introducing my research to women, I was explaining that the personal information provided by them would be confidential and that their names would be changed in the thesis. Almost all of them reacted that they had nothing to hide and it did not matter even if their real names were written. I think that by doing so, they asserted that they did not have any secrets or anything to be ashamed. They could talk about their lives openly because they were living it ‘appropriately’. Nadya had told me that she did not have anything to be kept confidential (“*Hiçbir mahremiyetim yok*”). Later, I asked her to clarify what she meant by this statement. She said:

I don’t have anything. I mean, I told you about my life, that’s all. What kind of privacy (*mahremiyet*) do you mean? I don’t have any privacy. I didn’t have any problems with my husband and I had no misfortunes when I was a girl. I didn’t even flirt with anyone, can you believe this? There were plenty of young men in our district but I wouldn’t flirt, because I didn’t have the permission to get married.¹²⁴

Nadya told me a lot about her deceased husband in the interview. She had had a very happy marriage, her husband had taken her everywhere and he had understood her personality very well:

I had a very beautiful marriage. Look; your spouse, I mean your husband, should have some flaws. “I was scared of his such and such attitudes; I was fed up, it’s good that...” I can’t find any negative traits, even a minute one so that I can say “Thank God...”. This is horrible. I’m thinking whether I would be grieving less, if he had bad habits. He neither had the habit of cursing, nor scolding. I told you that I’m impulsive;

evin var mı, senin maaşın var mı?” Yani bir ticaret üzerine bir evlilik oluyorsa hiç olmasın. Ben çok duygusal bir insanım, benim gibi bulamam. Hani ben hâlâ isterim ki yeri geldiği zaman beni alsın gelsin yemeğe çıkarsın, yeri geldiği zaman bana bir buket çiçek getirsin veya yeri geldiği zaman -işte bir özel bir günümüz varsa- beraber kutlayalım, gidilecek bir yere beraber gidelim. Elimden her iş gelir Allah’a şükür, evimde de ben masa donatırım. Adanalırım, yemeğin hasını yaparım. İnceksen beraber içeriz. E öyle bir adam bulamayacağıma göre, sen her şeyi kapat, hayatını böyle yalnız idame ettir, arada sırada da git bağır çağır, deşarj ol. (Özlem)

¹²⁴ Yok; hiçbir şeyim yok ki. Yani, anlattım hayatımı, bu. Ne mahremiyeti mesela? Hiçbir mahremiyetim yok. Ne kocamdan bir rahatsızlığım, kötü bir duruma rastladım; ne kızlığımda başıma bir hal gelmiş. Yani inanır mısın, flört bile etmedim. Çok muhitimizde delikanlılar vardı. Ama evlenme hakkım yoktu ki flört edeyim. (Nadya)

I used to go into rages. “Don’t get angry. Calm down, we’ll handle it, easy.” (*She touches my arm and imitates the way her husband used to calm her.*) The issue was not about him. Let’s say, I’m talking to him about you. “Easy, don’t get angry, calm down.” He was also quite a big man, he used to soothe me.¹²⁵

As Connidis remarks, “imagining interactions with past intimates is one way of sustaining intimacy in later life”. I thought that it would be invidious to ask Nadya whether she would consider another marriage or not; because her husband had a considerable place in our conversation and she was favoring solitude after losing him (Connidis 2006). Also, the common emphasis that they did not have “anything to hide” emphasized women’s chastity.¹²⁶ Only people with shameful stories would need anonymity; like the people in the third pages of the newspapers whose names were replaced by initials.

2.1.4.3 “Small Brains” and Consciousness

Some participants talked about “consciousness” while we were discussing romantic relationships and marriage:

Let’s say that I want to get married now, I would. But someone else would say “Isn’t it a disgrace (*ayıp*) after this age?” What’s it got to do with disgrace? Can you give me company in my lonely days? No, you can’t. If you can’t, then let me get married. Marriage is just an example here. This is the ebb of brains. One should be more open, more modern.¹²⁷ (Şake)

¹²⁵ Evet, çok güzel bir evliliğim vardı. Bakın, eşinizin, yani kocanızın biraz kusuru olmalı. Şu huyundan, şu karakterinden ürkmüştüm, yılmışım, iyi ki... Yok, diyemiyorum. Şu kadarcık kötü birşey bulamıyorum ki şükredeyim. O feci. Acaba diyorum kötü huyları olsaydı, bu kadar yanmaz mıydım diyorum, kanaatimce. Küfür bilmezdi, azarlamak bilmezdi. Ben doktora fevriyim dedim ya, böyle celâllenirdim. "Celâllenme, dur. Sakin ol, anlaşacağız, dur." Kendiyle değil mevzu. Mesela sizi konuşuyorum. "Dur, celâllenme, sakin ol." İri yarı da bir adamdı, beni sakinleştirirdi. (Nadya)

¹²⁶ Salamandra refers to this notion as “chastity capital” in her study on Damascus elite, in order to express that chastity was used as a means of distinction.

¹²⁷ Farz edelim ben şimdi evlenmek istesem ben evlenirim. Ama başkası der ki "Ya bu yaştan sonra ayıp değil mi?". Ne alakası var ayıpla? Sen benim yalnız geçen günlerimi yanımda beraber olabiliyor musun? Hayır olamıyorsun. Madem ki olamıyorsun bırakın ben de evleneyim. Farz edelim yani, evlenmek değil de, misal olarak. Biraz beyinlerdeki küçülmeler bunlar. Biraz açılmak lazım, biraz geniş düşünmek lazım. Biraz daha modern olmak lazım. (Şake)

I got married when was thirty years old, and I became a mother when I was thirty one. First came the business life, then marriage; maybe I was more conscious (*'bilinçli'*) and that was better. But this is not indispensable; sometimes the course of events can be different. But I don't think that it's advantageous to get married very young. It can turn out to be differently; but I think it's better for people to be conscious, to act consciously in marriage and in everything else.¹²⁸

The word consciousness as it is used here “carries covert references to education and urbanization and traces of modernization ideals” (Erol 2009, 383). Both Şake's and Ayşe's statements quoted above invest in the traditional/modern dichotomy and cherish the educated, independent and open minded modern woman at the expense of the lower class traditional woman who gets married (or, is forced into marriage) very early and finds it shameful to get married after a certain age (Erol 2009).

These comments should be thought together with the same participants' views about clothing and hair. Especially in Şake's interview, it was the discussion about clothes which evoked marriage as another issue that was culturally “banned” to old woman.

2.1.5 Ethnic and Religious Difference

Ethnicity was not usually mentioned as one of the primary aspects of the interlocutors' identities when they were asked to introduce themselves. It was sometimes articulated in order to convey a major event in the life course (Nadya's story of moving from Sivas to Istanbul because of the Wealth Tax) or in order to clarify that the days marked on one's calendar were different from those of the majority population (Şake clarifying that her she celebrates different holidays, because she is Christian and Armenian). The fact that I, as the 'researcher', did not push the informants to mention their ethnic and religious identities may be interpreted as a flaw in the data. However, if one assumes “that subjects are not pre-existing entities, but effectively produced, also entail[ing] the research as an influential site for the production of subjects” (Sandberg 2011, 79) not having a precise list of the participants' ethnic identities

¹²⁸ Otuz yaşında evlendim, otuz bir yaşında anne oldum. Onun için, önce iş hayatı oldu, ondan sonra evlendim, belki daha bilinçliydim, daha iyiydi. Ama bu şart da değil, olaylar nasıl gelişirse. İlla ki böyle olsun diyemem. Ama hakikaten çok genç evlenmenin bir faydası olduğunu da düşünmüyorum. Ama olabilir yani, öyle bir şartlar gelişir öyle olur, ama biraz bilinçli olmasını insanların, evlenirken de, herşeyde de bilinçli olarak evlenmesini, bilinçli olarak bir şey yapmasını tercih ederim. (Ayşe)

does not constitute a flaw anymore, and it rather becomes another issue to be analysed. How was the ethnic belonging articulated in the interviews? When was difference implied, revealed or suspected?

It is my first day in the Seniors Centre. I am striving to meet people, to explain them the purpose of my research. I am welcomed very warmly at one of the tables; women tell me their names and I am taking notes, writing the names of the people who might be eager to participate in interviews. I cannot hear when one of the women tells me her name. Realising that the name is probably unfamiliar to me, I am asking her to repeat. This is a “non-Muslim” name, probably an Armenian one. Then, the woman sitting next to her tells her name, but the previous woman intervenes: “Why are you saying this name?” she says. It appears that both of them are Armenian, but the second woman has more than one name and she prefers to use the Turkish one which does not reveal her ethnic identity. When warned by her friend she smiles, makes a hand gesture to express that it is not that important anymore and says “Okay, okay, it is [her Armenian name]”. Later I observe that women sometimes speak in Armenian (and in one case, Greek) among themselves. I’m getting accustomed to hear, when I am interviewing a woman, that a newcomer asks the others who I am in Armenian.

We are finishing the interview with Gülnaz, I am switching the recorder off. We are having our teas together, as she criticizes that in the day-time talk shows people are marrying each other for economic reasons and not for mutual trust and love. Then she says to me:

Gülnaz: You’d probably have a friend... (*‘Friend’ means ‘a significant other’ in this context.*)

Pınar: Uhm, yes I do...

Gülnaz: What does he do?

Pınar: He’s also a student.

Gülnaz: Good, good. Is he Turkish?

Pınar: Yes, he is.

Gülnaz: Good... A good personality is what matters, the rest is not important.

My informants who were not Armenian all had neighbors, friends or family members who were Armenian. These affinities were manifested in the discourses of friendship and

multiculturalism framing some parts of the accounts. Participants sometimes stressed the importance of being knowledgeable about different religious cultures. Fahriye for instance, explained me that her first marriage with an Armenian man had ended because of the political climate of Turkey at that time. She had a son from that marriage and she was saying that she still did not know his religion, that it was not important to her. Today she had a Jewish partner and she was attending the meetings of Jehova's Witnesses:

I appreciate these people (*Jehova's Witnesses*). They're going to people's houses everyday, even if they're chased. They're welcoming us so warmly that I feel like a queen when I go there. Sometimes foreigners are also coming. Recently the discussion topic was anger; it (*the topic*) doesn't have to be religious. They're always discussing psychological issues. But they're adding in between -they're really intelligent and smart- what Jehova thinks on a particular issue, they're adding it into the conversation. This is a tactical issue. I don't know what I am anyway. I'm happy about the new courses on religion. (*Elective religion classes were being discussed in those days when we had the interview.*) If you're knowledgeable, you can decide whether you want or not... But we weren't knowledgeable. It was banned. That was a mistake; that was İnönü's biggest mistake. He didn't give importance to religion. (...) We have to learn so that we don't make mistakes. If you're knowledgeable, you'd act consciously.¹²⁹

Selda, who was married to an Armenian man, told me both about her marriage and the multi-ethnic community at the Seniors Centre with similar references to 'humanity' and 'love':

Where are you coming from? Maybe this shouldn't be recorded... (*I'm telling her that my parents are from Elazığ and Istanbul.*) See, all of us are coming from somewhere, forming a mixed nation; this is what I'd like to say. Our lives are passing like this. (*Following my remark that she had not encountered any difficulties about getting along with her husband's daughter, even though the two women's ages were close to each other like sisters*) Also my husband isn't Muslim, he is non-Muslim. We lived two religions together. We celebrated four holidays together. It doesn't matter for me, being human is what matters. We're all coming from God; we're all sons of Adam. We all came from the soil, and we'll go back to soil. Religion, language, race are of little importance for me. Being human comes first. As Rumi says, "Come, come, whoever

¹²⁹ O insanları çok beğendim. Her gün evlere gidiyorlar, kovalasalar bile. Öyle bir karşılıyorlar ki, ben kendimi oraya gidince kraliçe hissediyorum. Bazen yabancılar da geliyor. Geçen gün konuşulan mevzu öfke idi; dini olmasına gerek yok. Hep psikolojik şeyler konuşuyorlar. Fakat bunun arasına sıkıştırıyorlar -çok akıllılar, hepsi de çok zekiler- bunun için mesela Yehova ne düşünüyor, onu hemen şey yaparken onu da sıkıştırıyor. Tabii ki bu taktik meselesi. Ben zaten ne olduğumu bilmem. Bugün konulan din derslerinden o kadar memnun oldum ki. Bilerek, istersiniz veya istemezsiniz... Ama biz bilmiyorduk ki. Yasaktı. Hata oldu, İnönü'nün en büyük hatası oydu. Dine ehemmiyet vermedi. (...) Öğrenelim ki yanlış yapmayalım. Bilerseniz, bilinçli yaklaşsınız. (Fahriye)

you are," "Come even though you have broken your vows a thousand times", isn't it true? I mean, we're like this. This should be our nature. If you know how to love, everything is beautiful.¹³⁰ (Selda)

In Selda's narrative the Turkish nation, the community in the Seniors Centre and her multi-ethnic family were associated with each other as coherent entities bound by love. While equality and humanity were put forward; the particularities of different identities were overlooked. Selda was also emphasizing, in a different part of our interview, that Istanbul was not as safe as before, and explaining this by an urban-rural conflict:

Back in the old times, Istanbul was a city where one could live at ease, around 1964. You're gonna ask the reason. Back then we could go outside without hesitating, but now it's a risk go to out after 9 PM for me, for us. It is a great risk. Emigration began; money changed hands, life changed hands, culture changed hands. That's why it's a great risk.¹³¹

The harmonious urban culture was damaged by the emigration from 1970's onwards. The "other" in Selda's narrative was not the urban minorities, but the rural populations.

Nadya was also interested in different religious cultures and told me that she had visited churches, mosques and "even a Cemevi".

I'd like to occupy myself with religion and humanity. Religious discrimination isn't a part of my character. *We grew up like siblings in a Muslim country.* I still don't

¹³⁰ Nerelisiniz siz? (*Kayıt cihazını işaret ederek*) Bunu oraya şey yapmayayım... İşte, hepimiz bir yerlerden gelmişiz, karma bir millet olmuşuz, yani işte söyleyeceğim bu. Bizim yaşantımız böyle geçiyor. (...) Üstelik de benim eşim Müslüman değil, gayrimüslim. İki dini bir arada yaşadık. Dört bayramı bir arada yaşadık. Hiç benim için bir mahsuru yok, insan olsun. Hepimiz Allah'tan gelmeyiz. Hepimiz Ademoğlu'ndan gelmeyiz. Hepimiz nihayeti topraktan geldik, toprağa gideceğiz. Benim için din, dil, ırk son planda. Önce insan. Hz. Mevlâna'nın söylediği gibi: "Ne olursan ol gene gel" diyor değil mi? "Yüz bin kere tövbeni bozsan da, gel bu dergâha" diyor, değil mi? (Selda)

¹³¹ Eski yıllarda çok rahat yaşanabilecek bir şehirdi, sene 1964'lerde. 1964'lerde çok yaşanabilecek bir şehirdi İstanbul. Çünkü niçin diyeceksiniz, rahatlıkla sokaklara çıkabiliyorduk. Ama şimdi ne yazık ki akşam dokuzdan sonra benim için, bizler için, sokaklara çıkmak, sokaklarda yaşamak çok büyük risk. Çok büyük risk. Göçler başladı, para el değiştirdi, yaşam el değiştirdi, kültür el değiştirdi, onun için çok risk. (Selda)

distinguish between a church and a mosque; they're the same to me. It doesn't matter.¹³²

Similar narratives of harmonious past were noted by Mills in her study on Kuzguncuk: “ties to local place also created a common identity shared by all as neighbors in the *mahalle*, where “*we were all like siblings; we had no problems*”” (2008).

As my research was not specifically focused on ethnic and religious identities, I was not insisting about these issues in the interviews. However, I argue that ethnic and religious difference was frequently touched upon, even in cases where “being human” or “a good personality” were posited as the individual characteristics of primary importance. This depoliticized speech did not mean that the difference was erased altogether: After all, Gülnaz was still asking me if my boyfriend was Turkish, before saying that she valued a good personality more than everything. I argue that when minority identities were revealed in the context of my research, they were always encompassed by affective notions such as “humanity” and “love”.

Nadya was the only participant who talked about the Wealth Tax and how it had an impact on her family, causing them to migrate from Sivas to Istanbul. She also made a brief negative remark on the violent politics of the nation state, while she was remembering other Armenian families from Sivas which had to come to Istanbul (Sevan and Şahinyan families):

These are dangerous words, my child; but the events of 1915 set our values back. These were great values; they were the most respectable, well-educated families of Sivas but they gained their identities here [in Istanbul]. They're from Sivas, our fellow townsmen and distant relatives.¹³³ (Nadya)

Nadya's “dangerous words” cited above constituted the only moment when a participant was critical about the national past.

¹³² Ben dinle, insanlıkla fazla uğraşmak isterim. Sonra benim karakterimde din ayrımı yok. Biz Müslüman bir memlekette kardeş gibi büyüdük. Yine ayırmam, bana cami ve kilise aynı şey. Hiç fark etmez. (Nadya)

¹³³ Tehlikeli sözler ama kızım, o 1915 olayı var ya, o zaman bizim çok değerlerimizi sıfırladı. Çok değer bunlar; oranın en saygılı, en bilgin aileleriydi ama yine de benliklerini burada kazandılar hepsi de. Sivaslıdırlar, memleketlimiz, çok uzaktan da akrabamız. (Nadya)

2.1.6 Being Active and Productive

The activity classes organised by the Seniors Centre (Ottoman calligraphy, hairdressing, percussion workshops) were always emphasized in the institutional promotion. However, my informants reported little interest in these classes: Only Özlem, who used to be a professional singer, was participating in percussion workshops. Other participants were knowledgeable about the classes, and they explained their reluctance to join either by a lack of patience or energy that they were linking to their age, or by their worries of not being able to perform adequately:

Selda: There are handcraft classes, embroidery classes, painting, hairdressing; but we're too old for these.

Pınar: What makes you think so?

Selda: This is my personal opinion. Some people can be interested, they can participate. Enough, no more patience for those activities. Because life is busy and hard. Those are for the earlier times. *People of our age lack patience. They are tired.*¹³⁴

Pınar: They told me that there were some activity classes here...

Melahat: Yes, there are; but I cannot go upstairs for the classes dear.

Pınar: Why?

Melahat: Why would I? *At age 83, I am a course on my own, enough! Why shall I go to classes my child?*¹³⁵

Perihan: There are embroidery classes, English classes, music; there are lots of things upstairs. My Sarıgül...

Pınar: Are you taking part in these?

Perihan: I wanted to, my voice is beautiful too; but I didn't want to be in that choir. *I'm tired now*; they would call from upstairs every second to play music and such. It

¹³⁴ Selda: Elişi kursu var, nakış kursu var. Boyama kursu var, kuaför var; ama artık bizi geçmiş yani onlar.

Pınar: Neden öyle düşünüyorsunuz?

Selda: Yani benim şahsım adına. Ama merak eden çıkmaz mı, çıkar; bakmaz mı, bakar. Tamam. O uğraşlara artık sabırlar bitti. Çünkü hayat çok yoğun, zor. Onları genç yaşta... Çünkü artık biz yaştaki insanların sabır tahammülü aşmış. Yorgun.

¹³⁵ Pınar: Burada kurslar oluyormuş...

Melahat: Evet var; ama yok, ben çıkamam kursa kızım.

Pınar: Neden?

Melahat: Neye gideyim ben kursa? Amaaan, kurs olmuşum artık, yeter! 83 yaşındayım, ne kursuna gideyim kızım?

wouldn't be nice if one can't make it adequately, that's why I didn't go. Otherwise, there is really good stuff upstairs.¹³⁶

These narratives conflict with those about "active aging", which are found especially in the interviews of three informants. These informants are Şake, Ayşe and Selda.

I met Şake on a day when the main hall was very crowded. After facing a few rejections (as it was my routine), I approached Şake who looked quite cheerful. She had fingernails painted in a very ornamental way and big, eye catching rings. I had not finished explaining my project to her, when she said: "Find a chair for yourself and start asking." I learned in the interview that she was an Armenian woman, a health care provider specializing on manicure, pedicure, hairdressing, etc. She had carried out her profession both in the health sector (providing care for the hands and feet of the people who were in intensive care units) and in beauty parlors in Büyükkada, Kınalıada, Harbiye and Kurtuluş. Later Şake helped me as *a gatekeeper* to find other contacts in the Seniors Centre. She usually was sending me to women in their early sixties¹³⁷, whose accounts were echoing the institutional discourse of Seniors Centre and espousing the discourse of 'active old age'. Let me first start by a long excerpt from her interview, where the narratives of "active old age" and "productivity" can be found:

Şake: I don't like sitting still. When I'm sitting my bones are aching, believe me, my body isn't used to it. (...) Here, in the tables over there, women cannot knit. They cannot read newspapers. They cannot do any crafts. It's banned, can you imagine that? They banned it among themselves, saying "We're here to talk, to chat". Chat, and knit something meanwhile, would knitting hinder your chat? Knit something, knit laces. *Each of these is an activity. There are fairs (kermes), participate in those! Bring your handiwork to the fairs. Isn't this another contribution to the family?*

¹³⁶ Perihan: Nakış kursu var, İngilizce'si var, oyun - müzik kursu var, yukarda her şey var. Benim Sarıgül'üm...

Pınar: Siz katılıyor musunuz?

Perihan: İstedim, sesim de güzel ama istemedim o koroya gireyim. E artık yoruldu, her dakika yukarı çağırırlar, müzik çalınacak edecek. Eksik güzel olmaz tabii, onun için gitmedim. Yoksa çok güzel şeyler var yukarıda.

¹³⁷ Şake once she sent me to a woman in her mid-fifties, forgetting that I was working with older people. As I was introducing my research to the woman, she said that she was not 60 yet, but 56. A younger woman who was sitting next to her said "You don't look like a 60 year old!" as if I had offended the older woman. I found myself in a very awkward position and had to apologize, even if I was thinking that it was unnecessary.

Pınar: Are you suggesting this in economic terms or in terms of creativity?

Şake: *Of course, both economically and because you're creating something. Think, think, think; where does it ever lead? These are not for me, really. (...) I do oil painting. I'm painting on fabrics, on frosted glass. Not in order to sell, I'm giving these to the people around me, it's my hobby. When I start something, if I cannot manage to finish it, I'm staying awake until the morning. I'm striving until it's finished. Why, why to stand idle? I don't gossip, I don't like small brains, to be exact.*

Pınar: What do you mean by small brains?

Şake: *There's nothing but gossip around... You cannot do anything unless you open up your brain. Opening up your brain means crafting, knitting; if you're not able to do anything, going to a home for the aged, to a foundation for one day. Wash their hair!*

Pınar: Where?

Şake: *Anywhere, there are homes for the aged, nursing homes. Darüşşafaka, other nursing homes... Go there, spend a day with the aged, spend a day with the children. There are plenty of places where to spend time. I washed people's feet in old age institutions, did I ask for any money? No. I washed and dried their feet. I put on lotions. What they told me was "God bless you!". Isn't this enough? Even more than enough.*¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Şake: Evet. Yani ben oturmayı çok seven, yani oturmayı hiç sevmiyorum. Oturduğum zaman inan bana kemiklerim ağrıyor. Alışmamış vücut çünkü. (...) Yani şimdi burada karşı masalarda örgü öremiyor kadınlar. Gazete okuyamıyorlar. Bir eliş yapamıyorlar. Yasaklanmış düşünebiliyor musun, kendi aralarında yasaklamışlar, biz buraya konuşmaya geldik, sohbeteye geldik diye. Hem sohbetini yap hem de bir şeyini ör, yani ne olur yani? Örgünü ör, dantelini ör. Bunlar birer faaliyettir. Kermesler yapılıyor, kermeslere git katıl. Yaptığın parçaları kermeslere koy. Ayrı bir katkı değil mi aileye bu?

Pınar: Ekonomik açıdan mı, üretmek bakımından mı?

Şake: *Tabii, hem bir şey ürettiğin için, hem de ekonomik bakımdan. Yani düşün düşün düşün, sonu ne olacak? Bana ters bu işler, çok ters. (...) Ben mesela yağlıboya yaparım. Kumaş üzerinde yağlıboya yaparım, buzlu cam üzerinde yağlıboya çalışırım. Yani bunu satmak için değil, çevreme veririm, kendi hobim. Bir işe başladığım zaman bitirmezsem sabaha kadar oturuyorum. Onu bitirene kadar uğraşıyorum. Yani niye, niye boş geçsin? Dedikoduyla işim, ufak beyin sevmiyorum yani kısacası...*

Pınar: O nasıl oluyor?

Şake: *Dedikodudan başka bir şey yoktur. Beynini açmadıktan sonra hiçbir şey yapamazsın, yani beyin açmak demek, el işini yap, örgünü yap, hiçbir şey yapmazsan bir gün yaşlılar evine, vakfına git. Onların başını yıka.*

Pınar: Nereye?

Şake: *Herhangi bir şeye, yaşlılar evleri var. Huzurevleri... Darüşşafaka, huzurevleri. Yani oraya git, bir gün yaşlılarla geçir, bir gün çocuklarla geçir. Geçir yani, zaman geçirecek yer çok. Ben ayak yıkadım yani huzurevlerinde, ben gittim para mı aldım, hayır. Ayaklarını*

Şake was blaming the “*women of the other tables*” for not “transform[ing] their passivity into sacrificial feeling and action” (Muehlebach Vol. 26 (1), 68). According to Muehlebach, population groups such as the retired elderly who have weak links with the labor market and who experience a loss of status engage with voluntary action in order to have recognition in the context of contemporary post-Fordist societies. The fact that the labor performed as “voluntary activity” is unremunerated makes it even more valuable: The emphasis is on the affective bond that is established between the carer and the person in need, on *love* and *compassion*; and a “*God bless you*” is appreciated as “*more than enough*”. The culture of voluntarism encompasses not only retired people but also students who are not a part of the labor market yet¹³⁹, housewives; or as in Muehlebach’s case from Italy, older people who had lost their job before getting retired and who are encountering hardships to find new employment opportunities. “Co-suffering, love, sympathy, compassion”, invested as the ‘core’ of these services, make difficult to problematize the exclusionary structures that position specific groups as providers and receivers of affective labor in the first place.

Şahke’s comments about the others denounce them for gossiping and staying embedded in the web of affective relations of the Seniors Centre. In order to be good citizens they should engage in proper affect and action, “accruing recognition not through waged but through unwaged labor” (Muehlebach Vol. 26 (1)). Şake fulfills her responsibility by offering her professional service free of charge: She’s helping others by washing their heads or relieving their feet, which is an act of bodily care which would be done only *out of compassion* if it is not given as a paid service. The activities that she suggests “for the other women” either bring very little monetary returns or no returns at all, but are assumed to yield symbolic belonging and recognition. She does not take into account that some of the women “sitting in tables over there” may themselves need care and support. Differences are overlooked and everybody is evaluated in terms of their passivity/activity and symbolic

yıkadım, kuruttum. Kremlerini sürdüm. Bana dedikleri şey şu: "Allah senden razı olsun." Yetmiyor mu? Çok bile!

¹³⁹ University students are encouraged to take part in voluntary activities with civic involvement projects, as course requirements. An example of this can also be found in my research, in the case of Kemerburgaz University students who participate in the percussion workshops in the Seniors Centre.

contribution to the economy. Also the contribution to the economy is expressed (or narrowed down) as “contribution to the family”. I find it significant that Şake was very disturbed by their ‘passivity’, and according to her these people were not fulfilling their duties for the family and for the society in general. However, I cannot argue that hers was the dominant opinion in the Seniors Centre. For instance Perihan, one of the women “sitting in the tables over there”, formulated a contradictory statement:

I wouldn’t do anything for the street. I got old myself, for whom I shall do something? It’s the others who should do things for me. They should do things for me, I’m old.¹⁴⁰
(Perihan)

Perihan was alluding to the general public by “the street” and she was expressing not that she would not labor for strangers. She was aligning herself on the other side of the exchange, with the people who deserved to be cared.

Ayşe and Selda, to whom Şake had asked to talk to me, were putting emphasis on their quality of staying ‘active’ despite their age or their retired status:

I’m retired, I lost my husband too. My life didn’t change to a great extent after retirement though; it didn’t deteriorate in terms of activities. I was swiftly adapted to the retirement life. That is to say, I had already worked for 34 years. I took charge in high-level positions too, during my working life. However, I thought that I needed to slow down at some point. Working was good; however it was necessary to slow down at some point. *I’m living that period since 2007 but I’m still active even if I slowed down.*

I was already handling all my tasks, I was handling everything. *Because I was involved in lots of activities, it [retirement] didn’t cause an emptiness for me.* I have acquaintances, friends. There is Türkân Hanım here, our head. She too guides us very well. She makes us participate in activities and motivates us. She greatly motivates us by saying “You can do it, you’re acting compliantly in everything” and guides us.¹⁴¹
(Ayşe)

¹⁴⁰ Sokağa hiçbir şey yapmam. Kendim de artık yaşlandım, kime ne yapayım? Herkes bana yapsın. Herkes bana yapsın, ben yaşlıyım. (Perihan)

¹⁴¹ Ben emekliyim, eşimi de kaybettim. Yalnız yaşantımda emekli olduktan sonra çok büyük bir değişiklik, faaliyet anlamında, kötü anlamda bir değişiklik olmadı. Çok çabuk adapte oldum emeklilik hayatına da. Şöyle ki, zaten 34 yıl çalışmışım. Üst düzey şeylerde de görev aldım çalışma hayatında. Fakat artık zaten biraz yavaşlamam gerektiğini düşündüm. Çalışmak

Because I was a working, active woman; the life at home started to bore me. Then I found friend meetings, neighbor meetings for myself, typical housewife meetings (“*tipik, bilinen ev hanımı günleri*”); these also started to bore me. Because I didn’t like social circles where one sits and gossips, and because I had been smoking since years, I found a place for myself in Beşiktaş, on the sea coast.¹⁴²

These two women (Ayşe and Selda) were not sitting in the main hall with the other people. Selda was in the little “game room” playing cards all day and Ayşe was either in the top floor, in the Women’s Assembly’s (Şişli Kent Konseyi Kadın Meclisi) office; or elsewhere, participating in other activities of Şişli Municipality as she was stating. Especially Ayşe was putting emphasis on “replacing the activities that were lost with new ones” as a way to maintain her sense self-worth (Biggs 2004).

2.1.7 Concluding the Interviews

Almost all the women thanked me back at the end of the interviews; some kissed me or asked questions about the degree that I was pursuing. Some commented on the interview and remarked that I had asked quite a lot of questions or that they had told me “*all their lives in fifteen minutes*”. Şake and her friend Luiz (whom had modeled for her when she was participating in hairdressing contests) listened to Şake’s interview right after we finished the session, sharing my headphones and nodding their heads while they were following the record. Because the main hall during our interview, Özlem asked me on the following days whether the record was audible or not; and said that she could help in case I could not transcribe it. “There aren’t any changes on my part, the story is the same” she said. Other women also commented about their interview performances:

güzeldi ama bir yerden sonra artık yavaşlamak gerekiyordu. 2007'den beri o dönemi yaşıyorum ama yavaşlasam da yine faalim. (...) Her işimi, her şeyimi hallediyordum. Faaliyetler içinde de olduğum için o da bana böyle, hani bir boşluk yaratmadı. E arkadaşlarım var, dostlarım var. Burada başkanımız Türkân Hanım var. O da bizi çok güzel yönlendiriyor. Etkinliklere katılmamızı sağlıyor ve bizi motive ediyor. "Yapabilirsiniz, her şeyde uyumlu davranıyorsunuz" diyerek bizi gayet güzel motive ediyor, yönlendiriyor. (Ayşe)

¹⁴² Çünkü çalışan, aktif bir hanım olduğum için sıkılmaya başladı. O zaman da kendime arkadaş toplantıları, aynı zamanda günler, yani bilinen tipik ev hanımı günleri, bu da beni sıkılmaya başladı. Çünkü ben öyle oturup lak lak dedikodu edilen ortamları sevmediğim için, uzun senelerdir sigara içtiğimden dolayı, Beşiktaş'ta bir mekanı kendime deniz kenarında yol tuttum. (Selda)

Nadya: I got tired; I couldn't manage to speak calmly. It's been the same since I was a child. I can't lower my voice and I can't speak calmly.

Pınar: You told everything very nicely though...

Nadya: The story might be nice but my narration isn't nice. I'm hurrying, as if I was in a dispute.¹⁴³

Thank you very much dear! (*She kisses me.*) May God give you a clear mind! Did I speak properly? I'll be happy if I did.¹⁴⁴ (Gülnaz)

It records my voice, right? For shame, I laughed a lot! You'd excuse it because of our age, and delete those parts.¹⁴⁵ (Nazife)

This was a phase when both the interviewees and I felt more relaxed compared to the beginning of the interview. Sometimes we continued talking, sharing tea and food.

2.2 Unwanted Intruders and Distinction

In this section, two specific moments that women were hostile against the others will be narrated. These hostile behaviors were triggered by the interview situation: They stemmed from the fact that I was doing the interviews in the main hall that everybody was sharing. However, they were also part of the conflicts that already existed in the field. Following an account on those moments of hostility, the chapter will be concluded by a discussion on the strategies of distinction in the interviews.

2.2.1 “Ask, but don't exceed the capacity!”

The first awkward moment, which I am still remembering with sadness, occurred while I was interviewing Arife. That day the hall was very crowded in the afternoon, and the background noise was increasing as new people were joining the ones gathered around tables.

¹⁴³ Nadya: Yoruldum ama. Sakin konuşamadım. Çocukluğumdan beri böyleydi, hem sesim yavaş çıkmaz, hem sakin konuşamam.

Pınar: Çok güzel anlattınız aslında...

Nadya: Anlatmam güzel olabilir ama anlatış şeklim güzel değil. Acele acele böyle, kavga ediyor gibi konuşuyorum...

¹⁴⁴ Çok teşekkür ederim canım! (Uzanıp yanaklarımdan öpüyor.) Allah zihin açıklığı versin. Düzgün konuştum mu? Düzgün konuştuysam ne mutlu bana. (Gülnaz)

¹⁴⁵ Sesimi alıyor değil mi? Eyvah, güldüm de çok. Yaşlılığımıza verirsin, silersin. (Nazife)

While Arife was answering my questions, women sitting on our right side were not really talking among themselves. At some point, I realised that they were murmuring and expressing by their gestures that they were disturbed by our talk. Melahat, who was sitting on our left made some brief remarks. She sarcastically asked Arife whether she was intending to talk more; and she asked me if Arife had told about her flats, which I silently approved. I thought this was a friendly teasing, as Arife was also smiling.

However, the attitude of the women on our right side was harsher than Melahat's. Nadya hit the table to draw attention and shouted that she had a headache. I had not interrupted the interview until that point because there were, in the hall, at least twenty other people talking all at once; and I had thought that it would have been very mean (or 'unethical', in terms of methodology) to silence her, while she was in the middle of an answer to one of my questions. After she finished her answer (to which I could not pay enough attention, being distracted by the other women's severe reactions), I tried to conclude the interview without offending her. Then I precipitated towards Nadya to say that I was assuming the responsibility for the disturbance; and I apologized. She said that Arife was a very talkative person in general and that I could not judge the line where I had to stop.¹⁴⁶ Arife kept her cheerfulness even though she was reprimanded and she kept telling her story. I finished the interview as soon as possible, without interrupting her too much. Nadya was still complaining aloud; calling Arife "impudent" ("Terbiyesiz!").

2.2.2 "Who are you, where are you coming from?"

Another day, I was getting ready for interviewing Perihan, who was coming to the Seniors Centre every day. As I was preparing my recorder, a woman approached us, looking for a place to sit. Perihan got angry and shouted at the woman that "those seats were occupied" and that "there were plenty of other places to sit in the hall". I suddenly realized that this woman was next to Arife when I had entered the hall: I had dropped by their table to ask Arife how she was. After I had left them, Arife would have probably told her that I was a student interviewing people. At that moment I couldn't decide what to do, and thinking that Perihan's

¹⁴⁶ Zaten çok gevezedir... Sen de soruyorsun, sor; ama bir kapasite var, o kapasiteyi aşma!

problem was mainly about keeping the chairs empty for her friends, I suggested bringing another chair to the woman. Perihan whispered:

Perihan: Sit down, sit... Why is she coming, why does she want to learn? I don't want to talk in the presence of another. It's personal, isn't it? (*Addressing to the newcomer*) What do you want, dear? What do you want, she should organize it...

Woman: She said that she was doing a research, and I was curious about what she was researching...

Perihan: No, we're researching ourselves ("*şahsımızı araştırıyoruz*"). Who are you? Who are you, where are you coming from? (The other woman leaves.) I don't have to explain myself to you in the presence of everybody. If you had a sense of shame, you wouldn't come here in the first place, intruding in other people's affairs like this...¹⁴⁷

These two incidents hinted at different dynamics of the main hall: The place was appropriated by the people who were coming there on a regular basis; and they were also defending their territory from the people that were deemed as strangers. The bodies of the strangers were transgressing the appropriate boundaries: They did not know where to sit, or when to stop talking. After Perihan sent the curious woman away, we resumed our interview. In the end, she told me:

Perihan: So you're going to put this in your thesis. You're going to think about what is right and what is wrong...

Pınar: All that you're saying is the important for me; it's the 'truth'. You're telling what you're experiencing...

Perihan: I'm shouting in the midst of all these people! If I were lying they would tell "Shut up, you liar!". Here, they would say it. My dear child... May God give you success!¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Perihan: Otur yerine, otur otur. O niye geliyor, o niye öğrenmek istiyor? Ama ben başkasının yanında konuşmak istemiyorum. Şahıstır bu, değil mi? (*Yeni gelen kadına*) Yavrum ne istedin? Hayır ne istiyorsun, evvela seni ayarlasın...

Kadın: "Ben araştırma yapıyorum," dedi, ben de dedim ne araştırma yapıyorum...

Perihan: Yok, şahsımızı araştırıyoruz. Sen kimsin? Yok, başka bir şey yok. Sen kimsin, nesin, onu... (*Kadın gidiyor.*) Ben herkesin yanında mecbur değilim sana izahat vermeye. Sen utansan buraya gelmezsin zaten. Başkasının işine...

¹⁴⁸ Perihan: Bunu master'ına koyacaksın herhalde. Düşüneceksin neler doğru, neler yanlış.

Pınar: Sizin dedikleriniz doğru tabii, ne yaşıyorsanız onu anlatıyorsunuz...

Thus, the woman was not chased because of the confidentiality of the information that Perihan was giving me; rather, her presence was unwanted at the table. Even if Perihan was not really “shouting”, she was talking with a loud voice that could be heard by the people sitting close to her. The woman was not welcomed, because she was an outsider who was “intruding in other people’s affairs”. Similarly, in Nadya’s case, Arife was silenced not because she was making too much noise, but because the other women knew that she was very talkative and that she was complaining about the same issues. As an illiterate woman, Arife was different than most of the others in the Seniors Centre and she was encountering problems about the tables where she was sitting:

Some people are messing with me my child, I’m not bugging anybody. I don’t like iniquity; I’m not fighting with anybody. They do, here. I’m getting bored, so I’m coming once in a while; maybe it’s better not to come... Sarigül is from the same city as me, if I were to inform him about these... I don’t. He’s from Erzincan and my mom is from Erzincan. It’s (or ‘he’s’) close to me.¹⁴⁹ (Arife)

She told me that women had several times changed her place saying that they did not want to be heard by her while talking, that her head was covered, or that she was sitting next to a man and that was inappropriate.

Fahriye and Nadya were expressing that “the place was hosting every kind of people from all the strata of society”. Though these statements seemed as an “objective fact”, they also meant that they were not happy about the “mixed” crowd and they would have preferred to be in a different place than their class others. Being old was restricting the places where they could go, and putting them next to women whom they might have avoided in the earlier periods of their life. Both Fahriye and Nadya commented that the institution was a place “that did not really fit their personality”. In another part of our interview, Nadya stated

They’re organizing lots of trips here. They’re taking to hotels, to tours. I’m not going to any of these. The bus comes here, 450 people went to Kumburgaz. I never stepped

Perihan: Bu kadar insanın içinde bağıyorum. Yalan olsa “Sus yalancı,” derler. Burada derler yani. Canım kızım benim. Allah muvaffakiyetler versin inşallah!

¹⁴⁹ Bazıları yapıyorlar bana kızım, ben kimseye çatmıyorum. Kötülük sevmiyorum, kimseye dövüş yapmıyorum. Burada yapıyorlar. Canım sıkılıyor arada geliyorum, gelmesem iyi ama... Sarigül aynı memleketli, söylesem... Yapmıyorum. O da Erzincanlı, annem de Erzincanlı. Yakın bana. (Arife)

in one of those buses. I'm getting scared that I might fall down, and also I cannot bear that racket. That pitching into tables to get the best part of the food and the biggest slice of the bread; it doesn't suit my character, I'm not going anywhere. And also, my husband already took me everywhere. Why would I go there for the sake of eating? They're all going for the food!

They're going to churches, eating there and having fun. Their aim isn't to see the church; they're going for the food. I never join. I can't. My health does not allow me either.¹⁵⁰ (Nadya)

“Getting the best part of the food and the biggest slice of the bread” was not a part of Nadya's habitus, and it was posited as an inherent (and demeaning) property of others' bodies. Nadya was also normalizing the property attached to her body as “her character”. In another interview, Perihan had also made a similar remark; saying that during the hotel stays the food and drinks were abundant, and that some people were “mannerlessly” leaving the tea and coffee taps open. This was another example of how the other's body was judged by not knowing the limits of proper behavior.

In the above quote from Nadya's narrative, repeating that one had visited all those places served to remind to the counterpart that one did not need the cultural capital which would be brought by these, that she already had the “connaissance”. Nadya had a story about visiting a Cemevi once: First she had not understood what the place was supposed to be, then they had taught her that it was a religious place for Alewis. She had visited those sites and acquired knowledge because she was interested, not because somebody had offered to take her and give free food.

In this section I pointed at the internal dynamics through which some actors in the field were distinguishing themselves from the others. Tables (and the positions occupied by the actors in the field) were protected from unwanted intruders. Others' inappropriate bodily

¹⁵⁰ Burada çok güzel gezdiriyorlar. Otellere götürüyorlar, gezilere götürüyorlar. Hiçbir yere gitmem. Otobüs geliyor buraya, 450 kişi Kumburgaz'a gittiler iki parti. Ben hiç, otobüse daha adım attığımı bilmem, ben gitmem. Ben korkarım, düşerim, sonra o patırtıya gelemem. O masalara saldırmalar, yemeğin iyisini, ekmeğin büyüğünü almaya, benim karakterime ters düşer, ben hiçbir yere gitmem. Bir de, kocam her yeri gezdirdi. Boğaz için ne gideceğim oralara. Yemek için gidiyorlar. (...) Kiliselere gidiyorlar, orada yemekler yiyorlar, eğleniyorlar. Yani kilise diye gitmiyorlar, yemek için. Ben gitmiyorum, hiçbirine gitmiyorum. Gidemiyorum. Sağlığım da elvermiyor. (Nadya)

manners (such as not knowing the limits within which one should act), lack of consciousness, unproductivity or some behaviors such as announcing charity acts¹⁵¹ were criticized.

¹⁵¹ This was the case of Sabiha, who repeatedly told me that she was not rich. She had recently bought tee-shirts for children from a seller who had come in Seniors Centre, and sent those to a nearby school. Her act was criticized by other women: They had said that Sabiha was showing off her wealth by publicly displaying her donation. Sabiha assured me that she had acquired all her belongings through working. She said that she had worked as a “polite beggar” (“*Kibar dilencilik yaptım*”), ringing people’s doors and selling journals for the benefit of a disabled people’s association.

CONCLUSION

In this research, I tried to explore, thanks to the contribution of research participants, how aging was experienced within the context of a local institution. Because the participants were participating in the public life in the same social space and knowing each other, it was possible to connect their narratives, and to grasp the similarities of experience that were produced by institutional practices (DeVault and McCoy 18). Each interview was unique and shaped by various dynamics such as the positionality of the participant, the institutional setting, the interview questions and the relation between us.

My methodology was re-evaluated in the field, as the research progressed. Especially the fieldwork encounters constituted a challenge because of my fear of being rejected. I usually felt shy, and sometimes intimidated in the field. Being able to write about the moments of rejection or repudiation, and about the emotions involved “a liberating experience” (Diamond). Moreover, talking about these situations of rejection with participants incited me to think about the position of the researcher in everyday settings. How could the researcher explain to the participants that the knowledges shared with her/him was relevant? The participants of my research were dealing with people who were ringing their doorbells to sell burglar alarm systems, those who were incessantly requesting them to support NGOs or to answer a couple of questions as part of “street interviews”. They were scared of being mocked and defrauded. Also, they were not thinking that their ordinary lives could have significance for a study.

On a sunny day, when I needed advice about whom to bother with my questions next, I went to Şake, as she had previously helped me to reach new people. Even though the courtyard was packed with women sitting, chatting and playing *okey*, she said that there was nobody whom I could talk to. She explained: “*There are many people who could talk with you, yet nobody who would understand you.*” By this remark, she was both implying the differences of cultural capital between her and the others, and casting a role to me as a “researcher” for whom banal aspects of life or lay knowledge were disqualified. Why would some old people sitting everyday in the same corner be interesting for anyone? However, as Moran argues, it

was also “lay knowledge that, by virtue of being so firmly embedded in specific social contexts, conceal[ed] resilient power relationships” (12).

In the beginning, I was not thinking about the Seniors Centre as “a political space”. With time, I figured out that it was a zone where the hegemony of the local power holder was consolidated. The public was bound by discourses of love and compassion. In one of the photos on Facebook there was a group of women showing *yellow roses* that were offered them for Mother’s Day to the camera. Each little gift was documented and bearing Sarigül’s imprint. Bigger gifts such as the hotel stays and expeditions were providing the elderly with a middle-class lifestyle and with sensual stories to be told.

The narratives of women showed, besides their common happiness to have the Seniors Centre, that age was given meaning in different ways. Some participants emphasized continuity, while others demarcated later life as a distinct period. Their ways of talking about body, appearance or clothing differed. Factors such as ethnicity and social capital complicated the initial picture of them as “a group of old women gathering in an institution for socializing”. Several of the women used specific references or brought certain properties forward to distinguish themselves from their class others. These strategies of distinction relieved *the malaise* of sharing the same social space with “people from all sections of society” (“*toplumun her kesiminden insanlar*”). Hostility was a part of daily life, as was the friendship.

My thesis included two big chapters. In the first one, I tried to explain the institution both as a physical space and a discursively constructed contact zone. I used both the interview that I had done with Türkân Çakar and the participants’ narratives about the institution for that part. I also used Sarigül’s own statements who emerged, unexpectedly, an important figure in my research. He was in all the interviews, as a loved and supported authority figure, a compassionate and respectful person towards the elderly. Seniors Centre was a gift from him (and not even from the municipality) to the elders. I argued that Seniors Centre was a “contact zone” where political sentiments were produced.

In the second chapter, I analysed women's narratives about their personal lives, though the distinction between the private lives and the public world was blurred. I looked at how age was accomplished in dialogue with the other. Some of the issues discussed, such as the physical appearance or housework, were opened to discussion by my questions and I had planned to discuss these issues from the beginning. On the other hand, topics such as intimacy, health, sexuality and ethnic differences were brought to my attention in the research process. Not all of the topics were discussed explicitly: Sometimes participants mentioned these briefly and implicitly, they used idioms and euphemisms, or gossiped about the others etc. We talked about the changing pace of the housework, about the meaning of home and the nursing home, or about the "appropriate" ways of clothing.

I also tried to trace how participants were distinguishing themselves from their class others. The efforts for distinction were taking place both in the institutional level and in the interpersonal level: In the institutional level, it was emphasized in the institutional representation that there were, among the "seniors of Şişli", educated and talented people. Their skills were documented and shared on Facebook (Fahriye Hanım was reciting a poem, while Ishak Bey was posing with the paintings that he had done). This institutional representation was echoed by some of the participants. Selda, for instance, was saying that she was happy about being in the Seniors Centre because the people around her were respectable people retired from important positions. In the interpersonal level, participants were criticizing others' behavior, struggling to protect their fixed places in the main hall from unwanted intruders or claiming that the place did not really suit their character, because there were people from all the strata of the society in there.

I argued that the place was providing the old people of Şişli ("Şişli'nin mutlu emeklileri") with a sense of belonging. They were becoming "active" consumers, (even "fashionable" consumers who benefited from yoga classes and hotel stays) through the trips or activities that were made possible by the municipality. Though it was very important that elders were getting socialized, the fact that the place was constructed by both parts as "a gift" was complicating the picture.

If I were to redo my fieldwork, I would choose to do an internship in Seniors Centre and I could carry out my research while working there. I hadn't considered this option as I had wanted to stay "independent". However, as the research progressed, I realised that doing ethnography in an institutional setting meant to be entangled in power dynamics. I depended on the permit of the director to do research, I was subjected to surveillance and I had even become a part of the institutional representation. One time, when I was just passing by the institution I went in to say hello. Women asked about my work and when it would be finished. Then Neziha asked whether I was seeing the mayor. When I replied that I was not, she strongly recommended me to visit him and that would pave the way for good positions for me. She said: "Take my word seriously and go see him, he would help you a lot". So, I was placed within institutional hierarchies and I wasn't exempt from power dynamics. How could being an intern contribute to my research? I could provide better insight about the regulation of everyday life from the position of the municipal agents and maybe it could have been easier to establish relation with women. Rather than being an "outsider" who was confusing people with her *bizarre* interest in their daily lives, I could start as a person who was actually working in the institution.

APPENDIX I: INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

1. Nazife (73 years old): She was born in Erzurum and was a housewife. She had been married three times, had lost her first husband who was the father of her three children, and her second husband had also passed away. Her third marriage had ended with a divorce. She was living alone.
2. Nadya (80 years old): She was an Armenian from Sivas. After her father's economic situation had worsened due to the Varlık Vergisi (Capital Tax), she and her sister had contributed to the family with tailoring and embroidery. She had been married when she was 36 years old and hadn't worked after the marriage. Her husband had passed away 3 years ago. She didn't have any children and was living alone.
3. Şakhe (67 years old): She was born in Istanbul. She had two children and two grandchildren. She was Armenian. She had worked as a health care provider all her life; specializing on manicure, pedicure, hairdressing, etc. She had carried out her profession both in the health sector (providing care for hands and feet of the people who were in intensive care units) and in beauty parlors in Büyükkada, Kınalıada, Harbiye and Kurtuluş. She had been living alone since 12 years.
4. Melahat (83 years old): She was born in Sivas and was Armenian. She had come in Istanbul in 1980 with her husband and two sons because of economic hardships. She had worked as a tailor while the family was in Sivas and gotten retired. Her husband was retired from Emek Sineması (Emek Movie Theater) where he had worked as a doorkeeper. Melahat and her husband were living with their younger son who was currently unemployed. She was sometimes getting confused about giving an exact chronology of the events.
5. Özlem (66 years old): She was born in Adana and had gotten married when she was only 13 years old. For ten years she had been subject to domestic violence. She had lived in Germany for a while as a worker and divorced her husband. She had earned a living as a singer in clubs. She was living alone in Kurtuluş Son Durak. She had

contact with her children who were still living in Adana and Kilis, but they did not have a close relationship. Her life story was drastically different than all the other informants' stories, both in terms of the events that formed it and in terms of the speech that she used.

6. Ayşe (61 years old): She had left Istanbul University Law School at her last year. She had worked for 34 years and gotten retired in 2007. She was living alone because her husband had deceased and her son had recently moved out. She emphasized that she was taking part in the organizations of Şişli Municipality and was a member of Women's Assembly.
7. Arife (Around 70-75 years old): She was from Sivas. She was illiterate. She could not tell me the exact year when she was born or how old she was, and she later linked this to an intention to protect herself from evil eye (*nazar*). Her life story had an ambiguous chronology, partly resembling Melahat's account. Arife's narrative mainly revolved around the building that she and her husband had owned in Halide Edip district of Şişli. She had distributed the flats of that building among her children. She had lost her husband and one of her sons had passed away in an accident. She was living alone in another flat in Halide Edip.
8. Selda (63 years old): She had lived in Anatolia -this was the way that she referred to her place of origin, rather than giving the name of a city- and came in Istanbul when she had gotten married. She had worked as a sales person before getting retired. Her second husband, whom she was currently married to, was Armenian. He was older than Selda and had a daughter from his previous marriage. Selda did not have any children of her own, but affirmed that she was getting along well with her step-daughter. An important turning point of her life was her husband's bankruptcy during a period of economic crisis. After that, she had worked for one and a half years in order to contribute to the family, selling semi-precious stones in Eskidji. She was living with her husband.
9. Fahriye (79 years old): She was a retired nurse. Originally from Manisa, she had worked in different cities of Turkey such as Tekirdağ, İzmir and İstanbul. She had been married twice. She had divorced her first husband who was an Armenian man and she was linking this divorce to the political climate in Turkey during that period. Her second husband had passed away. She too had a bankruptcy story. She was currently

living with a Jewish man that she had met in Retired Home. She had a son from her first marriage.

10. Perihan (80 years old): She did not give her exact birth year, however during the interview she stated that she was 80 years old. She had worked as a tailor, going to the homes of her customers and sewing. She had three children and seven grandchildren. She was living alone.
11. Gülnaz (75 years old): She was born in Kayseri. She had gotten married in Istanbul and had had two sons. Her husband had passed away and she was living with her younger son. She told me that she was a tailor, but she probably had worked informally because she was living with the pension that she was benefiting from her deceased husband's pension.
12. Sabiha (83 years old): She was from Black Sea Region. She had four children and she was living very near, with her daughter. She was expressing that her economic condition was good, but that she had acquired all that she owned by hardwork. She had a respiration problem which made hard for me to transcribe our interview.

APPENDIX II: THE POEM RECITED BY FAHRİYE

GEÇTİ BOR'UN PAZARI (Yazan: Namdar Rahmi Karatay)

Başta kavak yelleri estiği günler hani?
Beklediğin nişanlar, şerefler, ünler hani?

Aradığın sevgili, şanlı düğünler hani?
Selvi gibi ümitler döndü birer iğdeye,
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

Sende cevher var imiş bunu herkes ne bilsin.
Kimler böyle züğürdün huzurunda eğilsin?
Şöyle bir dairede müdür bile değilsin.
Ne çıkar öğrenmişsin mesahayı pi diye,
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

Bilmem ki ne olmağı senin gayen, maksadın ?
Fare gibi kitapların arasında yaşadın.
Ne dans ettin eğlendin, ne sevdin kız kadın,
Kim dedi hey serseri gençliğine kıy diye?
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

Gönül ne çalgı ister, ne eğlence ne de dans,
Ne güzel kadınların önlerinde reverans.
Kapandıkça kapandı bunca yıldır kahpe şans.
İhtiyarlık gölgesi perde çekti dideye,
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

Fırsatı iyi kolla, sakın olma dangalak,
Keyfine bak dünyada gülerek, oynayarak.
Sende iç şampanyalar, viskiler bardak bardak,
Dokunuyor üç kadeh şimdi bizim mideye,
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

Hasanın böreğine vaktinde yetişmeli,
Hiç durmadan gövdeye atıştırıp şişmeli.
Yanıpta kavrulmadan mükemmelen pişmeli,
Yoksa seni almazlar hiç bir yere çiy diye,
Geçti Bor'un pazarı, sür eşeğini Niğde'ye.

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