

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF OLD AGE
IN THE NARRATIVES OF 65+ WOMEN**

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ABSTRACT

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As an interdependent being, human seeks security and meaning through his interactions with his social world. Old age is a period in which this need can be felt more due to some changes that a person encounters. In order to grasp this period, starting from intersubjective relations of people may bring about significant information about the lives of people for the construction of old age perceptions. In this respect, this study is a contribution to the micro-sociology of old age for showing the different aspects of it through the experiences of thirteen middle-classed, relatively independent women who are 65 and more years old, perform daily praying and live in Istanbul in their homes. Rather than measuring the relationship between religiosity and being old, it tries to follow the meaning-making process of these women without undermining the role of the researcher herself. It is based on a phenomenological understanding of old age by using symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer by combining it with Elias' approach to old age. By making narrative analysis of life stories of women, it concludes that there are three major perceptions: old age as a physical and mental dependency, old age as despair vs. opportunity, and old age as loneliness. By looking the actions of women which are the results of the meanings of old age, the study questions the social interactions that give away these meanings.

Keywords: old age, narrative analysis, feminization of aging, dependency, symbolic interactionism

ÖZ

65 Yaş ve Üzeri Kadınların Anlatılarında Yaşlılık Algısı

Zülfikar, Hüsna

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Başkalarına bağımlı fitratıyla insan, toplumsal hayatla ilişkisiyle güven ve anlam arayışındadır. Yaşlılık insanın yaşadığı birtakım değişikliklerden ötürü bu ihtiyacı daha çok hissettiği bir dönemdir. Bu dönemi anlamaya insanın öznelarası ilişkileriyle başlamak bize yaşlılık algısının inşasında insanların hayatlarıyla ilgili önemli bilgiler verir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma, orta sınıf, görece bağımsız, beş vakit namaz kılan İstanbul'da kendi evinde yaşayan 65 yaş üstü 13 kadının tecrübesiyle yaşlılık mikro sosyolojine bir katkıdır. Bu araştırma, dindarlık ve yaşlılık arasındaki ilişkiyi ölçmekten çok, araştırmacının rolünü gözardı etmeden bu kadınların anlam verme süreçlerini takip etmeye çalışmaktadır. Çalışma, Herbert Blumer'in sembolik etkileşim teorisini Elias'ın yaşlılık anlayışıyla birleştirerek yaşlılığı fenomenolojik anlayışla inceler. Kadınların hayat hikayelerine anlatı analizi yaparak şu üç ana algıya ulaşmıştır: fiziksel ve mental bağımlılık olarak yaşlılık, umutsuzluk ve imkan karşılığında yaşlılık ve yalnızlık olarak yaşlılık. Kadınların yaşlılığın anlamıyla oluşan davranışlarına bakarak, bu anlamlara yol veren toplumsal ilişkileri sorgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yaşlılık, anlatı analizi, yaşlanmanın kadınlaşması, muhtaçlık, yalnızlık, sembolik etkileşim.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Old age was beautiful in the past. My maternal grandmother had a four-roomed house with a huge living room: a room for each of the two brides, my grandmother's room, and a room used as a cellar. In the morning, after getting up, everyone would have a duty to do. One would knead dough; one would graze the animals, my grandmother would sweep the doors, she would get up before the morning prayer and sweep everywhere. After that, breakfast would be set up on the floor; we didn't have tables back then. We would put mattresses on the floor. My aunt had two children; the other one also had two children. Everyone would gather around and eat together¹ (Perestu 68).

This is nostalgic childhood depictions of a woman who was born in Gönen-Balıkesir and migrated Istanbul at a year old, lives in Üsküdar with her husband, divorced son, and grandson. She diagnosed cancer on her 47 and recovered in a few years after a long and exhausting process, and now she is still a fulltime housewife of her home. This narration of old age can be seen as a typical example of a traditional old aged that lived among extended family by having so many people around him to socialize and have solidarity that is missed by yearning.

In Turkish sociological literature there are two kinds of basic understandings of old age, one of them mourns the dreamed old days in which family ties are powerful and old aged are looked after very well respectfully and the second one praises the individualistic family type that sees the transformation as natural and claims that society should be ready to this subjectivity from young ages and apply policies according to this fact. This tension arises from the economic-demographic

¹Eski yaşlılık çok güzeldi, anneannem bak 4 odalı bir evleri vardı koskoca bir salonları, bir gelinin odası, bir öbürkü gelinin odası, anneannemin odası, burada böyle kiler gibi bir şeyleri vardı, sabahleyin kalkılırdı herkesin vazifesi var kimi hamur yoğurur teknede, kimi hayvan otlatmaya gider, anneannem kapıları süpürür, erkenden ezandan önce uyanır, kapıları bahçeleri süpürür, ondan sonra bir sofraya kurulur, öyle masa falan yoktu, ondan sonra şilteler atılır, artık yengemin iki çocuğu var öbürünün iki çocuğu var herkes toplanır o sofraya.

explanations of old age that perceive it as a crisis to solve. That picture generally looks like the following:

Turkey is no longer a young country. The percentage of people who are 65 and more years old is 8.8 in the year of 2018. Among them, the percentage of the female is 9.8, whereas the percentage of the male is 7,7 (TÜİK, 2018). Only in four years, there is a 16% increase in the population of older adults, which was 8% of the whole population in 2014 (TÜİK, 2019). Moreover, this rate of older adults is predicted to increase in the future. In 2023 it is thought to be 10, 2% of the total population (TÜİK, 2019).

According to the result of Address Based Population Registration System in 2018, the elderly dependency ratio is 12,9 per hundred people aged 15-64, and is expected to increase in line with the increase in life expectancy in Turkey (TÜİK, 2019). Since the total fertility rate of Turkey is now under the replacement level, Turkey is seen as losing its “window of opportunity” which is used for denoting the high proportion of the working population at the working ages (20-54). In other words, according to population momentum when today’s working population becomes aged, there will not be enough working population that can respond to the aged people’s social needs. By exceeding the 7% threshold of those above 65 years of age, Turkey is no longer a young country, but an aged society due to an increase in the life expectancy rate and a decline in the fertility rate.

These are indispensable explanations when the topic is old age. To use statistical data is considered to be sufficient for indicating the significance of old age. Moreover, these alarmist statements are compatible with the policymakers’ perception of old age as a serious problem to be solved. This perception of old age as a serious problem comes from the demographic theories that are different appearances of modernization theories. The second demographic transition theory that is believed to happen after the second half of the twentieth century in Northern and Western Europe is based on the decline of fertility rate under the replacement level (Van de Kaa, 2001).

Moreover, the decline in mortality rate is another feature of this period, which brings about high life expectancy (Van de Kaa, 2001). By the inclusion of women to the working process, the role of the family as a caregiver to the aged population started to decrease, and states began to take more responsibility in economically sufficient countries (Duben, 2013, p. 6). However, by the time the welfare state starts to have difficulty to compensate for this responsibility due to the decreasing working population in contrast to growing old aged population (Duben, 2013, p. 7). Although the journey of Turkey is not as same as European states, the Turkish state has significant attempts to set up the same welfare standards with them such as retirement wages, health care (Duben, 2013, 8). In this respect, the decline in fertility rate that goes hand in hand with the changing role of women, Turkey seems to encounter the same problems with its European fellows. This is the reason for the increased recent interest of Turkish academia on the topic of old age, which are generally based on these demographic explanations (Şentürk & Ceylan, 2015, p. 17). However, this economic-demographic side is only one part of the story. Rather than this side, this study aims to follow the circulating meaning of old age through the narratives of people who are supposed to be old aged according to this standardized definition. It looks the perceptions of old age by analyzing the relations of so called old aged women in their social worlds.

1.1. Motivation

As a daughter of devout Sunni-Muslim, patriarchal, middle-class family that migrated from Bitlis to Istanbul in the 1970s, I always had a particular understanding of old age.

I grew up by knowing rules and regulations towards older people that are based on respect as a granddaughter. However, it gained new meanings after my paternal grandfather's dementia when the concept of care, self, and mind came to the picture. He was staying with my uncle's family, and we went there for accompanying him as needed since our home was very close to theirs. He died nine years ago at the age of 83 when he became utterly bedridden for a few months. This experience constructs an image of old aged who is dependent and should be

cared for by his family that correlates with traditional old age understandings. In a few years, my maternal grandmother who stayed with her daughters periodically had a heart failure that increased her dependency, and I tried to assist my mother in the whole process when she devoted herself to care for her mother. As gratitude for being energetic, vigorous young, I felt a kind of duty towards old aged, and this actually created a hierarchy among us. I was a powerful, merciful young that helps needy dependent old aged that turns our former relationship upside down.

After losing my maternal grandmother at the end of a year caregiving process, I started to question how other people give meaning to old age caring. "How do people give meaning to caregiving, whether they perceive it as a fidelity, moral duty, job, burden or all of them together; how does care receiver interpret the process?" kind of questions came to my mind. Rather than institutions, I was wondering about the views of the layman on care, dependency, old age, loneliness who experiences the home-care process. For that reason, I thought to find dependent old adults who are cared for by their family or paid laborer. However, after reading some literature, I have noticed that before an investigation about care, I should grasp the process of old age itself. Even the concept's different denotations like old age, aging, growing old, elder, senility are sufficient for attracting my attention to learn what kind of meanings do these words circulate. Who are elderly people? When does a person become old aged? What constitutes to be elderly? How do people understand that they are aging? Indeed, there are several answers to these questions from the discipline that you are looking for, and generally, sociological literature is based on a fixed definition of aging as only a "neutral" category that gives way to "more sophisticated" social analysis. By defining the ones who are 65 and more years old as old aged, it tries to evaluate the effects of something over old aged, or the effects of being old aged on something. I have wondered the phenomenological meaning of old age for the ones who experience that process. To put it another way, I have spotted the target from the caregiver to old people themselves in order to see their views on old age. On the other hand, I have changed my mind and dispensed with studying on care issue due to the sensitiveness of it. I would have difficulty to find people to do an interview,

and even if I found it, it would be hard to talk with the old aged people according to their dependence degree. Being dependent on care is a tough issue in terms of the psychology of a person, and it is determinative for self-understanding.

Eventually, I have put forward this question: "if there is something called old age, how do the so-called old aged experience it?" Right after I started to find people that are 65 and more years old and live at home rather than an institution. Moreover, due to accessibility and seeing the difference in women's understanding, I have decided to talk with only women and find out their perceptions of old age.

1.2. Key Concepts

Old age: The social construction of this concept is the starting point of this study. In contrast to its extensive meanings according to different literature that you are looking from, generally, it is associated with the chronological age and defined as a specific period that is believed to be different from other age groups. It is a somehow consequence of aging that a person experiences since his birth (Vincent, 2003). In terms of welfare states, old age consists of 65 and more years old that social and economic policies are arranged according to this definition. In this study, in order to grasp the different connotations of people who are believed to experience old age, all different notions such as the elderly, aging, senior, gray population, older adult are merged under the umbrella of old age. For the person who experiences the process, "old aged" is used instead of the elderly or senior.

Dependency: It is a comprehensive and controversial concept that is related to human nature. By asserting Elias understanding of the human as interdependent by nature that seeks meaning and security thorough people (Elias, 1985, p. 2) dependency is a necessary condition of human. However, type and the limits of it controversial in the sense that one should always explain the content of it. In this respect, it is a socially constructed concept that the meaning of it change according to content that is used. Fine and Glendinning quote from Walker (1982) who defines four type of dependency : "life-cycle dependency; physical and psychological dependency; political dependency; economic and financial dependency; and

structural dependency”(Fine & Glendinning, 2005, p. 606). It can be useful as a comprehensive definition. However, when it comes to old age in terms of policymakers, dependency supposes to have nominal meaning that can be measured such that there is a ratio of it. In this study, rather than political, economic, and legal side of it, the physical, mental, and social side of it will be analyzed in the narrations of women. It can be seen as an empty set that is filled by the definitions of women.

Loneliness: Loneliness, social isolation, or being alone are used interchangeably in this study. Although in English being “alone” means “without other people” (“Cambridge Dictionary,” n.d.-a) whereas “lonely” means “unhappy because you are not with other people” (“Cambridge Dictionary,” n.d.-b) there is not this kind of differentiation in Turkish that one can use “yalnızlık” is a neutral category that can be used negative or positively according to context that is used in. Rather than dealing with the growing literature on loneliness of old age (Victor, Scamler, Bowling, & Bond, 2009), this study observes the traces of loneliness on the narratives of women and tries to indicate their perceptions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Abbott (2001) argues that social science is full of “fractal cycles”. He divides social knowledge into “segmentary lineages” that are believed to be constituted by “fractal distinctions”. These distinctions repeat themselves in a specified pattern in a certain period. Although these successive distinctions include a condensed form of “system of knowledge,” they also give away so many misunderstandings. Historically these distinctions result in the constant rediscovery of the same knowledge that he labels as “fractal cycles” (Abbott, 2001, p. 147). He shows how this knowledge is split up such as pure vs. applied, structural vs. individual, quantitative vs. qualitative, and how each of these fractions is split up again in itself by bringing forth the same kind of fractions. He asserts that although there is always new terminology for each fraction, essentially there is not a new notion (Abbott, 2001, p.17). He gives the example of “culture,” how it was called solidarity in the past, and at present, how it is called identity (Abbott, 2001, p.20). He explains how each generation supposes some concepts as a discovery by labeling the old ones from directly opposite thinking styles (Abbott, 2001, p.21). He says that the middle generation and new generation may use the same words, but they use them in different connotations (Abbott, 2001, p.21). In this respect, he shows how these fractions include “both change and stability” (Abbott, 2001, p. 21). He categorizes “quantitative vs. qualitative, positivism vs. interpretation, analysis vs. narrative, realism vs. constructionism, social structure vs. culture, individual-level vs. emergent level, transcendent knowledge vs. situated knowledge” by matching the formers with the latter (Abbott, 2001, p. 28).

By believing this approach of social science, this study's theoretical and methodological lineage comes from the interpretation side of the knowledge, which is under one fraction called phenomenology, under another fraction called micro-sociology. More clearly, to grasp old age, this study will use the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer by including anthropology of old age literature.

On the other hand, from the social structural side of the knowledge, this study will use Norbert Elias' theorization of loneliness in which he explains the loneliness of dying in order to make a more general analyze

2.1. Phenomenology of Social World

Phenomenology carefully examines human experiences and how the essential tools of understanding are constructed (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2002, p. 25). Although it was a notion of social philosophy, it became a significant concept under existentialism and its proper entrance to sociology realized by Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) who is under the influence of Weber (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2002, p.27). Recalling the fractal cycles, it was not a new thing for sociology but had a different emphasis. Phenomenologists dealt with the question of "what makes things knowable" by emphasizing the "situatedness" of the universe. They believe that knowledge can only be attained by "empirical sensory perceptions" rather than abstract notions (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2002, p.27).

In this respect, Alfred Schutz investigates commonsensical knowledge that we have in our everyday lives while doing routine actions. He believes that in order to comprehend social reality we should look at the intersubjective meaning of social action rather than personal perceptions in which we cannot be involved precisely as an outsider (Johnson, 2008, p. 139). This idea is, in fact, an adaptation of Husserl's intersubjectivity, which asserts that human existence starts with the confrontation of the subject with the objective world (Duranti, 2010, p. 1). According to Husserl natural world is an arena of shared knowledge in addition to being a co-world that is made by language that Subject and Other is used (Duranti, 2010, p. 2). Hence intersubjectivity is the interpretation, organization, and reproduction of social reality (Duranti, 2010, p. 2). However, it should not be equated with only shared experiences since it presumes the mind-reading of an outsider to the subject.

Further than being shared experiences, intersubjectivity is projecting oneself in the place of the subject by believing that he would see the reality like the subject sees (Duranti, 2010, p.6). He says that "Nature is an intersubjective reality and a reality

not just for me and my companions of the moment but for us and all those who must enter into an interaction with us and can come to an understanding with us about things and people” (Husserl, 1989, as cited in Duranti, 2010, p.7). In this respect, objectivity can only be possible by intersubjectivity, which means that there is not an objective world by itself.

This idea of objectivity become widespread for the anthropology literature after the 1970s (Duranti, 2010, p.8). As a source of social reality, most of the anthropologists started to believe in intersubjectivity, in contrast to the positivist idea that claims to reach social reality by demographical and historical variables, (Duranti, 2010, p.8). All social constructionist ideas can be seen as appearances of this idea. On the other hand, Alfred Schutz makes the adaptation of intersubjectivity to sociology by adding action to the picture. He gives the example of Weber, the woodcutter that we have only a chance to observe rather than communication. Schutz asks how we can understand him. He answers his question in the following way: first by dreaming ourselves as if we were carrying the wood and second by recalling the memory or imaging that we did the same thing. In both situations, we suppose ourselves in his position, but he warns us that we do not make the two mistakes of “projective theory of empathy”. Empathy theory believes that knowledge of the observed is bound to knowledge of the observer and knowledge of the mind of the observed is thought to exceed the structural analogy between the mind of the observer and the observed (Schutz, 2002, p. 33). In this respect, rather than transcendental knowledge, he naturalizes human action that can be a different idea of Husserl (Duranti, 2010, p. 3).

On the other hand, he says that “We know with certainty that the other person’s subjective experience of his action is in principle different from our own imagined picture of what we would do in the same situation” (Schutz, 2002, p. 33). Hence, rather than one-sided knowledge, he underlines the mutual understanding that constitutes social reality.

2.2. Symbolic Interactionism

After giving brief information about phenomenology, it can be appropriate to start to summarize Blumer's theory of Symbolic Interactionism. Symbolic Interactionism bases on three assumptions which are: "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them", "the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows", "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encountered" (Blumer, 1998, p. 2) It is contrary to mainstream social science on his days that undermines the meaning by either seeing it as given or neutral thing that is shaped by attitude and the factors that give away to that attitude (Blumer, 1998, p. 2). In this respect, rather than starting from structures such as social values, roles, cultural norms, symbolic interactionism directly starts from meaning. On the other hand, it differentiates itself from realism that gives intrinsic meaning to things by asserting the second premise, which explains the source of meaning by social interaction (Blumer, 1998, p.3-4). The meaning of a thing arises from the actions of the people towards the person respecting that thing (Blumer, 1998, p. 3-4). However, the main difference of symbolic interactionism comes from its third premise that rejects the immediate application of meaning that derived from social interaction. The action of a person includes an interpretation rather than directly use the meaning that is formed by social interaction. He "selects, checks, suspends, regroups, and transforms the meaning" according to his state (Blumer, 1998, p.5). In this respect, he defines "root images" of symbolic interactionism that are "human groups or societies, social interaction, objects, human beings as an actor, human action and the interconnection of the lines of action." (Blumer, 1998, p.6) Hence, it can be seen that it does not start from total vagueness but defines some essential tools to stand on according to mutual interactions of them. Society is a combination of people who acts reflexively to each other according to the interaction that they engage in.

The action of a person is both a reflection and an interpretation of what he learns from the interaction. He accepts that people get involved in various organizations, a different status that have a particular set of meanings (Blumer, 1998, p.21).

Moreover, Blumer gives great importance to the empirical side of the theory. He indicates that "firsthand knowledge" (Blumer, 1998, p.38) by directly examining society is so significant for a social science rather than using it as data for proving hypotheses. After direct research of the empirical world, theories, techniques, notions should be found not before it (Blumer, 1998, p. 2, p.48).

On the other hand, one should always think that the results that he finds from the study of empirical world in which he observes the action of people according to their social interaction with the objects around them, is not something solid facts that resist modifying. On the contrary, "the organizations, institutions, division of labor, and networks of dependency" are confined to change (Blumer, 1998, p.50). Hence, symbolic interactionism does not explain structures as self-sufficient things that have their own rules and regulations but as an interpretive link among the actions of people (Blumer, 1998, p.59).

As can be seen, symbolic interactionism is not something weird for today's sociological students since social constructionist ideas become widespread in most of the social sciences. However, sociology did not give the necessary importance to interactionism (Atkinson & Housley, 2003). In the past, by being ignored by popular theories, "we (contemporary mainstream sociology) were never interactionist." On the other hand, now "we are all interactionist" but implicitly (Atkinson & Housley, 2003) since contemporary sociology owes many things to interactionism. They complain about how there is an "amnesia" toward interactionism that undermines the roots of today's qualitative studies. Rather than referring a unique character to interactionism, they also show how there are cyclical things (Atkinson & Housley, 2003, p.145) similar to Abbott's claim.

After this rough summary of symbolic interactionism, we should look at the position of old age in this literature. However, unfortunately, there is not acceptable direct application of this theory on old age literature. On the other hand, by remembering the cycles of Abbott, we may realize how this fraction of sociology has so many

similarities with the anthropological literature that has notable literature on the phenomenology of old age.

2.3. Anthropology of Old Age

In the anthropology of old age, the first thing that everyone agrees on was the inadequacy of the studies (Cohen, 1994; Hurwicz, 1995) until the 1980s. Although Cohen criticizes the laments of every writer for the dearth of research in the anthropology of old age, one cannot find so many resources when reviewing the literature even today with the label of "anthropology of old age". However, Cohen's difference lies in his inquiry on the meaning of this consensus asserting there has been a paucity in the anthropology of old age. He believes this is a legitimizing strategy that some writers use for their work by claiming that there is a failure in the past and the future will be far better due to themselves. More importantly, he claims that this narrative arises from the blurred relationship between gerontology and anthropology (Cohen, 1994, p. 138). This point is crucial in order to grasp the idea of death in contrast to several ethnographic and cross-cultural studies in gerontology. He indicates that the original structure of gerontology that has explicit methodologies and borders prevents people from including these studies under the anthropology literature. In this respect, it may be appropriate to talk a bit about gerontology.

2.3.1. Birth of Gerontology

Gerontology is a "scientific study of aging" that started at the beginning of the 20th century (Wimoth & Ferraro, 2007, p. 13). There are three aspects: physical aspects of aging, social aspects of aging, and public policy that deals with aging (Wimoth & Ferraro, 2007). In this respect, its emergence is inseparable from the emergence of a welfare state that defines liberal citizenship. Stephen Katz starts this process from the 19th century onwards by adapting Foucauldian disciplinary power argument to old age in his book called *Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge*. He indicates two effects of gerontology; the first one is the construction of "old aged people" and "old age" and the second one is the disciplinary power of gerontology that regulates old people according to the knowledge that it produces

(Katz, 1996, p. 1). His historicization is an adaptation of Foucauldian notions; “medicalization of the body” and “governmentality of the population,” which is a source formation of the modern power (Katz, 1996, p.8). In this respect, he demonstrates how gerontology includes both technologies of power and regulatory mechanism together. At this point, it may be necessary to give a brief explanation about Foucauldian biopower.

Biopower is new and unique, and it happened in two phases. The first phase is the emergence of technologies of power, which are focused on individual bodies. It conceives the body as a machine that should discipline, be controlled in order to optimize its capacity. In this sense, efficiency is a significant factor in order to explain the development of different kinds of institutions such as schools, army, workshops, for applying discipline. After the first phase of the 18th century, “the anatomo-politics of the human body,” the second phase on the species of body emerged at the end of the century. In this way, the formation of a new type of power completed. This second phase is constituted by the regulatory mechanism of power, which deals with the biological processes of the population. He states that disciplinary power tries to control a multiplicity of men through dissolving them as individual bodies whereas regulatory power tackles with this issue by transforming them into masses via looking immense structures such as reproduction, morbidity, mortality, production. He calls this last development as “biopolitics of the human race” since it tries to control so many processes such as birth rate, mortality rate, morbidity rate through a population. 18th century onwards, the effects of biopolitics can be observed as in the examples of propagating natalist policy, controlling not only epidemics but also endemics which changes the random nature of death to a stable process (Foucault, 2004, p. 244). In the light of this definition of biopower, it can be understood how regulatory mechanism constitutes the “old aged” whereas technologies of power establish tools like a pension system, nursing home, retirement, hospitalization.

In contrast to the heroic narrative of gerontology that claims to be knowledge for the assistance of old aged (Hirsbein, 1998), it makes them as a homogeneous group

that equals with unemployment and dependency (Grebner, 1997). This view harmonizes with welfare state understanding that defines who the elders are according to their inability to use their resources. Although through retirement and all social services it tries to establish social security for old aged people, it inevitably brings about the ones who are under threat by being the lack of security due to their lack of inclusion of the system through employment. As Cohen states concretely, old age is generally argued with binary oppositions which are biology versus psychology, culture versus language, economy versus society, and these dualities always give away false clarities(Cohen, 1998), gerontology stands in the middle of all these fields by getting closer to biology and economy side.This kind of gerontology perception is not exclusive to the 20th century but can still be valid.

2.3.2. Anthropology of Old Age Literature in Turkey

Like Cohen's analysis for India in which he witnessed the formation of gerontology not as the study of old age but as the creator of old age (Cohen, 1998) in the 1980s, Turkey has lived same kind of process for the formation of the discipline in the need of the state that should cope with old aged population. The book shows how being a senior citizen is equal to be a pensioner that constitutes a small percentage of Indian society (Cohen, 1998, p.88). He says that the gerontological narrative in India is based on the decline of extended family that gives way the "problem of aging." It is believed that due to westernization, industrialization; social support and consideration for old aged decreased (Cohen, 1998, p.89). This kind of idea is synonymous with the demographic transition theories' explanation, which is very common in Turkey. The report of State Planning Organization called "The condition of elders in Turkey and national action plan of aging" starts with the same kind of explanation by underlining how aging is not only the problem of "developed" countries but also "developing" countries that are arisen from rapid decline in the fertility rate and increase in the life expectancy rate(DPT, 2007, p.vii). In this respect, one can say the "alarmist, and apocalyptic" language of gerontology (Cohen, 1998) has found a place for itself in Turkey due to similar structural changes in society to India. Similar to the Indian case in which there is a man called Kumar who asserts himself as a first-person that defines aging as a social issue in India, in

Turkey, there is İsmail Tufan who is an establisher of first gerontology faculty in Akdeniz University. It is interesting to read how two men's alarmist language can be so similar to each other (Cohen, 1998; Tufan, 2014).

As stated by Cohen who asserts the subjugation of biology and psychology over the issue of old age, the meaning of old age is generally studied by public health or gerontology departments of medical sciences and psychology department in Turkey. However, researchers insist that their works are social gerontology by critiquing the domination of the field by geriatrics studies (Tufan, 2014). Although their works are generally adaptation of the functionalist theory of Parsons' sociology, they should be seen significant by their effort to include sociology to picture. The main problem of most research is the repetition of gerontological theories of aging (Activity, disengagement, continuity, role, deficit) and giving much statistical data by not analyzing the meaning of it in terms of social constructions. Although there are not much anthropological studies, there are notable sociological works on the elderly. Arun claims in his introduction article of their new journal "Senex" that there is not study of old age in Turkey, but there are so many works on elders (Ö. Arun, 2017, p. 1). He also criticizes the understanding of old age as a problem to solve by supposing them as a homogenous category (Arun, 2017) This heterogeneity needs to be studied by analyzing old age not as a problem of people who are 65+ but as a period that has social, cultural, economic history. In this respect this new journal or new interdisciplinary studies on old age are promising for the future. On the other hand, Üstel's ethnographic dissertation that deals with the daily life activities of old aged women who are from a senior center in Şişli can be seen as unique (Üstel, 2013) by its feminist anthropological character. By conducting interviews, she indicates the daily lives of a group of retired people who can be called upper middle class educated women. By giving excessive emphasis on her personal journey on ethnography, she shows the daily practices of educated, more secular women than mine participants in their aging process. It is significant in terms of anthropology of elderly institutions; however, it is a bit deficient in terms of compatibility of theory and analyses by being a lack of making concrete implications. She shows that these women have a feeling of belongingness through

being from Şişli, and in this institution makes stronger their belongingness by including them to the system as consumers.

2.3.3 Cultural Turn

On the other hand, if we turn the comparison of anthropology and gerontology again, we will find that the regret of anthropologists for the lack of studies has started to decrease since the 1980s. However, it is thought to be a glory of gerontology that starts to include anthropology in it by setting up a new field that is called geroanthropology (Cohen, 1994). Some scholars conceive this event as a paradigm shift from the ageist discipline of gerontology, whereas others approach more suspiciously to this change. This tension is related to more general problems in anthropology like the role of others, subjectivity, and reflexivity. For instance, Margaret Clark that is seen as a pioneer who tries to include culture in the picture of aging (Perkinson & Solimeo, 2013) grasp the process as a lack of reflexivity that American society denies looking at the significant life-span event of themselves (Hurwicz, 1995). However, rather than being a reflexive thing since most of the anthropologists are not old people, it has a representation problem that makes old people "Other" of the field (Cohen, 1994, p.141). Like White Man's Burden that should save the "Orient" from his shackles, geroanthropologist generally claim that they save the old people from ignorance and discover the distinctive features of aging (Cohen, 1994, p.142). This language of exploration used by undermining the political and economic side of the story is prevalent in the field. To put it another way, this is a repetition of gerontological understanding that constructs itself universal truth which is free from history.

On the other hand, Cohen talks about ambiguity that dominates the field. This is related to the existentialist ambiguity of gerontology like other modern sciences that stays away from the questions of metaphysics, meanings (Cole & Sierpina, 2006, p. 245). Without questioning the essence of life, it tries to explain aging by "knowing its necessary conditions" ((Cole & Sierpina, 2006, p. 246). However, after the 1970s, this gap is tried to be covered by "culture" (Cohen, 1994, p. 145) as a consequence of the cultural turn of every field.

At this point, it may be appropriate to talk about Geertz, who is an influential figure for the cultural turn. As a famous definition of Geertz, culture is "thick description" rather than a power that conducts attitudes, associations, collective actions; it is "a context" in which all of these "can be described" comprehensibly (Geertz, 1973, p. 14) It is webs of significance that man spins (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) but has a "socially established" character (Geertz, 1973, p. 12). Geertz believes that anthropologist can never understand the same thing with her informants' understanding. He understands "by means of" something or "with" something or "through" something (Geertz, 1983, p. 58). Hence, those somethings differ them. In this respect, cultural analyses are always interpretations, and these interpretations are never the same with the "raw social discourses" since ethnographer has only things that his informants say to him (Geertz, 1973, p.20). Hence, he believes that an anthropological study should have three qualities: "it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse, and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the "said" of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms." (Geertz, 1973)

Moreover, he adds that a cultural study is unforeseen (Geertz, 1973, p.26) and "incomplete" (Geertz, 1973, p. 29). It includes so many profound layers that are seen if you plunged in. On the other hand, he underlines it is neither subjective analyses nor only transmitting what he heard from the society he studies in, but it is a combination of the interpretive world with analytical structure (Geertz, 1973, p.30).

While dealing with "culture," we should bear in mind Myerhoff is an famous figure in old age literature whose book of *Number Our Days* starts with foreword of Victor Turner in which he represents the effort of Myerhoff as significant contribution to extremes of anthropology that are seen as oppositions like "self and other, head and hearth, conscious and unconscious, history and autobiography" (Turner, 1978). He sees the turn of the gaze of anthropology over old people in their own societies as a glory of reflexivity like Barbara Myerhoff herself and asserts that this process as a thrice-born (first birth is our becoming in our own culture, the second one is

exploring other culture and familiarize the unfamiliar, third birth is defamiliarization of the familiars of our culture) is achieved very well by Myerhoff in her study of senior center in an urban place with Jewish population (Turner, 1978) due to her Jewish background. The lonely people who experienced holocaust and have similar cultural past by growing in closed Jewish communities create a center culture here (Myerhoff, 1978, p. 9). She makes four years of ethnography with these people by trying to apply classical methods that are done for "exotic cultures." In order to feel the physical state of her subjects, she makes "imaginative identification" by wearing garden gloves, not wearing her glass, plugging her ears, making her movements slow (Myerhoff, 1978, p.18). In this respect, she claims that she conceives them not like "they" but as a part of herself (Myerhoff, 1978, p.19) She claims that old aged people in this Centre live a right old age in contrast to ordinary American population due to their "good health, resilience, endurance, imagination, courage and childhood passed in a society that treasured its children" (Myerhoff, 1978, p.218). To sum up, the study is a pioneer of an ethnography of old age however it can be criticized due to having a solid, structural idea of culture for explaining the old age experiences of people.

In the culturalist understanding of old age, it may be appropriate to talk about Margaret Clark and Sharon Kaufman in detail. They conceive old age as a socially constructed process that changes according to the social-cultural context (Perkinson & Solimeo, 2014, p. 1). Clark's *Culture and Aging* and Kaufman's *The Ageless Self* are believed to open a new debate for the studies of culture and personality(Perkinson & Solimeo, 2014). Clark made a research with 80 people from both mentally ill who are hospitalized and mentally healthy elders in 1966 and found that although two groups shared same kind of goals like "independence, social acceptability, adequate personal resources, ability to cope with external threats or dangers, having significant goals and meaning in later life and ability to cope with changes in the self" they differ in terms of their reasons to attain these goals(Clark, 1967, p. 60).

When she compares the perception of reality of both, she observes that communal elders have adaptive perceptions whereas hospitalized ones have maladaptive. For instance, they want to be independent because they do not trust the people and have a fear of them whereas the communal ones want to be independent for not restricting the freedom of people around them and have pride in autonomy (Clark, 1967, p.60). After interpreting all these five goals' main motivations, she concludes that mentally ill people persist their middle-aged value orientations which constitute those days' American culture, which is based on individualism, competition, aggressiveness, e.g. (Clark, 1967, p.61). She analyzes that in order to attain adaptation, there should be "dramatic cultural discontinuity" while passing from adulthood to old age (Clark, 1967, p.62). All of the themes are arranged according to the belief that there is concrete self-esteem that these people want to attain which can also be seen as cultural bias in the sense that it gives the primary significance to self-esteem. This kind of thinking defines taken for granted American society that has its own cultures and norms concretely. This fact is valid for Kaufman's Ageless Society in which she tries to define a concrete "self," which is independent of chronological age (Kaufman, 1986).

Kaufman claims that chronological age is a white cluster in the sense that old aged people have an ageless self that depicts a substantial self that is not changed by the social and physical transformations. She claims that the old aged does not have meaning in itself, but people have "meaning in being themselves in old age" (Kaufman, 1986, p. 6). She gives so many examples in order to indicate how old Americans have a stable idea on their self in contrast to all physical, psychological, and social differences that they experience. Most of them answer the question of whether they feel different from their younger times negatively by asserting that they are always the same. Although all of them accept the physical changes which affect their lifestyle negatively, they believe that as a person, they are always the same. This is very related by having an individualistic culture that sees a self as the independent notion from the people and structures. She says that old age gains meaning when people experience it and their experiences reproduced "self" continuously.

On the other hand, Sarah Lamb questions this “self” understanding that includes “permanent personhood” and claims that this idea is, in fact, one of the appearances of successful aging movement (Lamb, 2014). She indicates how the meaning of old age differs according to cultural attitudes toward it by comparing the North American type of old age understanding with the Indian type of old age understanding. In contrast to individualistic, productivity-oriented, unchanged American self that values independency, she shows how the Indian old aged people are ready to die by accepting old age as meaningful decline (Lamb, 2014). These qualities of North Americans give way to their successful aging perception, which is in fact “counter production” of ageism (Lamb, 2014, p.50). In this respect, she points out how our perception of old age is arranged according to cultural and political views on human nature (Lamb, 2014 p.51).

In the same way, by being against ageless self-understanding, Calasanti and Slevin claim that when we say "age categories are pseudo, they are construction, there is an ageless self" we help the denial of old age that is core idea of ageism. They believe that there are absolute results of age categories that differentiate old aged people from the middle-aged ones. Rather than undermining the social construction, they assert that there is a "material reality" (Calasanti & Slevin, 2006, p. 5). Old age brings about a decrease in authority and status that results in inequalities. These inequalities are "loss of power, workplace issues and marginalization, wealth and income, and cultural devaluation" (Calasanti, 2003). This “material reality” is crucial in order to grasp the process from a different angle. It is the biological side of the story used by gerontological knowledge a lot, and this is the reason that it takes so much criticism that is mentioned above.

On the other hand, when we return the fractions of Abbott; we may criticize symbolic interactionism for being insufficient to explain the biological side of old age. Therefore, we need a more comprehensive analysis of old age that includes both biological and historical processes into the picture. In this regard, Nobert Elias may be a suitable answer.

2.4. Elias' Sociology on Old Age

Elias who is seen foremost sociologist who tries to get close biology and sociology in twentieth-century (Kilminster, 2007, p. 131) deals with the question of "loneliness of Dying" by giving alternative ways of looking to old age. First of all, in order to grasp Elias' ideas on old age, we may present some necessary information about his sociology. Quilley and Loyal quotes from Goudsblom four statements of his theory (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 5)

(i) Human beings are born into relationships of interdependency. The social figurations that they form with each other engender emergent dynamics, which cannot be reduced to individual actions or motivations. Such emergent dynamics fundamentally shape individual processes of growth and development, and the trajectory of individual lives.

(ii) These figurations are in a state of constant flux and transformation, with interweaving processes of change occurring over different but interlocking time-frames.

(iii) Long-term transformations of human social figurations have been, and continue to be, mostly unplanned and unforeseen.

(iv) The development of human knowledge (including sociological knowledge) takes place within such figurations and forms one aspect of their overall development: hence the inextricable link between Elias's theory of knowledge and the sociology of knowledge processes.

As the first statement says, he directly starts from "interdependent people" rather than beginning with the individual and then concluding to society. (Kilminster, 2007, p. 15). He rejects the idea of homo clausus that is inclined to separate human as "body and mind, physical body and spirit or soul" (Kilminster, 2007, p. 15). This is also seen as a solution to structure vs. agency debate since each of them exists interdependently (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 6). In the second statement we notice the changing nature of these interdependent people and the role of history in order to understand this change. He says that in order to grasp human, every stage of history is as significant as others, one cannot make sociology by undermining history (Kilminster, 2007, p.4). The third statement is related to his analyses of the civilizing process in which he explains different kind of modernization process than the classical modernization theories that sees man as progressing from inferior to civilized (Kilminster, 2007, p.4). The fourth statement is about the nature of human knowledge that is a result of historicity and relationality of social things.

On the other hand, it may be appropriate to mention his Symbol Theory which is a rejection of notions that comes from ancient dualisms for constructing a more independent and realistic form of a human through evolutionary structure and period (Kilminster, 2007, p.133). He makes a connection between “human interdependence and biological nature” (Kilminster, 2007, p.134). His evolution understanding is not equal to Darwin's in terms of the reversible character of social one (Kilminster, 2007, p.135). To put it another way, “civilizing and decivilizing” can be realized simultaneously (Kilminster, 2007, p.135) in contrast to progressivist understandings. On the other hand, he underlines the communication ability of humans by using symbols as a distinctive feature over other species (Kilminster, 2007, p.135). Symbols are seen as an intersection point of human’s biological and social ability and in this respect the symbol theory tries to merge “physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological and cultural” aspects of human (Kilminster, 2007, p.140).

In the light this information, we may start to look at outcomes of widespread biological event that most of the people encounter: old age. In his book "Loneliness of the Dying," although his main problematization is on death, it also enables the crucial relationship between old age and loneliness. Elias asserts that the decline in old age leads to the isolation of a person from other people who ensure meaning and security for a person (Elias, 1985, p. 2). By meaning, he refers to a communal notion that comes from mutual connections of people. A human who cannot be separated from society constructs a meaning according to his dependence on other people (Elias, 1985, p. 54). He explains this isolation by the people's lack of help to old aged people for avoiding remembrance of their mortality since he is seen as someone close to death (Elias, 1985, p.10). Rather than death itself, the knowledge of death is troublesome for people (Elias, 1985, p.5) that they want to keep away with the idea of it. He claims that this is common in “advanced societies” (Elias, 1985, p.4) in contrast to others that do not stigmatize old aged. The whole study is an indication of how the nature of death and old age is "stage-specific," following the second statement of his theory that is told above. He goes on by saying that in the past, it was uncommon for a person to be alone, which results in the publicity of

their death in contrast to today (Elias, 1985, p.18). The conditions of lifestyle did not give so much opportunity to be alone, and the birth and death of people were social events that people from every age witness together (Elias, 1985,p.18). Avoiding the children's witnessing of death was not something familiar, and he believes that today's attitude stems from the own anxieties of the parents on death (Elias, 1985, p.19). He estimates that today's person perceives himself secluded and independent from others (Elias, 1985, p.34). His connection of independence and solitude is significant that is explained by a quest of meaning for today's person. When he gives up the dependence on people, he attains an independent meaning in this life that is resulted in seclusion for a person.

He states the reasons for the negation of the visibility of death to depict the difference of this epoch. Firstly, the life of human became longer that makes a person distant from the idea of death in contemporary society. Secondly, death is seen as an end to "ordered natural process" that its early coming is not imagined due to the medical progress (Elias, 1985, p.46). Thirdly, in contrast to previous societies' unexpected violent death, today's society has a more stable type of death due to old age or illness (Elias, 1985, p.48). Fourthly, the powerful individualization of contemporary societies brings about the invisibility of death. At this point, he indicates the useless aim of today's individualistic person for gaining an independent meaning separated from other people (Elias, 1985, p.55). The quest of independent meaning, although it is against to be a human, results in "real feeling of loneliness"(Elias, 1985, p. 57).

2.5. Summary

To sum up, these four elements bring about the invisibility of death in advanced societies, and it is believed that the same kind of attitude is shown towards old age. Elias claims that people of different ages never understand old age due to the negation of it (Elias, 1985, p.69). The unfavorable ideas around old age prevent people from empathizing themselves as old age. In this respect, he concludes that in less developed countries, the process is not like in which interdependency and communal meaning are still valid.

On the other hand, he asserts that one way or another there is a loss of power in old age that makes old aged more dependent on people around them. The degree of dependency may change according to their lifestyle and personality (Elias, 1985, p.71). He suggests that the senility that can be seen a regression to infancy on old age may be a kind of prevention for old aged to experience less grieve for the loss of power and dependency on other people (Elias, 1985, p.71). He explains this process as a kind of adaptation that can be suitable for his evolutionary understanding of humans that do not always progress but also regress. As a conclusion, he claims that old age leads to an essential transformation of human in terms of his position on society (Elias, 1985, p.72). His relationships with other people alter according to change on his power and status (Elias, 1985, p.72).

In conclusion, this chapter has been a quest for the theorization of the meaning of old age. It starts with representing the repetitive nature of social knowledge that has a similar kind of fractions. It goes on with the interactionist side of this social knowledge by giving background information for the adaptation of phenomenology literature of philosophy to sociology. Then the leading theory that will be used in the analyses chapter, symbolic interactionism, is explained in its Blumer's version. Moreover, due to the lack of studies as a direct adaptation of symbolic interactionism to old age, it returns the fractions and looks from a broad perspective of interpterion that consists of anthropological literature of old age. In order to indicate the tensions in the anthropology of old age literature, it mentions the problematization of gerontology that is seen as biopower mechanism by some political anthropologists. Followingly, it continues by summarizing cultural anthropologists by denoting basic definitions of the culture of Geertz, who is an influential figure for these anthropologists. In the end, it returns the fractions and goes the opposite side in order to include more structural analyses of old age thanks to Elias' ideas on death and old age. In light of this literature, the fieldwork will be analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study is on a perception of old age, conducted with 13 pious Sunni Muslim, middle-classed, relatively independent (in terms of physical and mental capacity) women who are 65-80 years old and live in Istanbul in their homes. It analyses how people labeled as old aged by policymakers see themselves and explain their process of old age. It is appropriate to start to clarify the conceptual framework of this study. Since the definitions of old age, old aged, old, elder, elderly, senior, and aging are controversial and change according to literature that is engaged with, in this study during the interviews the concepts of aging and old aged are used interchangeably in order to see the subjective distinction of the women themselves. The ambiguity of these concepts can be the main focus of this study, which tries to indicate the different depictions of agents who experience old age without forgetting the role of the researcher. As Wilson says "our terms and definitions" are pragmatic tools that cover presumed connotations and relations of power (Wilson, 2000, p. 4), I would try to see what kind of relations change the definitions of old aged.

The term perception is used in order to underline the micro-sociology side of this research, rather than starting from structures and institutions, it starts from the agents who experience the old age process and from that point it tries to reach more general conclusions on society. Even so, it is not a study of "the voice of the unheard" by being aware that social science is different from the experiences of narrators and talk to a different group of people (Abbott, 2001, p. 5). In this respect this study is not sociology "from below" but sociology "from within" being aware the role of researcher herself from beginning to end (Portelli, 1998, p. 16).

Devout Sunni Muslims can be an empty set without depicting our connotation to it. Since one cannot measure the religiosity of a person directly, this study has limited its samples by choosing them from the ones who are praying five times prayer

everyday, which has visible effects on daily life. Although this criterion cannot make them equal on their religiosity and their understanding of Islam, the study would try to show this diversion and discuss the reason behind it.

Women are only included in this study due to the accessibility of myself as a woman and seeing the difference in women's understandings. It is thought to be a small contribution to the "feminization of aging" literature, which based on the reality of longevity of women comparing with men (Chinnappan, 2015, p. 295), by presenting a case study from Turkey. However, in this study gender is a methodological signifier rather than theoretical signifier that determines the whole study.

The sampling method of this study is both purposive and convenience. "Sampling and selection are principles and procedures used to identify, choose, and gain access to relevant data sources" (Delmont & Mason, 1997, p. 120). In order to reach our relevant data sources: women who are 65-75 years old and performing daily prayer, I used my social network. In this respect it is purposive sampling by trying to find specific group of women who are diversified in terms of educational, marital and occupational status. On the other hand, it is convenience since it is found from my social networks that includes more or less similar kinds of people. Convenience sampling is called as non-random in the sense that it is chosen according to accessibility (Etikan, Abubakar, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 2).

This study asserts that these women are from the middle class. In order to measure this, I have not used direct income rates of these women but ask my networks to find me a sample who is nor economically dependent neither has a higher standard of living but who is moderate². It concludes with the women who live in their own homes without being the need of paying rent and have at least a retirement salary of themselves or their husbands to run basic needs. However, this does not mean that every participant's economic situation is equal, especially two educated participants: doctor Ayşe and teacher Nezaket. It can be said that their standards of

² Orta halli.

living are better than other participants. Their better standards of living are not surprising by taking care of their educational and occupational status.

In order to observe different experiences, occupational status of women is tried to be diversified however finding women who are 65 and more years old from different occupational groups was not easy from my network. After a while I realized that whoever I ask for finding a woman who is 65 and more years and practices daily praying, there is more or less similar kind of profile of woman who is housewife, widow or married, has primary education or only literate that do not have formal working experience. This indicates the results of choosing a convenience sampling.

We may understand this fact by comparing this with other social studies that may represent their generation. Our participants are 65 and more years old in the year of 1978 in which there is a comprehensive study of the Turkish fertility rate, they should be around 28-38 years old. That study shows that in those years 71.9 percent of the women population is married, whereas 25 percent of them are single (Tezcan & Coşkun, 2004, p. 17). The %57,3 of women who are between 15 and 49 years old are married before the age of 18. (Tezcan& Çoşkun, 2004, p.18). The education level of the population is %51.7 of it is illiterate, whereas %14.1 of it is literate but do not have diplomas, and % 27.7 of it graduated from primary school (Hacettepe Institute of Population Studies, 1978, p. 6). In the light of these datum, we may find out the difficulty to find participants from different marital, educational or occupational status.

Since dependency has different layers, we should explain what we mean by relative independence. Dependency can be conceptualized under four layers, which are physical, mental, economic, and social. These women are selected by the ones who can fulfill their basic physical, mental, and economic needs that most of them live alone in their homes by themselves. In this respect, they may be seen physically, mentally, and economically independent, however, according to their life stories, their dependency degree is different. Muhlise who had a severe car accident three

years ago that made her entirely bedridden for six months still has difficulty while walking, whereas Cemile has Parkinson's disease at a secondary level that affects her holding and walking ability.

Nevertheless, all can handle their daily needs. On the other hand, by being human, each of them can be seen socially dependent whereas the degree of it becomes more visible for the ones who live alone. Moreover, the cultural meaning of dependency is also crucial at this point that distinguishes this study from different cases.

The ages of women are between 65 and 75 except Saliha who is 80 years old, and this range is intentionally chosen in order to be compatible with the standard definition of old aged that are used by demographical and economic analyses. 65-74 years old are seen as "early elderly," whereas the ones over 75 years old seen as late elderly. These definitions are generally referred to as World Health Organization, but there is not any valid source of it. Orimo mentions the saying that claims this definition of old aged comes from the Bismarck's decision that makes the ones who are 65 and above as national pension receivers (Orimo, 2006, p. 149). Although there is an ambiguity in the source of this classification, it is still in force. Such that economic analyses or policies of social states use this definition of old people.

This qualitative study focusses on the perceptions of women who live in Istanbul in their homes alone or with their families, therefore not taking into consideration of the ones who live in elderly institutions. Since purposive sampling is applied, there is not meaningful diversity among the parts of Istanbul that they live in however they are generally from old settlements of Istanbul in which they have been living at least for a decade. However, it should be added that most of the women from the different parts Üsküdar. It is not an intentional choice to choose participants from the second most old aged district of Istanbul according to TUIK (Şentürk & Ceylan, 2015, p. 119). The third one is Fatih in which one of participant resides; the fourth one is Maltepe in which two participants live, the sixth one is Bahçelievler in which

two participants dwell, ninth of it is Pendik in which one participant lives (Şentürk & Ceylan, 2015, 119).

In-depth interviews are done with 13 women in life story format, and narrative analyses of them are significant since it is a “co-construction” in which the narrator and the listener build meaning together (Riessman, 2005, p. 4). For each interview, we make thematic and structural analyses which of the former deals with “what” is told and the latter deal with “how” it is told (Riessman, 2005 p.5).

Each interview took at least an hour and a half. Pseudo names are given to each of them; even some of them do not see declaring their real name as a problem. We've done one by one interview except for Perestu and Binnaz whose interviews accrued in a kind of focus group format. The story of this pseudo-focus group is like this: my intention was interviewing with Nezaket, and she gave me an appointment; however, without informing me she thought that inviting her neighbors would be beneficial for me. Except for Nezaket, there were four people, but two of them hardly involved the conversation and left the meeting early. Her neighbors are her close friends that are approximately at the same ages. I call this interview as a pseudo focus since the participants rarely listen to each other but generally it was a challenge for me to interview Perestu or Binnaz while there was a parallel conversation around. During this interview, Nezaket as being a host did not involve conversations attentively due to offering tea and pastry. For that reason, I requested a private meeting with her that she did not refuse.

All interviewees are recorded except one of them who did not want to be recorded insistently (Fatma). During Fatma's interview, I tried to take notes as much as I could. Except for Saliha, who is my late grandmother's relative & friend and Cemile, who is my neighbor, we have not known each other before. I explained to every participant of this study that I am a sociology student who researches the life stories of pious Muslim women who are 65 and more years old. I intentionally avoid using old age or old aged to see their perceptions of seeing themselves as old aged or not. However, if they ask for more detailed information, I say I am researching

the meaning of old age. However, my request for a life story is crucial for depicting the agenda of the narrative (Portelli, 1998, p. 29). Rather than having a formal relation, we generally have friendly conversations in which sometimes I answered their questions about my private life.

In any case, all of them should have an understanding of me, and this is worth to speculate. I would be seen as a "young veiled female student" who does "homework" about society, but also enthusiastic about having talks with elders that make women be "useful" for my "homework." I might only a proper girl like a respectful granddaughter of them. In addition to be a student, I would be seen as an examiner that questions their whole life. In this respect, this quotation from Saliha's interview is a remarkable indicator of my position in these narratives:

A'udhu Billahi Min Ashaytani' rajeem, Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, one day Allahu Tala says to Gabriel Alayhi salaam, descend to earth and I nvestigate my servants' attitudes. This is the command of Allah Tala, and hence Gabriel Alayhi salaam descends to earth and sees that many people go to the masjid, he like an average person enters the masjid. Masjid is full, and the Hodja is preaching, he rests against the wall and sees that someone is sitting on the right of him, and he is drowsing. He (Gabriel) nudges the man, he opens his eyes and looks at him, then drowsing again. The second time, third time... In the third time the man opens his eyes and says to him "I can declare who you are in front of people", "You are always nudging me, but I can declare who you are", he (Gabriel) wakes up to himself, at this point both of them stands up and get disappeared. He goes to the presence of Allah and says "O my God, have you examined me in front of your servants?", and then Allah Tala says to Gabriel Alayhi salaam "Do not say that there are not Gabriels of mine on the earth." This statement has touched me so much. I have read this in a book. He says that "there are so many my Gabriels on the earth," and hence I have said that Hüsna will examine me.³

³ Euzu billahi min eşşeytanir racim, bismillahirrahmanirrahim, Allah'u Teala Celle Cellaluhu Hazretleri bir gün Cebrail Aleyhisselam' a bir gün diyor ki yeryüzüne ineceksin kullarımın halini göreceksin, O da hani Cenab-ı Allah'ın emri, yeryüzüne iniyor Cebrail aleyhisselam, gelip bir mescidin önünde bakıyor ki bütün kullar namaza gidiyor bu da onlarla beraber bir vatandaş gibi o da camiye giriyor mescide, mescit dolu hoca sohbet ediyor, bu da sırtını bir yere dayıyor sağına bakıyor bir tane oturmuş, soluna bakıyor bir tane oturmuş, o durmadan, sağ tarafında oturan durmadan uyukluyor, pinekliyor, bu da onu hafif dürtüyor, bu bir gözünü açıyor ona bakıyor, gene uyukluyor, ikinci, üçüncüsünde ötekisi böyle bir gözünü açıyor diyor ki buna "senin" diyor "kim olduğunu şimdi burada söylerim" diyor, "sen durmadan beni dürtüyorsun ama senin kim olduğunu burada söylerim", o bir silkeleniyor işte ondan sonra kalkıyor adam bu da kalkıyor tabi ikisi de kaybolur bundan sonra, o gidiyor Allah'ın huzuruna diyor ki "Yarabbi sen" diyor "beni yeryüzünde de mi sınav edecektin" diyor ondan sonra Cebrail

These were the first sentences that she made at the beginning of our interview before I have said anything, and I was shocked and could not understand my position in this parable, who do Angel Gabriel Alayhi Salaam and the Saint represent? If I am a representative of Angel Gabriel Alayhi Salaam, I take the role of interrogator that questions her whole life like in the day of reckoning. As being an angel, I would be precious in the eyes of God; however, she was more precious than me by being an unknown saint that could go beyond the grade of angels. Whether all other interviewees see themselves more religionist than me is questionable, there is a fact that they all locate me as a religionist person. So this is the point that makes this study different. All narratives develop in a shared world of meaning in which we have supposed to have.

On the other hand, when we try to interpret the role of women, they are accommodating people that do not want to turn the mediators down and accept my request to talk about their "life stories" in order to help my "homework." All of them see the interview as an exam-like process that is recorded by a voice recorder. Hence, during the interviews, they were generally aware of the existence of the recorder. In this sense, they should dream an audience on the record, what kind of audience they can imagine is worth to ask. They can imagine a teacher, a knowledgeable person who evaluates rights and wrongs, a curious audience that wants to hear compelling stories or political authority. For instance, Cemile starts her interview by saying that "Hmm, my husband has passed away, I have been living here, I am a bit sick. Like this. I don't know what you are asking more, ask me I will say"⁴ as if she thought it as an exam or survey. Moreover, Emine says that "You will ask, I will answer"⁵ right after I have said that this is not something like an interview

Aleyhisselam' a Allah-ı Teala diyor ki "sen deme ki benim yeryüzünde senin gibi Cebraillerim yoktur" diyor, beni bu söz çok şey etti, okudum ben bunu kitapta, ondan sonra yeryüzünde de senin gibi Cebraillerim çok var diyor, yani Allah'ı Teala işte onun için dedim hüsna gelip beni herhalde imtihan edecek"

⁴ "Ondan sonra, kocam vefat etti. Ben burada oturuyorum. Anama diyeyim. Biraz rahatsızım. İşte böyle. Bilmiyorum daha başka ne soruyorsun, sen sor ben de söyleyeyim."

⁵ H: Öyle gazete röportajı gibi bir şey değil bu, ben soracağım siz cevap vereceksiniz şeklinde değil yani

E: Ee sen soracan ben cevap vereceğim

on the newspaper in which I ask, and she answers. In the same way of Çiçek who says in the beginning "Do not make questions difficult"⁶. On the other hand, Hayriye says "I don't have something to tell, I am illiterate, ignorant person, I do know neither new alphabet nor the old one. My narration is good for nothing, it does not work for you"⁷ by believing that there are enlightened people who listen to her and the knowledge is only related to education.

As Portelli says, this can be an indication of an embarrassment of participants. However, more importantly, it can be an implication of their feeling about the interview that they are doing it as an obligation so that they may give answers according to their belief in need of interviewer (1998, p.29). Furthermore, Gülsüm cuts her narrative while telling me the political environment of her childhood by asking me whether I am writing, immediately after my affirmation she gives up that issue.⁸ Beside Ayşe tells how she was so decisive to be a doctor in contrast to all kinds of discouragements of relatives, through narrating an anecdote by saying, "This can be interesting for you." She might believe that this is a biographical study of "successful" pious women that are so decisive regardless of hardships.

Hence although I am aware of the role of interviewer as an authority that defines the roles and structure of the narrative (Portelli, 1998, p.28), interviewees are also directors of their narrative by deciding what needs to be told and what does not. For instance, although I have spent one and a half days with Fatma, I was not able to ask questions about anything to her, but she structured her story in her way and

⁶ "Sorular zor olmasın"

⁷ "Benim anlatacak bir şeyim yok, ben okumamış cahil bir insanım, ne yeni yazıyı ne eski yazıyı öğrendim, benim anlatacaklarım hiçbir şeye yaramaz, senin işine yaramaz"

⁸ G: Evet, Allah rahmet eylesin babam geldi işte, orada çifliğimiz dardı, kardeşler ayrılınca dede ölünce onlar yetmedi yani, babam İstanbul' a geldi arkasından bizi de getirdi, Allah hayırlı ömür versin kalanlara buralarda barındık annem babam namaz kıları, inançları çoktu ama böyle imkanları yoktu yani seçim oldu 54 secimi 74 pardon Ecevit' in zamanında şey yaptılar sandık başına... Yazıyor musun?

H: Evet, bir yandan kaydediyorum zaten ben

G: Hii

H: Şey değil bir yerde kullanmayacağım, sorun değil yani gerçekten

G: Yani orada başladım (okula)

talked unceasingly except for the long breaks that she gave for salah. On the other hand, Rikkat gives concise answers to my open-ended questions that I had to ask yes-no questions that are answered yes or no by her literally. Like Myerhoff's third voice, I believe that there is a collaboration of our authorities (Riessman, 2005, p.224). By trying to have done word for word transcriptions for most of my interviews, I have tried to mirror them from my social world. In order to introduce them, demographic information is like the following:

Table 3.1 Demographic Information of Participants

NAME	AGE	EDUCATIONAL STATUS	MARITAL STATUS	OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	TO WHOM THEY LIVE WITH	WHERE THEY LIVE	MIGRATION	CHILDREN
Ayşe	66	School of medicine	Widow for a year	Gynecologist	With her daughter but she will live alone due to her attending physician daughter's appointment for another city	Fatih	Due to the civil service of her father there are a number of migrations before university education	Two Daughters and a son
Binnaz	74	literate	Widow for 21 years year	Tailor for long years and retired for approximately 10 years	Living with her divorced son for ten years	Üsküdar	At the age of 16 from Rize	Three daughters and a son.
Cemile	68	illiterate	Widow	Housewife	Alone for 8 years after her the death of her husband	Üsküdar	At the age of twenties from Elazığ	Two daughters (one of them is lost due to cancer) and two sons
Çiçek	66	an advanced technical school for girls	Married	Worked for 2 years as tailor, housewife for 40 years after marriage	With her husband and daughter	Üsküdar	No experience	Two daughters
Emine	67	Evening school at middle aged to be literate	Married	Housewife	With her husband and two daughters	Bahçelievler	At the age of 27 from Trabzon	Four daughters (one of them is lost due to cancer) and a son
Fatma	75	an advanced technical school for girls	Single	Teacher and manager in technical school till 61 years old	Alone for 6 months after the death of her step mother	Bahçelievler	At the age of 12 from Hakkari due to the civil service of her father	No experience
Gülsüm	75	Primary school	Widow	Housewife	Alone for 14 years after the death of her husband	Üsküdar	At the age of eight from Elazığ	No experience
Hayriye	75	illiterate	Widow	Peasant till 35 years old and then housewife	Alone for 9 years after the death of her husband	Üsküdar	At the age of thirtyfive from Çankırı	Three son and a daughter
Muhlise	70	illiterate	Widow	Housewife	Alone for 8 years after her the death of her husband	Pendik	At the age of 16 from Ordu	Three daughters and a son and four infant dead.

Table 3.1. (continued)

Nezaket	75	graduated from English literature and language	Divorced for 42 a year	Teaching fellow for 24 years and retired for 22 years	Alone for 13 years after the marriage of her son	Üsküdar	childhood at Ankara, teen ages at Istanbul	A son
Perestu	68	primary school	Married for 52 years	Housewife	Living with her husband and divorced son	Üsküdar	At the age of 3 from Balikesir to Istanbul	A son and a daughter
Rikkat	70	literate	Widow	Housewife	Alone for 10 years after the death of her husband and the marriage of her son	Maltepe	At the age of 14 from Bitlis to Diyarbakir for 16 years and at the age of 30 from Diyarbakir to Istanbul	Three sons (one of them is lost due to an illness)
Saliha	80	literate	Widow	Housewife	Alone for 12 years after the death of her husband	Maltepe	At the age of forty-four from Bitlis	Three daughters and two sons

3.2. Constraints of the study

There are many constraints of the study. The first one is the broadness of the topic that one has difficulty to cope with. In such a way that, it flits from a vast concept to another without qualifying each of them. To put it another way, dependency, care, burden, despair, or loneliness are essential concepts that one can study each of them separately in terms of their relationship with old age. Each of them has extensive literature which should be taken into account without undermining in a few references.

The second one can be a lack of this kind of study in Turkish literature that there are no direct reference points from the literature that is supposed to be fed. One can imagine the absence of it not as an oversight but an intentional absence due to the impalpable nature of the study.

The third constraint can be related to the analysis of participants of the study, which should be done more diversified. In other words, at the expense of categorization, the differences of each narrative are undermined despite having done the thematic and structural analysis of them. The demographic and economic differences between them are not taken into consideration as required in order to reach a general tendency for their perception of old age.

The number of samples can be seen deficient that obstructs the validity. However, it can be understood from the repeated narratives of the women that the samples reached a methodological maturity.

Nevertheless, in contrast to its constraints, this can be seen as a suggestive try for the adaptation of symbolic interactionism theory to old age literature in a case study from Turkey.



CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter will consist of the analyses of the perceptions of old age in the narratives of women according to the Symbolic interactionist theory of Herbert Blumer by merging it with Elias' approach to loneliness. We may start by adapting three premises of symbolic interactionism to old age.

1. People act according to the meaning of their old age.
2. These meanings of old age are derived from the social interactions that they have.
3. These meanings are circulated and changed through the things that they meet.

First of all, several concepts should be mentioned due to the life story format of the interviews conducted with open-ended questions. However, in order to narrow down our study specifically to the perception of old age, we will undermine some significant issues that should be the topic of another study.

Secondly, to analyze the perceptions, there will be some conceptualizations. However, one should not understand the meaning of these concepts according to the first meaning of the denomination but grasp them as a quest of meaning.

In the light of this information, there are three main perceptions of women that will be analyzed one by one in detail: old age as a physical and mental dependency, old age as despair vs. opportunity, old age as loneliness.

4.1. Old age as a physical and mental dependency

As it is said in the terminology part, here we do not use a concrete definition of dependency. Most of the participants define old age as being in need of assistance that we call dependency, so much so that they define "real" old age in this way. This idea is compatible with the biomedical approach to old age that sees it as "a

physical and mental decline” and arrangement for the end: “death itself.” (Powell, 2013, p. 1) Powell says this understanding is also robust among people that indicates how the discourse of old age that is constructed by power relations are internalized by people (Powell, 2013, p.2). Rather than starting from these power relations, we may look at how this meaning is constructed through social relations that these women engage in. First of all, it may be appropriate to talk about the phrases that they use. Women use “düşmek” very often, which literally means “fall, decline”. However, according to Misalli Büyük Türkçe Sözlük (Great Turkish Dictionary with examples), there are thirty-eight meanings of “düşmek”, some of which are worth mentioning in this context: (Due to a bad situation) Being obliged to be somewhere you do not want to be (7th), losing its value by increasing and becoming widespread, becoming ordinary (21st), departing from your status (23rd), losing the features or opportunities that you have attained (24th), degrading oneself, losing dignity (26th), (due to old age, illness and sadness) becoming exhausted, needy (28th). Moreover, the phrases with “düşmek” are also used in the narratives. “Elden ayaktan düşmek (literally, falling from hand and feet): (due to old age) becoming unable to work or walk (Ayverdi, 2011, p. 843). Ayağa düşmek (literally, fall to foot): Losing dignity, value, falling to the hands of unnecessary people..(Ayverdi, 2011, pp. 796–798). (Ayverdi, 2011, p. 226). In light of these, we may look to the narratives of women.

“I hope that I won’t be dependent on anyone, not to fall (ele ayağa düşmek), no one push me around... So difficult, so difficult. Being pushed around is too difficult”⁹ (Gülsüm)

“Old age is difficult, too difficult. Now, we say old age when someone becomes unable to work or walk (elden ayaktan düşmek). We are not old aged, I guess. We can go wherever we want”¹⁰ (Perestu)

Probably, it is the real old age. We “take” ages, but thank God every function works, your actions (slow down), some of your parts started to ache after a certain age, but I say to myself “these are not important”. It is not like my mum’s. There is not any loss of memory or anything (loss of physical ability).

⁹ Kimseye muhtaç olmam, ele ayağa düşmem, kimse itip kalkmaz... Çok zor, çok zor, itip kakılmak çok zor. (Gülsüm)

¹⁰ Yaşlılık zor zor şimdi bak elden ayaktan düştüğünde yaşlılık diyoruz da biz yaşlı değiliz herhalde, istediğimiz yere gidiyoruz (Perestu)

When I see my mother, I say to myself this is the old age certainly, may Allah protect us, but not every old person becomes like that.¹¹ (Nezaket)

It is difficult; I mean, you become powerless to do anything. Illness accompanies old age. At a young age, you used to be strong even you become ill. However, in old age, every part of you fall off, you do not have the power to work, but to whom will you complain, may Allah protect us from being bedridden (düşmek in 7th meaning), may My Lord protect everyone from falling (düşmek in 28th meaning), it is difficult for the caregiver and the cared, for these reason old age is difficult..¹² (Hayriye)

Difficult, too difficult, you would like something, they will bring it, it makes me so sad, my late husband used to say "You do not drink even a glass of water that I bring to you" We weren't used to (being served). We have always served others; I would always give even a glass of water to my children. In this way, you become like that. If they give you on the corner, you eat; if not, you do not. You become dependent on others. May Allah protect a person from becoming bedridden, being cared by others. Becoming bedridden is very hard¹³ (Muhlise).

Almost all of these women associate old age with difficulty; however, one should bear in mind that this is only one of their definitions of old age and that the same person can have different definitions according to intersubjective relations that she has. This definition is equalized with dependency. Hence, according to this meaning, none of the women believe that they are old-aged since none of them is needy at this degree that they describe. In order to grasp the intersubjectivity of this meaning, the actions that are shaped by it should be analyzed. It can be said that there are two significant acts according to this meaning: The first act is avoiding this process through some deeds, and the second act is standing on your feet. Being

¹¹ Herhalde yani asıl yaşlılık o herhalde asıl yaşlılık o herhalde, biz de yaş almışız ama her şeyimiz yerinde çok şükür, hareket biraz oran ağrıyor buran ağrıyor oluyor belli bir yaştan sonra ama onlar önemli değil ay diyorum annem gibi işte ne hafıza kaybı olsun ne şey olsun ama annemi görünce yaşlılık o herhalde diyorum, Allah vermesin yani ama her yaşlıda da olmuyor

¹² Zor bir şey, zor dediğim bir şeye gücün yetmez, yaşlanınca her hastalık da biniyor, gençliğinde hasta da olsan dayanıklı oluyorsun, ama yaşlandın mıydı her tarafın dökülüyor, dermanın yok iş göremeyosun, e kime ne diyecen Allah gene yatağa düşürmesin, Rabbim kimseyi düşürmesin, bakana da zor çekene de zor, onun için yaşlılık zor bir şey (Hayriye)

¹³ "Zor çok zor yatıyorsun bir şey istiyorsun onlar getiriyor üzülüyorsun ben çok üzülüyordum, benim rahmetlik diyordu ki hanım elimden bir bardak su içmiyon diyordu alışmamışık tabi, ona buna hep hizmet ettik, çoluğuma çocuğuma suyunu bile ben verirdim kimsenin elinden bir şey içmezdik, işte böyle olunca da şey oluyorsun, öyle köşede verirlerse yiyorsun vermezlerse yemiyorsun el bakımı oluyorsun, Allah kimseyi yataklara yatırmasin, ellere baktırmasin, yatmak çok zor" (Muhlise)

entirely dependent is so devastating that no one wants to be and try to avoid it through,

- Repeated praying
- Keeping mind busy

As an example of the first act, in order to avoid old age as a dependency, there are repeated prayers:

I talk to myself, I pray, 'My Lord three days on the bed, the fourth day on the soil, let me not depart from faith and Quran, neither make them (her children) helpless nor make me fall.' However, you may fall; it's not like every prayer will be answered. My mother used to pray. One day she suddenly had a stroke, she said to her neighbors that her legs are not working, she used to live alone in her village. She had a stroke while bringing back the woods she cut. Neighbors came to help, they put her on a bed. She lived for three days, on the fourth day she passed away. She always used to pray like "three days on a bed, the fourth day on the soil, may Allah not make me dependent." In her village she did not listen to any preach or lesson, but she used to pray salah, I mean I'm praying, but it does not mean that it will be answered, I may become bedridden.¹⁴ (Hayriye)

May Allah not make me dependent, three days on a bed, fourth day on the soil. With the Quran and faith, I pray salah and always say this prayer. My late mother used to pray here, I was sitting and listening, she used to pray the same thing, and this is what happened to her¹⁵(Cemile)

"Three days on a bed, the fourth day on the soil" is an old Turkish saying used for wishing yourself a self-sufficient old age that does not need any assistance except for three days. It dispraises dependency while accepting the reality of death. In this respect, we may make a quest for the social interactions that give away this kind of meaning. It can be said that there are three layers of interactions that may give this

¹⁴ Diyom ki dua ediyom nolur Rabbim 3 gün yatak 4. Gün toprak, imandan Kurandan ayırma, ne onları aciz bırak ne de beni düşür ya rabbim, e düşersin her dua kabul olacak diye bir şey yok anam ederdi de anama felç vurmuş bacaklarım tutmuyo demiş komşulara köyde yalnız yaşar, ... odunları kesmiş getirirken o anda Allah vermesin felç geliyor, komşular gelip yatırıyorlar, 3 gün yaşıyor, 4. Gün vefat ediyor, hep dua ederdi, 3 gün yatak 4. Gün toprak diye, kimseye beni muhtaç etme diye, köy yerinde ne bir sohbet duymuş ne de bir ders hep namaz kılardı, diyeceğim ben de dua ediyorum ama kabul olacak diye bir şey yok, yatalıklık gelebilir başa" (hayriye)

¹⁵ "Allah beni muhtaç etmesin, iki gün yatak üçüncü gün toprak, beni çocuklarıma yük etmesin, Kuranla imanla, ben devamlı kalkıyorum namaz kılıyorum bu duamı ediyorum, rahmetli annem namaz kılıyordu burada, o burada namaz kılıyordu ben burada oturuyordum, dinliyordum o da aynısını söylüyordu ve aynısı da oldu" (Cemile)

understanding. The first one can be their traditional knowledge of old age that they inherited from their parents. Their relations with the former generation shape this understanding. Cemile and Hayriye's narratives are significant examples of the cyclical nature of understanding. Their witnessing of their mothers makes them envision old age as the last step before death in which you become dependent only for a few days before death so much so that their practices in their old age are built by the same meaning that pray for the same experience.

4.1.1. Caregiving

The second layer of interaction that may bring about the perception of old age as neediness can be their experiences with old aged people. It is not surprising that almost every participant has experienced caregiving since it is normal for a woman to be a caregiver in her middle and late years (Duben, 2013, p. 16). "The role for women as natural caregivers" idea is widespread in Turkey that the reflection of it is valid on our participants (Duben, 2013, p.10). Traditionally, age difference between couples is seen normal in Turkey and most wives are younger than their husbands. When this fact combines with the biological fact of the longevity of women's lifespan, the result becomes an increasing number of widows that do not remarry as opposed to men in their situations (Duben, 2013, p.10). The age difference leads them to witness the morbidity of their husbands that may need care. In this respect, Gülsüm, Saliha, Hayriye, Cemile, Binnaz looked after their husbands throughout illnesses until they died. Emine looked after both parents and parents-in-law at different times. Çiçek looked after her father-in-law for eight months in her home. Now she looks after her mum periodically with her siblings.

Moreover, Ayşe and Nezaket spend some of their days with their mothers who became mentally dependent due to Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases and cared by a domestic worker. Their better standard of living indicates itself here that they can afford to hire laborers who are also women.

In this respect, their perceptions are significantly affected by their experiences with the people around them who generally need intense care. Rather than only

observation, the inclusion of them to the experience of old age of their husbands or parents as a caregiver who witnesses the whole difficulties of care, they equate old age with dependency.

In this sense, dependency and care can be thought as the two sides of the same coin in which the perceptions of each affect the other. The address of care can be children, disabled or old aged, but the subject is certain: a woman (Fine & Glendinning, 2005, p. 603). This idea was internalized by the women in which they all accept the caregiving process as their duty.

I am with a clear conscience; I looked after my mother-in-law despite her six children, among whom only my husband was dead. She was with me for ten years continuously. My mum had five children, I am in the middle, due to the loss of my husband she wanted to stay with me. I looked after her for nine years. When I looked after my mother-in-law, I was proud to serve her despite being a daughter-in-law, but she was right-minded. However, I understood that I had not done anything to her in comparison to looking after my mum. It was only like this: "Daughter-in-law, do this, cook this, give me a bath, give me this." I mean I used to do things according to her orders however my mum was not like that she needed protection, she became insane, forgot everyone, except me, but in the last two months, she also forgot me.¹⁶ (Binnaz)

Binnaz's emphasis on her clear conscience and lack of regret ("I do not regret two things in this life; the first one is looking after my mum and mother in law, they passed away peacefully near to me, and the second one is having four children"¹⁷) is an indication of how she perceives the caregiving process as rewarding action.

My husband prepared the living room, his (father-in-law) eyes did not work well, he should get accustomed to home, he was going to the restroom, he is male, it was difficult, we removed every carpet for preventing him from

¹⁶ Vicdanım rahat kayınvalidemin altı evladı vardı benimki ölmüştü, benim eşim gene son 10 senesine ben baktım devamlı yanımdaydı, annemin de 5 evladı ben ortancayım, yine sadece benim eşim yoktu o da beni istedi 9 sene de ona baktım, ama kayınvalideme bakarken ben böbürleniyordum işte ben ona hizmet ediyorum gelinim diye ama onun akli başındaydı, ben ona hiç, anneme bakınca anladım ki ben kaynanama hiçbir şey yapmamışım, sadece gelin şunu yap, şunu pişir, yıka beni kirlendim, şunu ver bana, öyle yani emri üzerine iş yapmışım ama annem öyle değildi annem korunmaya muhtaçtı, akli gitti herkesi unuttu bir beni unutmadı, en son iki ayında beni de unuttu. (Binnaz)

¹⁷ Hayatta hiçbir şeyden pişmanlık duymam, iki şeyden de çok sevinirim birisi kaynanama ve anneme bakmam, mutlu öldüler ikisi de ölene kadar bırakmadım, biri de 4 çocuk sahibi olmam

falling, my husband said to me 'This is not for two days, we cannot know how much he would live, are you confident for yourself', the sibling of my husband could not look after, I said "This is a test (imtihan) from God". Regardless, we brought him home, but I was praying every day "Oh Allah make me strong until returning your Amanah (deposit)" It was difficult, I was alone (to care) the whole day, I was not able to go anywhere. Allah gave that fortune, I have done for the sake of God, I have a clear conscience that I did whatever I could do. On the judgment day, I may say I have served my elder if He asks.¹⁸ (Çiçek)

Çiçek perceives caregiving as "imtihan" a kind of calamity by Allah in order to test her. She perceives her father-in-law as "Amanah" entrusted by Allah that should be appropriately returned without being hurt. Hence, in contrast to the difficulties of care, she has forbearance by believing that she is doing it for the sake of God.

If we try to analyze the phenomenological meaning of "Amanah," we can look at the intersubjective relation of object and the transcendental Ego. There is a different perception of human nature that sees his foundations directly related to transcendental power. This is the point that Husserl criticizes the anthropological knowledge that undermines the examination of "transcendental foundations" (Duranti, 2010, p. 3). It is the existentialist ambiguity of the social science that ignores the metaphysical explanations on meaning (Cole & Sierpina, 2006, p. 245). However, by staying in the borders of this social science, we will try to show the "empirical sensory perceptions" of meaning rather than abstract categories (Calhoun et al., 2002, p. 27).

The emphasis of both Çiçek and Binnaz on clear conscience is significant for the moral side of care. They conceive it as a filial duty for being healthy, energetic young that should help her relatives especially the weak, assistance needed old. Seeing caregiving in this way coincides with the alternative movement on the USA

¹⁸ beyim oturma odasını boşalttı, gözü de görmüyor eve de alışması lazım, tuvalete gidecek geliyor, erkek bir de zor oluyor, ayağının takılabileceği paspasları falan kaldırdık, eşim dedi bak bu bir gün iki gün değil ne kadar yaşayacağını bilemezsin, kendine güveniyor musun, ee öteki kardeşi bakamaz, ben de dedim bu da Allah'ın bir imtihanı ne olursa olsun işte aldık geldik, ama her gün dua ediyordum Allah'ım bu emaneti yerine teslim edene kadar bana gayret ver, zor durumlar oluyor, akşama kadar yalnız, hiçbir yere çıkmadım...

Allah nasip etti, Allah'ın rızası için, kendi vicdanım için rahatım ki elimden geleni yaptım, Allah'a hesap vereceğim zaman büyüğüme hizmet ettim derim yani, sorarsa (Çiçek)

that underlines the "ethic of care" by conceiving it as moral responding to the need of people in contrast to general feminist theories that perceive caregiving as a burden on the shoulder on women due to unequal power relations (Fine & Glendinning, 2005, p. 604).

On the other hand, their sacrificing attitude toward closed ones is not something that prevents them from thinking care as a burden when they may become the subject of it. This burden perception is noticeable in their embarrassment of staying at their children's homes even when they do not need any physical assistance at the time

When I enter home, I say 'Thank my Lord, I have returned my home, home sweet home.' For example, when I stay at my daughter's house and get up at night to perform ablution, I wonder if I will wake them up, or do something wrong. I always hesitate.¹⁹ (Cemile)

I am feel uncomfortable when I stay at E. or G.'s houses (the names of her sons). When they bring a meal for me, or I stay for few days I start to think "Oh my Lord am I consuming their foods, or am I consuming their water so much, am I oppressing them, do they become helpless because of me?" For these reasons I do not stay there.²⁰ (Hayriye)

I do not know; I cannot stay (at their houses), I wonder if my son-in-law is disturbed by me, or whether he questions why I am there. If I go to my son's home, I wonder whether my daughter-in-law questions why I am there. They do not say anything to me, but I always think like that. I do not look at the refrigerator, if I buy something, I buy for all of them, I mean rice, olive... Even when I buy something I do not look inside the refrigerator. However, after the illness of my daughter-in-law, I was obliged to use it since I had to cook. I have this shyness; my husband does not have. I cannot sleep in a different home, but he can sleep anywhere, and also, he can lose his temper

¹⁹ Eve geldim mi adımı mı içeri attım mı "Ya rabbi sana şükürler olsun evime geldim, herkesin evi... Mesela kıza gidiyorum, gece kalkıyorum abdest alıyorum acaba diyorum uyandılar mı acaba bir şey mi oldu, insan böyle şey de kalıyor...

²⁰ Ben kendim rahatsız oluyorum, birisine gidip kaldı mesela E.'ye ya da G.'ye, onlar şimdi önüme yemek getirince hani birkaç gün kalınca diyom ki Allahım ben mi tüketiyorum yemeklerini, ve yahut ben onların suyunu mu çok harcıyorum, bunlara ben eziyet mi ediyorum, bunlar hani acaba benden aciz mi kalıyorlar, huzursuzluk var bende, onun için bir yerde duramıyom işte"

and shout, I ask him 'Why are you shouting, this is not your house', but he does not listen²¹.(Emine)

Most of the participants who live alone, have the same negative idea about staying in their children's homes, even for a short term. Hayriye's thought is the most exceeded version of seeing herself as a burden that she calculates even the water she consumes at her children's home. One can look from the other side of the coin by questioning the intersubjective nature of understanding of what burden means to them and claim that it is the disturbances of old aged themselves that do not want to be under the surveillance of their children.

Their avoidance seems to be related to the family that their children set up, the son or daughter in law is not seen as close as their child such that in their needy situation, they would like to stay at their home with the help of their daughters or a domestic worker. This is suitable with the general tendency of "urban middle-class Turkish mothers" for the preference of daughters that are believed to be helpful through the whole lives of them (Duben, 2013, p. 17). Certainly, this choice is only possible for the ones who have a daughter. For others like Nezaket and Rikkat, having a domestic worker is seen as the best solution by having the economic power to compensate. However, for Gülsüm who sustains her life through only the retirement wage of her husband, and having no child to help in economic matters, the dependency is so catastrophic that she repeatedly prays against 'falling'. In this respect, Gülsüm can be an example of the poorest and the most fragile part of the old aged population of Turkey(B. K. Arun, 2011).

The degree of their understanding of burden may change according to their specific social interactions with their children. Nevertheless, the powerful connection between these three concepts, 'dependency, care, and burden' is apparent. As it is

²¹ Bilmiyorum kalamıyorum acaba damat benden bunaldı mı, acaba söyledi mi niye geldi, oğlumun evine gitsem acaba gelin söyledi mi niye geldiler, aslında söylemez ama benim içimde hep geçer, kimsenin dolabını açıp da bakmışlığım yok acaba ne var diye ama bir şey aldığım zaman hepsine ayrı ayrı alırım, pirinç zeytin ne bileyim aldığımız halde yine de açıp bakmam ne var ne yok diye, ne zaman işte bu kızın hastalığı oldu o zaman mecbur baktım dolaba yemek yaptığım için, benim öyle bir çekingenliğim var yani, hoş bizim adamda da hiç yoktur böyle, ben gittiğim yerde hiç uyuyamam ama o ayakta bile uyur, bir de kızar bağırır yav derim evin midir ne diye bağırırsın, dinlemez

found in the in-dept interviews of “İstanbul’da Yaşlanmak” in which all of the participants give importance not to be burden over their children when they need care rather than thinking about their health situation, (Şentürk & Ceylan, 2015, p. 237); this study’s participants are so sensitive on the issue of care by seeing it as a huge burden. However, their degree of dependency is significant, which differs them from other examples. For instance, almost every outdoor need of Cemile, Saliha, Hayriye, and Muhlise are done by their children, such as going to the hospital, shopping, paying the bills. These jobs are not seen as noteworthy dependencies and hence not as a burden to children.

On the other hand, the husbands of Perestu, Çiçek, and Emine deal with outdoor jobs that they do not need to do. It is compatible with the narratives of Rikkat and Gülsüm in which they start to be obliged to deal with outdoor jobs when their husbands were not able to do. For the ones who have earned their livelihood by themselves for a long time like Nezaket, Binnaz, Ayşe, and Fatma, the meaning of dependency is different in which they do not have expectations from people by accepting all deeds as their responsibility.

Furthermore, the third layer of interaction can be their observations of old aged people around them that makes them understand old age as dependency. Their observation as an outsider can sometimes be an antithesis of their experience with their parents or husbands’ old age, which goes along with illnesses.

However some people’s mind is not affected, my mum is 89 years old (the one who has Parkinson) but my neighbor in Şile, she is 93 years old, she solves puzzle, she is fine, she can walk on the street, she is so logical²² (Nezaket).

The dependency starts with the loss of mental and physical health of a person, there are so many people who are 90 years old but they may, (for example) my uncle’s wife who is 90 years old, she is the same age with my mum but she can do all of her jobs with government office, she can handle the needs of her home, she can go shopping, she can do all of these but my

²² Ama bazılarının hiç gitmiyor aklı, 89 yaşında annem 90 olacak, ama yan komşum var Şile’de 93 yaşında ama bulmaca çözüyor gayet iyi, sokakta yürüyor, gayet mantıklı

mum cannot, I mean the degree of old age is related to the mental and physical health of a person²³ (Ayşe)

As can be seen, both Nezaket and Ayşe give examples of incompatibility between chronological age and dependency. They demonstrate how dependency is not related to age but the need of assistance due to disability. At this point, Ayşe's definition is a bit different from the rest of the participants due to her background as a physician and she can approach from the geriatric narrative of old age.

Nevertheless, in their social networks, there can be supportive examples that are parallel with the understanding of dependency; however, in their narratives, they chose to tell opposite examples in this third layer of interaction.

Moreover, if we return the first act that is constructed by the meaning of old age as a dependency, we may count 'keeping mind busy'. This can be a solution to the implicit fear of losing the mind that they experience from the old aged people around them.

Absolutely there is a fear because you observe other people, but it is related to a person. Allah says, "Be treated, look after yourself", the body is also Amanah, if you do not look after it, if you obsess your mind with useless things. Sometimes a person makes herself, I mean she invites something, in this respect, I am hopeful, Thank God, I do not obsess my mind with useless things, I can be happy with little things, with trees, flowers, I mean these connect me to life. I hang around; sometimes, I travel even to Beykoz by myself if I do not find anyone. Going with friends is better but, the air is lovely in there, seashore, fresh air, it is fragrant in contrast to here (Üsküdar) you go Çengelköy, and it smells bad but Beykoz smells the real sea, there is also park in there, it is beautiful, that is it, in this way I spend my time.²⁴ (Nezaket)

²³ Burada şey önemli değil, kişinin akıl sağlığının ve beden sağlığının kaybolmasıyla başlar muhtaçlık, nice insanlar vardır ki 90 yaşındadır ama bir takım ,amcamın hanımı var o da 90 yaşında, annemle dönemdaşlar ama o amcamın hanımı şuanda devlet daireleriyle olan işlerini yapıyor, evinin bir takım ihtiyaçlarını gideriyor, alışverişini yapıyor, bütün bunları yapabiliyor ama annem yapamıyor, yani burada bence kişinin yaşlılığının dereceleri kişinin akıl ve beden sağlığıyla birlikte işler,

²⁴ Olmaz olur mu tabi ki korkuyorsun görüyorsun çünkü başkalarını ama biraz da insanın kendi, Allah tedavini ol demiş kendine iyi bak demiş, beden emanet, ona iyi bakmazsan, kafanı lüzumsuz şeylerle yorarsan bazen de insan kendi yapıyor yani bazı şeyleri kendi çağırıyor, ben yani o bakımdan umutluyum, Allah'a çok şükür, lüzumsuz şeylerle kafamı yormam, küçük şeylerle mutlu olabilen bir insanım ağaçla çiçekle bilmem neyle bunlar beni hayata bağlıyor işte, dolaşıyorum gidiyorum, kendi

Nezaket has a fear of old age as a mental dependency that is experienced by her mother. However, we may grasp how she combines a new meaning for herself according to different relations for her. This is the third premise of symbolic interactionism that claims the difference of a person while giving meaning to the social process. Rather than directly thinking about the same scenario for herself, she finds a new path according to her interaction with nature. She keeps herself busy by traveling and getting touch with nature that is believed to protect her from losing memory.

In our conversation with Perestu, Binnaz, and Nezaket; Perestu asks whether reciting Quran al-Kareem is a cure of Alzheimer's and finds an answer by Nezaket that it is related with keeping the mind busy. Hence, reciting Quran is also something that keeps minds busy.²⁵ Binnaz says it is related to avoiding reminiscence, looking to the future, not thinking so much, avoiding self-pity by undermining past events. She says one should deal with new things²⁶ and Perestu says she reads books about the life of Gnostics²⁷ in order to keep her mind busy. The increasing number of people who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's gives away both fear and a quest for a solution to this fear. TÜİK statics shows the increase in the number of people who died due to Alzheimer's. In 2013, it was %4,2 whereas, in 2017, it rose to %4,6. (TÜİK, 2019).

On the other hand, these whole narratives can be seen as dispraising the dependency. One can even claim that there has been always dispraise on

kendime bazen çıkarım taa Beykoz'a giderim kimseyi bulamazsam napayım, arkadaşla gitmek daha iyi tabi ama, çok güzel oranın havası, deniz kenarı temiz hava falan, deniz daha temiz orada mesela mis gibi kokuyor buralara kıyasla, Çengelköy'e gidiyorsun pis kokuyor, ama orası tam deniz kokuyor, bir de korusu var oranın Beykoz korusu, çok güzel, öyle şey yaparım yani kendi kendimi oyalıyorum yani (Nezaket)

²⁵P: Kuran okuyana olmaz diyorlar

N: Kuran okuyan bir de zihnini meşgul eden, Kuran okumuyor benim komşum ama çok zihnini meşgul ediyor, bulmaca çözüyor, hep günlük gazetesi olur önünde

²⁶ Bak o yaşlı kadın geri dönüş yapmıyor geleceğe bakıyor, kafasını yormuyor, eğer kendine acıyıp da eskileri hatırlayıp, hepimizin başında iyi şeyler kötü şeyler geçmiştir, geriye dönüp de kendine acırsa o kötü, ama yeni şeylerle oyalanırsa (Binnaz)

²⁷ Kitap değil de Evliyaların hayatları var bende onu okuyorum (Perestu)

dependency by indicating the existence of traditional saying of “three days on the bed, fourth day on soil”. However it should not be equalized with the dependency understanding of today’s successful aging movement that has three components: “the avoidance of disease and disability, the maintenance of cognitive and physical function, and social engagement”(Martinson & Berridge, 2015, p. 59)) by dreaming of an extensive independence. In order to grasp these women’s perceptions of dependency, we may look at their differentiation of themselves from being needy. This can be the second act that we called ‘standing on your feet’. The acts included under this definition can be proofs that indicate the independence of these women in their terms.

May my Lord protect our situation, may He not make it worse, we can perform ablution, we can pray salah, we can cook a portion of meal... I can clean up more or less; I can wash my clothes, I clean up (the home) a bit, I cannot do more.²⁸ (Hayriye)

Thank my Lord, may He not make me fall (elden ayaktan düşmek), may my Lord take His (Amanah) deposit while I am good in health (literally my hand and feet are working), while I am cooking a soup.²⁹(Gülsüm)

I’m at home; I can sit, I can perform ablution, I can cook a soup³⁰ (Saliha)

I do not define myself as old aged, I say ‘thank my Lord, I am good in health (literally my hand and feet are working), I can walk, I can go shopping, I am in my right mind,’ I say thank Allah, I mean I do not feel old age³¹ (Nezaket)

The first example shows that cooking can mean self-sufficiency of a person. It is interesting that some of them specifically say soup rather than any other meals. We should think about the meaning of soup in terms of social interaction. Our eating

²⁸ Rabbim yine böyle koysun da bundan aşağı etmesin yine abdestimizi alıyoruz, namazımızı kılıyoruz, bir kaşık yemeğimizi pişiriyoruz..., iyi kötü etrafı topluyorum, çamaşırım yıkiyorum, ortalığı da öyle bir alıyorum, fazla yapamıyorum (Hayriye)

²⁹ Evet Allahima çok şukur Allah elden ayaktan dusurmesin, kurban olduğum Allahima emanetini alsin elim ayagim tutarken corbami pişirirken (Gülsüm)

³⁰ Evimdeyim oturmuşum, abdestimi alıyorum bir çorbada üzerine koyuyorum (Saliha)

³¹ yok yaşlı diye tanımlamıyorum çok şükür diyorum elim ayağım tutuyor yürüyorum, alış-verişimi yapıyorum, aklım çok şükür yerinde, şükür Allah’a diyorum, ne yapayım yani yaşlı hissetmiyorum (Nezaket).

habits that are significant parts of our culture are related with social and economic relations that we engage in (Arlı & Gümüş, 2015, p. 145). Soup is defined as “a usually hot, liquid food made from vegetables, meat, or fish”(“Cambridge Dictionary,” n.d.-c) . Arlı and Gümüş claim that soup has a central place in the cuisine of Anatolian culture that it is a lifelong meal eaten from babyhood to death. (2015, p.147). The nutritiousness and liquidity which does not require teeth for chewing is the main reason why mothers feed it to their babies. This reason can be the same for old aged who have difficulty in chewing and digesting the heavy dishes. It is defined as a representative and executive of the table (Arlı & Gümüş, 2015, p. 147). In this respect, we may figure out the emphasis of women on cooking soup as a kind of indication that they can cook basic nutrition for themselves. This may also be a reflection of the former generation’s eating habit, which is based on home-made food, rather than ready-made food that has entered our lives more recently. On the other hand, it may be an indication of the continuity of their role as a housewife whose skill is generally evaluated by her ability to cooking. Furthermore, the meaning of a cooker should be thought in Turkish, “ocak”, which literally means the place for making a fire, also denotes home and family (Ayverdi, 2011, p. 2405). The phrase “ocağı sönmek” (blowing out the fire) means the destruction of home (Ayverdi, 2011, p. 2405). Hence, cooking something on the cooker is not only something that shows the self-sufficiency of a person to handle herself but also it is an implication of continuity of that household. Whether the women are alone or not, cooking can be seen as the continuity of their family and all those memories around it.

The second act can be performing ablution. Ablution is both physical and spiritual performance that should be done before any worship in Islam. In Turkish “abdest almak” is used both for ablution and also for going to the restroom. In fact, going to the restroom is a kind of requirement of ablution since without becoming absolutely clean from dirt one’s ablution cannot be realized. Moreover, being in your right mind is another requirement of ablution as any kind of worship is only obligatory for sane people.

Furthermore, by including washing of the feet, ablution requires significant physical power and autonomy. In this respect, their proof of not being dependent is both having the physical and mental capacity for performing ablution. Besides correlating their cyclical praying on the protection of faith until the last moment of their lives, we should not forget the spiritual side of ablution as worship.

The third act can be the ability to walk and work as an opposition of “elden ayakta düşmek” that defines old age as a dependency. Using hands in order to meet basic needs and walking wherever is needed is seen as an enormous blessing for which they show their gratitude.

A kind of autonomy and mobility which are ideal forms of citizen is internalized by these women. However, the degree of them is not equal with the individualized self of the USA literature (Clark, 1967; Kaufman, 1986) since these women mostly do not imagine a life without the support of their children in one way or another. To sum up as a general idea that we can get from the interviewees except Fatma, Nezaket and Ayşe who have always been relatively independent according to their educational and occupational status, all women have spent their time for the service of the people around them, have sacrificed a lot for the close ones and never needed to be cared by someone else and most of them still continue their roles by looking after their husband, children, divorced child or grandchildren. In this respect it may be seen as an example of the traditional role of women in Turkey as a devoted mother.

4.2. Old age as Despair vs. Opportunity

4.2.1 Old age as Despair

In the beginnings of winter, I even do not (deal with) my flowers even though I love them. I say to myself; this is winter, you will do it when spring comes. I mean if I need to change its pot etc. In autumn there is a sadness you know, old age is like autumn sadness, there is anything to look forward to, so how can you have hope. I mean for us³² (Çiçek).

³² Şey ben kışa girerken çiçeklerime bile ki sevdiğim şeyler öyle şey yapmıyorum şimdi kış nasılsa bahara yaparsın, saksını değışeceksem falan, sonbaharda bir hüçün olur ya onun gibi yaşlılık arkada gelecek bir şeysi yok ki ne umudun olacak ki, yani bizim için (Çiçek)

This is Çiçek's definition of old age that associates old age with a lack of hope. It is like famous quota that is referred to Ferdowsi: "Youngness is like spring; old age is like winter such a winter that there is no spring to come." ("Firdevsi," n.d.) Erikson, who classifies the lifespan of humans into eight different stages, claims that old age is time for ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1987, p. 241). In this stage, the ego seeks meaning according to accumulated assurance toward himself. He defines integrity as "post- narcissistic love of the human ego -not of the self- as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for" (Erikson, 1987, p. 241). It is a self-approval of his life by believing that it had to be like what it happened. He claims fear of death indicates the lack of this integrity due to the massive regret that a person feels for his old times (Erikson, 1987, p.242). In order to get ego integrity rather than feeling despair people recall and evaluate past experiences (Tromp, 2010, p. 243). In this respect, people of old age make life review and reminiscence frequently. Butler claims that life review is very typical for a person who comes close to death, and it gives a feeling of completion (Kunz & Soltys, 2007, p. 42). It is also believed that life review and reminiscence are necessary for the quality of life that people in this way construct the meaning and acceptance of death (Tromp, 2010, p. 243).

Moreover, one should add the life story format of this study as reason that intrinsically involves self-evaluations in it. As Linde quotes from Sapir that life story should have evaluative points about the narrator himself, it can be about the personality of him or moral judgments about the world around him (Linde, 1993, p. 21). To put it another way, the interviewee in one way or another make evaluations and judgments about himself or the things related to himself.

(In old age) A person becomes more tied to old things; she gives right to old aged people; she understands the mistakes that she made and says I should not have done this. I have always criticized myself objectively since I was young. I say so many times like "I wish I had not said that word, I wish I had not done that or not broken that person's heart." But I have always taken a

lesson from them. I have not made the same mistake twice. If I make a mistake, I stop there and make a heart-searching, I am still like that³³(Binnaz)

Binnaz defines old age as a time for self-evolution; however, she has such developed ego integrity that protects her from despair. Nevertheless, some other participants are not as optimistic as Binnaz that their narratives are based on a feeling of despair and regret like Çiçek's. Hayriye starts her narrative with her huge regret of being illiterate of reciting the Quran.

My life passed as blindfolded, since I do not know how to recite al-Quran, I always say to myself, My Lord Why I didn't think when I had time, why I didn't give the importance, I regret this a lot, now I am not able to understand, I am not able to go somewhere to learn, that's it, I am so regretful (Hayriye)³⁴

During the whole narrative, she refers to her illiteracy as a kind of connecting sentence. After finishing the chronological narrative of her life story, she says, "I do not know, our days have passed like that, in fact, I do not know anything." The content of her narrative is the hardships of old peasant life that cause the ignorance of her. She tells how peasant life that includes huge responsibility did not allow her to be literate of Quran and made her worthless in the sight of Allah. Hence her interactions that she engaged in after marriage by being a bride of peasant parents-in-law gave away her illiteracy that she feels massive regret now.

On the other hand, Cemile defines her old days with reminiscence:

"Oh, do not ask that, when I sit in front of TV, I watch TV, and it also watches me, I'm sitting and thinking, she became ill, some other become like that, he passed

³³ Daha eskilere bağımlı kalıyor, eskilere daha çok hak veriyor kendi yaptığı hataları anlıyor ben bunu yapmamalıydım diyor, ve kendi kendimi eleştiririm, gençliğimden beri tarafsız kendimi eleştiririm, keşke o lafı söylemeseydim, keşke öyle yapmasaydım, kırmasaydım dediğim çok olmuştur, onlardan da hep ders çıkarmışımdır, bir hatayı da iki kere yapmadım, bir kere yaptıysam ben orada zıncı diye dururum, ama vicdan muhasebesini çok yaparım, hala böyleyim

³⁴ Ömrüm körü körüne geçti, Kur'an'ı bilmediğim için ömrüm körü körüne geçti diyim, hep böyle Allahım ben niye böyle yaptım niye vaktinde düşünmedim, niye vaktinde üzerinde durmadım, buna pişman oluyorum duruyorum, e şimdi de kafama da girmeyo, bir yere de gidemeyon işte deyi öğrenmek için, buna çok pişman oluyom (Hayriye)

away, old things, what I have done, the ignorant things that I did, words, beatings, poverty..."³⁵ (Cemile)

Her narrative is full of yearnings and regrets for the past. The timing as a breakpoint for her narrative is her loss of daughter due to cancer. In this respect, her lonely hours pass with remembering the old days. Çiçek answers my question of contentment of herself like in the following:

I am pleased with myself; all praise is due to Allah (alhamdulillah). I can do everything on my own; I can cook, I can handle everything as much as I need. However, I suppose that I do nothing to compensate these things for gratitude, it cannot be by saying "Thank God", you should do something but for doing something... I do not know whether I do not have the ability or initiative... For instance, I have listened on the radio, did I listen today or yesterday, reading a book for visually impaired, how beautiful, yes I can support, but I cannot do something like that, stand by yourself and do a charity work for someone, no you do it only at the time that it is asked on your door, you cannot go somewhere or trust someone, that is...³⁶ (Çiçek)

She like all other women is thankful for not being dependent on meeting her needs but believes that thankfulness cannot be realized by only saying and feeling it but by doing something for the ones who do not have the same opportunities as her. This charity idea is not something that appears in the elderly period of her, but her noticeable emphasis on the difference of youngness in terms of determination³⁷ interprets this lack of ability or initiative of doing something despite her wish. This feeling of incompetent is valid through the whole narrative of her. On the other

³⁵ Ooo onu onu hiç sorma, oturdum zaman televizyon seyrediyorum televizyon beni seyrediyor, ee otuyorum bu böyle hastalandı bu böyle oldu, böyle öldü, bir şeyler oldu, eskiden ne görmüşüm ne yapmışım ne cahillikler, laflar dayaklar, yokluk memleket o zaman öyleydi (Cemile)

³⁶ "Şu halimden doğru söylemek gerekirse memnunum, elhamdulillah, kendim yapıyorum, pişiriyorum, ediyorum, yani beceriyorum kendime göre, fakat herhalde bunların şükürü olarak öbür tarafa geçersen bir şey yaptığımı da zannetmiyorum, çok şükür Allah'ım demekle de olmaz ki bir şeyler yapabilmeli diye düşünüyorum ama onu yapabilecek şeyi de becerim mi yok girişkenliğim mi yok, radyoda dinliyorum mesela, bugün mü dinledim, dün müydü, kitap okuma şeysi, engellilere, ne kadar güzel, destek evet olabilirim, ama işte böyle bir şey yapamam kalk sen bir yerde birine bir hayır yap, ancak kapına gelirse bir şey isterse hayır yapıyorsun, bir yerlere gidemiyorsun kimseye güvenemiyorsun, yani" (Çiçek)

³⁷ Azim. "Gençlik de tabi bir başka, dış bakımından başka, his bakımından başka, azim bakımından başka..." (Çiçek)

hand, Emine is another actor whose content of narrative is based on this feeling. Although she is a very active housewife that lives in a household with her husband and two single daughters in which she has so many responsibilities, she has anxieties for not being able to do her duties. Her explanation for the beginning date of this feeling is compatible with the time of the beginning of her daughter's illness although she did not make a cause and effect relationship between them. After her daughter's passing that happened a year ago, in addition to her routine responsibilities as a housewife she started to look after grandchildren by going their home periodically.

I think it became like this after a certain age, I mean for 3-4 years it has been intense, you know in this degree of lack of confidence. I do not have an eagerness before it, but I think this lack of self-confident has been there for 3-4 years. How it can be possible, what it is going to happen, will I be able to do it (kind of questions). For example, I buy cows when I go to the mountain pasture, (I'm thinking) will I able to pasture it, my Lord why I cannot go, in the morning I wake up and go smoothly.³⁸ (Emine)

She underlines that she had never been such a joyful person that shows enthusiasm for everything; however, for three or four years, her enthusiasm towards everything has diminished more. To put it another way, this feeling of incompetent goes hand in hand with the lack of eagerness³⁹.

I do not know; there is boredom inside of me. I say to myself, "never mind do not go out today". (When there is a gathering of her neighbors in which they come together and recite al-Quran) then, they come and ring the bell, "Mrs. Gülsüm we are waiting for you at downstairs", Then I immediately

³⁸ Belli bir yaştan sonra bu kadar oldu, aslında bu kadar olduğu herhalde 3-4 senedir, yani bu kadar güvensiz, bu kadar şeylik var bende, 3-4 senedir böyle, yani hevesim daha evvelden de yoktu ama bu kadar kendime güvenimin olmadığı 3-4 senedir, nasıl olacak, ne olacak, yapabilecek miyim, 3-4 senedir böyle, en basiti yaylada inek alıyorum, şimdi ben kalkıp da ineğe gidebilecek miyim, Allah Allah niye gidemeyeceğim, işte onu da düşünemiyorum, bakıyorum sabahleyin gayet güzel kalkıp gidiyorum (Emine)

³⁹ Hevessizlik

perform ablution and an enthusiasm comes and I immediately run.⁴⁰
(Gülsüm)

Gülsüm's this lack of eagerness can be solved by the care of other people. In this respect, it can be dealt with the loneliness of her. However, this is not the same for everyone, Emine and Çiçek live with their husbands and single daughters that they do not have chance to be alone, however their lack of joy is most concrete among others.

I mean when you do not have eagerness on this world you become old... They have joy of life I guess (for the people who is at the same age with her), I do not have. I'm witnessing the state of the world, what is going to happen, where will we reach, how can it go on like this, what is going to happen to our children, I think all of these, I say to myself do not mind the things you have lived, I mean in these days everything is worst but we are praying I hope that it will be better.⁴¹ (Emine)

I do not know whether I would say to myself old but I feel like this, maybe it is after losses (of beloveds) for instance my carpet is old, if I bought a new carpet and put it here, I would think whether I would use it, I mean it is not related with spending money but you know attachment to something, for example my glasses of guests (she is pointing her glass case on her living room), I had been hiding them, they were only used by guests when they come, but now I'm saying "never mind", but I did not think like this when I was young. Then this is old age, isn't it?⁴² (Çiçek)

As a general statement, one can define all these states as depression in psychological terms which is defined "lack of hope," "discouragement," "despair," "living in the past rather than present," "feeling deeply sad"(Runcan, 2013, p. 5).

⁴⁰ Bilmiyorum öyle bir bıkkınlık geliyor içime boş ver bugün çıkmayayım diyorum, hemen geliyorlar zile basıyorlar, Gülsüm Hanım seni bekliyoruz aşağıda, hemen abdestimi alıyorum bir gayret geliyor, hemen koşuyorum (Gülsüm)

⁴¹ Yav ne zaman dünyaya hevesin yoksa o zaman yaşlanıyorsun... Ya onların yaşam hevesi var herhalde, her şeylere hevesleri olduğu için benim hevesim yok, sonra ortamı görüyorum, yani ne olacak bu dünyanın hali ne olacak, nereye varacağız, nereye kadar bu böyle gidecek, hani bu çoluk çocuğumuzun sonu ne olacak onu düşünüyorum aman diyorum boş ver ben ne yaşadım, yani bu aralar haller çok kötü, ama dua yapıyoruz inşallah düzelir yani

⁴² yani yaşlı kendime der miyim şimdi kayıplar olunca mı nedir şöyle hissediyorum mesela halım eskidi, yeni halı alsam şuraya koysam, "aman onu eskitebilecek miyim" yani paraya kıyamadığımdan dolayı değil, yani böyle bağlanmak bir şeylere mesela saklıyorum mesela misafir bardaklarını duruyor (salonda duran vitrini gösteriyor), misafirden misafire kullanılıyor, aman şimdi öyle diyorum, gençken öyle demiyordum demek ki bu yaşlılık işte, değil mi (Çiçek)

Rather than seeing depression as a natural result of old age, Runcan defines three types of reasons for depression which are physical, emotional and psycho-social. In psycho-social reasons, Runcan tells four things: Retirement without being ready, loss of beloved ones, poverty and loneliness (Runcan,2013, p. 13). In fact, these can be only some of the social factors of this process.

This can be related to the troublesome feature of the knowledge of death. Elias says that human is the only creature who knows he will die, and this creates the tension (Elias, 1985, p. 5). The death of others reminds us our mortality that we neglect the death of others (Elias, 1985, p. 10).

To put it other words, when analyzing this process in terms of symbolic interactionism more systematically, we can with the meaning which equals old age with despair and by the narratives of women we see the acts that are shaped by this meaning such as not wanting to do something, regret, yearning, accusing oneself, life review, self-evolution, reminiscence, sadness. Next, when we analyze the second premise to find out the social interactions that bring about this meaning, we realize how the participants make a connection with their feeling of despair and the loss of beloved ones. Emine's and Cemile's loss of daughters due to cancer may bring about their lack of eagerness towards everything (Emine does not make a direct correlation however her grief for loss of daughter that happened a year ago is still fresh that we she became emotional while telling about her daughter).

Witnessing the loss of beloved ones implies the reality of the possibility of losing others. Hence, the fear of losing them becomes more apparent. This can be understood from the confess of Çiçek, who says she does not want to get an attachment with a new thing (not wanting to buy a new carpet). When we attach a thing, there will always be a risk of losing it. It can be seen related to the interdependency of us as a human that looks for security and meaning among each other in Elias' words (Elias, 1985).

Gülsüm's repentance to care of houseplants can be seen as another example of this fear of loss, she refuses to attach new houseplant after experiencing loss of others.

"After the loss of my husband, after 40 days my siblings took me to their homes to Antalya, when I returned at home, I found that all my houseplants passed away, since then I repent to care a houseplant".⁴³ (Gülsüm)

4.2.2. Old Age as an Opportunity

On the other hand, the participants are not always pessimistic in their narratives; on the contrary, some of them perceive old age as a period of opportunity that was not there before. "I like old age more when I become old, I like my old age, I still like it, and I say to myself I have always liked old aged people, liked to chat with them, I still like it"⁴⁴ (Saliha). Saliha is the most optimistic participant about old age despite being the oldest among them. Although she has chronic illness of heart and blood pressure like most of the women in Turkey on her ages, in her narrative, she does not even tell any kind of difficulty about old age. On the contrary, she depicts old age as a period which is beneficial for all people:

The mind is significant; May Allah protect our mind; I have always prayed like this for all old aged people. May he protect our mind that we can be beneficial for ourselves and the people around us. What is our benefit for them, we are praying for them, that is it. To our children, beloved ones, to everyone, neither commodity is precious like praying nor any other thing. I would like this, may He protect my mind, but about my years He wishes. Besides I am not complaining about my old age, I do not say I am old and should sit and not do anything. I cannot say that.⁴⁵ (Saliha)

⁴³ eşimin 40'ından sonra beni Antalya ya götürdü zaten kardeslerim geldim baktım ki çiçeklerimin hepsi ölmüş, sonra bir daha tövbe ettim canlı çiçek beslememeye,

⁴⁴ "...yaşlı olmaya adım attıkça yaşlılığı tey daha çok sevdim, yaşlılığımı sevdim yani hala da diyorum ki demek ki severdim ben yaşlıları, yaşlı insanları severdim, hala da öyleyim, hala da öyleyim, git gide de yaşlıları severim yaşlılarla beraber sohbeti severim" (Saliha)

⁴⁵ akıl çok önemlidir, Allah-u Teala bu akli başımızda muhafaza etsin, ben bütün yaşlılıklara herkese böyle dua ederim, Allah aklımızı muhafaza etsin de hem kendimize hem de başkalarına faydamız olsun, faydamız nedir dua ediyoruz bu, evlatlarımıza, sevdiğimizimize, herkese dua ediyoruz, ne mal onun gibi kıymetlidir ne de bir şey. Ben onu istiyorum, aklımı muhafaza etsin, artık yaşımı da ne kadar takdir ettiyse, bir de yaşlılığımdan şikayetçi değilim ben, ben yaşıyam kalayım bir tarafta oturayım, onu hiç diyemem hiç (Saliha)

Her explanation is remarkable since she resists the idea of "useless" elder by making believe herself that she is doing a job that nobody can substitute. She does include not only her beloved ones but also the whole society as a beneficiary of her praying. This can be seen as the third premise of symbolic interactionism that interprets the given meaning through her relations with social policy or commonsense of society that sees the old as a burden.

On the other hand, most of them grasp it as an opportunity in which you have more time to do worship. Some of them think that at their young age, there were so many duties and service tasks to do for their families and household that they even were not able to catch their daily praying.

There is not certain age (for worship), but we could not do it when we are young, when the children were small, we had elders, there were so many guests, in one repast we used to set up six tables, we couldn't catch up...Doing service. Cooking, serving, washing dishes, we could not find a time to pray, but now you, my daughter in law thank My Lord, pray five-times daily praying. ⁴⁶ (Muhlise)

As it seen in best form in the narrative of Muhlise most of these women's young days were full of service that they do for their family. Old age is a time in which your responsibility decreases that you may start to concentrate more on your duties towards Allah.

Oh, sure when you are young you pray less, I mean you can skip, but now you do everything on time...You can do it as it is obligatory, there is not more thought on your mind, you give importance to it, you say I should do on time and you do it.⁴⁷ (Rikkat)

I started to do more worship by being old... I mean afterlife is, you notice the worthlessness of this world, you know, more close to Allah, you feel more close to His power, especially when you are alone, I mean it is obligatory

⁴⁶ Belli bir yaşı yok da işte biz o zaman yapamadık, çoluk çocuk küçükkene, işte büyüklerimiz buradaydı gelenimiz gidenimiz, bir öğünde biz 6 tane masa kurardık, yetiştiremiyorduk,.. Hizmet ediyorsun onlara yedir içir, bulaşık yap nasıl zaman geçtiğini anlamadık ki yani namaza zaman bulamadık o zaman, mesela şimdi siz A. Allah'ıma şükürler olsun 5 vakit namazını kılıyor, sen gelinimiz kılıyorsunuz (Muhlise)

⁴⁷ Ee tabi gençken daha az kılabiliyordun, icabında kaçırıyordun şey yapıyordun, şimdi zamanında her şeyi yerine getiriyorsun...Zaten farz olduğu için şey yapıyorsun başka düşüncen olmuyor, kafanı ona takıyorsun, yerine getireyim zamanında yapayım diyorsun yapıyorsun yani (Rikkat)

according to your religion, we try to do our best, but there are people that do not worship even they are old, for example my neighbor in Şile, she is 93 years old and she does not care about daily praying or fasting, anything...⁴⁸ (Nezaket)

Binnaz says that in young ages a person works for this world whereas in old age she should deal with afterlife. In this respect she defines old age as a preparation of death which is suitable with decline understanding. She constructs this perception through her relations with the former generation.

Ageing is losing some of your functions, cannot doing the things that you would like to do. I think old age is this. In young age you enjoy everything, when you become old aged, you return to a certain thing and you only want to do it. At young ages you work for this world, in old age you work for afterlife. When you reach a certain period, you give up dyeing your hair, making up your face, this is old age. I mean you prepare yourself for death, we have witnessed this from our elderly and now we are doing the same thing.⁴⁹ (Binnaz)

Besides, Fatma sees her old age as a compensation to young age's devotion of time to working such that after retirement she starts to spend former working hours of a day with only worship without socializing with anyone.

"When I found that book "Evrad-ı Şerif" (dhikr/praying book), I said to myself, till today I worked for material things. When I was at school or the college, I did not go

⁴⁸ Ya ni benim oldu mesela ben yaş aldıkça daha çok yapmaya başladım... Yani daha öbür taraf, yani bu dünyanın boş olduğunu görüyorsun ne bilim Allah'a daha yakın, O Güce daha yakın hissediyorsun kendini, özellikle de yalnız olunca, yani yapman gereken şey dinimizce onu yapmaya çalışıyoruz işte yapabildiğimiz kadar, ama yaşlı olup da hiç yapmayan da var mesela benim Şile'de yan komşum 93 yaşında hiç alakası yok ne namazla ne oruçla ne şeyle... (Nezaket)

⁴⁹ Yaşlanmak şöyle bazı fonksiyonlarını kaybetmek, istediğini yapamamak, yaşlılık bence bu her şeyden gençken zevk alırsın, yaşlanınca yok, bir de bir yere dönersin hep onu yapmak istersin, gençken çalışıp dünyalık hazırlarsın, yaşlanınca ahiretlik hazırlarsın bence yaşlılık bu, yani bir yere kadar gelince diyorsun ki bak saçını boyamayı bırakırsın, saçını gözünü oynamayı, boyamayı bırakırsın, bu yaşlılıktır, yani kendini hazırlarsın ölüme daha doğrusu, büyüklerimizden öyle gördük biz de öyle yapıyoruz, bence yaşlılık bu

anywhere but worked daylong, just like those days that I worked day and night I would spend that time with worshipping Allah⁵⁰ (Fatma).

According to her interaction with people and things around her, she gives brand new meaning to her retirement. Rather than seeing retirement as a reward of her working, she thinks it as a period of compensation of her past interest on worldly matters and as an opportunity for purification.

On the contrary, the same compensation understanding can be used for legitimation of working that we see the example of it in the narrative of Ayşe. When she married with her late husband, he put some requirements but for legitimatizing her working she said to her husband:

I am a gynecologist, I would like to set up clinic and deliver births, you shouldn't prevent me, he said "working is not right for you", I said "I have used so many rights that exceeds the rights of Islam has given to me, I have studied on the same class with males, we examine patients together, we talk with each other, I have male teachers, and I have lots of sin, for this reason I should try to be released from my sins by using this blessing (being a doctor) on its order", then he said "won't be difficult for you to handle both housework and this?" I said "if you want to take the responsibility of my sins, I will sit at home"⁵¹ (Ayşe)

It is very interesting to observe how the same kind of meaning gives way to different actions according to social interactions that they engage in. This is reasoning that Ayşe still legitimize her working in contrast to feeling for the need of doing more worship after her 50s.

⁵⁰ Evrad-I Şerif kitabını da bulduktan sonra dedim ki şu zaman kadar maddi şey için çalıştım. Okulda, kurstayken hiçbir yere gitmeyip sadece sabahtan akşama o işlerle uğraştım, nasıl o zaman sabahtan akşama çalışmışsam, şimdi o vakti Allah'a ibadetle geçireceğim (Fatma)

⁵¹ ben doğum hekimiyim, ben muayahane de açmak istiyorum, doğum da yaptırmak istiyorum, bu konuda benim önümü kesmeyeceksin, tabi çalışman doğru değil gibi bir şey dedi, dedim ki ben bütün hayatım boyunca İslam'ın bana vermiş olduğu hakların çok üstünde haklar kullandım, erkeklerle aynı sınıflarda okudum, onlarla beraber aynı hastalara baktık, onlarla zaman zaman konuştuk, hocalarım oldu, ve ben çok günaha girdim, onun için benim şuanda bütün günahlarımı affettirmem için çalışmam, Allah'ın bana vermiş olduğu bu nimeti yerinde kullanmam gerekiyor, öyle deyince o da hem ev işi hem de bu ağır olmaz mı dedi, ben de dedim ki eğer bütün günahlarımı sen yükleniyorsan evde otururum. (Ayşe)

I mean, I can say that when I become 50, before it there were so many responsibilities like university (children) etc., after 50 years old I feel that lifetime is decreasing and the need of spending this time efficiently. I feel hurry but I have not done so much increasing on my worships since I am still working... by spending my time efficiently I mean I should, how many days (that I have), everything that is done for the sake of God is worship, we do our obligatory worships thanks God but not sleeping so much, not wasting time, there is more hurry now.⁵²(Ayşe)

4.3. Old Age as Loneliness

“The bad side of old age is when you lay, you want to drink a glass of water, there is not anyone to bring it for you, or there is a need for a meal, but there is not someone to give you... This is the bad side of old age.”⁵³ (Gülsüm)

Gülsüm (75) lives alone for 14 years after almost 20 years of caregiving process to her husband, who had a stroke. Her first marriage was at the age of 23, and they divorce after 16 years without having a child. After a few years, she married a late husband who had a stroke only in the third year of their marriage. She had some stepchildren who do not live in Istanbul. She has two siblings who also live different parts of Turkey, and among other relatives, only one of her nephews comes to visit her from time to time. She lives on the top of the third floor of approximately 40 years of an apartment building. There are only a few households as most of the flats are used as an office.

She answers my question of whether old age is difficult, by telling the difficulty of living alone. Hence in her mind, old age and loneliness are equal since two them become an inseparable part of the same experience. This can be the most explicit example of phenomenological meaning of old age that rather than whole biological

⁵² Şimdi bakın şöyle, onu da söyleyeyim ben size 50 yaşına gelince, 50 yaşından önce işte birçok sorumluluk işte üniversitesi bilmem nesi, 50 yaşından sonra ömrümün az kaldığını ve zamanımı çok daha güzel geçirmem gerektiğini düşündüm, yani böyle bir telaşa düştüm ama işte ibadetlerimde çok fazla artış yapamıyorum, böyleyim yani çalışma hayatında, Yani zamanımı çok iyi değerlendirmeliyim, şimdi kaç gün, yani Allah'ın rızası kazanmak için yaptığınız her şey bir ibadet, farz olan ibadetimizi yapıyoruz elhamdulillah, çok daha fazla uyumamalıyım, çok daha fazla şurada burada geçirmemeliyim, çok daha fazla telaş başladı. (Ayşe)

⁵³ “ Yaşlanmanın kötü tarafı çok, yatarsın bir su içmek istersin su veren olmaz, bir yemek lazımdır mesela yemek veren olmaz kötü tarafı... ya yaşlılığın kötü tarafı budur” (Gülsüm)

or economic explanations, Gülsüm's perception of old age is shaped by her relations with the things around her. The absence of a family is so powerful in her life that she implicitly does not define her last period of life as old age, but in fact, as loneliness.

"My dear, when there are people around me, I am not aging, for example if there are your children, your siblings, nephews, they do all your deeds, they do whatever you say; then you do not age. We run to answer the needs of our mum; we did not make her feel her old age.⁵⁴ "(Gülsüm)

When we go deep into the meaning of loneliness for her, we find out from these two quotations that it is, in fact, an absence of care. The ground meaning of loneliness is explained with her interaction with a thing -a glass of water- when she does not have energy or eagerness to take it herself. Moreover, her ideal old age is a period in which you are served and cared for by your closed ones. This meaning is built up by her experience with her mum that she prevented her from "feel" old age. In this respect, this can be seen as a second premise in which her interactions with her mum construct the meaning of old age, however this meaning should undergo a change due to Gülsüm's new interactions on life, her childless widowhood at a young age gives away a new type of old age than her mum which is suitable third premise of the theory.

On the other hand, her loneliness that started after the decease of her husband is a kind of breakpoint of her locomotive narrative in which she binds other topics to it. Structurally, it can be a crisis of her narrative that is solved by a new social interaction.

After decease of my husband I suffered a lot, alone at home, when I opened the door, I looked this side (she points a corner on her living room), he used to sit there, I felt so bad, I was about to go into depression, then I said to

⁵⁴ Yavrum etrafımda insanlar olduğunda hiç yaşlanmıyorum, hiç yaşlanmıyorum, mesela çoluğun çocuğun var etrafında, kardeşlerin var yeğenlerin var onlar her işini yapıyorlar, her dediğini yapıyorlar o zaman hiç yaşlanmıyorsun, biz anneme öyle koştuk Allahım'a şükür annemin yaşlılığını hissettirmedik (Gülsüm)

myself, this cannot go on like this, I should go somewhere or find a teacher and learn recitation from her.⁵⁵ (Gülsüm)

Then she learnt recitation of al-Quran al-Kareem by her neighbor and through her she is included the gathering of neighbors in which they come together and recite Quran and socialize.

While we were sitting my neighbor said to me – the one who teaches me-Sister Gülsüm, once a week my friend come to me, you may also come, we may both socialize and make your recitation better. I accepted and hence found a community, if I go there Thursday, I go to other one (neighbors) on Friday, Tuesday is for another one. Wednesday is for another (laughing) my days became full.⁵⁶ (Gülsüm)

In this respect, she finds both spiritual and social relief to her loneliness; however, it does not change the reality that there is not someone for bringing a glass of water at night.

On the other hand, loneliness is a significant pattern for other participants. Although they do not define their old age directly as loneliness like Gülsüm, it is a significant pattern that affects their narrative. For most of them, the first experience of loneliness start with the loss of their husband since there is not any kind of opportunity for them to be alone due to strong solidarity that have among family. Saliha defines the time that she feels her old age is “after the passing of my husband, I took the role of old aged in exact meaning.”⁵⁷

When we consider their narrative style, we notice the similar kind of patterns in the narratives of women, although they may have different stories. They start their life

⁵⁵ burada da beyim vefat edince çok bunaldım, yalnız ev kapıyı açıyorum o tarafa bakıyorum, o tarafta otururdu rahmetli, böyle fena oldum, yani bunalıma girmek üzereydim, sonra dedim ki ya hu bu böyle olmaz, ya bir yere gideceğim ya da bir hanımın yanına girip şey öğreneceğim, okuma öğreneceğim.(Gülsüm)

⁵⁶ sonra böyle otururken komşumuz dedi ki bana şeyi öğreten Gülsüm Abla dedi haftada bir gün gel de arkadaş da geliyor hem sohbet ederiz hem de Kuran'dan biraz daha iyi olur dedi. Olur dedim, oradan bir toplum daha yakaladık, sonra perşembe oraya gidiyorsam cuma oraya gidiyorum, salı oraya gidiyorum, çarşamba oraya gidiyorum, (gülüyor) bütün günlerim dolu...

⁵⁷ Ne zaman ben en çok beyim öldükten sonra adamakıllı yaşlı rolüne girdim ben (Saliha)

story by the birthplace of themselves, and except for the ones who have chance to take an education they do not talk about their childhood or parents but directly go on by mentioning the age that they married, then they continue with the birth of first child and the number of children that they have. For the ones who come from an educated family that have a civil servant father, migration can be a process before marriage; however, for the other ones, it happens right after marriage. Speaking of the marriage of the first child follows the number of children. Subsequently, caregiving to the parents of themselves or their spouses or directly to their spouses come to picture. Old age definitions follow the narration of the difficulty of the caregiving process. This pattern differs for the ones who have work experience by adding information about it before or after marriage. Without a doubt, my questions that lead up to old age is significant in the construction of this pattern. However, among participants whose eight of them is widow, one of them is divorced, and one of them is single, the pattern of loneliness comes to the picture inevitably.

Nevertheless, till that time none of them experiences to be alone, Even Muhlise whose parents died at her very young age, she and her siblings were looked after by their grandparents that they did not have to take full responsibility for their lives. They have lived under patriarchal family in which there have always been some social mechanisms that protect and control them.

Gender can determine the role of them in a family; however, the protection and control of family were there not only for women but also for men that it was rare for them to be alone. Even the ones who migrate Istanbul to find a job as can be seen in the examples of Muhlise, Hayriye, Cemile and Emine; their husbands were not alone in Istanbul due to their networks that they get solidarity from their hometowns. Immediately after they set up a household, they bring their wives and sometimes parents to Istanbul that they do not have a chance to be alone.

This situation can be discussed by Elias' theory of loneliness in which he claims that people has never been lonely like they are in today. As it is mentioned more

detailed on the theoretical framework chapter, "the real feeling of loneliness" stems from an independent meaning quest of today's person (Elias, 1985, p. 57). This quest is against the nature of human who is dependent on other humans by finding security and meaning on them. Elias makes a separation between the perception of traditional society and civilized one and asserts that in traditional society except for nuns and monks, people lived together that the structure of residency did not allow them to be alone (Elias, 1985, p. 18).

Like the comparison of Elias, participants themselves make the same kind of analyze by asserting that now human becomes lonely since childhood that they may have a fear of dying lonely.

Perestu: Now, old aged people die alone at their home; the neighbors find them dead.

Nezaket: That's it, that a person has fear about.

Hüsna: Do you have this kind of fear?

Nezaket: Yes. My son does not call me every day, but once or twice a week. Hence one thinks that whether something happens

Binnaz: I say to my son, control me on the mornings before going job, he says "mum, you were sleeping uncovered," I understand that he controls me in the mornings

T: But you should not think like that. Our Prophet says, "You will die as the same as you were living," we should not have anxiety.

Perestu: I do not even think that I become lonely and die lonely.

Nezaket: Because you are not alone, no one knows loneliness without experiencing it.

Hüsna: What kind of difficulties does it have?

Nezaket: First of all, you feel sad if you are alone. I feel weird. When there was my son at home, he was coming and going; there were things to do for him, for example, you were cooking for him, for the one who is coming, but cooking for only yourself is the only obligation, you cook because you should do it.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ P: Şimdi yaşlıların çoğu evinde ölüyor da komşular geliyor bakıyor ölü buluyor

N: İşte ondan korkuyor insan

H: Böyle bir korkunuz var mı

N: Var, oğlum beni her gün aramıyor mesela haftada bir iki ya bir şey olursa insanın aklına geliyor tabi

B: Ben oğluma diyorum oğlum sabah erken gidiyor, olur ya yatarım kalkmayabilirim, bir bak diyorum, "anne üstün açık uyudun" diyor bakıyorum kontrol ediyor sabahları beni

T:: Ama öyle hep düşünmemek lazım, diyor ya Peygamber Efendimiz nasıl yaşarsanız öyle ölürsünüz, o kadar da çok kaygılanmamak lazım,

P: Hiç aklıma gelmiyor, yalnız kalacağım öleceğim

N: Ama yalnız değilsin ki, yaşamayan bilmez yalnızlığı

This is the conversation that we had in the gathering on Nezaket's house. Nezaket, who lives alone for 13 years after the marriage of her only child, defines loneliness as sadness and she and Binnaz (who now lives with her divorced son) indicate their fear of dying alone. In this respect, loneliness has two layers of fear; the first one is while living, the second one is while dying. The ones who are living with their families, Perestu, Çiçek, and Emine do not even think that one day, they become lonely.

I do not have that fear (to be alone) , (silence for three seconds) there is not any situation like that, my husband would die, daughters would go, I do not suppose that my older daughter would marry she is 40 now, she would not leave me.⁵⁹ (Emine)

No, crowded, my social network is crowded.⁶⁰ (Çiçek)

In this respect, we can quickly notice the intersubjective meaning of loneliness that their social environments construct their understandings. However, for the others who live alone, loneliness is a kind of crisis to be solved, like the Gülsüm's solution of social gatherings, Cemile's strong ties with her neighbors is significant for her socialization. She has been living there for 27 years and says that she has always been sensitive not to break her neighbors' hearts. She says they can become more closed than one's relatives.

"Listen, my child, the relatives of a person cannot help but neighbors can help in an emergency. For example, in this apartment, they (my neighbors) say if you become ill or something happens to me, kick the wall, we will understand."⁶¹ (Cemile)

H: Ne tür zorlukları var

N: Yalnızlık olunca bir kere bir hüzün oluyor bir garip hissediyorsun kendini haliyle daha önce oğlan varken, çıkıyordun giriyordun onun işleri bir oyalanıyordun yani bir yemek yapıyorsun mesela onun için yapıyorsun birisi gelecek diye yapıyorsun kendin için içinden gelmiyor zorla yapıyorsun, yemem lazım diye

⁵⁹ Yok, öyle bir şeyim yok hani, (3 saniye sessizlik), benim yalnız kalacak bir durumum yok kocam ölecek de çocuklarım gidecek de, yani büyük kızımı sanmıyorum evlensin 40 yaşında o beni bırakmaz (Emine)

⁶⁰ Yok, yani kalabalık çevrem de kalabalık (Çiçek)

On the other hand, Nezaket who defines the departure of her son as a huge gap⁶², fill this gap with settling down to nature, dealing with agriculture⁶³. She tries to spend her time by walking, reading, learning a new language.⁶⁴ She observes herself and finds a solution to anxieties of her for dying lonely:

“If there are sad events, and you do not keep your mind busy (there will be anxiety for dying alone), I observed that, when I deal with nature, it does not happen, gardening etc. it enables person alive, the things that you planted grow up, this is a joy, parsley, onion.”⁶⁵ (Nezaket)

On the other hand, Ayşe, who also started to feel deep loneliness after the recent death of her husband despite having children and siblings around her; believes that she would not feel it as long as she works. Her perception of loneliness as an increased responsibility is important that indicates her strong relationship with her husband as a life partner.⁶⁶ Moreover, Nezaket's struggle to avoid negative thoughts and Ayşe's avoidance of feeling loneliness through working can be seen as a try to protect their sense of self that can be similar to Kaufman's ageless self that asserts

⁶¹Evet yavrum bak insanın anası babası bir şey olursa yetişmez sana ama komşu yetişiyor, bak mesela burada binadadırlar bana diyorlar ki eğer sen hastalandın falan bir şey oldu mu sen diyorlar duvara vur biz hemen anlıyoruz. (Cemile)

⁶² ondan sonra baya bir boşluk oldu tabi baya bir boşluk hissettim, ama işte bir zaman sonra alışıyor insan işte (Nezaket)

⁶³ valla işte ne bileyim kendimi doğaya çok veririm ben yazın yazlıkta çok toprakla uğraşıyorum

⁶⁴ Bir de ben yürüyüşü çok severim fırsat buldukça yürüyüş yapıyorum çıkıyorum ondan sonra kitap okumayı severim...öğrenme merakı var ben de dilden dolayı Arapçayı yarım bırakmıştım, gitmiş kursa, şimdi geçenlerde geçti elime bir kitap unutmuşum bazı şeyleri fırsat buldukça kitaptan kendi kendime öğrenmeye devam ediyorum

⁶⁵ Daha çok evet şey olduğu zaman üzücü olaylar olduğunda bir de boş olduğunda kendini meşgul edersen olmuyor, ona dikkat ettim, özellikle doğayla ilgilendiğim zaman pek olmuyor, bahçeyle falan, o insana hayat veriyor, o yetiştirdiğin şeyler büyüyor, o bir zevk yani, maydanozdur soğandır,

⁶⁶ Şimdi yaş alımı değil de eşimi kaybettikten sonra çok yalnız kaldığımı hissettim çünkü eşim her şeyi paylaştığım bir insandı, onun gidişinden sonra sanki yükümün çok daha arttığını, çocuklarıma karşı kendime karşı, yani o zaman yalnız kaldığımı hissettim, her ne kadar etrafımda çocuklarım kardeşlerim olsa da, şimdi kızım gidecek onu düşünüyorum ondan sonra yalnız kalacağım (5 saniye sessizlik) ama çok dolu bir hayatım var yalnızlığımı herhalde çok hissetmeyeceğim, bilmiyorum şuanda yaşamadığım için bilmiyorum çok dolu ve yoğun olduğum için geceli gündüzlü belki işim bittiği an kendimi daha yalnız hissederim. (Ayşe)

permanent personhood. Nezaket, Ayşe, and Fatma who can be seen most individualistic participants in terms of their narratives have a more concrete sense of self rather than other participants which can be related to their different social interactions that resulted in their educational and occupational status.

However, as in the Gülsüm case, none of these solutions can change the loneliness at night.

Nobody can be pleased with being alone, it affects one's inner sense, but there is not something to do Allah wants like that, I say, I thank Him, I do not have any need on anything or any person, I am thinking these. Alhamdulillah, I have reached a beautiful stage, I keep going but it brings about sadness, especially at nights you feel it more, On the mornings you go out and hang around bur nights there is an immense sadness.⁶⁷ (Nezaket)

The nights are significant since most of them feel their loneliness at night more than the daytime. It combines with the fear of burglars that might give harm to them. Hence the subject of security comes to picture again. Their dependence on people enables them to secure that in the absence of people around them they feel insecure.

One or two months I didn't sleep, I was not able to, I was lonely, I used to have a patient. I used to look after him, but I did not say anything to anyone, I turned on the lights and perform salah, come and back⁶⁸ (Saliha)

If there is someone suddenly, I become scared, I mean there is a fear sometimes, I do not fear at nights generally but sometimes there can be. I'm saying to myself if I were alone, I would not manage (She is referring to family apartment that she is living now). I mean I do not fear but there is something, you know ⁶⁹ (Hayriye)

⁶⁷ yalnız kalmaktan kimse memnun olmaz yalnızlık insanın içini şey yapıyor biraz ama yapacak bir şey yok ne yapayım Allah böyle istemiş çok şükür diyorum ihtiyacım yok bir şeye kimseye, onları düşünüyorum, güzel bir yere geldim elhamdulillah, devam ediyorum işte, ama hüzün veriyor bazen hele akşamları daha çok hissediyorsun, gündüz çıkıyorsun oraya gidiyorsun buraya gidiyorsun oyalanıyorsun filan ama akşamları baya hüzün oluyor insanda (Nezaket)

⁶⁸ 1 ay 2 ay ben sabaha kadar uyumadım, uyuyamıyordum, yalnız hem hastam vardı hem hasta bakmışam ama hiç kimseye de söylemedim, ışıkları yakardım namaz kılardım giderdim gelirdim (Saliha)

⁶⁹ Aniden biri girse korkuyom bir ürperiyom , bir korku oluyo yani arasıra, halbukisi gece meçe korkmam da oluyo arada bir korku...Demek ki yalnız olsam hiç oturamayacaktım. Yani ben de bir

I got used to, thank God, I do not fear, all my windows are barred, my sons made all of them, windows, doors, balconies. I lock the door in the evening before maghrib salah; I do not open to the door; all of them are barred; there is not any free place, then I do not fear. ⁷⁰ (Cemile)

At nights the best friend of most of them is television that is turned on even they do not watch it but as sound giver like a person⁷¹. Rikkat says that from the morning when she enters kitchen to prepare breakfast she turns on TV to make a noise in her home.

On the other hand, living alone is not always something that is difficult but also some kind of liberty for them. Cemile says that a person become free in her home⁷², whereas for Hayriye underlines the economic freedom of being alone at her own home ("Since it is my own home rather than rent or something, I do not go to children's home and disturb them, I am comfortable at my own, thank God I have money and home."⁷³), Saliha tells that she cannot feel free at the homes of their son in-law ("I am comfortable at my home, I do not feel comfortable near the sons in law, you know your hair can be uncovered, your arms can be seen at your home, why do I make myself disturbed..⁷⁴), Muhlise adds that she feels comfortable at her

korkmuyom gibi ama gene de bir şey var yani huylanıyorum arada şey yapıyorum boş mu bulunuyorum napıyorsam bir şeyden ürperiyorum ara sıralar falan" (Hayriye)

⁷⁰ Artık alıştım, çok şükür korku morku, korkmuyorum, pencerelerim hepsi demir yapıldı, oğlanlar pencelerileri, balkonları, kapıları hepsini demir yaptılar. Bir kapıdır, kapı da kitliyorum, akşam heman namaz kılmadan kapılarımı kitliyorum birisi gelmezse açmıyorum, her yer demirli yani, hiç açık bir yer yok, başka türlü de korkmuyorum. (Cemile)

⁷¹ "Öyle vakit geçiyor, evde bir şenlik ses oluyor işte geçiyor işte"(Hayriye)
"Yok mutfakta da var onu açarım, o benim arkadaşımdır izlesem de izlemesem de sesi gelecek"
(Rikkat)

⁷² "kendi evinde serbest ne yaparsan yap"

⁷³ "şimdi kendi evim olduğu için, hani bir kira mira olmadığı için, çoluk çocuğun yanına gidip onları rahatsız etmediğim için bir zorluk olmadı... şimdi daha çok rahattım kendi başıma Allah'a şükür param var, evim var"

⁷⁴ "...evimde rahat ediyorum nedir damat da olursa olsun rahat edemiyorum kızım, insanın evinde başı açılır ve yahut kolu yukarıda olur yani niye rahatsız edeyim kendimi, yok efendim "damat da ne olur evlat", evlatsa evlat Allah rahmet etsin anasına babasına..."

home by doing what she wishes to do⁷⁵, Rikkat claims that you are the decision maker of resting, eating, going out⁷⁶, Nezaket chooses to stay at home rather returning to father's home after her divorce and never joins the houses despite her mother's recent need of care by saying that she likes her established order of her house.⁷⁷ These are the acts that are shaped by the meaning of loneliness as freedom. Their social interactions with their children give away to burden idea that they chose to stay alone as an avoidance of this disturbance.

As Chinnappan's study on Indian old aged widows, joint living sometimes is intentionally not chosen by widows. She explains the reasons as having a proper place for every child to visit the widow, avoiding strain relations among widow and her children, migration of widow's children, and role of women as "sacrifice and kin keeping."(Chinnappan, 2015). Her first explanation can be applicable to our case since the child's home is not seen as a free place due to existence of son or daughter in law. In the narratives, no one mention strain relationship between themselves and their children however their burden perception may have understood as a protection of this kind of relations. Nevertheless, loneliness as an opportunity to take a self-decision is significant for widows who have never a chance to experience it.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter is a quest on the perception of old age through the narratives of 13 women who are 65 and more years old and live in Istanbul by analyzing through symbolic interactionist theory of Herbert Blumer and Elias' approach to old age. Their old age perceptions are categorized under three major concepts: old age as a dependency, old age as despair vs. opportunity, and old age as loneliness.

⁷⁵ : Ne bileyim istediğin gibi oturuyon kalkıyon

⁷⁶ "Kötü tarafı yok, iyi tarafı da kendi kafana göre her şeyi yapıyorsun, yatmanı, oturmanı, yemeni, içmeni, gezmeni yani kararı kendin veriyorsun"

⁷⁷ "zaten sıkıntılar çok yaşamışım, yani öyle arada gidip gelmek daha iyi, bir de kendi evimi seviyorum kendi düzenimi seviyorum ne bileyim öyle"

By using the three premises of symbolic interactionism rather than starting from structural notions, we start from the meaning itself that people give according to social interactions that they have. To grasp the construction of these interactions, we observe the actions of people that are consequences of the meaning.

According to old age as physical and mental dependency perception, women have two major actions. These are the avoidance of dependency through constant praying and keeping the mind busy, and standing on your feet through cooking, perform ablution and ability to walk. According to this definition of old age, none of them perceive herself as old aged. However, each of them has a significant fear of being old aged that they try to avoid it through some actions.

Followingly we analyze each action by trying to indicate the social interaction behind it. One of the reasons for the constant praying of not falling is a result of their relations with their mother as a representative of a traditional understanding of old age. Their cyclical praying of "Three days on a bed, the fourth day on the soil." depicts an old age in which you would not become dependent till the last days before your death.

The second one is their experience of old age as a caregiver when their husbands or parents need care. Although one can assume that since their early adulthood their caregiver role starts by their interactions with their husbands and children as a housewife; caregiving as a response to adult dependency can be categorized differently. Most of them perceive care as a filial duty that has moral returns in the eyes of God. Lack of it seen as an opposition to their conscience and betrayal to the trust of God who sends the dependent old aged as an Amanah to them that must be returned Him properly.

On the other hand, their understanding of care seems not to be the same when they become the subject of it as a care receiver. Perception of human as an Amanah is not directly applied to their process of old age in the possibility of dependency by conceiving themselves as a burden. In this respect, their whole perception of old

age as dependency and avoidance of it through actions is related to the avoidance of being a burden to their closed ones.

However, this should not be equalized with the independent people of civilized society that seeks a meaning separated from the people (Elias, 1985, p.34). This difference can be stem from the underdevelopment of Elias' four reasons for the negation of death and hence old age in this epoch. (Elias, 1985, p.45-55).

The first reason is the longevity of human that makes him distant from the idea of death and old age. This premise is not directly applicable to these women. Although they can be seen the ones who benefit from the features of this time by living longer, their social interaction with the former generation is still so powerful that their understanding of old age has not changed radically. Death is not something that is completely removed from social life; on the contrary by old age; it is something remembered and tried to be prepared by decreasing worldly matters and increasing worships.

The second reason for the negation of death is the perception of it as a medicalized process that early coming of it is not predicted. This reason can be observed in the lives of these women that they assume how the meaning of chronological age has changed⁷⁸. In their young ages they perceive certain age as old age which is not seen as old age anymore.

The third reason is as opposed to the unexpected death of past days; now there is a more stable type of death. This can be seen related to the second reason and be valid for our participants.

⁷⁸ "Önceden 60 diyorlardı ya şimdi 70 diyorlar, herhalde 70 yaş yaşlı gibidir diyorum ama (gülüyor) 70 yaşına geldiğimde göreceğim, Allah ömür verirse tabii" (Ayşe)
"Annem babam çok yaşlanmadı, biz gençtik annem 73 yaşındaydı vefat ettiğinde o zaman ona yaşlı diyordum ama şimdi ben 73 yaşındayım, kendime yaşlı demiyorum, 18 yaşındayım diyorum (gülüyor)" (Gülsüm)

The fourth reason is the powerful individualization of contemporary societies. Although the rise of individualization is an irrefutable fact in our society, the degree of it is controversial. The quest for meaning for our participants can be seen still derived from their social environment, especially by their children. This can be figured out from their perceptions of dependency in which they differentiate themselves from being needy through the actions that can be called standing your feet. The acts under this category such as cooking, performing ablution, and ability to walk indicates an interdependent woman whose outdoor duties can be done someone else which is not seen as a burden. On the other hand, the intersubjective meanings of these three actions are significant in order to indicate the continuity of the former status of woman as a devoted mother who can handle her personal needs by having the mental and physical capacity.

The second perception of old age is despair vs. opportunity. Rather than making a physical explanation of their old age, some of the participants define it as a psychological process that stems from their social interactions. The actions such as not wanting to do something, regret, yearning, accusing oneself, life review, self-evolution, reminiscence, sadness can be seen as the result of this meaning of old age as a lack of hope. By analyzing the narratives of women, we see the second premise: social interactions that bring about this meaning is the loss of beloved ones. The loss of beloved ones indicates the reality of the possibility of losing others, including ourselves that can imply the fear of death. In contrast to this negative perception of old age, most of them have an optimistic approach towards old age by seeing it as the freest time for devoting to perform worship.

The third perception of old age is loneliness that becomes apparent, especially on the narratives of widow participants. The absence of former social interactions gives way to the meaning of old age as loneliness since most of these women in any stage of life never encountered to be alone due to their developed family ties that enable solidarity. However, after the death of their husband, they come across to be alone, which makes them connate old age and loneliness together. The negation of old aged by society in order to escape from the knowledge of death makes the old aged

lonely by losing their source of security and meaning in Elias' terms (Elias, 1985). In the narratives of women who live alone, loneliness is a crisis that is tried to be solved in their social interactions. Some of them find a solution by including in a social environment through their neighbors (Cemile, Gülsüm) whereas others keep their mind busy with a different occupation like working (Ayşe), dealing with plants (Nezaket), worshipping (Fatma), knitting (Muhlise, Rikkat), watching TV (Rikkat, Muhlise, Nezaket, Gülsüm).

On the other hand, the advantages of loneliness are also underlined by women since most of them took the whole responsibility of their lives for the first time by feeling free. They may do whatever they wish to do without being intervened. In this respect, loneliness can be seen a resistance to dependency by forcing oneself to look after oneself.

All in all, like all other social concepts old age is a living thing that changes according to interactions that it engages. Rather than having concrete historical, economic, demographic, cultural meaning, it is shaped by the intersubjective relations of people. In this respect, yearning the traditional type or praising a new model of old age cannot be a solution to the needs of old aged. One should be included in the lives of them in order to understand their perceptions of old age that may give suggestions for the policymakers to compensate for their needs. In this respect, the need for socialization of old aged is apparent that the whole concepts of care, despair, and loneliness are one way, or another related to socialization.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As an interdependent being, human seeks security and meaning through his interactions with his social world. Old age is a period in which this need can be felt more due to some changes that a person encounters. These are biological changes that have different manifestations due to social interactions that people have. In order to grasp this period, starting from intersubjective relations of people may bring about specific information about the lives of people, which is challenging to attain through structural analysis.

This study is searching for these intersubjective relations in the construction of old age perceptions. Rather than an indication of a general attitude of a particular group of people such as women, Muslim, traditional, mother, widow, residents of İstanbul, middle class, independent, lonely or so on, it is a section from the lives of these people. This section is constructed in a biased environment due to having a researcher who has her security and meaning understanding according to social interactions that she gets involved throughout her life. Nevertheless, this section can be significant for indicating some tendencies of these people that can give some predictions about the general tendencies of society.

In this respect, this study is a contribution to the micro-sociology of old age for showing the different aspects of old age through the experiences of middle-classed, relatively independent women who are 65 and more years old, perform daily praying and live in İstanbul in their homes. Rather than elderly institutions, it only deals with the women who live their homes by themselves or with their families. By being chosen from the social networks of the researcher who is Sunni Muslim, all women are Sunni Muslims that are measured according to their performance of daily praying that has significant effects on the daily lives of a person. Rather than measuring the relationship between religiosity and being old, it tries to follow the meaning-making process of these women. By making a qualitative analysis of each

narrative both in thematic and structural ways, it indicates the traces of the perception of old age in the life stories of them.

The study starts with general statistics about the old age in Turkey for showing the increased number of people who are called old aged. Although statistics are generally used by economic and political analysis in order to show the threat of an increased number of old aged population in terms of their expenditures on the state, it is significant in order to get prepared to the far-reaching social consequences of it. The high life expectancy rate brings about a new period of lives that were not experienced by the former generations, which may need new arrangements. In order to understand this change, looking at the different perceptions of people who are the subjects of this process is crucial.

In order to realize this aim, the study is based on a phenomenological understanding of old age by using symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer by combining it with Elias' approach to old age. Phenomenology is comprehensive philosophical concept that deals with "what makes things knowable" by emphasizing the "situatedness" of the universe. Rather than an 'objective world in itself' it believes the intersubjectivity which is possible by the shared experiences of the subject and the other. Intersubjectivity is projecting oneself in the place of the subject by believing that he would see the reality as the subject sees. In this respect, symbolic interactionism believes that society is a combination of people who acts reflexively to each other according to the meaning of the things that are derived from the interactions that they engage in. However, these meanings are not stable but always change according to new interactions that a person enters.

By using these premises of symbolic interactionism, we have found that the actions of 65+ religious women are derived from three major meanings of old age. The first meaning of old age is physical and mental dependency that gives away two significant actions. These are the avoidance of dependency through constant praying and keeping the mind busy, and standing on your feet through cooking, perform ablution and the ability to walk. In this sense, old age is perceived as the

last step before death that nobody wants to be. The actions of women are significant for indicating their relations with former generations as a witness; with their husbands/parents/ children as a caregiver; and with their coevals as an observer. Their role of caregiver is essential for the construction of old age as a dependency understanding that they try to find their way to avoid it. However, their avoidance is not something as equal as successful or active aging perspectives in the sense that they explain not being dependent as having the power to cook, perform abundance, and walk. These actions are built up by the interactions of them that indicate religious caregiver that always interdependent with family members.

The second perception of old age is despair vs. opportunity. Some women conceive it as a last period of life that does not have any hope whereas some others see it as a blessing from God to compensate for ignorance of the past by devoting your time to worship God. The first meaning is followed by some actions such as not wanting to do something, regret, yearning, accusing oneself, life review, self-evolution, reminiscence, sadness. The social interaction that implies this meaning is the loss of beloved ones which indicates the reality of the possibility of losing others, including oneself that implies the fear of death. The second meaning is followed by some actions such as an increase in the amount of time for worship, constant praying for humanity that cannot be done someone else

The third perception of old age is loneliness, which is crucial, especially for the lives of widows. The difference between these women from general loneliness literature is their first experience of loneliness by always being in some kind of family. Thanks to the narratives of these women, we have the chance to witness this fraction and their confusion due to inexperience of it after the death of their husbands. Their ways of dealing with this lack of solidarity that used to be applied by the strong family ties are significant in order to indicate diverse needs of the women for a suggestion to the policymakers. Social and spiritual needs are solved by periodical gatherings of women, especially with neighbors. Moreover, keeping their minds busy with occupations such as working, dealing with nature, planting, worshipping

is valuable for showing their preferences. On the other hand, loneliness is seen as a freedom by some women since most of them took the whole responsibility of their lives for the first time by doing whatever they want without being intervened. In this sense, loneliness is a kind of resistance to dependency by forcing oneself to look after oneself. One suggests reinforcing policies of this freedom by solving the social dependency of a person through socializations that are compatible with their meaning world.

In the light of these perceptions, we can conclude that there is not static old age since it changes according to new social relations that people are involved. Rather than an adaptation of some standard policies of European social states toward old age, one should realize the cultural differences without undermining continues changing nature of them. These kind of qualitative studies in which one has the chance to observe profound meanings of old age may be beneficial in order to analyze these differences.

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