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Serif Esendemir

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NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Journal Focus

The *Journal of Aging in Emerging Economies* (JAEE) is targeted to increase the understanding of human aging in countries at various stages of economic development, and to improve the services provided to later-life adults. The JAEE welcomes articles, commentaries, and news about all areas of gerontology. Priorities will be given to applied research, practice concepts, education, and training, such as articles that apply sociological, psychological and biological concepts. JAEE is published online biannually in January and July by the Department of Sociology at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, USA. Manuscripts will be refereed by an international panel whose names appear in each issue. Reviewers will employ the blind peer review system. Authors may contact Egerton Clarke, Editor, at (330) 337-4296 and may submit manuscripts electronically to eclarke@kent.edu. For more information, go to the URL: http://www.kent.edu/sociology/resources/JAEE/index.cfm

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We encourage readers to submit letters to the editor concerning topics and ideas discussed in the published articles. All letters that are accepted for publication will be edited as needed and, before publication, the edited letter will be returned to the author for approval. Author(s) of article(s) discussed in these letters are encouraged to reply to the letter(s).

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Volume 2 – Number 2 of the *Journal of Aging in Emerging Economies (JAEE).*

In this Issue: Aging and Disaster Preparedness

FEATURE ARTICLES

Sustainability of Seniors: Disaster Risk Reduction Management
Amy Gray-Graves, Ph.D., St. Louis, MO, USA; K. Whisnant Turner, Ph.D., Denton, TX, USA; and James H. Swan, Ph.D., Denton, TX, USA

Disasters can change the social and economic infrastructure of impacted communities. The level of community development has a direct impact on the destruction of disasters inflicted on our population. As the size of the older population increases, it has become increasingly important to understand the vulnerabilities of older adults before, during, and after a disaster. This study was designed to examine community-dwelling older adults' level of willingness to evacuate, and how emergency management officials can minimize the risks that older adults may face in the event of a disaster. Practical Implications are also addressed.
Key Words: *older adults, evacuation, education, community response, vulnerabilities*

Disaster Preparedness for the Elderly: An Analysis of International Literature Using Symbolic Interactionist Perspective
Isiah Marshall Jr. Ph.D., Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA , and Shannon Mathews, Ph.D., Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this review examines literature pertaining to elderly persons who have been victims of natural disasters in North America, as well as around the world. The literature review addresses (a) emergency preparedness, (b) specific risk factors associated with the elderly, and (c) practice and policy implications. The review illustrates how negative perceptions of the elderly contribute to insufficiency of disaster services and a consequent increase in elder casualties.

Key words: elderly, emergency management, international, symbolic interaction

The Nature of Community Services in Turkey: The Case of Istanbul's *Gecekondu* (Shanty House) Areas

Serif Esendemir, PhD candidate, Denton, TX, USA

Community services for older adults in Turkey seem to be different from those in other parts of the world. Due to strong state tradition based on militaristic-bureaucratic elite, community services for older adults are often the responsibility of civil organizations. Although there are numerous examples of civil organizations providing these services, the example of hemsehri-based communities focuses upon the housing problem of the older adults in the gecekondu area of Istanbul. The experience of these communities indicate that older adults are still venerated members of these communities receiving the necessary psychological support which enables them to age well in their own communities and houses.

In this Issue: Aging and Disaster Preparedness

Dear readers

It is less than two years since we launched *The Journal of Aging in Emerging Economies (JAEE*, and already we have shared research topics that span aging issues in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. It is a pleasure to introduce the second issue of volume 2 of this international journal. The theme of this issue is "**Aging and Disaster Preparedness**." For many societies, disasters such as hurricanes, storms, tornados, earthquakes, and flooding are common occurrences that wreck havoc to the lives of thousands of their population. Although natural disasters transcend national boundaries and while their impact is felt by members of all age categories, elderly persons' vulnerability and the ways by which they respond to such disasters seem to warrant special attention to issues of disaster preparedness.

In our lead article, Dr. Amy Gray-Graves, Dr. K. Whisnant Turner, and Dr. James H. Swan examine community-dwelling older adults' level of willingness to evacuate, and how emergency management officials can minimize the risks that older adults may face in the event of a disaster. Their findings suggest that older adults are marginally more likely to respond to a mandatory order than to a voluntary request. Guided by this finding, the authors offer several practical measures that can be taken to ensure disaster-risk reduction and sustainability of older adults.

In our second article, Dr. Isiah Marshall Jr. and Dr. Shannon Mathews follow a symbolic interactionist perspective to examine the literature pertaining to elderly persons who have been victims of natural disasters around the world. The literature review addresses (a) emergency preparedness, (b) specific risk factors associated with the elderly, and (c) practice and policy implications. The review illustrates how negative perceptions of the elderly contribute to insufficiency of disaster services and a consequent increase in elder casualties.

In the final article, PhD candidate, Serif Esendemir, discusses the nature of community services for older persons in *Gecekondu* areas of Istanbul, Turkey. At present, the majority of social services are provided by the civil society, but this may change given that the aging population is expected

to more than double by 2030. He cautions that the conflictual relationship between the state and civil society organization may become critical to meet the challenges of an aging population.

On behalf of all members of the advisory and review boards, welcome to Volume 2 – Number 2. Our next issue is scheduled for January, 2011. As always, please join in the discussions and debates about aging and disaster preparedness and related issues.

Cordially,
Egerton Clarke, Ph.D.
Editor

THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES IN TURKEY: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL`S *GECEKONDU* (SHANTY HOUSE) AREAS

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[1]I owe a special thank to Prof. Stan Ingman and his wife Veronique Ingman for their fruitful suggestions in all stages of production of this article.

Introduction

Community services for older adults in Turkey seem to be different from those in other parts of the world. Due to strong state tradition based on militaristic-bureaucratic elite, community services for older adults are often the responsibility of civil organizations. Although there are numerous examples of civil organizations providing these services, the example of *hemsehri*[2] based communities focuses upon the housing problem of the older adults in the *gecekondu*[3] area of Istanbul. The experience of these communities indicate that older adults are still venerated members of these communities receiving the necessary psychological support which enables them to age well in their own communities and houses.

Strong State Tradition, Passive Aging, and Modernist Practices

The process of aging has been determined by various socio-political dynamics in Turkey. Aging as a social phenomenon has been affected by the tension between modernity and traditionalism.

It is widely believed that Ottoman-Turkish modernization dates back to Mahmut II's reforms. In order to create a more centralized state in 1826, reforms placed the state and army in a leading position (Kadioglu, 1999: 24-25; Unsal, 1998: 1). Since the state became the main agent of the Ottoman-Turkish modernization movement, attitudes towards aging were also defined by the ruling elite of the state. Therefore, Turkey showed a passive character when it came to aging. This passivism minimized the role of elderly persons in the public space by pushing them into a more private space.

Although some people are inclined to see Ataturk's reforms as progressive as they were introduced in Turkey, the manner by which these reforms were implemented showed there is not much deviation from the strong state tradition and passive citizenship. That is because, as Trimberger (1978) states, Ataturk's reforms were imposed from above instead of being introduced from below. That is why aging has become a passive social category in Turkey. Furthermore, such a "passive aging" was encouraged by state ideology, whereas "youth" was honored. One might argue that the state needed to increase its population by promoting the youth culture after losing most of its adult population during the Turkish War of Independence between 1919 and 1922.

Inspired by Fischer (1978) one can argue that Turkish society is going through a third phase in its modernization in which youth is seen as an emblem of hope and development. Compared to a traditional Ottoman past, one can readily see that a focus on youth was socially constructed as a means to promote modernization during the Republican period. It is easily argued that this conception was initiated by the Young Turks Movement before

the emergence of the Turkish nation state. That is because Young Turks referred to the members of the Ottoman society who were progressive, modernist and opposed to tradition.

One can easily be suspicious about the modernist practices in Turkey for several reasons. Perhaps the primary reason for this suspicion is that the "young/modern" Turkish republic needed to differentiate itself from the "old/traditional" Ottoman Empire.

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[2] The people who migrated from the countryside or other cities to a metropolis.

[3] Refers to "shacks" hastily built overnight without a proper permit. This demarcation can even be seen in the nicknames given to each nation-state. For example, the Ottoman Empire was referred to as the *Ulu Cinar* (Grand Plane Tree), a nickname replaced by "Sick Man of Europe." This name derives from a concept developed by the Russian Czar Nicholas in 1853. This "Sick Man" is nothing other than "Old" Empire which had several problems/diseases at that time. On the contrary, the Republic is prone to present itself as *Genc Cumhuriyet* (Young Republic). It is not a surprise to see the emphasis on this notion of "youth/young" officially. The "*Genclige Hitabe*" (Ataturk's Speech for Youth) is a good example of the Republic's vernacular on the subject, making it easier to understand the nature of this emphasis. The ageist nature of these nicknames reflects the social position of aging in the modern Republic.

Turkish modernization was implemented by a militarist-bureaucratic elite. Although a particular group of military retirees constitutes these elite, the rest of the older adults belong to the middle class or lower class. All of them are subordinated by these elite in addition to not sharing the same rights as military retirees.

Finally, Turkish modernization practice is dependent on the transformation of rural areas in which older adults traditionally wield power. Although older adults are still in a leading position in rural areas, the modernization process has started to undermine their position as it did in the urban areas. For example, the institution of the *Ihtiyar Heyeti* (Older Adults Council) advising the *muhtar* (the elected head of village) is not as strong as before in village administration. That is because the cities have started to dominate the villages completely with modernity and migration. However, not only do cities affect the villages, but also villages have begun to occupy cities with modernity and mass migration. That is to say, it is not a surprise to see some village-like foundations in the city structure today. This, of course, makes the boundaries between rural areas

and urban areas unclear, as can be seen in other modernizing countries. According to Davis (2006), for instance, while in Indonesia these ill-defined areas are called *desakotas*, meaning city villages, in one word, in Mexico they are considered as peri-urban spaces surrounding megacities. This larger context is useful for discussing the housing issue and identity problems of older adults in Istanbul, with the rise of *gecekondu* and *hemsehri* organizations.

Gecekondu: Informal Settlement of Metropolitan Area

To begin with, I would like to clarify the concept of *gecekondu*. This concept is used for a house built overnight without a permit. That is why the houses built by this method are completely informal settlements. This informality has a strong relationship with migrants in the city. Looking at the history of the *gecekondu*, it becomes obvious that the primary builders are *gurbetci* (seasonal workers in the city). Although some of these primary builders were able to turn their *gecekondu* into apartments, a significant number of these houses in Istanbul remains.



Picture 1) A gecekondu in Istanbul

As mentioned above, most of these houses have only one or two rooms. Therefore, they are not healthy and suitable for older adults –not to mention other family members. However, they often have to seek refugee in these houses to survive in the metropolitan city. Although they have electricity and fresh water, they are deprived of sufficient infrastructures.

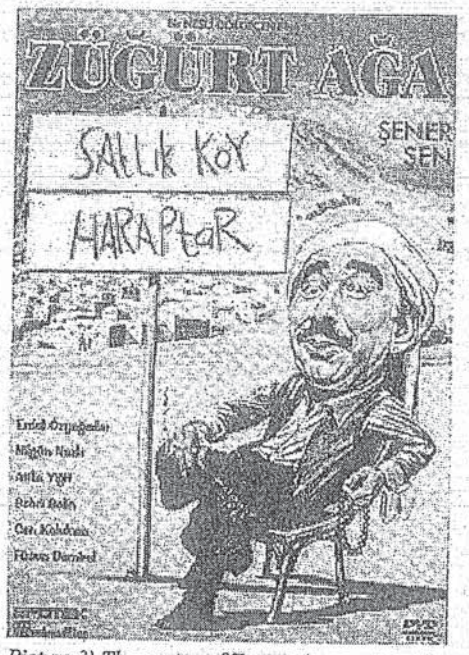
Thus, older adults are exposed to hard physical conditions, and their age leaves them more vulnerable and less able to cope than the other family members.

In addition to living in harsh physical conditions, older adults in *gecekondu* suffered from various psychological problems. First of all, most of them are feeling the dramatic effects of role or status change. For example, suppose an older adult who was an *aga* (lord) of several villages is now living in a house with only one or two rooms. Furthermore, suppose he is not employed in the city and thereby has to get economic support from his children. This situation does not just exist in theory anymore. One can readily see its full practice in each corner of Istanbul. It is evident just from going to a coffeehouse in any neighborhood of Istanbul and interviewing the older adults spending most of their time there. It is possible to hear almost the same story no matter where you go. Theirs is the story of despair and longing for the hometown.



Picture 2) Coffeehouses are filled by older adults

One can't define this longing as postmodern nostalgic seeking for the past. Instead, this is the constant aching of never healing injuries inflicted by the older adults' new environment. Unfortunately, these injuries don't seem to heal by going back home. What Brah (1996) said about the longings of the diaspora is also the case for the longing of older Turkish adults for their hometowns. For him, "home" is a place of no return although it can be visited by people leaving it.



Picture 3) The poster of Zugurt Aga movie with a sense of humor stating "Agahtar Village for Sale" in the sign

A Turkish movie named *Zugurt Aga* (Penniless Lord) accurately portrays how a powerful person in the village loses his power after moving to the city. In the movie, Sener Sen is the lord of the Agahtar Village. All the peasants leave the village and move to the city due to the severe drought, whereas the lord insists on staying in the village, yet ultimately the lord also decides to move to the city. It is really hard for him to adopt a new life in the city. He soon spends all his money and becomes penniless. Nobody respects him anymore and even his spouse leaves him. Therefore, he becomes a peddler, selling *cig kofte*, a dish made of raw ground meat, pounded wheat, and red pepper.

This film, of course, dramatizes the story, but it somehow reflects the reality of the situation in Istanbul. That is because older adults face serious problems in the city. As we are going to discuss below, these problems should be related to the housing problem in *gecekondu* areas in Istanbul.

Turkish modernization theory imagined the new Istanbul as a melting pot of various migrant communities living together in harmony. In practice, however, this idealized unsustainable model proved to be an unsavory stew in which former migrant-based communities operated under a different model than that of the dominant city powers as far as

housing and culture were concerned. Considering *gecekondu*/housing in Istanbul, it is apparent that Istanbul did not succeed in uniting and integrating entire communities in its melting pot. In my opinion, this is because Istanbul was thought of as a nation-state prototype to which other ethno-religious groups were forced to migrate and be assimilated into the dominant culture. This prototype failed with the decline of the nation-state in the global era. Furthermore, the population of Istanbul has become more diverse and some new social groups have taken hold in city life. Especially, *hemsehri* communities are worth being discussed to emphasize this diversity.

Hemsehri Communities: Providers of Informal Community Services

A *hemsehri* community can be defined as a group of people coming from the same city and forming some formal/informal relationships to adapt to the situations in their new home cities. Although the *hemsehri* community always refers itself to a hometown, it tries to become a new life strategy in the city. Use of *gecekondu* is one of the strategies of a *hemsehri* community in terms of housing in the city. The concepts of *gecekondu* and *hemsehri* are generally mentioned together. It is important to know how a *hemsehri* community places itself, or finds a place, in the city. This place is mostly in *gecekondu*.

It is evident that the *gecekondu* is not a desired place for a *hemsehri* community. By applying Agnew's (1987) theory of place to *gecekondu*, it is no exaggeration to claim that it gives a personal and emotional attachment to the *hemsehri* community. That is because *gecekondu* is not only a place for sheltering, but also it is at the core of the *hemsehri* informal network in which the residents of *gecekondu* fulfill all their needs. One of these needs that interests us most is the services they offer to older adults. Interestingly, this is also under the control of the informal network of the *hemsehri* community. As Kurtoglu (2005) states, even a *hemsehri* community feels itself responsible for finding doctors for the older adults in their critical times. It is not surprising in these circumstances to see the doctor affiliated with the same network or a close informal community.

There are several reasons for explaining why even the services for older adults remain within the borders of informal *hemsehri* network in *gecekondu* areas of Istanbul. Perhaps the primary reason is the disdain of the urban elite for the urban poor. As mentioned above, this kind of

attitude has its roots in the philosophy of emergence of the Turkish nation-state. According to this philosophy, the urban poor are a potential danger for the world of the "pure" urban elite. That is why they are required to change or be pushed out. Such a philosophy shares the same logic with a "modern gardener" culture in which "weeds" are supposed to be removed (Bauman, 1989).

Another reason for such insulation of services can be linked to insufficient state services for older adults of the urban poor. That is because state services are based on complex bureaucratic procedures. Furthermore, as Heper (1983) contends, the bureaucratic organs of the state always play a role in alienating citizens from systematic or state help. This conflictual relationship between state organizations and citizens leads informal organizations to fill the gap in social service. Citizens have found their own ways since the state has not engaged in their social problems. The *hemsehri* network is one of the ways citizens found to solve their problem in the city. It is important to note how these *hemsehri* networks started to build some associations to negotiate with the state organizations and make the state recognize their services, which is an initial stage of being formalized. Although it is still too early for these associations to take a strong civil initiative, one can entertain the idea that newly-built *hemsehri* organizations try to eradicate the inequality between the urban elite and urban poor for the benefit of poor *hemsehri* communities (Gunes-Ayata, 1992).

Gramsci (1971) sees civil society as one of two parts of the state which is generally seen as the private or non-state sphere; whereas he attributes the other part to political society which represents political institutions and legal constitutional control. In reality, both parts of the state often overlap. That is because civil society is based on consent while political society is the realm of force and they complement each other in the end.

Gramscian theory is mostly applicable for urban elite associations, the civil legs of political society, but it is hard to claim that all forms of associations are completely under the control of the state in Istanbul. Most *hemsehri* associations and *wakfs* (religious/charitable foundations created by and endowed through a trust fund) are two prominent examples of relatively independent civil society organizations in Istanbul-Turkey, because instead of consent from these organizations, they are in a conflict with the state. For example, until the ruling of the Human Rights Court of Europe on January 9th, 2007, even the property rights of *wakf* of religious minority groups were controlled by the state. This means that there is not

a peaceful atmosphere between these organizations and the state. In a similar vein, although most of them are not *hemsehri* associations, about 185 associations of a similar nature were closed by Turkish courts. This is not a negligible number and it shows that the state is not happy about the development of the civil sphere. Without a doubt, as stated above, this conflictual relationship between the state and these associations cause them to develop their own ways of acting. *Gecekondu* housing was discussed above as one way.

Even though there is a relative increase in the number of *huzurevi* (nursing home) in Istanbul alongside modernization, older adults are still primarily cared for by family members in the network of *hemsehri* groups. That is why the *hemsehri* network provides many services to the older adults. Since they are not living in separate houses, they have to live with their families. As mentioned above, this causes some problems in *gecekondu* houses with two rooms, but the *hemsehri* network in ethnic enclaves or *gecekondu* areas seems to assuage some difficulties older adults are encountering there.

One of the main services of the *hemsehri* communities for older adults can be psychological. Utilizing Fischer's (1978) four stages as a base, one can say these communities are going through the first stage in which the attitude toward the older adults is one of veneration. There is a great respect for the older adults in *hemsehri* communities. One can say this respect is in a traditional style and thereby is going to be diminished by the impact of modernity. Nevertheless, in these communities this veneration seems to keep its form longer and resists the culture in which older adults are looked at condescendingly.

There are many examples for keeping the mental state of older adults healthy and helping him or her with "aging in place." One such example can be regular visits to older adults and getting advice from them in certain matters by positioning them as experts.

Keeping the room or house of the older adult clean is the responsibility of family members in the first place, especially daughters-in-law. If there are no family members to take care of older adults, *hemsehri* communities automatically take responsibility for them.

Conclusion

In Turkey, not only have community services for the older adults always been associated with civil society, but also they have related to the services for orphan and people with disabilities; hence, it comes as no surprise that no separate governmental unit exists for services to

older adults. Although there is institutionalized help, such as *Sosyal Guvenlik Kurumu* (Social Security Institution), *Sosyal Hizmetler ve Cocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* (Social Services and Child Protection Institute), and *IBB Saglik A.S.* (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Health Corporation) like state units for older adults, the majority of social services are still provided by the civil society. Nevertheless, "intervention" in this subject is often unwanted as well, due to its special interest in colonizing private space. Therefore, there is an ongoing conflict between political society and civil society, which seems to define the course of community services for older adults in Turkey.

The bottomline is that the percentage of aged will increase in Turkey from 7.01% to 15% by 2030, and the conflictual relationship between the state and civil society organization may become critical to meet the challenges of an aging population.

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