**TRAUMA OF CHECHEN REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING IN ISTANBUL:
MEANING MAKING AND COPING STRATEGIES**

**by
HATİCE ÖZEN**

Submitted to the Graduate School of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Sabancı University

January, 2014

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APPROVED BY:

Emre Hatipoğlu   ……………………….

(Thesis Supervisor)

Teri Murphy   ………………………..

Çağla Aydın   …………………………

DATE OF APPROVAL: 19.12.2013

ABSTRACT

**TRAUMA OF CHECHEN REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING IN ISTANBUL:
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Hatice Özen

Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Master of Arts, 2014

Emre Hatipoğlu, Thesis Supervisor

Keywords: Russian Chechen conflict, refugees, trauma, coping strategies, religion

This research aims to explore how Chechen refugee women living in Turkey who lived through the distress of war made sense of what happened to them. More specifically, it examines the meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen refugee women, in particular traumatic loss of a family member. The semi-structured interviews which are conducted with 11 Chechen refugee women provided the main data of this research. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used as the basic methodology for the data analysis. The analysis of the accounts of the Chechen refugee women showed that the traumatic experiences that these women lived through influenced their psychology profoundly, they have became vulnerable and distressed. In response to the traumatic experiences of war, they deepened their religious and spiritual beliefs, yet these beliefs provide resources for dealing with their traumatic memories. Considering the meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen women in my study, the accounts of these women revealed 10 recurrent themes: increased religious service, submitting to the will of God, Elhamdilullah, theological explanations for the causes of war, depersonalization of traumatic experience, what makes a martyr, expected benefits of martyrdom, deserving the honor of martyrdom, idealized martyr, and obliged narrative of happiness. All coping strategies, except obliged narrative of happiness were found to be important source of strength, coping and resilience for Chechen refugee women. However, obligatory narrative of happiness appeared to interfere with the healing processes of these women.

ÖZET

İSTANBULDA Kİ ÇEÇEN MÜLTECİ KADINLARIN TRAVMASI: ANLAMLANDIRMA VE BAŞETME STRATEJİLERİ

Hatice Özen

Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü, Yüksek Lisans, 2014

Tez Danışmanı: Emre Hatipoğlu

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus-Çeçen savaşı, mülteci, travma, başetme stratejileri, din

Bu çalışma Türkiye de yaşayan savaş mağduru Çeçen mülteci kadınların başlarına gelen olayları nasıl anlamlandırdıklarını, ve bunlarla nasıl baş ettiklerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Daha belirgin olarak, savaş stresiyle, özellikle de savaş sonucunda yakın aile üyelerinin kaybıyla yüzleşen Çeçen mülteci kadınların stresle başa çıkma stratejilerini araştırmaktadır. Onbir Çeçen mülteci kadın ile yapılan yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler bu çalışmanın verilerini oluşturmaktadır. Çeçen mülteci kadınlarla yapılan görüşmelerin analizleri, bu kadınların yaşadığı travmatik olayların onların psikolojisini derinden etkilediğini, ve onları korunmasız ve endişeli hale getirdiğini göstermiştir. Yaşadıkları travmatik deneyimler sonucunda, bu kadınlar manevi ve dini inançlarını derinleştirmiş, ve bu inançlar onlara stresle baş etmelerinde kaynak oluşturmuştur. Stresle başetme stratejileri göz önüne alındığı zaman, bu kadınlarla yapılan görüşmelerin analizleri 10 tekrarlayan tema açığa çıkarmıştır: artan ibadet, Tanrı'nın iradesine itaat, şükür (Elhamdilullah), savaşın sebepleri için dinsel açıklamalar, şehitlik mertebesinin beklenilen faydaları, şehitlik mertebesini hak etme, idealleştirilen şehit, ve zorunlu mutluluk anlatısı. Zorunlu mutluluk anlatısı hariç, bahsedilen bütün başetme stratejilerinin Çeçen kadınlara güç verdiği, ve stresle baş etmeleri ve rahatlamları için önemli kaynak oluşturduğu bulunmuştur. Zorunlu mutluluk anlatısının ise bu kadınların acılarını ve yaslarını ifade etmelerini engelleyerek iyileşme süreçlerini negatif yönde etkilediği bulunmuştur.

To my family,

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the study

In recent history, civilian populations have often suffered from excessive political violence (Schmidt, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008: 269). They have witnessed the atrocities of war and violence, and experienced human right abuses. Many of these civilians have been killed during the wars and military campaigns, and furthermore, most of those surviving these traumatic experiences have been forced to flee their home countries (Ghobarah et al., 2003 as cited in Schmit, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008). Therefore, among the most important consequences of contemporary wars can be described as refugee experience. "Refugees are the uprooted (Handlin 1951), suffering losses of every description, including social identity, place, family, livelihood, and support systems, and must struggle to find their way in a new, often hostile, environment with a foreign language and customs" (cited in George, 2010: 383). These conditions clearly risked refugees with physical and psychological distress, because "embedded within them is the often-unspeakable violence associated with the refugee experience" (George, 2010: 383). An academic study on the consequences of refugee experience on the mental health of affected individuals is important, it can (1) enable voices of refugees heard; (2) provide greater insights into refugees' unique struggles; (3) enable health care workers to provide more appropriate and culturally competent psychological interventions; (4) and enable governments and NGO,'s to offer more effective refugee services (Georgia, 2010).

One example of refugee exposure to traumatic events would be the Chechen refugees created by the Russo-Chechen conflict. The conflict between Russian empire and the Chechen people that started more than two centuries ago has intensified throughout the

Soviet era, and continued until now (Sakwa, 2005). Chechnya's claim for independence rests on "a distinctive historicist reading of its relationship with imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-Communist Russia" (Sakwa, 2005: 32). This relationship is interpreted in terms of "exploitation and subjugation of Chechen nation", and goes hand in hand with the heroic narratives of resistance (Sakwa, 2005). The cost of the Chechen's fight for independence has been uncountable in socio-economic and social psychological terms. As a consequence of the war, the population of Chechnya has been shrunk (Kramer, 2010). Around 40,000 civilians have been killed, tens of thousands have taken refuge in abroad, and approximately 50,000 have become internally displaced people (Kramer, 2010). The atrocities of the war have forced hundreds of thousands of Chechen people to flee from their home country, and moved to different parts of the world (Askerov, 2011). Many of them found temporary shelter in countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia's autonomous Republic of Ingushetia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Iran, and other European countries (Askerov, 2011). Some Chechens have remained as internally displaced people within the borders of Chechnya (Askerov, 2011). Approximately 3000 Chechen refugees fled to Turkey between 1999 and 2010.

Considering the severity of the Chechen refugee experience, and the amount of Chechen refugees scattered around the world, several studies substantiated their psychological suffering. Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007; Renner, Ottomeyer, & Salem, 2007; Mollica et al., 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2007; Maercker & Müller, 2004; Renner, Laireiter, & Maier, 2012; Jishkhariani, Kenchadze, & Beria, 2005; Akhmedova, 2005). These studies point out the high incidence of traumatization among Chechen refugees. Chechen refugees report very high rates of traumatic events that they had either experienced personally or witnessed, including threats to one's life, sexual assault, dispossession, eviction, crossfire, aerial bombardments, imprisonment and mortar fire (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2004). Much of those surviving Chechens have been compelled to relocate several times. Considerable amount of Chechen refugees have lost someone close to them as a result of the war- related atrocities. Furthermore, they have lived in hard conditions in refugee camps (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2004). All in all, these studies reflect the nature of Chechen refugee experience as a process of continuous traumatization: they suffer during the process of pre-migration, displacement, and re-settlement.

Chechen women refugees have had to carry the highest burden during the Russo-Chechen conflict. They have experienced more violence and suffered more than the other segments of the society (Askerov, 2011; Dennis, 2011). The violence they have been subjugated to has affected their psychology deeply or profoundly. Given the lack of health infrastructure, increasing chaos and displacement, women struggle to maintain responsibility for their children's physical, emotional and financial well-being during the war (Ashford & Huet-Vaughn, 2000; El-Bushra, 2000 cited in Robertson et al., 2006). In many instances, women have been left behind as single parents and overworked to feed their children. Women also became pawns in the military conflict; they were threatened, kidnapped, and raped by men. As a result of their experiences, they have suffered from psychological as well as physical illnesses. Moreover, Chechen women's lives have been also difficult in refugee camps where they faced economic, social and psychological problems, and "been solely dependent on random humanitarian aid from outside" (Askerov, 2011: 323). They have lived in unacceptable conditions, traumatized by conflict, loss and displacement and in fear of their security (Jonhson, Thompson, & Downs, 2009; Askerov, 2011).

Being inspired from the literature above, this study aims to dig out the psychological consequences of displacement on the Chechen refugee women living in Turkey. More specifically, in this study, I attempt to understand how Chechen refugee women who had lived through the distress of war, particularly that of traumatic loss, made sense of what happened to them. I wanted to learn how these Chechen refugee women moved forward in their lives; furthermore, if "recovery" was possible, how it appeared and how it was expressed. To help answer this general research question, this thesis also aims to answer the following sub-questions; (1) how have war, escape, and displacement influenced the psychological well-being of displaced Chechen women; (2) how have traumatic experiences shaped Chechen women's understanding of life and, their approaches to life; (3) how have Chechen refugee women given meaning to their traumatic experiences; and (4) how have Chechen refugee women coped with their painful experiences? By approaching the subject in that way, this study aims to give a more complete picture of the meaning making and coping strategies of these Chechen refugee women, and their subsequent healing process.

1.2. Significance of the study

Over the years that the Russo-Chechen conflict has been going on, it has received considerable attention from the academia, and there have been numerous research conducted on the subject. Much of the literature on Russo-Chechen conflict has focused on either historical overview of the conflict or socio-cultural, economic, and material consequences of the conflict. Studies considering the psychological consequences of the conflict are very limited. This present study differs from those in the sense that it approaches the issue from a social-psychological perspective and examined the psychological consequences of Russo-Chechen conflict on Chechen refugees living in Turkey. In this respect, this study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on Russo-Chechen conflict by examining the psychological consequences of refugee experience, in particular traumatic loss. Chechen refugee women's understanding of trauma, in particular traumatic loss, and subsequent coping strategies is a novel topic that has not been studied extensively in the context of Russo-Chechen conflict.

Additionally, because the sample unit of this research consists of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey, this study not only enriches the growing literature regarding Russo-Chechen conflict, but also contributes to the literature regarding refugees living in Turkey by conducting research on an overlooked population which has not been studied before. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research aiming at Chechen refugees living in Turkey. I hope it will reflect the psycho-social conditions of the Chechen refugee women living in Turkey, and create awareness on the subject, and thus leading further research on Chechen refugees

This study primarily contributes to the literature on refugee trauma with its emphasis on meaning making and coping strategies in dealing with the traumatic war experiences, in particular loss. It illuminates meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugee women in the face of trauma, in particular traumatic loss. In the literature, studies examining the meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugees are prevalent, but mainly adopt a quantitative strategy (e.g. Renner & Salem, 2009). To the best of my

knowledge, none adopt a qualitative methodology . Qualitative methods seem to be helpful in extracting the rich subjective experiences of the participants. Therefore, the present study enriches the growing literature on meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugees by approaching the issue qualitatively: How Chechen refugee women who experienced the distress of war, in particular traumatic loss make sense of what happened to them? A qualitative investigation is employed to explore the subjective experiences of these refugees. This research is of great value because it shed lights into the details of Chechen refugee experience, and related coping strategies, which in turn, might give ways to further research questions.

One unique contribution of this research comes from its participants; the participants of this study consist of Chechen refugee women who lost at least one close family member as result of the war related violence. Studies considering Chechen refugee experience have showed that these refugees vary in their traumatic experiences. Some of them have witnessed the death of their loved ones, some have been exposed to air mortal fire, some have been injured as a result of the exploitation, and some have experienced imprisonment, and dispossession. Momartin et al. (2003: 777) underlines "the importance of recognizing the fact that refugees are heterogeneous in their trauma experiences". This present study primarily focuses on the experience of traumatic loss of a close family member, and aims to explore the unique experiences, and coping strategies of Chechen refugee women whose close relatives were killed as a result of the war related violence. Previous studies with Chechen refugees have approached their traumatic experiences as homogenous, and have not differentiated the participants in terms of their traumatic experience. Different from previous research, the present research focuses on the experience of Chechen refugee women suffering from traumatic loss of a family member. Therefore, this present study makes a novelty to the existing literature on Chechen refugee experience by focusing on how Chechen refugee women understand and make sense of traumatic loss, and what kind of coping strategies they develop in the face of traumatic loss.

This present study also speaks to the global literature on martyrdom. Although there have been a growing body of research on martyrdom, much of the existing studies either analyze the social, political, and psychological motives for martyrdom, or socio-political

reflections and consequences of martyrdom operations. However, studies concerning the trauma or psychological suffering of the relatives of the martyrs are very limited, and conducted with Palestinian subjects (Habiballah, 2004; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). To the best of my knowledge, there is no study examining the psychological suffering of the relatives of the martyrs in Chechnya. In this respect, the present study makes a contribution to the literature on martyrdom with its emphasis on specific meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen refugee women who are the relatives of the martyrs. Considering the severity and even increasing use of martyrdom operations as a strategy of violence in Chechnya, this study can enrich the clinical-practical knowledge on Chechen refugee women's experience of traumatic loss, and might open the doors for further research.

Considering the complexity of Russo-Chechen conflict, understanding social, political, cultural, psychological and historical variables, which play an intimate role in Chechen refugees' experiences, is necessary while listening their narratives (Georgia, 2010). With the help of the qualitative approach, this study aims to extract rich subjective experiences of the Chechen refugee women, and thus provide an understanding of complex issues facing Chechen refugees and their subsequent coping strategies. I hope understanding how Chechen refugee women make sense of their traumatic war memories, and what coping strategies they utilize will allow the development of culturally-competent and effective intervention strategies by mental health workers and establishment of effective refugee services by the government, and NGO's. In briefly, the findings of this present study will make an important contribution to the theoretical literature on social-psychological consequences of refugee experience, trauma, and coping strategies, and also practical clinical knowledge about Chechen refugees' experiences of trauma.

1.3. Outline of the study

This study approaches the consequences of Russia-Chechen conflict from a social-psychological perspective, and aims to analyze how Chechen refugee women who experience the distress of war, in particular traumatic loss made sense of what happened to them. To help answer this general research question, this study also aims to answer the following sub-questions; (1) how have war, escape, and displacement influenced the

psychological well-being of displaced Chechen women; (2) how have traumatic experiences shaped Chechen women's understanding of life and their approaches to life; (3) how have Chechen refugee women given meaning to their traumatic experiences; (4) how have Chechen refugee women coped with their painful experiences? Considering the complexity of Chechen refugee experience, this study consider the complex variables facing refugees in an attempt to draw a general picture of Chechen refugee experience, such as society, history, culture, religion, gender.

The thesis is composed of 5 chapters. Initially, in chapter 2, the reader is introduced to the literature review. In an attempt to review the complex variables facing Chechen refugee women, this chapter is designed to include four sub-sections; (1) refugee experience; (2) women refugee experience; (3) martyrdom culture; (4) a case study of Russo-Chechen conflict. Under the section on refugee experience, I will review the literature on mental health of refugees by emphasizing the role of pre-flight stressors, and post-flight stressors facing refugees, and their psychological after- effects on refugees. It also provides necessary background on the cultural responses to refugee experience. In the following section, unique experiences of women refugees will be briefly reviewed. The section on martyrdom culture discusses the course and consequences of martyrdom operations at the individual, social, and political level. It also describes the scriptural reference to martyrdom operations. After reviewing motives for martyrdom operations, I will focus on the martyrdom culture in Chechnya. In the final section on a case study of Russo-Chechen conflict, I will present a brief history of the Russo-Chechen conflict, and the recent developments, as well as discussing the consequences of the conflict from economic, material, cultural, and psychosocial perspectives.

Chapter 3 is the methodology section, in which I will describe the research methods which are used to collect and analyze the data by explaining the rationale behind preferring those specific techniques. The strengths and weaknesses of the selected methodological designs will also be discussed.

The subsequent chapter analyzes the data collected through the personal interviews with the Chechen refuges. This section is composed of three sub-sections: (1) Chechen Muslim theodicy; (2) martyrdom culture; (3) obliged narrative of happiness. Under each

sub-section, related themes were found meaningful throughout the analysis of the interviews will be presented in detail, and discussed with the help of some quotations.

In the last chapter, summary of the findings, and discussions concerning those findings will be presented with reference to the literature. At the end of the chapter, theoretical and practical implications of the findings, as well as areas for further research will also be exhibited.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Refugee Experience

In recent history, "civilian populations have often become targets of political violence" (Schmidt, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008: 269). Many have been killed during wars and organized military campaigns; furthermore, most of those surviving these traumatic experiences have been forced into flight to different parts of their home countries or abroad (Ghobarah et al., 2003 as cited in Schmidt, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008). The UNHCR defines refugees as: "persons who are forced to flee their home countries to escape serious human rights abuses and other causes of prolonged physical and emotional distress" (UNHCR, 2006). It is important to note that there are divergences regarding the use of the terms refugee and asylum seeker in the literature. "In some studies, persons with refugee status are referred to as asylum seekers; in other studies, persons still awaiting an asylum outcome are referred to as refugees" (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly, 2009: 92). The term refugee used in this paper includes asylum seekers, refugees; internally displaced and repatriated persons affected by war and organized political violence. Every day the basic rights of refugees are violated in numerous countries across the world; countless refugees become targets of ongoing physical, sexual, and psychological violence, and many of them expose to disasters, incidents of extreme trauma, and imprisonment (CCR, 2002). Considering the global magnitude of global refugee movements, an academic study of the consequences of displacement on the mental health of the affected individuals is very important.

2.1.1. Mental Health of Refugees

There is a growing body of research on the psychosocial consequences of forced migration, and describing refugee experience as a chronic process of traumatization (De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010; George, 2010). The effects of trauma on refugees

are "long-lasting, both physically and mentally" (George, 2010: 379), and "shattering to both inner and outer selves" (Steel et al., 2006 as cited in George, 2010: 379). The complex cluster of pre-flight and post-flight stressors of war, such as violent losses, dispossession, persecution, imprisonment, ethnic conflict, family separation, cultural uprooting, acculturation stressors and legal insecurity constitute a pervasive accumulation of life-threatening events, and characterizes the refugee experience as a pervasive risk for psychosocial problems (Lustig et al., 2004 cited in De Haene, Grietens, & Verschueren, 2010). Thus, refugees suffer not only from the psychological distress caused by the experience that led them to flee from their home country, but also from a wide range of difficulties while becoming adapted to their new environment (Orasa, Brune, Huter, Fischer-Ortman, & Haasen, 2011).

Large scale studies have substantiated the psychological suffering of refugee communities, and these studies reflect the nature of forced displacement as a risky context for the development of psychosocial problems. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety are likely to be the most common mental health disorders among refugees. A systematic review by Fazel et al., (2005) suggests that one in 20 refugees has suffered from major depression in Western countries, about one in ten has suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, and about one in 25 has suffered from generalized anxiety disorder. Additionally, such disorders also overlap in most of these refugees. In their review, Fazel et al., (2005) also compare the mental health of refugees with that of non-refugees: A higher prevalence of mental distress among refugees when compared to non-refugees is found. Refugees appear to be about 10 times more likely to have posttraumatic stress disorder than does the general population of host countries (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). Another systematic review by Lustig et al., (2004) notes the increased prevalence rate of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, distress, and anxiety symptoms among adolescent and child refugees (Lustig et al., 2004). Considering thus the high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety among refugee populations, it is important to understand the underlying causes, courses and consequences of these psychological dysfunctions among refugees.

High rates of PTSD have been found across different host countries and refugee groups (Schmit, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008; Fazel, et al., 2005). In their study, Oynut et al., (2009) examine the prevalence rate of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression among Rwandanese and Somali refugees living in Ugandan refugee camp. Thirty two percent of the Rwandese and 48.1% of the Somali refugees are found to have PTSD. Similarly, in their study, Neuner et al., (2004) explore the prevalence rate of PTSD among Sudanese refugees of the West Nile region, Sudanese nationals, and Ugandan nationals. The findings show increased rate of PTSD for three different population groups: Sudanese refugees (50.5%), Sudanese nationals (44.6%), and Ugandan residents (23.2%). Furthermore, several studies consistently report a high level of post-traumatic stress disorder among Bosnian refugees and displaced Bosnian civilians (Bell, 2000; Weine et al., 1998 as cited in Schmidt, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2007).

In addition to PTSD, co-morbidity of PTSD with several psychological dysfunctions is found among refugee populations. In their study with Bosnian refugees, Mollica et al. (1999) reveal that approximately 26% of the refugees manifest comorbid PTSD and depression. A later study by Momartin, Silove, Manicavsgar and Steel (2004) extends the findings of Mollica et al. (1999) by investigating whether the refugees with comorbid PTSD and depression represent a high-risk group for psychological dysfunctions. In their research findings, 24% of their sample is found to have a single diagnosis of PTSD, 40% are found to manifest comorbid depression and PTSD, and %36 found to have no diagnosis. When compared to normal population and those with pure PTSD, the comorbid group suffers from more severe symptoms of PTSD and higher levels of disabilities.

The psychological consequences of refugee experience are both long-lasting and persistent (Askerov, 2011). "It takes many years for refugees to recover from the material and non-material damages of refugee experience" (Askerov, 2011: 287). Persistent levels of trauma-related symptoms are found among refugees several years after their re-settlement in a host country (Miller et al., 2002). The finding that 20 years after the resettlement of Cambodian refugees in the United States, 62% were diagnosed as suffering from PTSD (Marshall et al., 2005) is very significant in this respect. In line with this analysis, Hasanovic (2012) finds that Bosnian refugees and internally displaced civilians

frequently suffered from PTSD three and an half years after their resettlement. A high level of traumatization is observed among these refugees more than three years after their resettlement. Similarly, Vojvoda, Weine, McGlashan, Becker and Southwick (2008) examine the longitudinal course of PTSD among traumatized Bosnian refugees; in their study, 21 refugees were evaluated after arriving in the United States shortly and then one year and three and a half years later. 76% of these refugees are diagnosed as suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at baseline, 33% at one year, and 24% at three and a half years. The findings support that although PTSD symptom severity diminished over a prolonged period of time, 24% of the refugees still met diagnostic criteria for PTSD after three and half years of their re-settlement, most of them continued to experience at least one or more trauma-related symptom(s). These findings designate the persistency and durability of psychological symptoms among refugees, indicating the severity and long-term nature of the refugee problem (Vojvoda et al., 2008).

2.1.1.1. Pre-Flight Stressors and Refugee Mental Health

Refugees vary greatly in the extent and range of their trauma experiences (Momartin et al., 2003: 775). They might be exposed to a multiple challenges, such as traumatic losses, human rights violations, dispossession and evictions, and threat to life that "occur concurrently or sequentially during the period of persecution, flight and resettlement" (Momartin et al., 2003: 775). Understanding which experiences are most relevant to generating and perpetuating psychological disorders such as PTSD and depression is particularly complex in the field of refugee mental health. Increasing research has indicated the salience of life threat in the development of PTSD. Dahl and colleagues (1998) reveals a higher prevalence rate of PTSD among Bosnian refugees in concentration camps who had experienced fear of dying than those experienced general war traumas, such as dispossession, eviction, and traumatic loss etc. Complementary to this finding, Momartin et al. (2003), in their study, examine the antecedents of PTSD among Bosnian refugees living in Australia. Given a high rate of PTSD (63%) among Bosnian refugees, threat to life or fear of dying is found to be the only factor predicting PTSD status. In support of these findings, McFarlane (1989) and Green et al. (1993) advocate that the critical trigger for PTSD is being close to death. Similarly, Morgan et al. (2001) find that the experience

of fear of dying have a significant influence on the degree to which participants experienced symptoms of dissociation related to military training.

Additionally, the severity of symptoms and psychological dysfunction associated with PTSD are predicted by the combination of life threat and traumatic loss. Shrestha, Sharma, and Van Ommeren (1998), in their study with 526 Bhutanese refugees find significantly higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, and depression among the torture survivors. In line with this research, Mollica et al. (1998) reveals a positive relationship "between number of torture experiences and symptoms of depression and arousal symptoms in a sample of Vietnamese ex-political prisoners" (Mollica et al., 1998 as cited in Sachs et al., 2008: 199). In accordance with these findings, DSM-IV also emphasizes the core experience underpinning an individual's risk for PTSD as the perception of threat to his or her life (Momartin et al., 2004: 236). In short, the above-mentioned studies assert that threat to one's life is a significant trigger of PTSD (McFarlane, Archison, Rafalowicz, & Papay, 1994; Green, McFarlane, Hunter, & Griggs, 1993; Momartin et al., 2003).

Countering this plethora of studies underlining threat to life as the single most important trigger of PTSD, Sachs and colleagues (2008) show that personal experience of religious persecution is the most upsetting experience, even in the presence of torture experiences, for Tibetan refugees. Accordingly, understanding the impact of traumatic experience on refugees from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds is important. The significance of and meanings underlying trauma experiences might vary across culture, "cultural meanings might be more important than the concrete details of discrete events in determining risk to PTSD" (Silove, 1999 as cited in Momartin et al., 2003: 776). Understanding which events are more salient to developing PTSD among refugee populations is a complex process and requires grasping the cultural meanings that refugee population assigned to that particular event.

Similar to PTSD, some experiences are more salient in generating depression among refugee populations. Despite the high prevalence rate of depression, or depression comorbid with PTSD among refugee populations, little research attempts to understand the relevance of traumatic experiences to depression risk in such populations. Carlson and Rosser-Hogan's (1994) study of 50 Cambodian refugees show that separation from family

members, loneliness and loss of loved ones predicted depression, whereas closeness to death and threat to life are associated with PTSD. In support of these findings, Momartin and colleagues' (2004) study with Bosnian refugees elucidates that threat to life and traumatic loss both generates necessary background for the development of depression comorbid with PTSD. Correspondingly, traumatic loss of loved ones, especially close family members, appears to predict depression among refugees (Silove, 1999; Miller et al., 2002 cited in Momartin et al., 2004).

In addition to type of traumatic event, another factor influencing the severity and prevalence of psychological trauma or symptoms of PTSD is the number of traumatic experience. Neuner et al., (2004) show how the number of traumatic experiences influences the prevalence and severity of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in a random sample of 3,339 Ugandan nationals, Sudanese nationals, and Sudanese refugees of the West Nile region. Increased rates of PTSD are found for three different population groups in the West Nile: Sudanese nationals (44.6%), Sudanese refugees (50.5%) and Ugandan residents (23.2%). Neuner et al., (2004: 1) find a positive correlation between "the number of traumatic events experienced by refugees and the number of endorsed PTSD symptoms". Of the 58 respondents experiencing the greatest number of traumatic events manifest symptoms that met the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. They elucidate the positive or linear correlation between traumatic exposure and PTSD, the major psychological consequence of war related violence, thus explaining the high prevalence rates of PTSD war-torn societies, and refugee populations. In support of this finding, Hasanovic's (2012) study with Bosnian adolescent refugees find increased rate of PTSD among these refugees, and demonstrate the prevalence of PTSD as differing significantly between the Zvornik group (60.8%) ,the Srebrenica group (73.9%), and the Bijeljina group of respondents (47.6%). Thus, the most severe PTSD symptoms are observed among in surviving adolescent refugees from Srebrenica, then Zvornik and finally from Bijeljina. The increased PTSD prevalence and severity among adolescents from Srebrenica and Zvornik could be explained by the fact that the most severe war catastrophe is experienced by the surviving civilians from Srebrenica, then Zvornik, and finally from Bjelijina (Hasanovic, 2011 cited in Hasanovic, 2012; Hasanovic et al., 2011; Porter & Haslam, 2005). In support of previous findings (Sachs et al., 2008; Momartin et al., 2003), these results show that prevalence and severity

of PTSD among refugees vary also in terms of the type and number of traumatic experience.

2.1.1.2. Post-flight Stressors and Refugee Mental Health

The psychological after effects of displacement cannot be understood "simply as the product of an acute and discrete stressor such as threat to life and torture, but depend crucially on the economic, social, and cultural conditions from which refugees are displaced and in which refugees are placed" (Porter & Haslam, 2005: 609). Research has increasingly substantiated the pervasive impact of post-flight stressors on refugee mental health (Haene, Gritens, & Verschueren, 2010). Exile-related risk factors such as social isolation, unemployment, safety concerns, family separation for extended periods of time, and acculturation problems form major sources of psychosocial distress, which in turn, might intensify the impact and temporality of pre-migration trauma (Birman & Tran, 2008; Ellis, McDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008; Montgomery, 2008 cited in Haene, Gritens, &Verschueren, 2010).

The psychological consequences of displacement are profoundly linked with the economic, social, and cultural conditions into which refugees are disposed (Porter & Haslam, 2005). In their meta-analysis, Porter and Haslam (2005) reveal that the quality of post displacement conditions has a significant influence on the mental health outcomes of refugees. Refugees resettled in permanent, private accommodations appear to produce better mental health outcomes than those resettled in institutional and temporary accommodation centers. Refugees having economic opportunity (a right to work, access to employment, and maintenance of socioeconomic status) demonstrate better mental health than those lacking economic opportunities. Furthermore, refugees from conflicts that remained ongoing have worse mental health outcomes than those refugees who came from conflicts that had been resolved. Thus, despite the historical focus on the acute stressors of war, it is important to recognize the enduring contextual post-migration stresses face refugees including (but not limited to) marginalization, socioeconomic disadvantage, acculturation difficulties, and loss of social support. The combination of pre-flight and post

flight stressors reflects the broader sociopolitical context of refugee experience (Porter & Haslam, 2005).

Considering the effect of post-flight stressors on refugee mental health, Rasmussen et al., (2010) question whether post-flight factors specifically contribute to the psychological distress among Darfuris living in refugee camps. The authors show the rates of past-trauma and current stressors among Darfur refugees, and underscore the contribution of each to psychological distress experienced by these refugees. Basic needs and safety concerns are more strongly associated with psychological distress than war-related traumatic experiences. Furthermore, the effects past-trauma has on the mental health of the Darfuris are mediated by current stressors. Although war-related traumatic events appear to be the initial causes of refugees' psychological problems, findings suggest that "the day-to-day challenges and concerns experienced by refugees mediate the psychological distress associated with these events" (Rasmussen et al., 2010: 228).

2.1.1.3. Refugee Characteristics and Mental Health

In addition to post-displacement stressors, refugee characteristics also appear to influence the mental health outcomes of refugees (Porter & Haslam, 2005). Firstly, according to the meta-analysis results by Porter and Haslam (2005), age is found having strong association with refugee mental health: child and adolescent refugees appear to have relatively better mental health outcomes than adults. However, some research indicates greater vulnerability in children (Jablensky, 1994; Kinzie, 1986). Thus, the association between age and severity of posttraumatic response is still been controversial, with some evidence indicating better outcomes for child refugees (Porter & Haslam, 2005), some indicating worse mental health outcomes in children (Jablensky, 1994; Kinzie, 1986). Secondly, biological sex is also significant variable to refugee mental health: Female refugees appear to experience poorer mental health outcomes than men (Porter & Haslam, 2005). Refugees displaced from rural areas manifest poorer mental health than do those from urban areas (Porter & Haslam, 2005). Finally, more-educated refugees score lower on mental health outcomes than do less-educated refugees (Porter & Haslam, 2005).

2.1.2. Mental Health of Asylum Seekers

After analyzing psychological sequela of refugee trauma, in this section, I will examine the asylum seeker experience, and it's psychological after effects. Although the terms refugee and asylum seekers are used as a substitute for each other in the literature, it is important to differentiate them because there are important differences in the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. According to Ryan, Kelly, and Kelly (2009: 88), "unlike persons with refugee status, asylum seekers live with the constant fear of deportation, and thus they are among the most marginalized and powerless groups in societies". In general, they don't have access to work, adequate private accommodation, education, and regular social welfare benefits. These harsh post-migration living conditions put asylum seekers at risk for poor mental health (Ryan, Kelly & Kelly, 2009). In their study, Ryan, Kelly and Kelly (2009) have reviewed the empirical literature on asylum seeker mental health from the last 20 years. They find high levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD among asylum seekers from both community and clinical samples. Similarly, Eytan, et al. (2007) reveals increased rate of depression among asylum seekers from Europe, Africa and Asia. Almost half of the participants (49 %) reported depression symptoms, and 30 % met the diagnostic criteria for major depression. In relation to this study, Laban et al. (2005) expose comparable rate of depression (34.7 %) among Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Laban et al., 2005). This rate is appeared to be significantly lower among asylum seekers who had been in the country for less than six months (25.2 %) versus over two years (43.7 %). Complementary to these quantitative studies, in an in-depth qualitative study of 10 asylum seeking families in Finland, Sourander (2003) used a semi-structured interview to investigate their psychological symptoms. The accounts of the participants show that most of them suffered from depressed moods. In another qualitative study, Silove et al. (2002) conduct interviews with 33 East Timorese asylum seekers who attended a clinic for survivors of trauma. They find that 53% of the participants meet the criteria for major depression, and an additional ten percent are diagnosed with minor depression. Apart from depression, thirty seven percent of the participants exhibited symptoms of anxiety. In support of these studies, in their study, Renner, Salem and Ottomayer (2006), reports a very high rate of PTSD (48%) among African asylum seekers in Austria. In short, these studies

show that increased rate of psychological trauma is evident among asylum seekers across different cultures. "The most likely explanation for the poor levels of mental health among asylum seekers might be that they are exposed to multiple potent stressors in an environment where coping resources are severely limited" (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly, 2009).

Considering the important role of post-flight conditions in the asylum seeker experience, research has increasingly evidenced the pervasive impact of post-flight stressors on the mental health of asylum seekers. In his study, Silove et al. (1998) describe the details of post-migration factors that are associated with the mental health of Tamil asylum seekers. They find that the main sources of post-migration stress among Tamil asylum seekers are (1) the fear of being sent home; (2) family members back home; (3) delays in processing asylum applications; (4) and unemployment. Furthermore, loneliness and boredom are also associated with increased rate of distress among these asylum seekers. Begley et al. (1999) applied the same post-migration stress instrument in an Irish context. The major stressors among their sample include (1) the difficulties in visiting one's home country; (2) the safety of family members back home; (3) delays in processing asylum applications; (4) not being allowed to work; (5) discrimination; (6) loneliness; and (7) boredom. Qualitative findings from the study of Rees (2003) support the previous findings regarding main sources of perceived stress among asylum seekers. Interviews reveal that fear of deportation and an inability to plan for the future have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of Timorese women asylum seekers living in Australia. These studies points out the importance of post-flight conditions in the mental health of asylum seekers.

2.1.3. Asylum Seeker-Refugee Compared

Asylum seekers encounter conditions less favorable than those met by refugees. Increasing research has suggested poorer mental health among asylum seekers as compared to refugees (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly, 2009). In their study, Gerritsen et al. (2006) show that asylum seekers report increased levels of depression (62%), anxiety (41%) and PTSD symptoms (28%) when compared to refugees (29 %, 28 %, and 11 % respectively). Complementary to this study, Ryan, Benson, and Dooley (2008), in their follow up study,

compare the levels of distress among people who were still in the asylum process and those who had obtained a secure legal status. Asylum seekers are found to show increased levels of distress than the people with secure legal status at both baseline and follow-up. "The only people showing a decrease in their distress level at follow-up those who had obtained a secure legal status between the study phases" (Ryan, Benson, & Dooley, 2008: 103). To illustrate, Silove, Steel, McGorry, and Mohan (1998) compare Tamil asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants in terms of risk for poor mental health. No difference between refugees and asylum seekers is observed. However, when compared to immigrants, they found asylum seekers at higher risk for depression, anxiety, and PTSD symptoms. These studies have elucidated that asylum procedure is inherently damaging to the mental health of displaced people by creating additional stressors (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly, 2009). There has also been evidence that "mental health deteriorates over time as asylum seekers await an outcome but that it improves once a positive outcome is obtained" (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly 2009: 105). Although eliminating the stress of legal status insecurity is impossible, its detrimental effects might be reduced through speedier decisions on asylum applications (Ryan, Kelly, & Kelly 2009).

2.1.4. Cultural Responses to Refugee Experience: Coping Strategies

It is commonly accepted that "culture has significant impact on response to trauma and coping process. The presence and intensity of trauma symptoms are needed to be interpreted differently in different cultures by taking local meaning systems and socio-political milieu into account" (Hussain & Bhushan, 2011: 575, cited in Westermeyer, 2000). Increasing number of researchers has attempted to analyze the culture specific squaela of trauma among refugees from different parts of the world. Cultural factors such as religious beliefs, traditions, community ideologies, and value systems appear to influence the ways that refugees make sense of and the deal with trauma.

Religious beliefs forming important ingredients of culture appear to influence all aspects of coping responses to trauma, such as appraisals, meaning making, coping activities, and motivation. The cultural influence of religion is evident in all aspects of coping responses, such as appraisals, coping activities, and motivation. A substantial

amount of research has documented the important role of belief systems in dealing with trauma. Spiritualism and political commitment appear as protective factors among tortured activists in Turkey (Başoğlu et al., 1994), ideological commitment serves a protective function among Palestinian children (Pünamaki, 1996), and religious beliefs, ideological commitment and social cohesion play protective role against war-related trauma in Israel (Kaplan, Matar, Kamin, Sadan, & Cohen, 2005). In line with these studies, religiosity and political conviction are found to play important roles in the coping strategies of Palestinians (Baker & Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1995; Habiballah, 2004). In their study, Baker and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (1995) show that Palestinians who (1) participated actively in resistance; or (2) who held political convictions; or (3) were moderately religious show the least signs of helplessness, hopelessness, and pessimism. Complementary to this study, the Palestinian women who are the mothers of martyrs benefit from religious beliefs and practices in coping with their trauma (Habiballah, 2004). Not questioning the will of God, increased praying, and visiting the martyrs' graves are some of the coping methods of Palestinian mothers whose children were murdered during the war-related violence. They frequently used the words hope (*Amal),* patience (*Saber)*, and faith (*Iman)*. According to some theorists, religious beliefs act as a tranquilizer for these women, and make them calm or tranquil (Habiballah, 2004). In line with these studies, Orasa et al., (2011) examine the role of religious beliefs or ideologies as coping strategies in the outcome of psychotherapy with traumatized refugees. In support of the previous research, they reveal that refugees who have strong belief systems experience better improvements in the process of psychotherapy, and show better mental health outcomes at the end of treatment (Orasa, Brune, Huter, Ortman, & Haasen, 2011). In relation with these findings, Robertson et al., (2006), in their study with Somali and Oromo women refugees living in United States of America, reveal that most of the participants turn to religion to deal with their traumatic memories: seventy one percent of the participants pray to reduce stress. In another study, Sachs, Rosenfeld, Lhewa, Rasmussen and Keller (2008) describe the experiences, coping strategies, and psychological distress of 769 Tibetan refugees arriving in Dharamsala, India. Although Tibetans had faced a range of potentially traumatizing experiences prior to escape from Tibet, such as imprisonment, abuse and torture, the findings show that only 10% of the refugees meet diagnostic criteria for depression or anxiety. "An unusual degree

of resilience among Tibetan refugees, even those who have survived torture, is evident" (Sachs et al., 2008: 202). According to Sachs et al. (2008: 202), "how Tibetan refugees viewed and coped with their experiences explains the unusual degree of resilience among these refugees". Most participants utilize religious coping strategies which in turn enable them to view other's suffering as more severe than their own. Religious coping strategies and empathetic and subjective appraisals of painful experiences appear to protect these refugees against the harmful effects of trauma. These studies underscore the function of belief systems as coping strategies, and protective factors among refugee populations from different cultures.

Proper understanding and assessment of traumatic experiences necessitates knowledge of the cultural factors that affect one's worldview. Several studies have indicated that "community ideology, and value systems could give meaning to traumatic events and promote adaptive functioning in everyday life, even under extreme conditions" (Hussain & Bhushan, 2011: 57). In their study, Hussain and Bhushan (2011) reveal that cultural factors such as Buddhist philosophy and practices, religious rituals, historical exemplars of strength and resilience, and community bonding and support are important source of strength, coping, and resilience for Tibetan refugees. Participants described various aspects of Buddhism that helped them to make sense of and to cope with their trauma. Firstly, Tibetans perceive Dalai Lama not only as a spiritual healing agent but also a fatherly image who takes care of their needs. Secondly, Tibetans in exile preserve their culture and religion in particular Buddhism, and this belief system provide them sense and meaning in dealing with their traumatic experiences. Kinsie (1988, 1993) also reports similar findings in the context of Cambodian refugees who suffered multiple traumatic events. In that, Cambodian refugees are also found to interpret their traumatic experience in terms of Buddhist beliefs of karma and fate. Thirdly, all participants consider their family and refugee community as the source of support and hope. "It is their common history, belongingness to a common land, common language and religion, and common mission to return to free and independent Tibet that act as a cohesive force" (Hussain and Bhushan, 2011: 570). In line with this finding, Goodman's (2004) study with unaccompanied refugee youths from the Sudan identifies community and collective self as an important theme reflecting the coping strategies of the youth refugees from Sudan. Feelings of

collectivity and community provide strong protection against the traumas and hardships experienced by these young refugees. Robertson and colleagues' (2006) study with Somali and Oromo refugee women also suggests similar findings. Forty six percent of the participants appear to benefit from community support in dealing with trauma: They talk with friends to reduce stress. In support of this finding, socializing is one of the methods of coping among Palestinian mothers (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). Finally, the historical exemplars that fought bravely and sacrificed their life for Tibet's independence help these Tibetan refugees to continue their struggle at both personal and collective level by providing them strength and hope (Hussein & Bhushan, 2011). In short, community ideology, value systems, and religious beliefs shape the coping strategies of refugees, and influence how they make sense of their traumas. "Cultures with religious and traditional heritage and collectivistic values may provide better means and resources for finding meaning and making sense of distressing events" (Hussein & Bhushan, 2011: 576).

In addition to belief systems, traditions, and value systems, several coping strategies have been adopted by the refugees from different cultures. Goodman's (2004) study with refugee youths from Sudan find suppression of traumatic memories and their associated negative feelings, and distraction as important coping strategies used by these refugees. In addition, Roberston et al. (2006), in their study with Somali and Oromo women refugees (n=1134) living in United States of America find that 29% of the sample slept to reduce stress.

2.2. Women Refugee Experience

Women comprise 50% of world refugees (Sam, 2006 as cited in Renner & Salem, 2009; Mertus, 2000). Many studies reveal that women refugees in all parts of the world experience common socio-economic problems, such as socio-economic discrimination, exploitation, lack of legal autonomy, and vulnerability to violence, especially sexual violence (Mertus, 2000; UNHCR, 2003a; Ward, 2002; WHO, 2002; Pavlish, 2005). In addition to socio-economic challenges that refugee women face, they also suffer from multiple physical health problems. Tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases; parasitic diseases; sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS; anemia and malnutrition;

hepatitis B; meningitis; and other infectious diseases can be considered as serious consequences of living in crowded, and harsh conditions (Toole, Waldman, & Zwi, 2001). In addition to physical illnesses, women refugees also suffer from several mental health conditions. "The experience of forced migration requires a continuous response to change and the skill to adapt to often-traumatic new circumstances" (Pavlish, 2005: 882). They have endured trauma as refugees during their pre-flight, flight and post-flight period, as well as traumatic experiences unique to women (Pavlish, 2005). All of these factors contribute to an increase in stress that ultimately impacts women's mental health (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Walker & Jaranson, 1999 as cited in Pavlish, 2005).

2.2.1. Mental Health of Women Refugees

Considering the complexity of the women refugee experience, increasing research has documented the gender specific sequela of trauma among refugees. A growing body of research has showed that women are more vulnerable to developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than men subsequent to traumatic events (Breslau & Anthony, 2007; Kessler et al., 1995; Tolin & Foa, 2006; cited in Renner & Salem, 2009). However, the association between the biological sex of a refugee and post-traumatic response has still been controversial, with some studies indicating complex and culturally variable associations between biological sex and trauma (Porter & Haslam, 2005). A recent meta-analysis (Porter & Haslam, 2005) reveals that female refugees have poorer mental health outcomes than do men refugees. Similarly, in Al Gasser's (2004) study with Kosovo refugees, post-traumatic symptoms and depression are more frequently observed among women refugees and, in a sample of African refugees, more women than men are found to experience loneliness and boredom (Halcón et al., 2006). Complementary to these studies, Vojvoda et al. (2008) describe the evolution of trauma-related symptoms among affected Bosnian refugees over three and an half years; shortly after arriving in the United States and then one year and three and an half years later. The findings show significant gender differences across three evaluation time points: Women refugees score lower than men in all three evaluation time points. "At the three and an half time point, PTSD symptoms in women refugees are two and an half times more severe than male refugees and the women are five times more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD" (Vojvoda et al., 2008: 435). Despite

the substantial amount of research demonstrating women's susceptibility to PTSD, there have been some controversial findings. Momartin et al. (2003), in their study with Bosnian refugees living in Austria, find no significant gender differences between men and women regarding their scores on PTSD. Furthermore, Oynut and colleagues' (2009) study among Rwandanese and Somali refugees' shows similar results. They do not find any significant gender differences between men and women's PTSD and depression scores. Similarly, in Renner and Salem's (2009) study of Afghan, Chechen, and West African refugees, all the measures of depression, post-traumatic stress, and anxiety as well as the social functioning questionnaire do not produce significant gender differences. Although a substantial amount of research has confirmed women's susceptibility to PTSD, the findings are still controversial. These adversarial findings may be explained partially by cultural factors. Thus, further academic research is needed to understand gender specific sequela of PTSD across different cultures.

After considering studies examining gender differences between men and women's responses to trauma, it is important to question whether there is difference among women's response to trauma within their same-sex group. Robertson and colleagues' (2006) study with Oromo and Somali women refugees notice important differences among three parenting sub-groups of women: (1) women responsible for one to six children (small families), and (2) women with no children, (3) women responsible for more than six children (large families). Women with large families are found to report higher counts of trauma and torture incidences, and more related problems than the other two groups. Also, women who denote higher levels of trauma and torture are older; less educated, and have more family responsibilities. These individuals seem to have more psychological as well as socio-economical problems than do women with fewer or no children.

Men and women refugees may expose to different traumatic events during their pre-migration, migration and post-migration processes. Increasing research has underscored the important gender difference on event types experienced by refugees. Oynut et al. (2009) reveal that Rwandese women experience more sexually violent events than the men. Similarly, Somali women report a significantly higher count of sexually violent events than Somali men. In line with these findings, Momartin et al. (2003), in their study with

Bosnian refugees living in Austria, underscores a gender difference in the event types experienced by these refugees. In particular, "men were more likely to be incarcerated in concentration camps where they suffered torture and other extreme human rights violations, whereas women tended to be separated and displaced" (Momartin et al., 2003: 780). These studies demonstrate how men and women refugees experience differential exposure to traumatic events during their process of displacement and resettlement.

To shed light into gender specific sequela of trauma, research has addressed the gender specific symptomatology and coping strategies among refugees. In Renner and Salem's (2009) study with Afghan, Chechen and West African refugees, women, as compared to men, are found to experience more somatic symptoms, emotional outbursts, and loss of sexual interest, while men are observed to suffer from detachment.

> Women report crying and a feeling of a lump in their throats as well as heaviness in the whole body more often than men and often suffer from a loss of sexual interest. Women, as opposed to men, tend to cope with their problems by attending to their children and by pursuing indoor activities. Men, on the other hand, in accordance with traditional gender roles, report a higher degree of detachment as well as differential coping strategies, namely getting involved in social activities and looking for information. For women, typical coping strategies are concentrating on their children and various indoor activities, while men prefer looking for work and socializing (Renner & Salem, 2009: 106).

In relation with this study, Robertson and colleagues' (2006) study with Somali and Oromo refugees also reveal how these women coped with traumatic memories of war. Sleeping, praying, and talking with friends are the relief mechanisms held by Somali and Oromo refugee women. Because psychological symptoms as well as coping strategies differ between men and women refugees, it is important to understand traditional gender roles among refugees in the course of psychiatric intervention.

Research has shed light into the details of women refugee experience, and elucidated the problems that these women faced during the phases of migration: pre-migration,

migration, and post-migration periods. Pavlish's (2005) study with 13 Congolese refugee women provides five themes reflecting the problems that these women face; (1) health implications of poverty; (2) the struggle to survive; (3) the overburden of daily work; (4) ambivalence about family planning; (5) the lack of freedom to express themselves Firstly, poverty appears to be the most significant issue that these refugee women believe influence their health. It also interferes with these women's ability to care for their children. "Some women report that they engage in prostitution because they have to do whatever is necessary to gain the means for feeding their children" (Pavlish, 2005: 888). Secondly, being away from their ordinary lives in Congo makes it complicated for these women to plan for their future lives. These women express "feeling caught in the present with chronic sadness about the past and very little hope for the future" (Pavlish, 2005: 888). Thirdly, they describe how the overburden of daily work impacted their health. Finally, they are confused about family planning and reproductive health. If they are married, they have to comply with their husband's demand for sexual intercourse. Women report that if they did not comply with their husband's request: "…he would beat me or go to different women" (Pavlish, 2005: 888). Many women participants describe a feeling of constraint: they feel lack of freedom in expressing themselves, especially when their husbands are around. Stagnation, mental distress, and gender relationship concerns are reported as the main sources of stress among these refugee women. Similarly, Baird and Boyle (2011) describe the experiences of refugee women from the Dinka tribe of Southern Sudan. These women describe their experiences of forced migration (pre-migration, migration, and post-migration phases) to the United States as a series of cultural transitions. These women express (1) the difficulty of trying to balance the ingredients of two different cultures, namely American and Dinka; and (2) the difficulty of learning to support their family in a new country during resettlement period. Their accounts reflect how they face hardships in their transition to a new country, and culture. Furthermore, Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2003) study with Palestinian mothers reveals that the mothers' role following the loss of their children is more difficult. Not only do they need to carry the pain of loss, they need to support the rest of the family to prevent them from losing hope. Research indicates the problems that refugee women face during the process of forced migration, displacement, and resettlement are aggregated by the gender dynamics within the family and society,

cultural and environmental changes, and health problems unique to women. Understanding women refugee trauma requires the consideration of changing gender dynamics during the process of pre-migration, displacement and re-settlement.

2.3. Martyrdom Culture

Martyrdom operations are found in similar forms in many countries around the world, such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Palestine (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). These operations have become a preferred strategy of violence for many resistance groups around the world as "they are quite effective, relatively easy to carry out, inexpensive, and hard to detect" (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007: 416). These acts try to achieve a goal, they are planned carefully and rationally (Barkan & Snowden, 2001 as cited in Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). Furthermore, martyrs are not coerced to commit such acts. Instead, there are plenty of volunteers who are willing to achieve the mission (Ghosh, 2005 as cited in Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). Considering the severity and increasing use of martyrdom operations as a strategy of violence around the world, it is important to understand why a young man or a young woman gives up his or her life to become a martyr.

"(A) Martyr is first and foremost a person who serves as a witness for his cause and whose legitimacy lies in his commitment to the extent that giving up his life is more viable than giving up his principles" (Cook, 2007: 373). Death is always inevitable and predictable for devotees. Martyrdom has been seen in secular traditions as well as religious traditions. While Japan Kamikazes of World War-II, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, anarchists and PKK are representatives of a secular expression of martyrdom, Islamic martyrs, such as Chechen, Palestinian and Al-Qaida members, and Christian martyrs under the Roman Empire represent the religious understanding of martyrdom (Ferrero, 2012). "All share the feature of voluntary suicide for the provision of a public good, be it the witnessing of the faith, the victory of one's side in a struggle, or the slaughter of the infidel enemy"(Ferrero, 2010: 858). According to Ferrero (2012), all of the fore mentioned people are considered "martyrs". Understanding why a person becomes a martyr requires

consideration of individual factors as well as socio-cultural and historical frame in which the individual operates.

2.3.1. Psycho-social Motivations of Martyrdom

In martyrdom literature, there have been several attempts to explain why people engage in martyrdom operations. Historian Laquer (2001) claims that all societies have their share of madmen, and their abnormality accounts for involvement in martyrdom operations. According to Laquer (2001), these psychotic people are among us all the time. In normal situations, their desires remain encumbered and those people die a solitary death or take part in other kind of tragic acts. However, when there is a war or civil conflict, these people find an opportunity to realize their hidden aspirations through voluntary death, namely martyrdom. However, unlike Laquer's findings, most research concludes that the martyrs are not psychologically abnormal (Silke, 2003; Horgan, 2005 cited in Silke, 2008). Deep interviews with a large sample of volunteers or their relatives suggest that martyrs are entirely normal and non- psychotic people (Ferrero, 2012). Furthermore, when compared to other violent criminals, terrorists are found to be much healthier and more stable (e.g. Lyons, & Harbinson, 1986 cited in Silke, 2007). In line with these findings, Reuter (2004: 204) notes that "most Islamic martyrs are normal, fearless people with strong convictions" (cited in Güss, Tuason & Teixeria, 2007). Thus, "the individuals involved into martyrdom operations do not suffer from mental illnesses or disorders, instead they are generally ordinary and unremarkable in psychological terms" (Silke, 2008: 119).

Overall, people who are involved in martyrdom missions are a very heterogeneous group and the range of people who become involved in martyrdom operations is vast (Silke, 2003). They can vary in terms of education, family background, age, gender, intelligence, economic class, and so on. Despite this heterogeneity, a substantial amount of research has shown that "a number of factors appear to be relatively common in the background of terrorists" (Silke, 2003: 105). Firstly, most people who take part in martyrdom missions are young, in particular teenagers (Silke, 2007; Bakker, 2006). Secondly, most devotees are male (Silke, 2007; Bakker, 2006). Although young men teenagers constitute the majority of terrorists, some recruits are female and a few are much

older (Bakker, 2006). It is important to note that in recent years, female freedom fighters have often seen in Chechnya. Thirdly, studies concerning economic background of devotees have clarified that there is no clear link between deprivation and membership to extremist organizations (Maleckova, 2005). Hence, these people seem to be motivated by a belief in a political cause not by economic factors, such as poverty and psychological factors, such as mental retardation and schizophrenia (Silke, 2007). Sageman's (2004) study with members of radical Islamist group show that these people are mostly well educated, and come from upper-or middle class backgrounds. Similarly, Holmes's (2005) study of the 9/11 hijackers reveals that these Islamic martyrs are quite well educated. Furthermore, they are from middle-class families, and do not suffer serious mental disorders (Atran, 2003; Pape, 2005).

Involvement in martyrdom operations is for most people a gradual process (Horgan 2005 as cited in Silke, 2007), typically appearing over a period of years. Growing body of research has analyzed the factors that contribute to a person's decision to become a martyr, and determined several drivers. Ultimately, it appears to be the combined impact of cultural, social psychological, historical and political factors that pushes and pulls someone into becoming a martyr (Silke, 2007; Güss, Tuason, & Tixeria, 2007).

Firstly, identity is found to play an important role in explaining involvement into martyrdom operations (Silke, 2007). The key aspects of social identity in the context of Islamic martyrdom operations are (a) the role of religion and (b) group loyalties. Religion seems to lie at the heart of Islamic martyrdom operations. The global Salafi jihad has a deliberate religious agenda with the ultimate goal of recreating past Muslim glory in a far-reaching Islamic state, and defeating the Western powers that prevent the establishment of the Islamic state. Furthermore, becoming involved in martyrdom operation is considered to be a group phenomenon (Sageman, 2004; Bakker, 2006). It is small group where individuals gradually become radicalized. "Members undergo a long period of intense social interaction with a small group of friends develop strong mutual intimacy which relieves their previous isolation" (Silke, 2007: 111). Both Sageman (2004) and Bakker (2006) find that "individuals' new Salafi faith results in their becoming more isolated from older friends and family, and leads to an ever-increasing dependence on, and loyalty

towards, the group" (cited in Silke, 2007:111). Social marginalization also appears to be a common factor in the backgrounds of most devotees. Increased sense of identity, commitment and in group affiliation facilitate volunteers' entry into martyrdom operations in a way that their involvement into these operations is approved by their social peers.

Secondly, for most volunteers, a main motivation for participating into a martyrdom cell revolves around a desire for revenge (Schmid, & Jongman, 1998 as cited in Silke, 2007). "Perceived injustices are important drivers of individual decisions to become involved in militant activism, the beliefs and experiences of injustice on the socio-political level become a miserable and concrete reality in the lives of many young people who later decide to become martyrs" (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007: 424). Not considering an opportunity to joining in politics (Crenshaw, 1990), these individuals often turn to be aggressive, and thus seeing revenge as the only appropriate way to promote justice in society. In the study by Güss, Tuason, and Teixeira (2007), most volunteers describe their experiences of traumatic loss: at least one of their beloved relatives or friends were murdered, maimed, or abused by the enemy. The experience of cruelties, death of loved ones and revenge are considered as the key motivations in becoming an Islamic martyr (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). According to Güss, Tuason, and Teixeira (2007), the feeling of helplessness, outrage, and revenge causes individuals to do something as extreme as participating into a martyrdom cell. Islamic martyrdom volunteers in Iraq and Palestine satisfy their need for self realization by looking for a group to join (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). The volunteer's need for affiliation is met "by belonging to a group of people who think similarly, and who are more likely to have had experienced the same oppression, outrage, and helplessness" (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007: 426). In this process, the permanent influence of martyrdom trainings is very important. Mostly, "central to training is the conviction that planned attack was desired by Allah" (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007: 429). To sum, group processes, particularly a desire for revenge and a need for affiliation appear to influence the person's decision to become a martyr.

Thirdly, an individual's decision to become a martyr is influenced by the socio-political context in which a person operates. The finding that there has been a great public support for martyrdom acts in both Palestine and Iraq can explain the high incidence of

martyrdom operations in these regions (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007). More than 70% of Palestinians and 70% of Lebanese support martyrdom missions, and regard them justifiable (Atran, 2003). Furthermore, the socio-political context, especially U.S. occupation in Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the unreliable local puppet governments have all contributed to the development of the enormous potential pool of Islamic martyrs. Thus, socio-historical-political context plays an important role in person's decision to become a martyr.

Fourthly, for the volunteers, there are several anticipated and immediate rewards connected with the accomplishment of a martyrdom mission (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). These rewards constitute a trigger for martyrdom operations (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). Firstly, according to the interviews with volunteers in Iraq and Palestine, a successful operation ensures direct access to paradise, not only for the Islamic martyr, but also his relatives (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007). Another anticipated reward for the Islamic martyrdom volunteers is the reunion of family members in the hereafter. They believe that they will meet with their beloved ones who were killed by the enemy in the paradise. Therefore, the Muslim belief in anticipated rewards provides the volunteers with a unique incentive. In addition to other-worldly rewards, these martyrs are welcomed, and admired by their wider community, and celebrated as such. Monetary support is also provided for the martyrs' surviving family members. "The terrorist network financially supports volunteers' families who were left behind" (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007: 431). Therefore, direct access to paradise, high social prestige and generous financial assistance can be considered as anticipated rewards for the martyrdom act.

In addition to anticipated rewards mentioned above, preparing for the act also provides immediate rewards for the volunteers. Joining the cell and preparing for missions contribute to a feeling of empowerment: They do not remain passive and powerless. In the eyes of the volunteers, act of martyrdom is the most valued technique of jihad (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007). For them, volunteering accompanies with feeling of moral superiority, and courage. Furthermore, separatist groups provide the outsiders with high social status. In that, some communities and societies consider separatist groups and their members as courageous, honorable and important. Also, in some communities, they are

considered as freedom fighters. As Palestinian volunteer puts it: "after recruitment, my social status was enhanced. I got a lot of respect from my acquaintances, and from the young people in my village" (Post, & Denny, 2002 as cited in Silke, 2007: 110). It is important to understand that becoming a martyr is a gradual process; and reward mechanisms play an important role in person's decision to become a martyr.

Finally, as Ghosh (2005) argues "despite the strength of a volunteer's convictions, the final hours before an attack are exceptionally difficult for the volunteers" (cited in Güss, Tuason, & Teixeria, 2007: 432). They experience guilt, shame, and regret. To alleviate these feelings, they utilize three main mechanisms: (1) dehumanization of enemy; (2) minimization of individual's responsibility for the act; and (3) inhibition of empathic feelings for the possible victims (Güss, Tuason, & Teixeira, 2007). As a summary, several social psychological processes, including political, economic, cultural, religious, and emotional factors appears to be involved in a person's decision to become an Islamic martyr. Apart from above mentioned factors, volunteers also make reference to scriptural references to justify their decisions for becoming a martyr. Correspondingly, it is important to consider how people understand scriptural references.

2.3.2. Islamic Scriptural Reference to Martyrdom

Because of Islam's involvement in politics, it is important to understand the interpretation of martyrdom, and the meaning attached to the term "martyr" in Islam (Cook, 2007). Due to the rise of political Islam, many people have manipulated the scriptural references to martyrdom "by seeking to demonstrate the importance of following the law" (Cook, 2007: 32). Although suicide bombings are forbidden in the Qur'an and Hadith (the statements or actions of the prophet Mohammed), many people attempt to legitimize their actions by referring the scriptural references. Therefore, understanding scriptural references to Islam is necessary to comprehend the martyrdom culture more deeply. According to Cook (2007), considering how one becomes a martyr, most verses of the Qur'an refers to the male warriors in combat, and offers otherworldly rewards for these warriors. However, the bulk of the Hadith considers non-violent deaths, including drowning, dying from a plague, or dying in childbirth as also martyrdom. Cook (2007: 36)

asserts that "these categories are too broad and represent a widespread effort by the community to open the doors of martyrdom to anyone who wants it", including those who do not die in battle. According to Cook's assessment, life of the person determines whether he will turn to be a martyr, not his death. He also maintains "the ideal Muslim martyr is a male who willingly enters combat with pure intentions and killed as a result of that choice" (Cook, 2007: 30). Although taking one's own life is expressly forbidden in the Qur'an (4/29), people have manipulated these texts "by seeking to demonstrate the importance of following the law" (Cook, 2007: 32).

In consideration of the utilization of martyrdom operations by Islamist extremists, Post (2009) stressed that the Qur'an strictly prohibits suicide bombings. Among the many Suras (the divisions of Qur'an) forbidding suicide as follows: "And do not kill yourself, for God is merciful to you" (Qur'an, 4/29 cited in Post, 2009: 382). However, according to suicide bomb commanders; "It is not suicide. Suicide is weak, it is selfish, mentally disturbed. This is martyrdom or self-sacrifice in the service of Allah" (Post, 2009: 382). Another commander argues "a martyrdom operation bombing is the highest level of jihad, and highlights the depth of our faith. It is martyrdom attacks which earn the most respect and elevate the bombers to the highest possible level of martyrdom" (Post, Sprinzak, & Denny, 2003, 171–184 as cited in Post, 2009: 382). The act makes them to feel more significant, and thus transcending their individuality. They consider suicide bombing as an opportunity to cause harm to the enemy, and to prove their commitment to God. Apart from these, they also regard being selected for martyrdom operation as a privilege and even a reward. It appears that suicide bombing commanders approach martyrdom operations differently than Qur'an do. Considering the complexity of martyrdom operations, understanding how Islamic extremists make sense of Islamic scriptures, and justify their missions is crucial.

For many years, the subject of women fighting in Jihad has remained a controversial issue in classical and contemporary Muslim religious literature. Cook (2005) looks at the classical and contemporary religious literature to review the arguments being made for females participating in jihad. Although classical authorities discourage women fighting except in the most extraordinary circumstances, they don't expressly forbid it. In response

to the attempt by women who wanted to join in the fighting process, Prophet Muhammad says that "the reward given to men in jihad would be given to women if they obeyed their husbands and kept to their houses" (Cook, 2005: 377). In general, classical Islamic sources appear to be negative about the role of women in jihad. However, contemporary Muslims have modified these conclusions and attempted to legitimize women's participation in jihad and martyrdom operations (Cook, 2005). For example, Muhammad Khayr Haykal, an Islamic writer, distinguishes between the two types of jihad: "jihad as fardkifaya (where the obligation of jihad is upon part of the Muslim community) and jihad as fard 'ayn (where the obligation of jihad is upon each and every one of the members of the Muslim community)" (as cited in Cook, 2005: 379). He argues that when a jihad is upon part of the Muslim community, there is no requirement or responsibility for women to fight, but if they wish to volunteer they should have that option. In addition to Haykal, Islamic scholar Al-Takruri cites six fatwa's allowing women to participate in martyrdom operations. Although he tries to legitimize women's participation in jihad, supporters of classical Islam have identified number of problems in his explanations; (1) questions of reward for martyrdom; (2) issues of gender division; and (3) sexual purity of women. Firstly, while male martyrs traditionally receive extravagant sexual rewards in heaven, no such rewards are specified for women. This noun creates confusion about women's involvement. Secondly, women's participation to war creates confusion in gender roles in family as well as society. Thirdly, it is difficult to protect women's sexual purity under war conditions. To sum, there is a contradiction between classic Islamic sources and contemporary religious sources about women's participation to jihad. While classical sources are fairly negative about the women's participation to jihad, contemporary Islamic sources are in favor of the role of women in jihad, and try to legitimize it (Cook, 2005).

2.3.3. Culture of Martyrdom

Concepts regarding jihad and martyrdom have enjoyed the support of almost all Islamic movements in the world, especially in Chechnya and Palestine (Litvak, 2010). These movements have benefited from the concepts of jihad and martyrdom to mobilize people, and promoted the culture of martyrdom as a noble ideal, an object of yearning, and a passion (Litvak, 2010). One of the Islamic resistance movements in the world is Hamas,

which represents the Palestinian resistance movement. It considers the doctrine of "Jihad of the Sword'' and ''martyrdom" as central pillars of Palestinian identity and as main sources of political mobilization and national empowerment (Litvak, 2010). In the same study, Litvak (2010) describes how Hamas benefits from and practices the doctrine of "Jihad of Sword" and "martyrdom". For Hamas, it is a war between the Muslims representing the party of God and the Jews representing "the party of Satan". According to Litvak (2010: 717), there appears to be a tendency among all religious movements to view their struggles in cosmic terms, "between those fighting on the side of God against those fighting on the side of evil". Since Hamas considers the Jews as the usurpers of Muslim territories, they define their struggle against Jews as a defensive war, thus "declaring jihad as an individual duty incumbent on every able-bodied Muslim" (Litvak, 2010: 719). As part of the jihad concept, Hamas cultivated a culture of death which glorifies martyrdom as a manifestation of jihad, noble ideal, passion and true meaning of life. (Litvak, 2010). Martyrdom has become an object of personal and collective aspiration for Palestinians. For Hamas, "the blood of the martyrs has always served as the fuel of jihad, of resistance and liberation, and as a light which illuminates the way in the darkness of oppression" (Litvak, 2010: 729). Furthermore, the present generation can reach happiness through martyrdom, not life. According to Hamas, God would award them through martyrdom so they should thank God. For Hamas, those who carry out suicide attack "are the most preferable martyrs" (Litvak, 2010: 725). Most Hamas publications have promoted martyrdom as a noble ideal; they have published a book commemorating the lives and actions of famous martyrs. Research indicates that in order to mobilize the Palestinian masses, Hamas has intentionally cultivated a "culture of martyrdom" in the society.

In the societies in which martyrdom operation has been used as a tactic, the martyrdom culture has also been established throughout education (Post, 2009). For example, signs in the classroom at Al-Najah University in the West Bank and at Gaza's Islamic University state reflect how a culture of martyrdom is cultivated through education: "Israel had nuclear bombs. We have human bombs" (Post, 2009: 384). Furthermore, the theme of the high status of martyrs is evident in Palestinian society (Post, 2005). Another example relates to signs found on the walls of Hamas-run kinder gardens which state, "The children of the kindergarten are the martyrs of tomorrow". This theme is found in all levels

of school. In the Hamas-run Islamic school in Gaza City, an 11-year-old student stated that: "I will make my body a bomb that will blast the flesh of Zionists, the sons of pigs and monkeys. I will tear their bodies into little pieces and cause them more pain than they will ever know" (Kelley, 2001: 383). Another example demonstrating how entire education system contributes to the culture of martyrdom was reported by USA Today's article (26 June 2001): referring to one of the rewards awaiting martyrs in paradise, a teacher yelled "May the virgins give you pleasure". The martyred boy's classmates responded, "Allah Akbar". And the reporter notes that, "the principal smiled and nodded his head" (cited in Post, 2009). These examples demonstrate the importance of education in the spread of martyrdom culture at all levels of society.

2.3.4. Martyrdom Culture in Chechen Society

Research reveals the high incidence of martyrdom operations in Chechen society. In other words, Chechens have often been involved in martyrdom operations that demonize and dehumanize the enemy and glorifies self-sacrifice (Speckhard, & Ahkmedova, 2006). Furthermore, Chechens have made much greater use of women than any other Islamic-related terror groups across the world. Considering the prevalence and severity of martyrdom operations in Chechen society, Speckhard and Ahkmedova (2006) examine various motives for involvement in Chechnya at the organizational, individual and societal levels. On the organizational level, "Wahhabism as the Chechen terrorist ideology is labeled within Russia and Chechnya in its militant form is the ideological underpinning of Chechen terror groups, which is linked ideologically to the global Salafi jihad but fine-tuned to fit local circumstances" (Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006: 440). Although Chechen groups have been considered nationalist and separatist in their motivations, even increasing religious rhetoric has been involved into their claims (Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006). At the community level,

In contrast to the social climate of Palestinian terrorism where societal support for suicide terrorism sometimes reaches well over fifty percent of the population, in Chechnya there is not currently an atmosphere of strong community support for suicide terrorism either as a politically expedient tactic

or as a positive religious expression. Although the population of Chechnya is predominantly Islamic there does not currently exist that which in Palestine is often referred to as a "cult of martyrdom. In Chechnya, there are no public community-wide celebrations that take place after a suicide act, nor are posters or other markers of honor placed in public places proclaiming the terrorists as either national or religious heroes (2006: 441).

A lack of widespread support for suicide terrorism is evident in Chechnya. Different from Palestinian samples in which parents express pride in response to the martyrdom of their children, Speckhard and Akhmedova (2006) does not report any mother considering the murder of her son as an act of martyrdom. Although there is no popular support for martyrdom in Chechnya, Chechens have been supported by a wider worldwide Muslim community considering what they see as suppression of Chechen population and human right abuses.

At the individual level, Chechens have been severely traumatized both because of their current experience and the history of their nation (Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2006). As mentioned earlier in this literature review, experiences of trauma and loss constitute a necessary prerequisite for creating the vulnerability and psychological foundation for martyrdom. Some of the psychological vulnerabilities triggering militant jihadist mentality can be cited as foreshortened life expectation, extreme traumatic grief leading to a desire to reunite in death with loved ones, a generalized revenge reaction, depression and despair. When these factors combine with a religious ideology that demonizes the enemy, glorifies martyrdom, defines sacred values worth dying for, promises an afterlife for martyrs, promotes jihad and gives meaning to suffering- a strong pathway is created for the martyrdom to take root (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006).

Since the start of their suicide terrorism campaigns, Chechen have used more women in their martyrdom campaigns than do any other Islamic-related terror groups (Speckhard, & Akhmedova, 2006). Women have been closely linked to the actual fighting in the Chechen conflict (Cook, 2005). Although the radical Islamists in Chechnya have produced more women suicide attackers than any other Muslim separatist groups around the world, their fatwa designed to legitimize women's right to participate in suicide attacks are

ambiguous (Cook, 2005). In their fatwa (a legal opinion issued by an Islamic scholar) that defines the role of sisters in jihad, they emphasized that "women have a supporting role and should not go and actually fight unless called for fighting. Those sisters who voluntarily want to join the fighting for reward from Allah are advised to not go unless the leader of Jihad in that place calls sisters to fight" (cited in Cook, 2005: 379). Chechen women have been advised to perform activities, such as raising mujahidin children, medical assistance to fighters, encouragement, and praying. These activities are considered traditional in nature. Thus, Chechen religious authorities hesitate to make the revolutionary call of Chechen women to the battlefield (Cook, 2005). Instead, they have stated that "women should take the earlier examples to heart when they know that their husbands or sons are going to fight jihad, and not be obstacles" (Cook, 2005: 382). Correspondingly, considering socio-political-religious environment in Chechnya is necessary for understanding how Chechen women position themselves in Chechen resistance, particularly their approaches to martyrdom operations.

2.3.5. Women's understanding of loss: Martyrdom

Interpretation or understanding of martyrdom, in particular the term *"Shaheed"*, carries cultural, social, political, historical and religious meanings. Furthermore, the meaning that women assigned to martyrdom appears to be different from that of their male counterparts because women are found to be influenced not only by the socio-historical-political context, but also by the nature of existing gender relationship (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). Considering the importance of martyrdom culture in war-torn societies, it is important to understand the cultural-political meaning of the term "martyrdom" in the eyes of the women. There is a complex relationship amongst personal trauma, gender roles, the nation's history, collective struggle, power structures, culture, and religion (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). This complexity can enable understanding of individual women's tragedy. The section below reflects the result of "considering the influence of the internal dynamics of psychological trauma, political oppression, gender dynamics, patriarchal structures, history, religious beliefs, and social expectation upon the reaction of women to the war conditions as reflected in the trauma of losing a child" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003: 392).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2003) study with Palestinian mothers reveals that the act of martyrdom refers to the extended meaning of national victimization, and religious sacrifice during the Palestinian intifada. According to the Palestinian women, a martyr is one who dies as a result of the struggle for freedom and is considered as a hero. Palestinian mothers who lost their sons as a result of war-related violence feel that their loss is not only their own; it turns to a collective national loss (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). A woman's "private" son becomes the nation's martyr, and she becomes the "mother of a martyr". Women argued that although their son is honored as a national hero, and his death is regarded as a national loss, he is still their child, and the pain is the same. These mothers not only suffer from the deep pain of the social and collective glorification of their son's acts, they also forced themselves to deny their personal suffering. They are expected to react to the sudden death of their children in a happy and proud manner. "The patriarchal oppression that denies mothers the right to mourn, adds to the religious and political oppression, and thus causes a great deal of psychological and psychosomatic suffering to mothers" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003: 398). The high social and religious status which is assigned to these women, as a result of being a mother of a martyr, interferes with their ability to mourn the death of their sons. They are torn between the need to act in terms of (1) their new social status caused by being a mother of a martyr, and (2) the agony they experience due to their traumatic loss (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). Similar findings are reported by Habiballah (2004); she conducted interviews with 16 mothers of martyrs from Palestine. "These mothers experience the dilemma of being a Muslim and being a mother": On the one hand they want to protect their children and prevent them from participating into confrontations, on the other, Palestinian national resistance is an adventure for national independence and loss of life is of great probability under these conditions (2004: 16). It is evident in their accounts that most women have discouraged their children from going to the war. Further, in an attempt to stop them, they have turned to use of punishment. However, it is the socio-political environment that has caused these children to take part in confrontations (Habiballah, 2004). What makes the things even more complicated is that martyrdom has rooted in Palestinian society for more than two decades. The wider society behaved towards these women in a way that their pain should have been replaced by the pride. On the one hand, these mothers welcomed the support system that were offered by

the wider community, but the same support system is the support that causes them feel choked. These women have been refugee women who lost their close relatives; the pain of a losing a relative is the same regardless of whether he is a martyr or not. These women found themselves unable to grieve in a culture which believes that martyrs are to be prized and not mourned. Thus, they have found themselves trapped in a society that gave them support while demanding that ''these women become the public figures of steadfastness and pride'' (Habiballah, 2004: 16). Thus, they are not offered permission to mourn for their martyred relatives so they are not able to recover from the loss totally. Thus, these findings show the importance of looking socio-political, historical, and cultural landscape while listening to the women's suffering, and understanding their interpretations of loss.

2.4. A case study of Russo-Chechen Conflict

2.4.1. History of the Russo-Chechen Conflict

"The conflict between the Russian Empire and the Chechen people that started more than two centuries ago has continued throughout the Soviet era" (Askerov, 2011: 101). Chechnya's claim for independence has been based on a "distinctive historicist reading of its relationship with imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-Communist Russia" (Sakwa, 2005: 30). This relationship is interpreted in terms of exploitation, oppression and subjugation of Chechen nation by Russians, intertwined with heroic narratives of resistance (Sakwa, 2005). "Imam Mansur is known to be the first leader to fight the Russian conquest of Chechnya (1785–1791) and to call for unity of the Caucasian peoples" (Gammer, 1996 cited in Popovski, 2007: 432). However, the most famous hero of Chechen resistance continues to be Shamil (1797–1871) who is the symbol of the Daghestani and Chechen resistance against the Russian occupation. (Gammer, 1994 cited in Popovski, 2007). In Soviet times, Stalin encouraged Russians to locate and settle in the Caucasus. Correspondingly, the number of Russian people living in Chechnya has been increased. After Chechnya was briefly occupied by the Nazis in 1942–1943, "Stalin's accusation of the Chechens' collaboration with Hitler was used as a pretext for the Soviet government to order the deportation of 425,000 Chechens and 93,000 Ingush to Kazakhstan and Siberia in

February 1944" (Bremmer, & Ray, 1997 as cited in Popovski, 2007: 432). Many died as a result of epidemics, and exposure to the cold and hardship. Chechen historic sites and gravestones were also destroyed (Gall, & De Waal, 1997 cited in Popovski, 2007). This continuous oppression of Chechen people over centuries has produced severe human suffering which has "embittered and unified the Chechens (already a distinct and defiant ethnic group at the time of the Russian conquest) into a solid independent-minded nationality within the Soviet Union" (Popovski, 2007: 432).

Although the long-standing strivings of Chechen people for independence remained latent for quite some time, it erupted again with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s (German, 2003 cited in Askerov, 2011). The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up a power vacuum throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia, while Russia struggled to find an effective way of asserting its interests (Popovski, 2007). The warlords in Chechnya attempted to take advantage of Russian weakness seeking to separate more territory from Russia and create a far-reaching Islamic republic from Black to Caspian Sea. The Russian reaction to this national self-assertion was "brutal and the relationship between Chechen Republic and Russia deteriorated rapidly" (Askerov, 2011: 17).

In 1994, the Russian authorities launched military operations in Chechnya to preserve the constitutional order inherited from the Soviet Union, which quickly escalated into a full-scale war (Popovski, 2007). During the course of the war, Russian troops found it difficult to fight in Chechnya. Although they were able to detect the positions of the Chechen fighters in many instances, Russians failed to gain a total victory. Unable to win the war, Russia eventually signed a peace agreement with the Chechen fighters. Finally, on August 30 1996, the Khasavyurt cease-fire agreement that marked the end of the first Chechen war was signed in Khasavyurt by Alexander Lebed and Aslan Maskhadov (Hughes, 2007). "Khasavyurt was a ceasefire rather than a constitutional status agreement, leaving the issue of independence to be decided by a later referendum" (Popovski, 2007: 432).

During the first war in the 1990s, the public order in Chechnya broke down nearly completely, and it has never been re-established (Kramer, 2010). The three years of quasi-independence in Chechnya from September 1996 to September 1999 did not bring

Chechnya harmony and peace; it was accompanied with rampant criminality, hostage takings, chaotic violence, terrible attacks on foreign aid workers and general lawlessness (Kramer, 2010). Although Aslan Maskhadov was elected as the president of the republic in January 1997, "he failed to consolidate the Chechen society and aggravated the split that had existed since 1991" (Kramer, 2010: 212). As a result, the regime lost trust in Chechnya as well as in Russia where the majority of Chechens live (Sakwa, 2005). His government was challenged by radical elements, particularly those led by field commanders such as Shamil' Basaev. They publically charged Maskhadov with making a secret agreement with Russian authorities, and with betraying Chechen people (Sakwa, 2005). Therefore, "Maskhadov gradually lost control over the former field commanders, criminal gangs, and Islamic extremist groups and over the territory beyond the city of Grozny" (Kramer, 2010: 212).

With the influence of foreign Islamists, radical Islam became widespread in Chechen society, and gained a great impetus among Chechen youths. Especially, it took hold of Chechen male youths. (Sakwa, 2005; Kramer, 2010). Starting from the mid-1990s, radical Islamists from different parts of the world began to gain access to the Chechen movement (Wilhelmsen, 2005). The flow of these foreign Islamists in Chechnya was considered to be one of the reasons for instability in the Republic. Many Islamic militants (generally known as Wahhabis) who once fought in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Tajikistan, came to Chechnya, and claimed to fight on behalf of the wider Islamic community, namely Ummah. There was not only a constant flow of radical Islamists to Chechnya but also of weapons, narcotics, and foreign currency. With the internationalization of the Chechen resistance, the conflict between Maskhadov and the field commanders sank into the background (Askerov, 2011). He was unable to suppress the even increasing Islamized rhetoric among the society, which was created by the radical Islamist warlords (Sakwa, 2005). "The group of the infamous Saudi-born terrorist Habib-Abd al Rahman, known as Khattab, consisted of a few hundred foreign hirelings. Under his leadership Wahhabi training centers helped prepare fighters and were organized and sent for active duty in Chechnya" (Askerov, 2011: 89). They attracted Chechen youths who had been raised in undesirable conditions and who have lived through 1994-1996 war, into Chechnya's militant forces (Askerov, 2011). This shift from purely nationalist separatism to a combination of Wahhabism and nationalism

triggered the growing hostility among Russian society toward the Chechens (Kramer, 2010).

During the three years of quasi independence in Chechnya, nothing was achieved in terms of restoring the economy, infrastructure, health and education services, and social sphere (Sakwa, 2005; Kramer, 2010). Destroyed cities, villages, and houses were not rebuilt, and hundreds of thousands of Chechen people lived in dilapidated houses with no sewage, water and electricity. There was a real threat of ecological and epidemiological diseases. People suffered from illnesses and starvation; in particular there was increased death rate among children. Schools, colleagues, and universities were closed during this period. The disintegration of economic, cultural, and social ties within society was evident (Sakwa, 2005).

The chaotic atmosphere in Chechnya was exacerbated by the fact that "underworld" groups ruled over the society in 1996-1999 periods (Sakwa, 2005). According to the Russian and Chechen authorities, there were 157 armed groups in Chechnya. "Owing to its organized criminality, Chechnya became the biggest producer, consumer and dealer in narcotics and weapons in South Russia" (Sakwa, 2005: 33). While pro-regime groups have control over oil pipelines and the illegal trade in oil products, other organized groups were preoccupied with robberies, kidnapping and trading in "live" goods. Furthermore, human right violations on a mass scale were evident, such as murder, arrests, kidnapping and human trafficking (Sakwa, 2005). According to the authorities, there were approximately 60-70 crimes a week, including eight to ten murders. More importantly, the authorities and officers were found to be involved in these crimes. There was an operating slave market at the center Grozny in which Chechens were held captives as hostages, and exposed to violence (Sakwa, 2005).

To sum, the three years of Chechen quasi independence turned into an unprecedented era of anarchy in which Chechen civilians were killed, defamed, robbed, kidnapped with impunity, or died as a result of sickness and starvation. The Republic, which was described by lawlessness and anarchy, began to threaten not only its own citizens but also its neighboring countries, and ultimately Russia itself (Sakwa, 2005). "The political process of state building under Maskhadov came into contradiction with the Chechen's aspirations

for national self-determination and ultimately failed" (Sakwa, 2005: 35). These circumstances contributed to Chechen separatism and secessionism (Sakwa, 2005).

In an attempt to spread separatist ideas to other part of the Caucasus, Islamic commanders, Shamil Basayev and Khattab, launched an invasion of neighboring Dagestan in August 1999. However, this further deteriorated the catastrophic environment in Chechnya. Following soon after the invasion of Dagestan, bombing of apartments in several places, such as Dagestan, Moscow and Guryanov Street, Moscow Kahisrkoe Highway and Volgodonsk, produced a climate of fear and anger against Chechens-although Chechen involvement in these violent attacks remains unclear (Sakwa, 2005). In response, the second North Military Operation got started on 2 August 1999 when Russian federal forces gave support to Dagistani units to drive the Chechen guerillas back; and then Russian army entered Chechnya on 1 October 1999 (Sakwa, 2005). The Russian federal forces' reentry into Chechnya triggered the mobilization of Chechen insurgent groups, and intensified their separatist claims (Lyall, 2009).

The second Chechen campaign went hand in hand with an anti-terrorist campaign (Gilligan, 2010; Sakwa, 2005). The aim of the Russian federal forces in the first war was to restore constitutional order while they characterized the second war more as a "counter terrorist operation". This was reflected in Russian public's increasing support for the second war (Sakwa, 2005). All Chechens were immediately perceived and treated as suspects. "The mass persecution of all Russian citizens of Chechen nationality began, above all, through the inspection of registration documents" (Sakwa, 2005: 34). Russian political authorities justified its disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force in Chechnya as a fight against terrorism. (Askerov, 2011; Gilligan, 2010; Kramer, 2010). The Kremlin manipulated the capture of a Moscow theatre and the taking of hundreds of children as hostages to justify increasingly lawless counter-terrorist operations. Furthermore, Russian political authorities tried to legitimize their armed operations in Chechnya as a fight against terrorism; even they consider Russian's war against terrorism as a part of the war on global terrorism (Gilligan, 2010). The Russians based their global terrorism claims on the Chechen's use of suicide bombing in their military campaign strategies: The Acts of the Black Widows (Askerov, 2011). Officials maintained that

Chechens were planting bombs on women and sending them to destroy targets, ultimately leading to many suicide bombings in the region (Askerov, 2011). "Russia has attempted to merge the use of suicide bombing as a general tactic in Chechnya to the wider United States led war on terror to gain international legitimacy for its Chechen wars" (Askerov, 2011: 93).

Although the Russian authorities repeatedly acknowledged that life was returning to normal, they empowered the Chechen administration to continue to annihilation of separatist fighters and supporters (Popovski, 2007). This was an internal war, "where its own citizens were mixed with the Chechen warlords" (Sakwa, 2005: 17). Normality, therefore, came along with a continuous terrorization of the civilian population: "Masked anonymous security forces often entered villages deemed to be separatist strongholds and kidnapped young males" (Popovski, 2007: 433). Approximately, 40 % of the kidnapped people later disappeared, no trace of them was found. The families of these separatists were also abducted, terrorized, and killed (Popovski, 2007). Furthermore, internally displaced people were forced back to Chechnya against their will, without any economic and security guarantees (Popovski, 2007). Although these people were unwilling to come back to Chechnya, this return was presented as a happy return by the Russian authorities (Mite, 2004 cited in Popovski, 2005). The Russian authorities also closed refugee camps, and threatened those resisting return to Chechnya with blacklisting them as terrorists (Popovski, 2007).

Despite all efforts of the Russian government, "it has not won the war totally and decisively" (Askerov, 2011: 101). Although Russia has a strong local government in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, it has been impossible to remove all of the Chechen guerilla formations. According to Askerov (2011:101), "the second Chechen war that started in 1999 continues to this very day".

2.4.2. Consequences of the Russo-Chechen Conflict

The cost of the Chechen fight for independence has been immense in socio-economic and social-psychological terms. Firstly, throughout the conflict, atrocities have been committed by both Russians and Chechens, in particular at the expense of civilians

(Kramer, 2010). The Russo-Chechen war has been the war between Russian federal units and Chechen guerilla forces, not the war between two organized armies (Askerov, 2011). To distinguish between combatants and non-combatants within the Chechen community has been difficult; therefore, the fighting has caused countless instances of human rights abuses (Gall, & Waal, 1998; Askerov, 2011). "The war on terror provided Russia with a convenient alibi to engage in lawless acts of intimidation against the Chechen population" (Popovski, 2007: 443). Chechen civilians suffered from the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Russian army (Sakwa, 2005). The disproportionate use of force by the Russian forces gave way to the death of many civilians. The Chechen guerrilla units, for their part, have often benefited from civilians as suicide bombers and launched revenge attacks against Russians. The death of civilians on a mass scale is evident as a result of the war related violence, and it could be considered the most severe consequence of the Russo-Chechen conflict (Sakwa, 2005). Like so many contemporary local wars, "the most important characteristic of the Chechen conflict has been its brutality" (Sakwa, 2005: 30).

Secondly, analyzing the role and effect of gender in the Russo-Chechen conflict is necessary because it diffuses all levels of this conflict (Askerov, 2011). The severe consequences of war for women in Chechnya are evident. For example, "during the Russo-Chechen wars women suffered more than other segments of the Chechen society (Askerov, 2011: 320). At the beginning of each war, many Chechen women left their homes, and took up arms against Russian soldiers with their male counterparts. Many rapes of Chechen women by Russian soldiers were evident during the both wars, but the exact number was difficult to determine because Chechen women found it disgraceful to report the perpetrators to the authorities (Askerov, 2011). In numerous instances, women were left behind as single parents because of the war (Askerov, 2011). They worked as many as twenty hours a day to feed their children (Askerov, 2011). "Women's lives have been especially hard in refugee camps where they are solely dependent on random humanitarian aid from outside" (Askerov, 2011: 324). Furthermore, the Chechen society has been transformed by the war: The gender imbalance that women outnumbered men is evident (Askerov, 2011). In Chechnya, as a result of patriarchy and extended period of war, gender violence was adopted as a way of life (Askerov, 2011). Apart from these, the war in Chechnya also resulted in young women becoming terrorists, such as Black Widow group

of women who became suicide bombers. Women also became pawns in the military conflict; they were threatened, kidnapped, and raped by men. In particular, the female relatives of prominent Chechen officials were subjected to terrible torture during the war (Askerov, 2011). Thus, the war in Chechnya can also be described as a form of psychological warfare on women (Askerov, 2011).

Thirdly, the Russo-Chechen conflict resulted in large amount of material and cultural losses (Sakwa, 2005). More than half of the villages were bombed, more than 70% of houses and administrative buildings were partially or completely destroyed, and large parts of city of Grozny were damaged. War has also interfered with the industrial and agricultural developments in the country. More than 300,000 hectares of land ended up being contaminated with explosives, and oil industry and railroads were also disrupted (Sakwa, 2005). Almost the entire population in Chechnya turned to be unemployed. A whole generation of young men has grown up without getting formal education. "Many of them are involved into the armed conflict, and the only skill that they have is to wage war" (Sakwa, 2005: 40). Among the most important of consequences of Russia Chechen conflict is cultural losses. Many cultural foundations and historical buildings within Chechnya were destroyed by the Russian federal forces. "The wars have been merciless on both the Muslim and Christian places of worship as well as on the historical architecture of Chechnya" (Sakwa, 2005: 40). Some important cultural institutions destroyed are the Academy of Science, the University and pedagogical institutions, research institutions, theatres, hospitals, as well as libraries (Sakwa, 2005).

Fourthly, the population of Chechnya has been shrunk as a result of the long-lasting Russo-Chechen conflict (Kramer, 2010; Popovski, 2007; Askerov, 2011). The population before the start of the second war in 1999 was approximately 1.05 million but it decreased to 700,000 during the war (Kramer, 2010). Around 40,000 civilians have been killed, 50,000 were internally displaced, hundreds of thousands took refuge in abroad, and a vast number have become internally displaced people (Kramer, 2010). The atrocities of the war have forced hundreds of thousands Chechen people to flight into different regions of the world (Askerov, 2011). "Many Chechens fled their homes for the second time, as they had returned to them after fleeing during the first wave of violence between 1994 and 1996"

(Askerov, 2011: 281). Between 1999 and 2000, approximately 600,000 Chechen people fled from Chechnya. Many of them found temporary shelter in countries such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia's Autonomous Republic of Ingushetia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Iran, and other European countries (Askerov, 2011). Some significant numbers have remained as internally displaced people within the borders of Chechnya (Askerov, 2011).

Fifthly, with insecurity, fear, and suffering persisting for more than two decades, a whole generation of Chechen individuals has grown up under extreme war conditions, engraving violence deep in their minds (Starr, 2004; Horne 2002; Hammerli, Gattiker, & Weyermann, 2006). "These permanent war conditions have attained the character of a collective trauma in Chechnya" (Gilligan, 2010: 32). To this day, "genocidal actions have left traces upon the Chechen people and are remembered much in the same way the Holocaust is remembered by Jews" (Seely, 2001; cited in Hammerli, Gattiker, & Weyermann, 2006: 160).

2.4.3. Chechen Refugee Experience

As of summer 1999, less than 600,000 Chechens remained in Chechnya (Askerov, 2011). Since September 1999 more than 325,000 Chechens have fled from Chechnya, another 125,000 have been internally displaced in Chechnya (Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007). Most of these refugees flight to neighboring countries such as Azerbaijan (12,000), Georgia (4,000), and Russia's Autonomous Republic of Ingushetia (325,000), and in various parts of Russia (140,000) (Askerov, 2011). Approximately 3000 Chechen refugees fled to Turkey. Some Chechen refugees left Chechnya for the United Arab Emirates, Ukraine, Iran, and other European countries (Askerov, 2011). Hundreds of thousands have remained as internally displaced people within the borders of Chechnya (Askerov, 2011). "On many occasions the people of Chechnya were forced to flee, but after a few hours of walking, they were compelled by Russian forces to turn back. Then, the Russian air force bombed the refugee convoys, killing civilians" (Askerov, 2011: 281).

2.4.4. Mental Health of Chechen Refugees

Despite the severity within the Chechen experience and the amount of refugees scattered around the world, little research substantiates their psychological suffering. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) depicts the living conditions, psychosocial and general health status, as well as displacement history of Chechen refugees both in temporary accommodation centers in both Ingushetia and Chechnya. High level of traumatization among Chechen refugees is found. Interviews show that refugees hesitate to return their homes because of security fears or because their property had been destroyed. Furthermore, they have been forced to relocate several times. Most of those interviewed have been exposed to crossfire, aerial bombardments, burning of houses, and destruction of property, imprisonment, eviction, dispossession and mortar fire. More than 20% have witnessed killings, and about 50% have seen maltreatment of family. Approximately 90% of people in the Chechen camps of Ingushetia have lost their close relatives as a result of the war atrocities. The living conditions in both locations have serious shortcomings; (1) access to medicine and health services is problematic; and (2) food shortages and increased dependency on outside help is evident. Non-specific health complaints, such as headaches and joint pains, are widespread among Chechen refugees. More than 80% of these refugees believe that the conflict had triggered mental disturbance. Similarly, Renner, Salem and Ottomeyer (2007) find high incidence (62%) of PTSD among Chechen refugees living in Austria. In their study, Maercker and Müller (2004) find increased rate of PTSD among these refugees living in refugee camps in Ingushetia. Seventy six percent of the Chechen refugees meet with the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. When compared to other studies on Chechen refugees (e.g., Mollica et al., 2007; Rasmussen et al., 2007), the rate of PTSD appears to be higher among these Chechen refugees living in refugee camps in Ingushetia. This situation might reflect the "Chechen participants' particular situation of living in refugee camps not far from the Chechen border soon after new combat activities" (Maercker and Müller (2004: 250). Chechen refugees report very high rates of traumatic events that they had either experienced personally or witnessed including violence, threats to one's life, sexual assault, witnessing death and injury, and living under severe conditions (Maercker, & Müller, 2004). In brief, above mentioned studies reflect the nature of

Chechen refugee experience as a process of continuous traumatization: they suffer during the process of pre-migration, displacement, and re-settlement.

Considering the importance of post-flight stressors for the development of psychosocial problems among refugees, Renner, Salem and Ottomeyer (2007) detail the Chechen refugee experience and reveal the problems faced by refugees living in Austrian refugee camps. Many factors are found to contribute to Chechens' discomfort in the refugee camps. Chechens are concerned about their relatives back home. Furthermore, "Waiting for the official notification in the course of application and fear of not being granted asylum with the potential of a pending deportation" also cause a great deal of apprehension (Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007: 257). Another challenge that Chechen women faced is communication problems due to the lack of language skills. Despite the discomfort caused by living in crowded and harsh conditions, and unstable political situations, most Chechen emphasize the positive effect of living in a safe country without experiencing fear of dying. These findings show the importance of living in a safe country and being free from violence for the Chechen refugees who experienced terror during the war and subsequent displacement.

Renner, Salem and Ottomeyer (2007) examine the culture-specific symptoms of trauma among Chechen refugees. Chechen refugees are found to suffer from feelings of suspiciousness, fearing complot against them, thus triggering the sense of helplessness, which in turn promotes somatic symptoms like feeling "sick in the stomach". Chechen suspiciousness is also evident in the interviews conducted by Renner, Laireiter and, Mainer (2012). The authors report that when offered social support, Chechen refugees, particularly men, react with suspicion. They appear to be afraid of conspiracy against them. Also, Chechen suspiciousness makes these refugees to benefit less from the social support than do Afghan refugees. Such feelings might interfere with the process and outcome of psychiatric intervention. Furthermore, somatic symptoms, such as feeling pins and needles on their skin, experiencing heart trouble, and feeling pressure in their chest are mentioned by Chechens, and regarded as life threatening by some. In addition to somatic symptoms, sleep disturbances and nightmares are the most cited health-related concerns among Chechen refugees. It is noteworthy that "since male Chechens are socialized in a belligerent

culture, in which fighting and toughness are encouraged, and showing emotions are considered as feminine, Chechen men do not openly show their negative feelings" (Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007: 260). Instead, their feelings seem to find somatic expression in digestive symptomatology. According to Chechen socialization, which emphasizes toughness, self-assertion, and vendetta behavior Chechens are found to less frequently share sadness or strain about their home country, relatives and friends left back home. Showing depressed mood is considered as an indicator of weakness, hopelessness, and defeat. It might be the reason of why Chechen refugees appear more irritable and tense, rather than being depressed. They also never referred to hopelessness. These studies indicate that understanding symptomatology specific to Chechen culture is important while listening to their trauma narratives.

2.4.4.1. Mental Health of Chechen Children Refugees

Several studies have substantiated the experience of Chechen refugee children. Jishkariani, Kenchadze and Beria (2005) investigate the psychosocial problems of 400 Chechen refugee children from 4 to 16 years old. They reported high incidence of PTSD among these children refugees: 71% of the respondents met with the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Traumatic war events appear to be a trigger for the development of PTSD, such as the experience of a home attack (90%), being under fire (69%), death of a close relative (20%). Additional pre-flight and post-flight stressors, such as starvation, cold, epidemics, and lack of sleep also generate the basis for the development of PTSD among these children. The combination of these factors explains the high prevalence of PTSD (71%) in this sample of refugee children. In addition to PTSD, they find several stress related disorders among these children refugees. Four percent of these children suffer from PTSD with tic disorders, 13% suffer from PTSD with Obsessive-Phobic syndrome, 10% suffer from PTSD with behavioral disorders, and 3% suffer from PTSD with depressive disorders. Furthermore, the authors evidence the progressive changes in the personality of these children over a period of 10 years: the formation of the "image of enemy", a hostile attitude to world and state, and aggressive reactions. These might be caused by being continuously surrounded by and in close relationship with other traumatized refugees. Also, "the fixation of the community members on the traumatic war experiences and the

dissemination of the negative memories" or feelings among families all contribute to the transmission of trauma from one generation to another (Jishkariani, Kenchadze, & Beria, 2005: 37). Evidence of trauma transmission is also found in the generation born after the migration. In another study, Akhmedova (2005) shares her experiences with Chechen refugee children in Ingushetia. She carried out group therapy with children who had been in war zones before their arrival to the camps. Her research supports Jishkariani, Kenchadze and Beria's (2005) finding as children in her study manifest acute stress reactions, signs of PTSD and many of them have tics and enuresis. She also observes aggressive and elevated risk-taking behaviors among these adolescents following traumatic exposure. During play therapy, the children demonstrate repetitive, destructive, or interrupted playing. Mutual induction of traumatic experiences in family members and also in the wider community that these children belonged, incorrect attitude of the society, media, and government officials, along with the lack of a psychosocial rehabilitation, harsh living conditions, lack of legal protection, and uncertainty of future contribute to the psychosocial problems among the Chechen refugee children living in Ingushetia (Jishkariani, Kenchadze, & Beria, 2005).

2.4.4.2. Mental Health of Chechen Women Refugees

Chechen women refugees have had to carry the highest burden during the Russo-Chechen conflict. They have experienced more violence and suffered more than the other segments of the society (Askerov, 2011; Dennis, 2011). The violence they have been subjugated to has affected their psychology to a great extent. Given the lack of health infrastructure, starvation, and increasing chaos and displacement, refugee women struggle to maintain responsibility for their children's physical, psychological and financial well-being during the war (Ashford & Huet-Vaughn, 2000; El-Bushra, 2000 cited in Robertson et al., 2006). In many instances, women have been left behind as single parents and overworked to feed their children (Robertson et al., 2006). Dramatic gender imbalance in Chechen society has become clear throughout the time: Women far outnumbered men (Askerov, 2011). In addition, Russian authorities behaved intentionally brute towards Chechen women. Evidence of the objectification and enslavement of Chechen women by Russian soldiers is well documented: "there were many rapes of Chechen women by

Russian soldiers during both wars, but it was hard to determine the exact number because women were too ashamed to report the perpetrators to the police" (Askerov, 2011: 324). Moreover, Chechen women's lives have been also hard in refugee camps where they have faced physical, social and psychological difficulties. In these camps, they have been solely dependent on the humanitarian aid coming from outside (Askerov, 2011). They have lived in unacceptable conditions, traumatized by conflict, loss and displacement and in fear of their safety (Jonhson, Thompson, & Downs, 2009; Askerov, 2011).

Gender specific responses to trauma are important in collectivistic societies, such as Chechnya (Renner & Salem, 2009). In their study, Renner and Salem (2009) examine the gender differences in symptomatology and coping among Chechen, Afghan and African refugees living in Austria. Specific findings regarding the Chechen population are presented here. There are no gender differences between men and women regarding the measure of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress as well as the questionnaire of social functioning. However, a detailed analysis of questionnaire items reveals significant gender differences between men and women's traumatic symptoms and coping strategies. "Women, as compared to men, report more somatic symptoms, emotional outbursts, and loss of sexual interest, while men reported detachment" (Renner & Salem, 2009: 99). Furthermore, for women, typical coping strategies are concentrating on their children and pursuing various indoor activities, while men prefer looking for work and getting involved in social activities. It is also noteworthy that female participants find it helpful to call on female family members for their support. Similar findings are reported by Renner, Ottomeyer and Salem's (2007) study among Chechen refugees living in Australia. Meeting with other members of their ethnic group, sharing experience, and having a chat in their own language are especially important relief mechanism for Chechen women. They also stress the positive effect of concentrating on their children care. On the other hand, the Chechen men stress the importance of being allowed to work in order to take care of their families. In line with the above research highlighting the importance of social support among Chechen refugees, Renner, Laireiter and Maier (2012) find that social support significantly reduces stress reactions, such as anxiety and depression, and improved the Chechen refugee's psychological and socio-cultural adaptation over time by moderating acculturative stress. However, Chechen women refugees appear to benefit more from the

social support than do men. This finding can be explained by the Chechen men's suspiciousness (Renner, Laireiter, & Maier, 2012). These studies indicate that understanding the symptomatology and coping strategies specific to Chechen women is important while listening to their tragedies and offering effective assistance.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this study, I attempt to understand how Chechen refugee women who had lived through the distresses of war, particularly that of traumatic loss, made sense of what happened to them. I wanted to learn how they moved forward in their lives; furthermore, if "healing" was possible, how did it occur and how was it expressed? As a way to begin understanding and conceptualizing their war memories and refugee experiences, I entered their lives, their worlds, and their narratives through personal interviews. In other words, the main research strategy used to generate data is the interviews conducted with a sample of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey. A total of 11 interviewees participated in the study. Utilizing a semi-structured approach to interviewing provided the kind of flexibility I needed to remain sensitive to their needs and interests. The interviews I conducted were rich and dense, as well as unique. Each woman told her story differently. While some women were dramatic - telling tales of heroism or tragedy, others stammered in starts and stops. Their answers and narrated stories were analyzed by using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Interpretive phenomenological analysis represents a "sensitive approach to listening for knowledge that has been suppressed, oppressed, or perhaps not yet articulated (Murphy, 2011: 58).

In this chapter, I will describe the methodology of my research. First, I will explain the main research question and sub-questions sought throughout this study. Then, I will illustrate my method of data collection: How I collect the empirical data of my research by focusing on (1) how I introduced my research into the community; and (2) how I contacted the participants. Thirdly, I will describe my semi-structured interviews, the dominant method for data gathering. The rationale behind the use of these specific methodologies

and their strengths and weaknesses will be also discussed. Further, I will illustrate the ethical considerations of my research. Finally, the strategy followed in analyzing the collected data is another topic within this chapter.

3.2. Research Questions

The broader research question of this study is "How did Chechen refugee women who lived through the distress of war and experience traumatic loss make sense of what happened to them?" To help answer this general question, this study also aims to answer the following sub-questions:

- How have war, escape, and displacement influenced the psychological well-being of displaced Chechen women?
- How have traumatic experiences shaped Chechen women's understanding of life and their approaches to life?
- How do Chechen refugee women give meaning to their traumatic experiences?
- How have Chechen refugee women coped with their painful experiences?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I turn to qualitative research as a scientific method of inquiry. "Qualitative research seeks to unpack how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight" (Kvale, 2008: 4). Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner (1995), in their study, define the foci and goals of qualitative research. Two characteristics of qualitative research relevant to my work are the following. First, qualitative research is an adventure for depth rather than breadth. Instead of drawing from a large, representative sample of the population of interest, this kind of research try to acquire in depth, and intimate information about a smaller group of individuals (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). Second, qualitative research is frequently considered within the context of discovery rather than of verification (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). "This difference does not mean that qualitative research takes place within a vacuum of literature, and is unconcerned with the findings of previous research" (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995: 88). It means that qualitative research is not necessarily leaded by

literature-driven questions and hypotheses. Instead, it is more concerned with the empirical world (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). For qualitative research, it is important that the issues, concepts, topics, and themes of the study are linked to the roots of the unanswered questions or dilemmas in the existing research literature (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995: 884). Thus, qualitative research can be considered as an ideal instrument to address new issues or established issues in a new manner (Glasser, & Straus, 1967 cited in Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). Considering the foci and goals of qualitative research, my research question seems suitable for conducting qualitative research:

"How did Chechen refugee women who lived through the distress of war and experience traumatic loss make sense of what happened to them?"

3. 3. Collecting Empirical Data

3.3.1. Introduction to the Community

Prior to embarking on my project, I believed it was important to investigate whether or not the community would welcome my research. My first contact was Ömer Bezirgan, the head of the Imkan humanitarian foundation, which provides help for Muslim Chechen refugees in Turkey. In this capacity, the Imkan foundation serves as the centering point for the Chechen refugee community in Turkey. In our conversation with Ömer Bezirgan, I briefly introduced my research idea and explained why studying the challenges Chechen women face in the aftermath of war was personally important to me. He agreed to help me, thus guiding and arranging my meeting with the heads of Chechen refugee camps: Merve Korkmaz and Hasan Avcar. Merve is the head of Chechen refugee camp in Kayaşehir; Hasan, the head of Chechen refugee camps in Fenerbahçe and İzmit. They are Chechen refugees living in Turkey. Both Merve and Hasan are known, trusted, and respected in their community, and they are treated as a head of their community. Since they are able to speak Turkish and Russian frequently, they serve as a mediator between the Chechen people and outsiders, such as NGO's, journalists, and researchers. Both Merve and Hasan agreed to help me establish contact with the Chechen women who (1) had lost someone close to them during the war and (2) were willing to talk about their personal experiences. They

nominated the Chechen women as possible candidates for taking part in my research. First, Hasan and Merve contacted with the women who lost their beloved ones during the war. Second, they ask them as to whether they are eager to participate in my research or not. Third, I met only with the women who accept to be a participant in my research. I worked through Merve and Hasan to set up an appointment with my research participants. None of my participants called me directly. Since the topic covers deeply personal and sensitive experience, making previous connections with the people who were willing to share their experiences appeared beneficial for my research.

3.3.2. Participants

The qualitative data of this study were collected by recording interviews with Chechen refugee women who have been living in Chechen refugee camps. The commonality of the research participants is that they lost someone close to them during the Russo-Chechen conflict. A total of 11 interviewees participated in the study. The women who were interviewed were between the ages of 25-55. The interviews were conducted in three different regions. The first research field of the study was Kayaşehir located on European side of Istanbul. The second research field of the study was Fenerbahçe on the Anatolian part of Istanbul. The third research field of the study took place in another city, İzmit, bordering Istanbul in the East.

Participant	Age
Gulsum	41
Beyza	43
Selma	26
Mehtap	25
Nurgul	48
Tugba	31
Emine	42
Rukiye	32
Nisa	31
Belgin	44
Merve	35

Table 3.1: Age of the participants

In qualitative research, potential interviewee sample does not necessarily depend on representativeness, but rather it is based on how relevant, in-depth information can be obtained (Neuman, 2006). For this reason, in this study, purposeful sampling was used to select the individuals to be interviewed. I conducted qualitative interviews with 11 Chechen refugee women who lost someone close to them during the Chechen war. According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling increases the chance for the researcher to select the people who are willing to take part in the study and may offer different perspectives on the subject. Additionally, my aim in using purposeful sampling was to gain specific insight about the Chechen refugee experience, particularly traumatic loss. I did not attempt to make an empirical generalization from a sample to the population.

Among the various approaches to purposefully sampling, the snowball technique is especially preferred in determining the interviewees. In this technique, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the issue; and these people are used to establish further contacts with others (Bryman, 2004 cited in Kvale, 2008). I employed this technique in first contacting the heads of the Chechen camps in Kayaşehir, Fenerbahçe and İzmit. I also used this technique to establish contact with the Chechen refugee women. By using the snowball sampling technique, I was able to gain access to eleven Chechen women willing to be interviewed. This kind of sampling is appropriate and preferable for difficult-to-reach populations; however it has a limitation (Neuman, 2006). In that, it might constrain the researcher into a smaller circle of contacts in his or her network (Neuman, 2006). For my study, I could not conduct an interview with

the women who (1) rejected to take part in my study; and (2) and did not hear about my research. This reflects the limitation of my research. According to Neuman (2006), the snowball technique might constrict the diversity of the responses of the people interviewed and reduces the quality of the results in terms of reflecting different perspectives. In my research, in order to minimize that drawback, I paid attention to finding interviewees who have diverse characteristics such as age, occupation, education, or family ties. According to Kvale (2008), the number of subjects necessary is based on the purpose of the study. In common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be between ten and fifteen. This number is influenced by a combination of the time and resources available for the study as well as the law of diminishing returns (Kvale, 2008). However, determining the number of interviews in this type of qualitative research is also based on data reaching a saturation point. A saturation point is reached when the researcher realizes that there are no new insights being offered through the interviewees' narratives, when the interviewees' responses start to become similar, and when the major trend begin to recur. At this point, researchers can stop adding new individuals to their sample (Glasser & Straus, 1967 cited in Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). After realizing that specific and prevalent themes started recurring, I stopped conducting further interviews. In total, 11 interviews were conducted.

3.4. Data Gathering Methods: Semi-structured Interview

Interviewing, as a research instrument, is probably the most widely used method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2004). "In a qualitative interview, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves tells about their lives world, about their dreams, fears, and hopes, hears their views and opinions in their own words, and learns about their social lives" (Kvale, 2008: 1). The interviews were conducted during the periods of April 2012, October 2012, and February 2013. Prior to the interviews, consideration was given to gender, age, language of the refugees, and the characteristics of this particular refugee group. Ethical values were also taken into consideration. Nine of the 11 interviews were conducted with the help of a translator. With the consent of the participants, interviews were tape-recorded. Interview periods varied in accordance with time, location and interviewees.

In this research, a semi-structured interview was used to collect data from single respondents. Semi-structured interview is the most widely employed method of data collection in the field of qualitative psychology (Kvale, 2008; Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviewing's popularity as a method research is due partly due its compatibility with several methods of data analysis such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, and interpretive phenomenology. Another reason for the popularity of semi-structured interviews is that "they are somewhat easier to arrange than other forms of qualitative data collection" (Willig, 2008: 23). In the following section, I will discuss (1) the general characteristics of semi-structured interviewing, (2) certain factors involved in conducting semi-structured interviews, (2) the interview agenda, (3) translation, (4) recording, and (5) transcription.

3.4.1. Semi-structured Interview

"A semi-structured interview attempts to understand themes of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Kvale, 2008: 11). In other words, the topic being explored through semi-structured research interviews is the interviewee's everyday world. "This style of interviewing is sometimes described as non-directive; however, it is important to acknowledge that it is the researcher whose research question drives the interview" (Willig, 2008: 24). Although the interview is similar to a conversation, as a method of data collection, it has a purpose and involves a specific technique".

Kvale (2008) also points out that semi structured interview should be chosen when the topic concerns detailed individual experiences and issues of sensitivity. This kind of interview is considered as a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing both the experiences and the meaning attached to those experiences by subjects. In my interviews, the questions are designed to elicit the self-reflection of Chechen refugee women and how they made sense of what happened to them. Clearly, semi-structured interviewing was an appropriate fit for the research question of this study. Since the topic contains many sensitive issued and emphasizes feelings, opinions, and interpretations, data collection required a less structured method than a basic survey. Because refugee experiences generally involve deeply sensitive and personal issues, the types of questions I asked have

an impact upon the Chechen women. It is possible that interviewees, consciously or unconsciously, avoid giving sincere answers and sharing their real feelings; this avoidance might harm the aim of the research. To reduce this potential outcome, I particularly underlined the confidentiality issue to the respondents at the onset of my study. When we began the interviews, I assured each participant that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. Furthermore, during semi-structured interviewing, I attempted to "…exhibit openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than naming ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation" (Kvale, 2008: 12). Interviews retained a flexibility; they were neither strictly structured with standard questions nor entirely non-directive but also maintained a focus on the overall research question for my project. Interviewing these women to learn more about their unique refugee experiences was central to my data collection. I did lead interviewees towards certain themes (etc. loss, martyrdom, and coping strategies) to address more specific issues. According to (Bryman, 2004: 316), "if the researcher is beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus, rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic, it is likely that the interviews will be semi-structured ones, so that the more specific issues can be addressed". As previously mentioned, I chose this method to understand, from their point of view, how they made sense of what happened to them. I believe that it was important to remain flexible. Because the existing literature on the subject was limited, I wanted women's stories to teach me "what they considered "most" important in their war/post-war journeys" (Murphy, 2011: 78). Utilizing a semi-structured interviewing in my research provided the kind of flexibility that I needed to remain sensitive to their needs and interests.

In a semi-structured interviewing, researchers are advised to take into account the possible effects of their own identities (i.e. gender, social class, ethnicity, age, etc.) on the interviewee (Kvale, 2008; Willig, 2008). According to Willig (2008: 25), "semi-structured interviewing, perhaps more than other types of interviewing, depends on the rapport established between interviewer and interviewee" (Willig, 2008: 25). It necessitates "sensitive and ethical negotiation of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Willig, 2008: 25). In my research, I identified and introduced myself as a Muslim woman researcher. Because Chechens are suspicious towards foreigners, particularly non-Muslims (Renner, Laireiter, & Mainer, 2012) my identity as a Muslim woman seems to make it

easier to establish trust between me and interviewees during the interviews. During the interviews, they frequently said that "you can understand us…you are also believer…Pray for us…we belong to same religious community, Ummah…" They treated me as someone from their own community. It seems that they trusted me. Although, according to their belief systems, they have to cover their faces with the existence of foreigner, most of the women opened their faces up during the interviews. They treated me as someone from their own group.

3.4. 2. Interview agenda

In semi-structured interviewing, the researchers have a schedule of questions or specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide (Bryman, 2004). While creating my interview guide, I paid attention to the quality of question and its sequence. My desire was to have a line of questioning that flowed reasonably well, but I was prepared to alter the order of questions during the actual interview. Questions are not required to follow an exact outline or schedule (Bryman, 2004). Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked especially if they serve to follow up on issues shared by interviewers (Bryman, 2004). I remained flexible during the interviewing. Thus, I used a protocol of ten to fifteen guiding questions but maintained a vision that together we would share the direction of our conversation. The following is a list of my initial guiding questions:

- I am trying to learn more about how violence and war have impacted women and their families. If it would not be too difficult, I'm wondering if you could tell me more about your life. Before coming to Turkey, what was your life in Chechnya like?
- Would you be willing to tell me about some of your experiences during the war and escaping? What happened to you and to your family? Did you experience fear; were you ever threatened or exposed to violence?
- Would you be open to talk about the way your son/ husband was killed?

- What does it mean to you that your child or husband was martyred? What does it mean to you to have a martyred child or husband? (If it has) How has this experience brought meaning to your life?

- How do you define "martyrdom''? According to you, how is it different from "death''? (Is it more tolerable?)

- How are you holding up? What personal, philosophical, political and/or religious elements help you in coping with these painful experiences? Could you explain more?

- How do you make sense of your experiences? According to you, why did these things happen to you?

- Who is/are responsible for your experiences?

- Where do you place yourself in the Chechen resistance? What kind of responsibilities does just being women in the resistance saddle you with?

- How do your painful experiences influence your perception of life? Do these experienced lead any changes in your life, any changes about your approaches to life, your understanding of life?

Lofland and Lofland (1995 cited in Bryman, 2004: 322) advise that "the analysis of qualitative data is not left until all the interviews have been completed and transcribed.'' Based on this advice, I preferred ongoing analysis of data as I continued to interview. When I began to code and analyze data, additional questions were added to enlighten the emerging concepts. These are examples of additional questions raised during my analysis:

- How do you consider your son/husband's participation to Chechen resistance/war? Did you support or prevent him?

- While you are struggling with these painful experiences, how do your family and relatives support you? I am wondering about their attitudes, feelings and beliefs: What strategies they used in helping you and how they approach you.

- How does the wider community support to you? Does it help that you have women around you? Are you become more calm and relaxed when you talk with the women who are the mothers of martyrs?

- If you have a child, how are the siblings coping with this death? How do you help/support your children through the death of their father/sibling? What strategies do you use to make this martyr situation more understandable to them?
- Are you angry at anyone?
- Do you have feelings of revenge?

3.4. 3. Audiotape-recording

In qualitative research, the interviews are nearly always tape-recorded and then transcribed (Bryman, 2004). According to Bryman (2004: 317), ''this procedure is important for detailed analysis required in qualitative research and to ensure that the interviewees' answers are captured in their own terms'' because qualitative researchers are frequently interested in not just in what people say but also in the way that they say it. Tape-recording is essential for the complete account of the series of exchanges in an interview and for a deeper and more thorough analysis (Kvale, 2008). ''The words, their tone, pauses, and the like are recorded in a permanent form that it is possible to return again and again for re-listening'' (Kvale, 2008: 93). According to Bryman (2004: 32), "tape-recording is the best way of recording data because it enables interviewer not to be distracted by having to concentrate on taking notes on everything that is being said". Taping allows the interviewer to concentrate on the topic, and the dynamics of the interview. However, there is also cost of using tape recorder, in that "it may disconcert respondents, who become self-conscious at the prospects of their words being preserved" (Willig, 2008: 26). This fear can influence what is being said. Participants may not be entirely comfortable and relaxed in the presence of a tape recorder (Willig, 2008). In my research, I recorded and transcribed all of the interviews but two interviews: 1 participant refused to be taped, and the tape recorder malfunctioned during another interview. For the two interviews not taped, I recorded detailed notes. According to (Bryman, 2004: 322), "when faced with refusal or tape recorder malfunction, an interviewer should still go ahead with the interview by recording detailed notes, as it is highly likely that useful information will still be forthcoming". However, there is a cost of note taking: It is easy to lose the phrases and language used while taking notes. Taking extensive notes also interrupts the

free flow of conversation, thus distracting both the interviewee and interviewer. It interferes with eye contact and non-verbal communication as well as discourages the development of rapport between interviewee and interviewer (Willig, 2008). In my study, Nisa who lost her husband during the war was very suspicious of being tape recorded. I turned off the tape recorder at her request. My conservation with Nisa was rich and revealed interesting information on sensitive issues, such as black widows and death of her husband. One explanation of the richness of the interview may be the closure of tape recorder. In that, she appeared to be comfortable in talking during the interview. Furthermore, when I turned off the tape recorder, I took detailed notes. While taking notes, I found it difficult to establish eye contact with the participant, and follow the nonverbal communication. At the end of the interviews, I transferred the recordings and written notes to a computer where they could be stored and read for analysis.

Parker (2000 cited in Bryman, 2004: 323) observed that "some of the most valuable parts of the interview took place after the tape had been switched off, the closing intimacies of the conversation being prefixed with an explicit "well, if you want to know what I really think….". Furthermore, Hammerley and Atkinson (1995 cited in Bryman, 2004: 323) argues that ''such unsolicited accounts can often be the source of revealing information or views". This observation is certainly what I found in connection with my research. As soon as I switched off the tape recorder, all the interviewees continued to ruminate on the topic of interest and frequently said more interesting things than they did in the interview. It was usually not appropriate to switch the machine back on again, so I tried to take some notes either while the person was talking or as soon as possible after the interview.

3.4.4. Translation

The first wave of interviews was conducted with the assistance of bilingual female Chechen interpreter, Merve, in the Başakşehir refugee camp. She has been living in Başakşehir refugee camp for 15 years and could speak Russian and Turkish fluently. She has been the head of the Chechen refugee women living in Başakşehir camp, winning both the respect and trust of these women. It is important to note that she lost her husband during the war. Merve helped me contact the refugee women who were willing to take part in my

study. She helped me conduct interviews and acted as an interpreter during three interviews. However, using a leader as a translator caused several problems in my research. Kvale (2008: 70) defines this dynamic as "elite interviews" and describes them as occurring "….with persons who are leaders in a community, people who are usually in powerful positions". When an interview is established, "the prevailing power asymmetry of the interview situation may be cancelled out by the powerful position of the elite interviewee" (Kvale, 2008: 70). What is underscored here is relevant to my interviewing. Merve began to drive the interview process through her comments, and questions, and thus discouraged the interviewee to talk about sensitive issues, such as martyrdom and healing. When the participants begin to talk about the death of their husbands in detail, she gazed up on them. Furthermore, she sometimes hesitated to translate the comments or social idioms that passed between her and the interviewees. Thus, using a translator who is the head of Chechen community was problematic for my research. Another tension is that because "the translator essentially interprets the voices of those who speak; another layer of subjectivity is added" (Murphy, 2011: 82). Furthermore, instead of translating word by word, Merve tended to re-state in generalities. To her, it was disruptive to re-iterate word for word, especially if it was an emotional segment of the narrative. This summary mode of interpretation often left out information that would have been lost to me had it not been for a secondary interpreter. Additionally, they sometimes talked exclusively in Russian, and Merve abstained to translate the answers given by the interviewee. Furthermore, because the theme of my research is sensitive, and deeply personal, Merve's physical presence might potentially threaten the psychological safety of those being interviewed, thus discouraging them to reveal information. According to Emmel (1998), the only way to guarantee translation accuracy is to employ different interpreters to check recordings against transcripts. I chose to validate her translations by using a ''blind'' or secondary interpreter, Azat Noriakhmetov. Azat is as graduate student in Sabanci University's Conflict Analysis and Resolution program in Turkey, and fluent in Russian and English. Azat transcribed all three interviews again by listening to the audio-recording. His transcriptions revealed the off-the-cuff comments or social idioms that had passed between Merve and the interviewees. These additional parts added rich color and dimension to the narratives of the interviewees.

Considering the difficulties that I mentioned above, I changed my interpreter for the remaining interviews. I conducted eight interviews with the assistance of another bilingual, female Russian interpreter, Sofiyya Noriyeva. She is fluent in Russian and Turkish, also studying Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Sabanci University; thus, she too was trained in how to listen narratives of trauma. Having taken a course on ''Trauma, History, and Memory'' in Sabanci University, she possessed the skills necessary for listening to narratives of trauma. She was able to build linguistic and social bridges between me and each woman. This situation appeared to facilitate establishment of rapport during the interviews, and to enable the participants more comfortable and psychologically secure. For example, if I asked a question during the interview that Sofiyya did not think the participant understood, she would immediately advise me. Her interpretations ended up being bi-directional and helped generate critical knowledge that I would have missed without her cues.

3.4. 5. Transcribing

For interpretive phenomenological analysis, a detailed transcript is a necessity (Gibbs, 2008). Indeed, "qualitative researchers who are interested in respondents' interpretation of their world need more detailed analysis, and they are advised to transcribe interview recordings" (Gibbs, 2008: 14). The choice of transcriber depends on such factors as the purpose of investigation, the time and money available, and the availability of a reliable typist (Kvale, 2008). For my research, I had no funds to employ an audio typist, thus I transcribed all of the interviews myself. According to Kvale (2008) and Gibbs (2008), there are advantages to doing your own transcripts: (1) researchers who transcribe their own interviews will become more familiar with the content; (2) they will know the socio-emotional aspects of the interview situation present or be reawakened during transcription process; (3) they will have already began to analyze the data; and (4) they will inevitably get started to generate insights about the data. As Kvale (2008) says, doing my own transcripts enables me to become more familiar with the data, and seemed to facilitate my understanding and interpretation of the narratives of the women. While transcribing, I noted some commentaries, and took enlightening notes about these women's accounts, feelings, and voices. I found myself having started the analysis. At the end of the analysis

process, some of these notes turned to the super-ordinate themes. Furthermore, listening the accounts of these women second time provided me with the new insights about their stories, and I sometimes realized some aspects of their accounts that I could not recognize during the actual interview situation.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Kvale (2008) asserts that ethical considerations diffuse all phases of research. First, researchers must ask whether or not the theme of the study will improve knowledge and practice in the field. Additionally, researchers should consider whether or not the theme of the study will contribute to the promotion of human welfare. Second, ethical concerns about project design involve obtaining the subjects' informed consent to participate in the study and securing confidentiality. Thirdly, "the consequences of the interview interaction for the subjects need to be taken into account, such as stress during the interview" (Kvale, 2008: 24). Finally, there is an issue of confidentiality when reporting private interviews in public. According to Kvale (2008: 28), ethical issues of reporting involve "the consequences of published report for the interviewees and for the groups they belong to''.

Although these questions and concerns have already been addressed in this chapter to a certain extent, I will treat them in more detail in the following section. Firstly, considering the ethical guidelines concerning the theme, I believe that the focus of my study serves the promotion of human welfare. In some respect, I hope that my research might itself begin a healing process in the community of Chechen refugee women. Most women who participated in the study expressed their positive feelings about being part of the study. Furthermore, they said that they began to feel more relaxed, validated, and hopeful after the interviews. Thus, it seems that the project began to enhance the psychological experience of the participating subjects. Secondly, ethical concerns about design involve obtaining the subjects' informed consent to participate in the study. At the start of my interviews, there were issues about who would give the consent - the Chechen women themselves, the head of Chechen refugee camp, or the chairman of Imkan foundation. In an attempt to address the ethical issues of consent, I informed the head of the Chechen refugee camp and the chairman of Imkan foundation about the purpose and

procedure of the interview, and described the types of questions that I would be asking. Additionally, at the beginning of each interview, I informed the interviewees about the purpose and the procedure of the interview, as well as possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project. Then, I explained to the participants the nature of my study, described some of the questions I would be asking, and shared my vision for the project. Informed consent further involves "obtaining the voluntary participation of subjects and informing them about their right to withdraw from the study at any time" (Kvale, 2008: 26). Correspondingly, I gave the participants a Confidentiality Consent form to read and sign if they agreed to the interview. My interpreter translated the form into Russian (See Appendix A for Confidentiality Agreement). All the interviews that I conducted were based upon the voluntary participation of the subjects.

Thirdly, ethical guidelines for social science research emphasize the need to guarantee the confidentiality of the subjects. How the confidentiality of the interview subjects can be protected is not without ethical implications. "Confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported" (Kvale, 2008: 27). In order to address the ethical demands for the confidentiality of the subjects, (1) I made clear before the interview that only the researcher will later have access to the interviews; (2) I did not reveal the real identity of those involved in my research. In other words, I have not used their full names; (3) Instead, I gave nicknames to each participant; (4) I made the speakers on the transcripts anonymous, thus guaranteeing the subjects' anonymity. Furthermore, each woman chose the location of her interviews. I wanted them to define interview place in a way that made them feel most secure. While some of the women felt more comfortable having family members nearby during the interviews, some appeared at ease being completely alone with me.

Fourthly, ethical requirements for research require considering the consequences of the study for the participating subjects (Kvale, 2008). "The consequences of an interview study need to be addressed with respect to possible harm to the subjects as well as to the expected benefits of participating in the study" (Kvale, 2008: 28). In relation with this, Gibbs (2008) note that researchers are required to be sensitive to the possible harm that their study might cause to the participants. As Murphy (2011) says, interviewing women

who have lived through traumatic experiences necessitates even more serious consideration as the ethical concerns run deep. The theme of my research might enable Chechen women to talk at length and in depth about sensitive issues they would not normally address. My questions could direct them back into feelings of guilt, fear, misery and suffering; and remembering might cause emotional distress or even re-traumatization (Murphy, 2011). I was aware of the distress these memories might cause participants and made provisions for it. With the help of a network of psychiatric professionals, I developed necessary skills for understanding, validating, reassuring, and soothing the participants. When I considered it necessary, I guided the participants to the psychiatrists who were willing to assist me.

Ethical issues raised by an interview study go beyond the live interview situation itself and also encompass reporting: When publishing the study, what consequences may be expected for the subjects and for the groups they represent? (Kvale, 2008). The issue of confidentiality arises again when reporting private interviews in public. It is necessary to consider consequences of the published report for the interviewees and for the groups they belong to (Kvale, 2008). I have taken precautions to protect the subjects' privacy: The participants have not been credited with their full names in the reports. Instead, they are anonymous. According to Parker (2005 cited in Kvale, 2008: 28), "anonymity of the subject also serves to protect the researcher, denying the subject a voice in the research project".

3.6. Methodology: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

As a way to begin understanding and conceptualizing Chechen women's war memories and refugee experiences, I approached my interviews through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA aims "to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world, and the main currency for an IPA study is the meanings particular experiences and events hold for participants" (Smith& Osborn, 2007: 53). By following its steps, I remained focused on the stories and perspectives of each woman. I believe this approach represents a sensitive method to listening for Chechen refugee women's trauma narratives that has been suppressed, oppressed, or perhaps not yet articulated. In the following section, I briefly introduce Interpretive Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA), the factors leading me to utilize Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in my research, and how this technique was employed in this study.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is increasingly being used as a qualitative method, particularly in health psychology research (Smith et al. 1999 cited in Willig, 2008). It was designed to gain insight into individual participants' psychological worlds. Willig (2008:73) considers IPA as a specifically psychological research method because "IPA is concerned with gaining better understanding of the quality and texture of individual experience; that is, it is interested in the nature or the essence of the phenomena". The aim of IPA is to explore the research participant's experience from his or her perspective (Willig, 2008). The approach is phenomenological in that "it involves detailed examination of the participant's life-world; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 53). It looks at phenomena from the point of view of those who experience them (Willig, 2008). IPA regards the research exercise as a dynamic process in which a researcher plays an active role. A researcher is the one who is trying to get close to the participant's personal world. He or she takes, in Conrad's (1987) words, an "insider's perspective", even though it is impossible to do this directly or completely (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 53). Having an insider perspective requires a two stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutics. What this means is that as "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 53). Therefore, IPA is intellectually related to theories of interpretation, and hermeneutics (Packer and Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969 cited in Smith& Osborn, 2007). Consistent with its phenomenological origins, IPA is therefore concerned with trying to understand from the point of view of the interviewees. At the same time, detailed IPA analysis also allows asking critical questions of the texts from participants, such as the following: What is the person aim to achieve here? Do I realize something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of? (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, "IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional state" (Smith& Osborn, 2007: 54).

According to Smith and Osborn (2007), the IPA researcher needs to be aware of the complexity of this chain of connections. IPA starts from the assumption that "people's accounts tell us something about their private thoughts and feelings, and that these in turn are implicated in people's experiences" (Willig, 2008: 73). Correspondingly, the researcher needs to interpret the participants' mental and emotional state from their accounts (Smith, & Osborn, 2007).

3.6.1. Constructing a Research Question

According to Smith and Osborn (2007), IPA is a proper approach (1) when one is trying to find out how individuals perceive the particular situations they face, and how they make sense of their personal and social world; and (2) when one is concerned with complexity, process or novelty. "There is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather, the aim is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 55). For my research, I attempted to learn how Chechen refugee women make sense of what happened to them from their own perspectives. I sought to learn from each woman how they came to make sense of their pre and post war experiences. How they reflect upon and define their situation is a complex process. IPA is appeared to be a useful tool to understand what they experience from their own perspectives, and uncover this complexity. Furthermore, phenomenological research describes and documents the lived experience of subjects but there is no attempt to explain it (Willig, 2008). In line with IPA guidelines, in my research, I attempt to document the perspectives of Chechen refugee women about what they experienced. Considering the foci and goals of IPA, I choose IPA as a suitable method to explore how Chechen refugee women who experienced distress of war made sense of what happened to them.

3.6.2. Sample

IPA studies aim to say something in detail about how a particular group of people make sense of their personal and social worlds, rather than making general claims (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Therefore, these types of studies are usually conducted on small sample sizes. IPA studies have been conducted with samples of one, four, nine, fifteen and more

(Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, IPA researchers usually try to find a fairly homogeneous sample. Through purposive sampling, a researcher finds a more closely defined group for whom the research question will be significant (Smith & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007), how the specificity of a sample is defined is dependent on the focus of the research. For my research, the topic under investigation has itself been rare and thus determined the boundaries of my sample.

3.6.3. Collecting Data, Tape-Recording, and Transcription

IPA researchers attempt to analyze in detail" how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 57). It therefore necessitates the use of flexible data collection instrument (Smith & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007: 57), "the best way to collect data for an IPA study and the way most IPA studies have been conducted is through the semi-structured interview". During interviewing, tape recording is necessary for IPA studies because a researcher can miss important nuances without recording (Smith, & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007: 64), "it is not possible to do the form of interviewing required for IPA without tape-recording". For IPA studies, the level of transcription is needed to be at the semantic level: "One needs to see all the words spoken including false starts; significant pauses, laughs and other features are also worth recording'' (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 65). In line with IPA codes, I transcribed the whole interview, including interviewer questions, significant pauses, and sounds such as laughs or coughing. In short, my research appears to be convenient with IPA guidelines for interviewing, tape recording and transcribing.

3.6.4. Analysis

IPA researchers attempt to analyze "how participants perceive and make sense of things which are happening to them" (Smith, Osborn, 2007: 55). The underlying assumption in IPA is that the researcher is interested in learning something about the respondent's psychological world (Smith& Osborn, 2007). Meaning is central to the analysis process, and the aim is to understand the content and complexity of those

meanings (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This requires that the investigator engage in an interpretative relationship with the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2007). For instance, Jonathan Smith (1997 cited in Willig, 2008: 57), characterizes interpretative phenomenological analysis as "an attempt to unravel the meanings contained in…accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the texts and transcripts". For the purpose of my research, I adopted two distinct levels of interpretation as advocated by Eatough and Smith (2008 cited in Willig, 2008). The first level of interpretation can be considered as a more descriptive and empathic approach. It aims to allow the researcher to enter the participant's world, whereas the second critically interrogates the participant's narrative in an attempt to gain further insight into its nature, meaning and origin. The second level of interpretation, therefore "takes the researcher beyond the participant's own words and understanding" (Eatough & Smith, 2008 cited in Willig, 2008: 63). According to Willig (2008), higher levels of interpretation might enrich the research by yielding new insights and understandings. It seems to be important for listening the voices of traumatized refugees. However, this approach also gives way to ethical issues around the imposition of meaning by the researcher (Wilig, 2008). Considering that ethical considerations diffuse the entire research project (Kvale, 2008), I tried to balance and utilize both levels of analysis in my research.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis follows an idiographic approach whereby "insights produced as a result of intensive and detailed engagement with individual cases (e. g. transcripts) are integrated only in the later stages of the research" (Willig, 2008: 60). Different stances to IPA are possible, thus there is no single, definitive way to do IPA (Willig, 2008; Smith and Osborn, 2007). In their chapter, Smith and Osborn (2007) frame a series of steps for conducting a research study using IPA. They describe it as being a suggestive approach rather than a prescriptive one (Smith & Osborn, 2007). For the purposes of my study, I followed Smith and Osborn (2007) by incorporating all three steps described below. It is important to note that "qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretive work which the investigator does at each of the stages" (Smith and Osborn, 2007: 67). In this section, I will provide a detailed presentation of the stages involved in doing interpretive phenomenological analysis.

3.6.4.1. Looking for Themes in the First Case

In the first phase of the analysis, the transcript is read a number of times in order to become as familiar as possible with the account, and meanwhile notes taken (Smith & Osborn, 2007). "There are no rules about what is commented upon, and there is no requirement, for example, to divide the text into meaning units and assign a comment for each unit" (Smith, & Osborn, 2007: 67). Some of the commentaries that I made during my analysis are attempts at summarizing or paraphrasing, some were associations or connections that came to my mind. I also commented on the use of language by the interviewees. As I moved through the transcript, I found myself commenting on differences and similarities, echoes, amplifications, and contradictions in what a participant was saying. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), in the next step, a researcher returns to the beginning of the transcript, and uses second margin to document emerging theme titles. In this stage, "the initial notes are transformed into concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text" (Smith, & Osborn, 2007: 68). According to Smith and Osborn (2007: 68), "the themes move the response to a slightly higher level of abstraction, and may invoke more psychological terminology". This transformation of initial notes into themes is retained throughout the all transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

3.6.4.2. Connecting the Themes

In the second stage, a researcher lists the themes, and looks for connections between them (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In the initial list, the order provided is chronological – "it is based on the sequence with which they came up in the transcript. The next stage involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher tries to make sense of the connections between themes which are emerging" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 72). While some of the themes cluster together, some might appear as super ordinate concepts. As the clustering of themes emerges, Smith and Osborn (2007) advise checking the transcript to make sure the connections work for the primary source material or - to double check this against what the participants actually said. In other words, a researcher constantly checks his or her own interpretation or sense-making against the actual words of the participants. The next step is to create a table of the themes, ordered coherently. "This process will have

identified some clusters of themes which capture most strongly the respondent's concerns on this particular topic" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 73). The clusters are themselves denominated, and turn to the super ordinate themes. Following the identification of super-ordinate themes, Smith and Osborn (2007) describe the process:

> The table lists the themes which go with each super ordinate theme, and an identifier is added to each instance to aid the organization of the analysis and facilitate finding the original source subsequently. The identifier denotes where in the transcript examples of each theme can be found by indicating key words from the particular extract, and the page number of the transcript. Because most of the themes reappear in the transcript, the identifier denotes a particularly good example of the relevant theme. Furthermore, during this process, certain themes may be dropped: Those which neither fit well in the emerging structure nor are very rich in evidence within the transcript (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 74).

3.6.4.3. Continuing the analysis with other cases

In the third stage, the analysis incorporates interviews with a number of different individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith and Osborn (2007: 73), "one can either use the themes from the first case to help orient the subsequent analysis or put the table of themes for participant 1 aside and work on transcript 2 from scratch". In my research, I utilized the latter strategy: I started the analysis of each case, as though it was the first. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), whichever approach is adopted, a researcher is required to detect repeating patterns but also recognize new issues coming on the scene as he or she works through the transcripts. Therefore, the aim is to respect convergences and divergences in the data by "recognizing ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 73). Once each transcript has been analyzed through the interpretative process, an ultimate table of super ordinate themes is produced. "Deciding upon which themes to focus upon requires the analyst to prioritize the data" (Smith & Osborn, 2007: 74). The themes are selected on the basis of the factors, such as (1) how the theme is related to the focus of research question; (2) theme prevalence within the data; (3) the richness of the particular passages that

highlight the themes; (4) how the theme enlightens other aspects of the account (Smith& Osborn, 2007). Consistent with the iterative process of IPA, as the analysis continues, a researcher reviews earlier transcripts in the light of this new super ordinate theme, and include the examples from those earlier transcripts in the ongoing analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

After describing the methodology of my research, in the following chapter, I will seek an answer to my research question: How the Chechen refugee women who lived through the distress of war, in particular traumatic loss made sense of what happened to them. In an attempt to answer this question, as I said previously, I conducted 11 interviews with the Chechen refugee women, and the analysis of the interviews will be described below.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

The main research question of this study is "how Chechen refugee women who had lived through the distresses of war, particularly that of traumatic loss, made sense of what happened to them". To find an answer to this question, this section will present the data collected through the 11 interviews with the Chechen refugee women living in Istanbul. This chapter is composed of three parts; (1) Chechen Muslim theodicy; (2) martyrdom culture; and (3) obliged narrative of happiness. Each part presents themes which are considered meaningful in the frame of the research question.

The section on "Chechen Muslim theodicy" aims to reflect how the Chechen Muslim identity shapes their beliefs and appraisals regarding what happened to them during the war. More specifically, it describes the meaning making and coping strategies of these women related to Chechen Muslim theodicy. This part reveals five recurrent themes: (1) increased interest in Islam; (2) submitting to the will of God; (3) Elhamdilullah; (4) theological explanations for the causes of war; (5) depersonalization of traumatic experience. The following section on "martyrdom culture" makes a reference to the ideology of martyrdom which has gained the support of Chechen people for many years. In this chapter, I aim to reflect the Chechen women's interpretations of martyrdom, and how their understanding of martyrdom influences their coping strategies, and subsequent healing processes. To gain a comprehensive picture of their understandings of martyrdom, this section consists of four sub-sections; (1) what makes a martyr; (2) expected benefits of martyrdom; (3) deserving the degree of martyrdom; (3) idealized martyr; (4) obligatory narrative of happiness. The final section on "obligatory narrative of happiness" is concerned with the Chechen women's interpretation of mourning in the frame of Islamic philosophy of steadfastness. It details how their interpretation of Islamic Philosophy of Steadfastness shapes their coping strategies and subsequent healing processes.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the findings, it is important to make four remarks. Firstly, due to confidentiality, the real names of the interviewees are not mentioned. Instead, I assign each of the interviewee nicknames. Secondly, the terms "majority" or "most" are used if that theme was stated by more than half of the participants. Thirdly, the quotations are used to explain the themes, and support the discussion on that subject. Finally, the significance of all the data given in this chapter will be discussed in detail in the conclusion chapter of this present research.

4.1. Chechen Muslim Theodicy

This section aims to explore the internal worlds of the women in my study, how being Chechen Muslim shapes their beliefs and appraisals regarding what happened to them during the war. More specifically, I explore meaning making and coping strategies as they relate, particularly, to a Chechen Muslim theodicy or a "religious way of understanding the nature of suffering and evil" (Murphy, 2011: 201). With the current dominance of Islam in Chechnya, people's understanding and experience of traumas has been colored by their religious and spiritual beliefs. Religion, whether measured by frequency of prayer or religious service, or subjected statements about religion and religious practices, is a major part of the culture of Chechen refugee women in my study. The religious affiliations of these women have been closely linked to the Islam. The experiences of these women provide a unique opportunity for the study of religiosity, spirituality and ideology, and their relation to psychological sequela of traumatic experience, in particular loss. Therefore, analyzing religious beliefs and related ideologies of these women is vital to my study. Religion appears to be the strongest force in these women's lives, providing several explanations for the traumatic experiences that they lived through, prescribing the ways of coping with these traumas, and providing guidance for healing. The women in my study faced a level of violence that is difficult to absorb. Therefore, the traumatic events that these women lived through forced them "to stand at a crossroads for understanding and making meaning" (Murphy, 2011: 219). Analyzing their meaning making, coping and appraisal strategies illuminates if and/or how religious and spiritual resources were utilized.

Considering the meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen women in my study, and their relation to Chechen Muslim theodicy, the accounts of these women reveal five recurrent themes. These can be cited as the following; (1) increased interest in Islam; (2) submitting to the will of God; (3) Elhamdilullah; (4) theological explanations for the causes of war; (5) depersonalization of traumatic experience. Before continuing to the analysis of the interviews, I will review the literature on the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in the face of trauma. Then, I will present the discussion of the themes.

4.1.1. Religious Meaning Making

Religion is a unique meaning system because as "a process, it is a search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (Pargament, 1997: 32 cited in Murphy, 2011). The sacred is worthy of respect in the eyes of the believers. God, higher power, the transcendent or holy can be cited as examples (Murphy, 2011). According to Murphy (2011), it can be a major resource for significance and meaning in people's lives. For purposes of this study, I will use the term "religion" in a broad sense. My definition includes religious practice, teaching, rituals, personal expressions and feelings of spirituality and particularly personal beliefs about the sacred. McIntosh (1995 cited in Murphy, 2011: 219) argues that "religion serves as a global belief that shapes perceptions about the world and the nature of reality, while also generating aspirations for the self and how to interact with others". As a meaning system, it is possible to consider religion "global" because it encompasses many subsets of belief such as moral order, the nature of evil, human condition and divine justice (Murphy, 2011). "Religiosity and spirituality are strongly based on a personal quest to understand questions about life, meaning, justice and relationships with the sacred or transcendent" (Moreira-Almeida & Koenig, 2006 cited in Peres, Moreire-Almeida, Nasello, and Koenig, 2007: 346). From the everyday to the extraordinary, religion might provide motivations, and guidelines for how to make sense of and navigate through life (Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003 cited in Murphy, 2011). "It can prescribe what people should strive for as well as the ways to follow to reach those goals" (Pargament, 1996 cited in Murphy, 2011: 219). Because religion can constitute the foundation for global beliefs and goals, it could play an important role in the coping process in the face of trauma (Park, 2005 cited in Murphy, 2011). Grame et al. (1999 cited

in Doucet & Rovers, 2010) argues that trauma survivors often struggle with spiritual matters related to the meaning of life, human nature, suffering, guilt, forgiveness, and divine justice. According to Peres et al. (2007), religious beliefs might affect how people interpret and cope with traumatic life events. According to Pargament (1997), for many people, religion is a theological orientation that prescribes how they make sense of what happened to them, and can make their suffering more bearable. "The role of religious coping is also of interest in the face of trauma, especially in the developing world where religion is of central cultural significance" (Ali et al., 2012 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007).

Recent work in psychology has focused on the use of religion as a coping mechanism (e.g., Pargament, 2007 and Pargament et al., 1998). Meaning making and coping are interrelated; both refer to the reconstruction of global belief system after it has been shattered (Murphy, 2011). Increasing research has showed that religious and spiritual beliefs can be experienced as helpful to people in dealing with traumatic life incidences (e.g., O'Reilly, 1996; Pargament, 1996; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Rudnick, 1997; Rynearson, 1995; Schumaker, 1992; Koenig, 2005). Koenig (2005) notes that religious and spiritual beliefs may also function as protective factors that can help to alleviate the adverse effects of psychological trauma. In his study, Fallot (1997 cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005), points out spirituality as an important resource for dealing with trauma in women with multiple abuse histories. Most women consider their spirituality as a key factor in their recovery processes. For example, seeing God as a trustworthy refuge helps them to make sense of their traumas. Similarly, Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser (1998 cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005: 4) found that religious people were more likely to say that "they had both recovered from the trauma and had found meaning in it". Furthermore, in their systematic review, Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005), suggest that religious and spiritual beliefs can be a source of coping for many refugees who have been forced into exile. In relation with this, De Voe (1997 cited in Murphy, 2011) also points out the important role that religious beliefs play in coping during the resettlement process as refugees face with adjustments problems due to differences in cultures, values, social norms, and language. In brief, religious and spiritual beliefs can be an important resource for dealing with traumatic life events.

Trauma survivors can face particular difficulty in integrating traumatic life events into a sensible narrative (Peres et al., 2007 cited in Doucet & Rovers, 2010). Some researchers have proposed that "religion serves to integrate the seemingly incomprehensible trauma into a sacred order -providing the knowledge that even the traumatizing events have a place within the order of a large universe" (Berger, 1990 cited in Chen & Koenig, 2006: 372). Complementary to this, Peres et al. (2007) points out those religious and spiritual beliefs can offer ways to positively reconstruct personal stories by providing a sense of order, purpose, and meaning in the midst of a shattered existence. Thanks to spiritual and religious beliefs, traumatic life events may be meaningfully processed. Pargament et al. (2004 cited in Peres et al., 2007) has identified a number of helpful forms of religious coping:

(1)benevolent reappraisal(seeking a lesson from God in the event, and reframing negative events and personal losses through the eyes of a loving God who remains in control is spite of life's hardships); (2) seeking spiritual support (searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care); (3) active religious surrender (doing what one can and then putting the rest in God's hands); (4) seeking spiritual connection (thinking about how life is part of a larger spiritual force); and (5) seeking religious direction (prayed to find a new reason to live).

These are considered as positive coping mechanisms, and associated with better mental health outcomes among diverse populations (Caplan et al., 2011). In that, positive religious coping affirms individual action, provides a source of support, and enables a collaborative relationship with God (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998 cited in Caplan et al., 2011). However, religious coping does not necessarily yield better mental outcomes (Caplan et al, 2011). Pargament (1997 cited in Khamis, 2012) differentiates between positive religious coping and negative religious coping. Feeling abandoned by God, expressing anger at God, questioning religious beliefs, self blame, and a feeling of being punished by God for one sins or lack of spirituality are considered negative religious coping. While positive religious coping is related to improved mental health, negative religious coping is associated with increased level of anxiety, depression, and post-

traumatic stress symptoms in diverse populations (Ano, & Vasconcelles, 2005; McConnell et al., 2006 cited in Feder et al., 2013).

After examining the role that religious and spiritual belief play in overcoming trauma, it is important to know who is more likely to turn to these theological explanations for dealing with their traumatic experiences. According to Pargament (1997), "people are regarded as religious when the sacred informs their deepest values and when the sacred is invoked to help, support or maintain those values" (Pargament, 1997 cited in Murphy, 201: 220). As I mentioned above, there have been several studies indicating that religious beliefs and values often influence how people appraise critical life events. Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005). Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick (1997 cited in Murphy, 2011) found that most religious people take refugee in religious explanations to understand why people suffer. They hold a defense about the nature of evil and divine punishment, in order to explain why a good and all-knowing God permits suffering (Furnham & Brown, 1992 cited in Murphy, 2011). After reviewing how religious and beliefs are used as coping strategies in the face of trauma, in the below sections, I will reflect upon how Chechen Muslim theodicy shapes the meaning making and coping strategies of the refugee women in my study.

4.1.2. Increased Religious Service

All of the Chechen refugee women in my study turned to Chechen Muslim orienting system, and thus deepened their religious beliefs subsequent to trauma. "Exposure to trauma may have an effect on people's religious beliefs and involvement, yet such beliefs and involvements may also function as resources for those struggling to cope with trauma" (Chen, & Koenig, 2006: 380). Traumatic events that women in my study experienced during the war (e.g. Physical assault, resettlement, and murder of loved one) caused tremendous distress. According to Shaw, Joseph and Linley (2005), traumatic events could play a role in developing and deepening one's faith. People struggling to cope with traumatic events might experience a significant change in life priorities, and they can give increased importance to spiritual and religious issues (Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2000 cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005). According to Janoff-Bulman, (1992 cited in Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005), for many, "rebuilding shattered assumptions causes an enhanced sense of

meaning in life and a greater existential awareness" (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991 cited in Shaw, Joseph & Linley, 2005: 3), which can trigger an enhanced spiritual or religious life.

Deepening of religious beliefs subsequent to trauma is evident among the Chechen refugee women in my study. To help understand "why these things happened to them", Chechen refugee women in my study turned to their Chechen Muslim orienting system to translate concrete experiences into meaning. In response to the traumatic memories of war, all of the women in my study not only conserved but also deepened their religious beliefs and these beliefs shaped their meaning making and coping strategies. All women described their increased interest in Islam by comparing their daily lives before and after the traumatic experience of loss. For example, Gulsum who lost her husband during the war says that:

> Although I performed the namaz five times in a day previously, I am trying to live more in line with the teachings of the Prophet and Quran now. Comparing to the past, I am performing the namaz more appropriately now. I feel myself better and more relaxed when I give more importance to my religious practices, especially the namaz. I am trying to live according to the teachings of the Prophet, the life of Prophet Mohammed.

Similarly, Emine whose husband was killed during the war says that:

> My commitment to religion is increased when compared to the past. I am more interested in and more willing to learn about Islam. I have found consolation in Islam.

Islam is full of rituals, such as namaz, allusion and fast and engagement in such practices gives these refugees strength, happiness and peace of mind. Such rituals are part of daily activities of the women in the study. Chechen refugee women perceive these religious practices as purifiers of the mind. Their increased interest in religion after the traumatic experience is evident. Religion is the strongest force in these women's lives, providing guidance in coping with traumatic memories of war, and promoting psychological well-being. All of the women in my study, as a result of the tragic event of

losing a close relative turn to religion for consolation and comfort. The Quran, Hadith, the teachings of the Prophet are sources of guidance in how to react, understand and cope with loss and difficulties. They emphasize their increased interest in Islam after their relatives died as martyrs. These women turn to religion for consolation, pray and speak with Allah more frequently. According to them, the more they practiced religion, the more untroubled and tranquil they became. For example, Gulsum who lost her husband during war times says that:

> Whenever I have free time, I perform the namaz now. While I was performing the namaz 5 times in a day previously, I am performing the namaz every time when I feel sad. So, it is more frequent than previously. I tried to memorize the Suras. But, namaz makes me feel tranquil, comfortable better.

Tugba, a young woman, lost her husband when she was pregnant. She describes how practicing religion makes her more tranquil. She says that:

> I am new more interested to learn about my religion. I learn laws of Allah written in Quran. And I feel happiness and joy during this process…First, you feel tremendous stress, but God alleviates our sufferings little by little. Thanks to him we survive.

For these women, being able to participate in Islamic religious rituals, praying, and learning more about Islam play a stabilizing role. Thus, engagement in such activities gives them strength, happiness, and peace of mind.

4.1.3. Submitting to the Will of God

God's plan and submitting to the will of God have been the themes that showed up in my dialogues with these women. All of the women in my study held the position that God was in control and that God has a divine path for each of them. At the foundation of their global meaning system is an understanding that God is an all-powerful, all-knowing creator who sustains, ordains, and judges the universe. God is omnipotent and all-merciful. They consider "suffering and evil in the context of God's power and mercy" (Murphy, 2011:

228). According to them there is nothing happens outside of God's will: No calamity, nothing happens without God's permission. They believe that anything that happens to them doesn't happen by accident. It is permitted by God, even if it is bad. Anything good or bad that happens, it happens with the permission, and the will of God. They refer to the passages in holy Quran describing the will of God. According to the women in my study, Quran says that sometimes when you think something is good for you, it is bad for you; sometimes when you think something is bad for you, it might be good for you. Furthermore, they points out that people are not the ones who have ultimate knowledge, to follow or see things. People are limited by nature. However, God is omnipotent, and all merciful. The women in my study believe that what happened during the war was pre-destined, with the permission of the God, and thus submitted to the will of God. Nisa's sentences illustrate how she submits to the will of God in order to make sense of what happened to her during the war:

> I don't accuse someone of what I experienced during the war. Because the calamities that I experienced came from God. Allah gave these traumas to me, he wanted me to experience these painful events so I don't consider or assert that someone is the cause of war. However, it is painful. When I read the news about the war crimes, I hate those people who killed, murdered, or harmed the Chechens during the war. But, I consider what we (as Chechens) experienced during the war as the will of God. Of course, war causes dramatic changes in my viewpoints about the world and expectations. I regard war as a goodness or beneficiation for Chechens because it strengthens our links to God; we turn to be more religious. For example, before the war, I had worldly desires, such as houses, cars etc. However, after the war, the only thing that I want is to fulfill my basic needs so that I can pray God, and perform my responsibilities.

All of the women in my study trusted and submitted to the will of God without questioning. They hold the position that God was in control of the universe and that God has a divine path for each of them. They believe that anything or all of the hardship, all the turmoil or calamities that they experienced are from God. At the same time, they are sure that God doesn't want anything bad to happen to them. In that aspect, blaming God, questioning the

will of God, and thinking that God wants something bad to happen to them are all fallacies, and considered a sin in the eyes of these women. Gulsum who escaped from Chechnya as a result of the calamities that she experienced points out that:

> After I arrived to Azerbaijan, I continue to perform my daily practices such as praying, and reading Quran. I tried to focus on my daily activities in order not to think about the murder of my father. Because the more you thing about the loss of your father, the more you question the will of God, and thus the more you commit a sin. It is the reason of why I tried not to think about the murder of my father. Instead, I was preoccupied with daily activities and Islam. When a person questions God's will, he or she commits a sin...I hate Russian government. And, if they (Russian government) continue to torture and tyrannize over Chechen population, my hatred or disgust against them will last...I am no longer optimistic about the life. It is not entertainment for me anymore.

Similar to Gulsum, Emine stresses that she has never questioned why these things happened to her:

> I did not search for any cause about what happened to me. Because, there is no cause. Each and every person will die sooner or later. Everything is the will of God. I thanked God for everything, Alhamdulillah. I believe and trusted in God's will. It is my fate which was determined approximately 150 years ago. Elhamdilullah.

These women have been sure that Allah who causes them to experience difficulties during the war controls everything, and He will definitely help them to handle all the difficulties that they have experienced. According to these women, God controls the universe. Just as Allah causes these women to experience difficulties, so he will definitely alleviate their suffering sooner or later. Beyza who lost her as a result of the war explains how she submitted to the will of God, and trusted God;

> I trusted the will of God. I complied with the will of God. I accepted everything coming from God. It does not matter it is good or bad. I am steadfast. Being

steadfast means (1) not to cry, (2) not to mourn, (3) and to be aware of the fact that what happened during the war is the will of God. Furthermore, it means that God does not adjudge a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it. Being steadfast necessitates to be aware of all of the above mentioned realities, and not to rebel against God's will.

All of the women in my study have parallel thoughts about how God will help to them to handle all the difficulties that they experienced. Believing the mercy of God seems to help these women to make sense of their trauma. According to their belief system, "God does not adjudge a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it". Rukiye who lost her husband during the war deploys this point of view in her sentences:

All of the calamities that I lived through occurred with the permission of Allah. It is Allah who gives these painful experiences to me. Likely, Allah gives us strength to deal with these traumas. He never adjudges a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it.

Furthermore, Mehtap whose husband was murdered during the war narrated the adversity of war, and pointed out how God has helped her in dealing with the trauma of war. She explained that she was pregnant when she learned about the murder of her husband. She expressed how it was difficult to experience pregnancy and loss at the same time. She described her stress as unbearable and intolerable. According to her, during these terrible times, God gives her strength for handling the distress of war, and makes her quiet. Her sentences illustrate this point:

It is coming from God who knows the best thing for us. People around me say that "your husband went to the heaven where there was no armed conflict, and fear. He was in peace of mind''. They are right. I have been patient, elhamdilullah. I prayed to Allah, and Allah helped me, he gave me power in dealing with this stress. I know that God did not adjudge a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it. So, God gave me this exam, it is my exam. Because, I am capable of dealing with it. Otherwise, God did not gave me this exam. I am patient, and I continue to live with this.

To summarize, these women believe that (1) all the calamities that they experienced are from God, (2) God doesn't want anything bad to happen to them; (3) God is in control, (4) God does not adjudge a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it; (5) God has a divine path for each of them. As a result of these belief systems, these women expect God will alleviate their sufferings sooner or later. They have trusted God who is an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-merciful creator. Tugba's sentences shows how she trusts God: She is sure that God is aware of the calamities that happened to her, and He definitely will help her in dealing with these traumatic memories and end the suffering of this women eventually. She says:

Well, first of all, you feel tremendous stress, but God alleviates our sufferings little by little. Thanks to him we survive. God doesn't forget about his servants. With His help I can survive. It was not difficult, since I always prayed to God. *Elhamdulillah*.

Having Islamic religious belief system appears to help these women in coping with the trauma of war. Despite the calamities that they experienced during the war, the image of God as an all-powerful, all-merciful, and all-knowing creator enables these women to feel secure. Submitting to the will of God, and knowing that God has been in control seem to prevent these women from losing their hope and purpose in life. Their beliefs guarantee that their suffering will come to an end sooner or later. Believing that the pain is not unending seems to alleviate their distress, and makes them hopeful. Despite the painful experiences they lived through, they are thankful to God. It is the reason of why these women frequently articulate the term "Elhamdilullah" in their speeches. In the below section, I will explore the term "Elhamdiullah" in a more detail.

4.1.4. Elhamdilullah

"Elhamdilullah" is one of the themes that were offered throughout all of my interviews. "Elhamdilullah" is the Arabic word, meaning "thanks to God". All of the women in my study express their blessings to God because of the fact that (1) God has allowed them to survive; (2) God has prevented worse disasters from occurring during war and the process of migration and resettlement. The Islamic philosophy of "Elhamdilullah"

is reflected in how these women think about the calamities they experienced. It becomes clear in their way of thinking as well as their behaviors. Instead of questioning the will of God or complaining about what they experienced, these women prefer to say "Elhamdilullah", and thus compare themselves with the women in more disadvantaged positions. The women in this study describe feeling lucky that their traumatic experiences were not as bad as those of others. For example, Beyza who lost her son during the war compares her traumatic experiences with those who experienced more severe trauma. She says that:

> There are some people who worse than us, such as widows. As a mother, it is not easy experience. But, my sister said that there is no mother in Chechnya whose child is not a martyr. Every mother has a martyred child. Imagine, there are five or six martyred children in the same family. Alhamdulillah, I have only one, but I could not stand.

Instead of questioning the will of God (why God allows him to die or suffering in general), she compares herself with the woman whose sons and husband were killed during the war. She compares herself with the more disadvantaged women. In a way, she considers herself lucky when compared to the women who lost their husband and sons. Thus, she offers her blessings to God because God permits only one of her sons to die. Her husband and other sons are alive. These women compared their own tragic memories with those of others who experienced much more traumatic events. This though process appears to bring consolation. Knowing that there were some people who had experienced more than they did has enabled these women to be more at peace with their situation. This way of thinking seems to help these women to cope with the traumatic war memories. For another example, Beyza compares her traumatic experiences with her grand parents' painful experiences to make sense of her traumatic experience and to feel at peace. She says that:

> The tragic events we experienced are not worse than what my grandparents experienced. Theirs were more painful than ours. I remembered the times when I was a child, my grandmother was explaining to me what happened during the war. She explained to m her tragic memories: To survive, they were eating the

skins of the potatoes Russian soldiers ate. There are many many books exposing and exploring the sufferings we experienced because of Russia.

In addition, all of the women in my study are thankful to God because God allows them to be alive. They feel themselves privileged and lucky because God enabled them to escape from the war and live.

The belief that war occurred with the will of God makes these women feel more relaxed, and secure. They feel secure because of the fact that God who permitted these painful experiences to occur, is in control, and aware of the suffering of these women, and he will definitely help his servants. They perceive God not only as a governing agent or adjudicator but also a fatherly image taking care of their needs. Knowing and submitting to the will of God makes the things they experienced during the war more bearable. Finally, the Islamic philosophy of *Elhamdilullah* provides "a mindset full of acceptance which seems to be the key to happiness and peace of mind" for the Chechen women (Hussain & Bhushan, 2011: 585). Trusting to the will of God protects one against the trauma of war and helps in the meaning making process. Nisa's viewpoint illustrates this point:

We accept everything coming from God. We believe in Allah, and we have fear of God in our hearts. We comply with and submit to the God's will. If we did not submit to the will of God, and questioned "why did these traumas happen to us", then we would lose our senses, and go off our nut. Because we experienced the calamities of war, including torture, murder, and poverty. For example, one of my friend's grandmother was killed during the first war. Thanks to the fact that she was raised with Quran, *namaz* and the teachings of the Prophet, she is able to preserve her sanity. Similarly, while I was growing up, I was praying, and fasting, and performing the *namaz*. I was also a religious and faithful person previous to the war. Indeed, these have helped me a lot. However, there are some young people who are not faithful (they do not worship and fulfill their religious services), it is difficult for them to make sense of the war experiences.

4.1.5. Theological Explanations for the Causes of War

Religious and spiritual beliefs and cultural values influence the causal beliefs about the traumatic events experienced by the refugees (Caplan et. al, 2011). Accounts of the Chechen refugee women in this study showed that these women develop religious, and supernatural casual beliefs about what they experienced during the war to make sense of their trauma. Spiritual and religious beliefs form a significant part of Chechen refugees' causal beliefs about what they experienced. The high endorsement of religious explanations of trauma is clear among these refugees. This can be related to religious affiliation of Chechen refugee women, namely Islam. Most recurrent causal beliefs about traumatic experiences reflect (1) feeling of being punished by God for one's sins or lack of spirituality; (2) feeling of being tested by God; and (3) feeling of being rewarded by God. It is important to note that while some of the women adopted two or three approaches at the same time to make sense of their painful experiences, some embraced only one explanation.

The first causal explanation of trauma is that what happened to these Chechen refugee women during the war was a punishment because they were disobedient to God, and they went astray. In other words, what happened to them during the war came as a punishment for their disobedience. Feelings of being punished by God for their sin or lack of spirituality seem to make these women feel guilt and shame. Emine is one of the women whose husband was killed during the armed conflict between Russian soldiers and Chechens. I find Emine's illustration a strong metaphor for the punishment approach:

> I never question "why did it happen to me" because each and every person will die sooner or later. Everything (good or bad) comes from God, and occurs with the permission of God. We do not question the will of God. We should comply with the God's will. However, I sometimes ask myself whether what happened to me during the war is a punishment for my disobedience to God. I don't know. It does not matter. All of the things that I experienced come from Allah. There is no any other way.

Similarly, Gulsum refers to her sins to understand why she experienced these painful events:

> I don't know why these things happened to me. It is great probability that God wanted these things to happen, it is God's will. Indeed, it is not a probability. It is definite that these things happened with the permission of God. Each and every person commits a sin throughout their lives. I am sinful too. May be, it is the reason behind why God allow my suffering.

The second approach is that the war was a test to Chechen people; to test how patient they are, how steadfast they are, how much they can persevere through the trials of this world. As a result of these trials, God will decide upon them. Beyza who experienced traumatic events during the war considers what she experienced as a test:

> We have shown patience because Allah tested me for several times. He has tested me with wealth and poverty. Then, he took my child. Now, he is testing me with the loss of my child. Allah gave the exam to those people who are privileged on the eyes of Allah. Because, Allah tested me with the loss of my child and poverty, we have shown patience. It is our test. Elhamdilullah, I accept everything coming from God. I submit to the will of God without any question.

According to Chechen women in my study, through testing, God understands who is more patient, steadfast, and religious in the world. Thus, God decides upon who deserves heaven through testing. In the eyes of these women, suffering (or the trials of this world, or what they experienced during the war) is purposeful. According to them, God tested them because who will be placed into the heaven should be decided upon through testing. Because God loves these people, He exposed them to a test, and gave them an opportunity to show how patient, steadfast, and religious they are. So, these people consider traumatic events they experienced during the war as an opportunity to prove their commitment to God. If they submit to the will of God, and remain steadfast in response to what they experienced during the war, it will be the indicator of their religiosity, and commitment to God. Only those people who are being tested, and stay steadfast in response to that test will be placed into heaven. According to them, God does not adjudge a burden to somebody

who is not capable of carrying it. If God gives them this exam, they are capable of dealing with it. All of the women in my study question "for what purpose does God give these painful experiences to them or test them". As an answer to this question, these women conclude that God tests these women because he has a clear purpose of ascending these people into heaven. Believing that what they experienced during the war is a divine test mechanism seems to help these women in coping the trauma of war. Beyza says:

> If God tests us, it would be purposeful. People say that Allah gives test to those people who are religious, close to Allah, and beloved by Allah. It is our test, the test of my family. My husband and sons are very faithful and religious. They never harm to or injure anything, even an ant. God gives this test to us because we are his beloved ones, we are close to him. He loves us.

Since the test determines who will be placed into the heaven, all of the women in my study pray God to help them pass the test. As Caplan et al., (2011) says religious causal beliefs influence the help-seeking behaviors of these refugee women. In that, God is an active intimate presence in the lives of these women, they engage in prayer daily, and pray that God helps them to pass the test. They consider the test mechanism as an opportunity for showing their commitment to God, thus a chance for getting the ultimate prize of heaven. If they pass the test with the help of God, they will get the ultimate prize: God's blessings in heaven. Otherwise, they will go to the hell. Considering the tragic events they experienced (test) as an opportunity seems to make the distress of war more bearable for these women. Instead of concentrating on the painful events themselves, these women prefer to focus on the positive side-effects of their experiences. According to this belief system, it is because of what they experienced during the war that these women have a chance to ascend into heaven. Hafza' s sentences illustrate how these women consider their painful experienced as a test, and pray God to help them pass the test:

> When I lost my husband, I never felt loneliness because Allah was with me. I took refugee in Allah. I know that he tested me with wealth previously. Now, he tests me with poverty and the loss of my husband. The important point is to be steadfast during the tribulation, and pass the test successfully. I always said *Elhamdilullah*. I was in Azerbaijan at those times. Unfortunately, Azerbaijanis

are not helpful. They did not provide aid or assistance to me. I constantly asked Allah to help me to pass the test. I continuously asked for his help. One day, while I was walking on the street, an old man who is a green grocer called me, and offered me free potatoes, tomatoes, onions and fruits. I did not want to accept because I did not have any money for buying these things. However, he insisted, and said if you have money later, I am sure that you will pay for these vegetables. I am thankful to him. When I arrived to home, my children were very surprised, and asked me how I got all of these vegetables and fruits. I said that God sent all of these things to us. Elhamdilullah, Allah was heard my praying, and sent his help to us.

Furthermore, Selma's sentences show how these women see testing as an opportunity that can enable them to go to the heaven:"It is my exam, it is coming from God. I have to live these experiences because it is my destiny. God wants me to experience these painful experiences, he knows the best thing for me. May be, this is the way which enables me to go to the heaven". Furthermore, the idea of a divine test is common in the wider community to which these women belonged. Selma also describes how the wider community smoothes her.

They were saying me that ''you should show patience, be patient''. It is coming from God who knows the best thing for us. Your husband went to the heaven where there was no armed conflict, and fear. He was in peace of mind''. I have been patient, elhamdilullah. I prayed to Allah, and Allah helped me, he gave me power in dealing with this stress. I know that God did not adjudge a burden to somebody who is not capable of carrying it. So, God gave me this exam, it is my exam. Because, I am capable of dealing with it. Otherwise, God did not give me this exam. I am patient, and I continue to live with this.

Not only these women themselves, but also the wider community that these women belong to regard the tragic events of war as a test mechanism. According to them, this test has a purpose of ascending these women to the heaven. It seems that these Chechen women adopted a positive approach to make sense of tragic war memories. Therefore, they regarded their painful experiences as a test or opportunity to ascend them to the haven.

Having a positive look on what they experienced (or considering their tragic experiences as a test mechanism) appears to help these women to make sense of their memories, alleviate the distress of war, and thus make their experience more bearable.

The third causal explanation is that the war is even a reward. The reason why some women in my study believe this is because if someone dies for the sake of his religion, or in defense of his home - and if he is killed unjustly, he died as a martyr. For those, there is a reward in paradise. I will examine how these women understand death in the context of war, and define martyrdom in the following chapter.

4.1.6. Depersonalization of Traumatic Experience

According to the Western theorists, experiencing the emotional pain of trauma nearly always causes trauma survivors to ask the question ''why did the tragedy happen to me?'' (Johnson, & Thombson, & Downs, 2009). Contrary to what Western theorists expect, none of the women in my study asked the "why me" question. Instead, they preferred to ask "why us or why Muslims in Chechnya. Jeffrey Alexander (2004 cited in Kim, 2012: 2000) defines a cultural trauma as occurring when "members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways". Alexander's definition of "cultural trauma" might reflect how Chechen refugee women in my study perceive and interpret the assault on their community. Their accounts illustrate how violence and its ensuing trauma created group consciousness among Chechen Muslims living in Chechnya. These women define themselves in terms of their ethnic and religious identities (being Chechen Muslim), and they approach what they experienced from a group allegiances perspective. All of the women adopt the belief that they had been targeted because of their allegiance to their particular ethnic and religious group, namely being Chechen Muslim rather than because of something personal. They depersonalize their experience of trauma. For example, when I asked Gulsum whose brother and son were killed why these things happened to her, she answers that:

They came to everybody not only me. They came to us not because we were helping the jihadists. For example my brother was working. The only thing he

did was to work regularly and perform *namaz*. Although he did not engage in any anti-Russian activity, the Russian soldiers harmed him. They gave him a going over. Also, I know some people who were interrogated by the Russian soldiers via electric shock.

These women emphasize the cultural, religious, and historical basis for their ethnic and religious fear. They were taking up a group position in describing their experiences of trauma, in which there have been an expectation of violence occurring along ethnic and religious lines. Beyza assumes her Muslim identity while talking about why these painful events happened to her. In her accounts, she describes the historical grounding for her religious fear. She says that:

> I don't know whether they (Russians) are fighting for money. Or they fought against us because they have a lot of gun and they tried their guns on us. But it is not only against us. There is violence everywhere, including Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria. What happens in these regions is cruel. They behave cruelly towards us. You know, they fight against Muslims. They persecuted and tyrannized over the people who are Muslim. It is the same everywhere. They continue to suppress Muslims. It happened to Muslims for many years, and it continues.

Accounts of these women show how violence and suffering shaped their collective consciousness and identity. In response to what they experienced during the war, their religious and ethnic identities become more salient. For example, Selma refers to her ethnic identity and religious identity to make sense of her traumatic experiences. She says that:

> Also, it was not only me. In Chechnya, almost everybody experienced these painful events, sufferings and loss. This is Muslims in Chechnya. Not only in Chechnya, in Afghanistan, Syria, and Palestine, our Muslim sisters and brothers, the Ummah have faced with war, suffering and fear. They were tortured because of their religion, Islam.

Some of the women describe the memories of their grandparents, showing that Chechens have experienced trauma, loss, violence and suffering throughout history. Generational trauma is defined as a secondary form of trauma that "results from the transfer of traumatic experiences from parents to children" (Davidson & Mellor, 2001; Motta et al., 1997 cited in Doucet & Rovers, 2010: 94). Generational trauma may be derived from a variety of tragic events such as atrocities of war, domestic violence, displacement (Danieli, 1998 cited in Doucet & Rovers, 2010). Increasing research has substantiated the existence of generational trauma (e. g. Beckham et al., 1997; Bernstein, 1998; Yehuda et al., 1998; Williams-Keeler et al., 1998 cited in Doucet, & Rovers, 2010). Fossion et al. (2003 cited in Doucet & Rovers, 2010: 95) argues that "the telling of war-related experiences by survivor grandparents to their grandchildren, particularly when presented in conjunction with descriptions of their own prewar existence, has helped to transmission of trauma". According to Doucet and Rovers (2010), it has cherished a sense of family history that is characterized by violence, torture, suffering and survival. The account of the Chechen refugee women in my study evidenced the grandparents' communication of their traumatic past to their offspring. Rukiye who was raised in wider family says that:

> "The life story of my grandmother was nearly as identical as mine. Her father
> and her husband were killed. And I grew up with those stories: It was still
> USSR back then; how her father was hiding from Russian authorities; how she
> hid him from the police force''.

According to these Chechen refugee women, the atrocities of war have been experienced by themselves, their families, their ancestors, and the Muslims in Chechnya. Rukiye says: "They came to everybody not only me". Growing and living in such context where trauma was a common and ordinary occurrence has enabled these women to refer trauma as a shared experience. This reference appears to facilitate a process of normalization for participants by helping them to accept trauma and its consequences as part of their lives. Believing trauma as a shared experience also seems to enhance their sense of group membership. It is a shared trauma for these Chechen women, their ancestors, and the Muslims in Chechnya. In the eyes of these women, almost all Muslims in Chechnya have been exposed to violence, and tortured. And, it seems to lead the

normalization of suffering on the eyes of these women, and the construction of a new Chechen identity having its roots in violence and trauma. The normalization of traumatic experiences of war is clear in Rukiye's sentences:

> Maybe it comes from my childhood. I never asked myself "why me?" and I never thought that this should not happen to me. This question did not come to my mind until you asked it. And everyone has his/her stories. It is impossible that somebody suffered and others didn't. Everyone has his/her story, you know, Chechnya is very small after all. And the reason for my feeling that "I have to" stems from the fact that I am a part of Chechnya. If war came to Chechnya, why shouldn't it come to me, to my house? In fact, war came to me.

The accounts of these Chechen refugees appear to challenge the individualistic approach to trauma. According to Stocks (2007: 73), "it would be inaccurate to suggest that survivors of trauma have nothing in common with each other, but it seems that in order to comprehend fully the effects of trauma upon the individual subject some appreciation of historical, social and cultural specificity is essential". For the Chechen refugees in my study, religious, historical and ethnic identity appear to influence how these women approach the war, how they make sense of the war, and how they see the causes of war. Because of their ethnic and religious bonds, these women prefer to ask "why did these painful things happened to Muslims in Chechnya?" instead of "why did these painful things happened to me?". Also, the atrocities that these women experienced during the war and its subsequent trauma trigger the construction of a new Chechen identity rooted in historical suffering, brutality, and violence. For these women, asking the "why me" question is inappropriate because they believe that they had been targeted because of their allegiance to their particular ethnic and religious group rather than because of something personal. They depersonalize their experience of trauma. According to these women, their suffering is not without reason. They have become targets of political violence because of their ideological and religious values and ethnic affiliations. According to Bakan (1968 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007) "suffering for a reason is easier to endure than suffering without cause, benefit, or meaning". Believing that it is society that is targeted rather than

the individual not only facilitates acceptance of trauma but also serves to strengthen social bonds and cultural identity within the Chechen society.

To summarize, in this chapter, I attempted to understand how being a Chechen Muslim shaped their beliefs and appraisals regarding what happened to them during the war. Considering the meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugee women in my study, I reviewed five recurrent themes. It is clear that all of the women in my study turned to their Chechen Muslimness orienting system to understand why these traumas happened to them. In the context of Russo- Chechen conflict, their ethnic and religious identities become even more salient. Not only do they conserve their beliefs but also these beliefs shape their meaning making and coping strategies. Believing and trusting in God's divine plan helped them cope with the traumatic events they experienced. Religious beliefs provided an answer that helped them to remain sane, feel a sense of control, and bear the pain of trials. According to these women, suffering is purposeful regardless of whether it is rooted in a test of faith or a painful result of sin, or an expected reward or martyrdom. They believed that there will be relief in the hereafter. Their desire is total submission to the will of God. Faith has provided these women with strength for working through their traumatic experiences. According to them, thanks to religion, they come to see what they experienced in positive and more acceptable way. Gulsum's sentences show how trusting and submitting to the will of God helped her to stay sane, and made the calamities she experienced more bearable.

> We accept everything coming from God. We believe in Allah, and we have fear of God in our hearts. We comply with and submit to the God's will. If we did not submit to the will of God, and questioned "why did these traumas happen to us", then we would lose our senses , and go off our nut. Because we experienced the calamities of war, including torture, murder, and poverty. For example, one of my friends' grandmother was killed during the first war. Thanks to the fact that she was raised with Quran, *namaz* and the teachings of the Prophet, she is able to preserve her sanity. Similarly, while I was growing up, I was praying, and fasting, and performing the *namaz*. I was also a religious and faithful person previous to the war. Indeed, these have helped me a lot. However, there are some young people who are not faithful (they do not

worship and fulfill their religious services), it is difficult for them to make sense

of the war experiences.

She not only stresses the positive role of religion in her healing process, but also emphasizes how it is difficult for non-believers to deal with the distress of war. According to her, Islam is the source of strength for working through what happened to her during the war. In the eyes of these women, thanks to Islam, they come to see what they experienced in a positive way.

4.2. Martyrdom Culture

The complex history of Chechnya has generated a martyrdom culture (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2010). Considering the long-lasting oppression of Chechen population by Russians, ideology of martyrdom has became a central place in Chechen Muslim identity and received the support of Chechen society for many years (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2010). All of the Chechen women in my study present martyrdom as the epitome of their global belief system. In their speeches, they often referred to the term "martyr "to define their murdered relatives, and explain their loss. Considering the high prevalence of "martyrdom" discourse in the accounts of the Chechen women in my study, this section aims to explore their perceptions of loss and martyrdom, and how their interpretation of martyrdom (or the ideology of martyrdom) is reflected in their meaning making and coping strategies. Interpretation or understanding of martyrdom, in particular the term "*Shaheed*", carries cultural, political, historical meanings (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2010). There is also a complex relationship amongst personal trauma, gender roles, the nation's history, collective struggle, ideology, culture, and religion (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2010). To understand individual Chechen refugee women's tragedy, and its subsequent trauma and healing processes requires deeper investigation.

In light of the Chechen women's interpretation of martyrdom, and related meaning making and coping strategies, the accounts of Chechen refugee women reveals four recurrent themes; (1) what makes a martyr; (2) expected benefits of martyrdom; (3) deserving the honor of martyrdom; and (4) idealized martyr. Before proceeding into the

analysis of the data, the literature on the role of religious ideology in coping with the trauma will be presented. Then, I will introduce the discussion of the themes.

4.2.1. Religious Ideology and Trauma

Ideologies, such as martyrdom held during a traumatic event can influence trauma survivors' meaning making and coping strategies (Khamis, 2012). For many theorists, ideology speaks to all shared political, moral, and religious belief systems (Khamis, 2012). According to Khamis (2000, cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007), "ideology represents long-standing commitment to politico-religious principles and choices, commitment to religion as faith and practice, and attitudes about the political party". The sources of ideologies are widespread, it can be religion, ethics, culture, fiction, politics and etc (Khamis, 2012). Among the many sources of ideologies, one of the most important is religion. In the literature, there is fuzziness among theorists about the understanding of religion: "religion as a culture" or "religion as an ideology" (Williams, 1996). While some theorists treat religion as an independent variable or an implicit expression of culture, some consider religion as an ideology (Williams, 1996). "Religion has been intertwined with the nation's politics and purposes since its inception" (Williams, 1996: 3680). Increasing research has evidenced religion as an active force on many sides of political struggles (Williams, 1996). In that, "religion has legitimated regimes, siphoned potential grievances into other-worldly concerns, provided organizational support for social movements, and offered a conception of justice that mobilized participation for change" (Williams, 1996: 368). Therefore, ideology and religion are fused together; it is difficult to disentangle their effects (Khamis, 2012). Considering the dynamics of Russo-Chechen conflict, and complexity of the term "martyrdom" in this context, for my research, I prefer to treat "martyrdom" as a religious-politico ideology held by the Chechen refugee women rather than simple religious belief system.

"The role of religious ideology is of interest in the face of trauma, especially in the developing world where religion is of central cultural significance" (Ali et al., 2012 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007). There has been an increasing research on the relationship between religious ideology and psychological after-effects of trauma (Laor et al., 2006), and these

have pointed out the protective role of religious-politico ideology in the aftermath of trauma. Growing body of research have demonstrated the protective function of ideological commitment to a cause: it is found to increase the ability to cope effectively under stress (eg. Punamäki, 1996, Punamäki et al., 2008 and Shamai, 2002 cited in Khamis, 2012). In support of these studies, researchers have found that religious-politico ideology provides trauma survivors with meaning, purpose in life, and hope for future, thus serving a protective function (Laor et al., 2006; Oren & Possick, 2010). Furthermore, it is also found to prevent severe symptom development by increasing the level of personal resources of trauma survivors. (Laor et al., 2006; Oren & Possick, 2010). Similarly Punamäki (1996 cited in Khamis, 2012), in his study, suggests that ideological commitment protected against anxiety, insecurity, depression, and feelings of failure. In support of these findings, Khamis's (2000) study with the adolescents from Gaza strip and South Lebanon shows that ideology of martyrdom plays an important role in sustaining life under the most devastating of circumstances. It provides a particular way of coping for these Palestinians.

According to Khamis (2012), there are two ways through which ideology may influence the coping processes and outcomes. Firstly, "ideology may provide a belief system or perspective that enables individuals to deal differently and perhaps better with crises in general and war atrocities in particular" (Punamäki, 1996, Punamäki et al., 2008 and Shamai, 2002 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007). Secondly, ideology may have an influence on the coping strategies of trauma survivors through the tenets and attitudes that they adopted, such as *Jihad* and *Shehadah* (Khamis, 2012). As Bakan (1968 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007) indicates, "suffering for a reason is easier to endure than suffering without cause, benefit, or meaning". Considering the positive role of religious ideology in coping with the trauma, the below section reflects the Chechen refugee women's understandings of martyrdom, and how it influence meaning making strategies, and subsequent healing processes.

4.2.2. What Makes a Martyr?

All of the Chechen women in my study present the idea of martyrdom as the epitome of their global belief system, Islam. When I asked them "whether they lost someone close

to them during the war", all of the women answered in the same way: " Yes, my child or husband is a martyr". Furthermore, when I asked them about their marital status, all of the women who lost their husband during the Chechen resistance said that ''my husband is a martyr''. Instead of saying "my husband was killed, murdered, died, or tortured during the war times", these women preferred to say ''my husband is a martyr''. They intentionally define or name their husbands or children as martyrs because the term "martyrdom" carries particular cultural, political, historical and religious meanings in the context of Russo-Chechen conflict. This section aims to reflect these women's visions of loss and martyrdom. More specifically, I explore (1) how Chechen refugee women in my study define martyrdom (related loss and trauma) in their own words; (2) what makes a martyr according to these women; (3) what martyrdom means to them; and (4) how /why martyrdom is different from normal death on the eyes of these women?

In the context of Russo-Chechen conflict, understanding the local interpretation of the word *Shaheed* requires uncovering the cultural, political, and religious dynamics that laid behind. According to the Chechen women in my study, the term *Shaheed* refers to any and every person who falls, dies or is being killed as a result of the Russo-Chechen conflict. This person could be a girl killed while playing in their garden, a baby murdered in his mother's lap, an adolescent who died on his way to school because of the car accident, a stone thrower, an ambulance driver shot while on duty, etc. Thus, the act of martyrdom bears an extended meaning of national victimization and religious sacrifice during the Chechen resistance period and afterwards. In can be concluded that all of the Chechen refugees in this study expand the definition of martyrdom in a way that each and every person who dies under war conditions will be defined as a martyr, and benefit from the blessings of martyrdom.

According to Chechen refugee women in this study, the only precondition of dying as a martyr is to die during the war times. There is no any other prerequisite for the identity of a martyr for the Chechen women in my study. These women assume (thus conclude) that each and every Chechen person fights for the sake of God. Gulsum's sentences who lost her brother and son as a result of war illustrate how the definition of martyrdom is stretched in Chechen society. She conceptualizes what makes a martyr in the following way:

Each and every person who falls, dies or is being killed by the enemy during the war (even if he or she dies in the bed) is accepted as martyrs. During the war times, it is no necessary to fight against the enemy to become a martyr. If a person dies in his/her bed, we consider him/her as a martyr. Allah will regard them as martyrs. My brother who was 18 years old was hijacked by the Russian guerilla forces. They came to our homes, stole our valuable properties, including money and jewelry, and beat my brother, bound his arms and foots. They pushed him into the car by using force. And, they took him away without saying anything. We have never heard about him again. I believe that God will consider him as a martyr. He turns to a martyr inshallah.

Chechen refugee women in my study stretch and expand the definition of martyrdom based on the requirements of the socio-political context. They don't even question whether the person being killed is martyr or not. According to them, the term *Shaheed* refers to any and every person who falls, dies, or is being killed by the Russian guerilla forces during the war times. They also justify themselves based on the teachings of the prophet, holy Quran, and the Hadith. Some of the women quote the verses of Quran, and the teachings of the Prophet justifying that the person being killed is *Shaheed*. Considering the elevated status of martyrs in the earth and the pleasures that awaits martyrs in the paradise, these women make themselves believe that their fathers, husbands, brothers, or sons are martyrs. Knowing that the person being killed reached such a privileged status appears to make them proud and partly tranquilized. Nisa whose father was killed during the war defines martyrdom in her own words referring to holy Quran:

Allah said that if somebody die for the sake of Islam, he will definitely turn to a martyr. We thought that my father was a martyr because he died for the sake of Islam. Inshallah, he is a martyr. For me, his martyrdom is the source of pride. For me, dying a martyr is much better than dying as an ordinary person in bed. For example, my brother has been in jail for 5 years. For me, it is better to die as martyr than to be in jail for five years.

Although these women are distressed with the murder of their family member, they consider themselves lucky and proud as being the relative of a martyr. Nisa who lost her husband in the armed conflict between Chechens and Russians explains how she has dealt with the loss of her husband. She explains believing that her husband died as a martyr makes the reality (the loss of her husband) more bearable for her. As Bakan (1968 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007) indicates, "suffering for a reason is easier to endure than suffering without cause, benefit, or meaning". She says:

> He died during the war times. I regard him a martyr inshallah. Although we are sorry for his death, and we find it difficult to stand for his absence, we try to console each other by saying that (1) martyrdom is better than living under these conditions; (2) it is high and elevated status. I remember that my daughter tried to smooth her grandmother by pointing out the elevated status of martyrdom.

When comparing martyrdom to normal death, these women regard the former as an honorable death. It is considered as a legitimate death for the martyr and legitimate suffering for the relatives of the martyrs. According to these women, martyrdom carries religious and political meanings, and these meanings appear to partly explain the elevated status of martyrdom in the eyes of these women. In political terms, *Shaheed* is the person who dies in the struggle for freedom, and thus honored as a hero. In religious terms, *Shaheed* is the person who dies for the sake of Allah. In the eyes of the women in my study, martyrdom represents a life of heroism, and valor on earth and, eternal pleasures in the hereafter. Rukiye, in her own words defines martyr, and argues that martyr is the person who dies defending himself, his religion, his family, and his homeland.

The researcher: What difference does it make (or doesn't make) to know that you husband was *shaheed*?
Rukiye: Well, what difference does it make whether someone died in the construction site or he died defending himself, his religion, his family, his homeland – is there difference?

As I mentioned above, increasing research has provided support for the protective role of religious ideology under most devastating circumstances, in particular atrocities of war. According to Cook (2007), believing that the person being killed in war is martyr in

Islam provides a particular way of coping. The accounts of the Chechen refugee women in my study seem to provide support for the protective role of ideology of martyrdom in the aftermath of trauma. Women in my study explain how knowing that her husband or son is a martyr makes them more at peace. Believing that the person being killed is a martyr appears to make the distress of loss more bearable for these Chechen women. For example, Nisa says:

> Martyrdom is different from conventional death in a way that martyrdom is an honorable death. It is the source of proud for us. Furthermore, believing that my husband is a martyr helps me a lot. Believing that he is martyr relieves me, and enables me partly tranquilized. Considering him martyr ease not only me but also my family, including my daughter, son, and parents of my husband. We have relieved each other by saying that "everything will get well, and we will meet in the heaven where there is peace.

Knowing that their relatives are martyrs appears to enable these women to feel tranquilized, and relieves them of unpleasant feelings in some degree. Because they consider the status of martyrdom higher than the any other status in the world. It is a desired rank on the eyes of these women. They feel themselves lucky. According to these women dying as a martyr is better than living in such a corrupted world.

To summarize, there is a promotion of martyrdom as a noble ideal, and an object of nostalgia or even passion among the refugee women in my study. These women are considered religious, and they regard this world merely as an entry to eternal life in paradise or a transhipment point. Consequently, they promote martyrdom as an ideal, as a means of attaining paradise. Because they think martyrdom provides an opportunity for them to ascend into heaven, these women represent martyrdom as a positive achievement instead of pain, and they stress the benefits and pleasures that await martyrs in the paradise. Therefore, these refugee women stretch the definition of martyrdom in response to the needs of socio-political context. Although each woman in this study defines martyrdom differently, they agree on how someone becomes a martyr. Because when their relatives are included into that definition, it means that their beloved ones and these women themselves will able to benefit from the merits of martyrdom status which is given by God.

According to them, martyrdom is the way of attaining glorified life on earth and eternal pleasures in the hereafter. Considering the elevated status of martyrdom in the eyes of these women, it is seems to be more understandable that they want their fathers, or husbands, or brothers to die as martyrs. Naming their relatives as martyrs makes these women feel calmer and more proud because they believe in the expected benefits of martyrdom in the hereafter which will be described below.

4.2.3. Expected benefits of martyrdom

All of the women I interviewed emphasize that martyrdom is different from conventional death, and they described what difference it makes to know that the person being killed is *Shaheed*. According to them, martyrdom represents an honorable death. Because, as I mentioned above, Chechen women define *Shaheed* as the one who dies for the sake of religion (Islam), homeland (Chechnya), and nation (Chechens). In response to their self-sacrifice, martyrs according to the women in my study, will be bestowed by Allah a glorified life on earth and eternal pleasures and benefits in the hereafter. These women regard martyrdom as a positive achievement instead of a source of pain or suffering. They focus on the benefits of martyrdom while making sense of their traumatic experience, namely loss. Focusing on the benefits of the martyrdom not only enables these women to understand their traumatic experience, but also enables them to feel calmer. These Chechen women base their claims about the benefits of martyrdom on the teachings of the prophet, verses of the Qur'an, and the Hadith. These constitute the main source of information about the pleasures that awaits martyrs in the hereafter. This section will describe the expected benefits of martyrdom according to the Chechen women in my study; and discuss how believing the expected benefits of martyrdom influence their subsequent healing processes. These women conceptualize four benefits of martyrdom which will be described below.

Firstly, all of the Chechen women emphasize that God enables martyrs to be free from any pain while they are dying. Instead of pain, these martyrs experience great pleasure and happiness when they die. According to Beyza, it is the reason why her martyred son was smiling when he died. His smiling face was the indicator of his psychological state, namely being free from any pain. She, describing his death says that: ''He repeated the

Islamic testimony of faith. He prayed to Allah. Again, he repeated the Islamic testimony of faith, and then he died a martyr. There was his smiling face''.

Furthermore, Emine whose husband was killed refers to the teachings of the prophet to describe how martyrs experience feelings of pleasure while dying. She says that:

> Indeed, there is a great difference between martyrdom and normal death. The ones who die as martyrs reached a privileged status. According to Hadith, all of the dead people had been gathered together in the court. Then, they were asked to answer the following question: Is there somebody who wants to die again and again? Then, the entire martyr showed their willingness. They said that we want to die again and again. It is pleasure for us.

Believing that their martyred relatives did not suffer while dying appears to help these women to make sense of their traumatic loss. Also, this situation seems to alleviate their distress in some degree.

Secondly, these women describe the benefits of martyrdom during the departure of the soul from the body. According to Chechen women in my study, martyrs are not exposed to any interrogation process while their soul is leaving their body. In Islam, when a person dies, "two angels with the names of Nakir and Munkar appear to the soul in the grave for questioning. These angels are responsible for interrogating every soul just after its body is entombed". The interrogation is an important opening process before the soul receives its ultimate punishment or bliss. During the interrogation, the authorized angels ask questions about faith, such as "what is your Lord, what is your religion?". After the interrogation process is over, the soul leaves the body. In the case of the martyrs, there is no interrogation process because of the fact that these people die for the sake of God. Considering their sacrifice, God forgives all of their sins immediately. According to these women, " the carpets of the paradise are spread out, and the gate of the garden are opened for these martyrs". Then, they are directly placed into the heaven where there is peace of mind. Mehtap who lost her father during the war describes the conditions of a martyr in the hereafter:

Allah says that "if a person dies for the sake of Islam, he will turns to a martyr and, I permit him/her directly to go to the heaven. I forgive all of his/her sins. Normally, when a person die, he or she is exposed to interrogation process. Two angels with the names of Nakir and Munkar approach to the soul for the questioning. However, in the case of martyrs, there is no interrogation process. They are directly ascend into the paradise without being interrogated". Allah will offer these martyrs endless pleasures and blessings which are beautiful than the worldly fancies. I think this idea is very appealing.

Thirdly, all of the women I interviewed underscore that God forgives all of the sins of the martyrs and permits them directly go to the heaven where there is not conflict, fear and violence. These martyrs are bestowed by God eternal pleasures in the paradise. For these women, paradise means to be free from violence, torture and persecution. Instead of describing heaven as a source of unending blessings and pleasures, they focus on the peace of mind and tranquility which are granted to martyrs in the heaven. The above mentioned finding shows the importance of living in safe heaven and freedom from violence for the Chechen refugee women who experienced terror during the war and subsequent displacement. Considering the war conditions in Chechnya, these women see martyrdom as a way of emancipation from persecution, torture, and subjection. For them, it seems more preferable to die as a martyr instead of living under war conditions. Selma says:

Martyrdom is very different. Normal death is death. Martyrdom is different. When you become martyred, God forgives all of your sins. You are allowed to go to the heaven directly without any interrogation. It is similar to baby who is pure and free from sin. He (my husband) was a martyr. Definitely, he would go to the heaven where there were no armed clashes, fear, and suffering. It was better than the world. I wanted to a martyr too. I have been asking Allah to make a martyr of me too. Similar to my husband...

Nurgul explains how being a martyr is better than living under war conditions:

I and my friends, and the elderly in the community, were afraid of making comment about the war, and the Russian government in the war times.

However, my daughter Mehtap was very courageous and passionate. She said: "why are you afraid of these Russian soldiers? If we are killed, we will turn to martyrs. We will meet in the heaven. How nice it is. I consider martyrdom as a way of emancipation". My husband was 50 years old, and he was very ill. I think that dying as a martyr was better for him. Unending pleasures wait him in the heaven.

In short, all of the women in my study represent martyrdom as a way of emancipation instead of pain, and the emphasis is placed on the benefits and pleasures that await martyrs in the paradise. For these women, dying as a martyr is more preferable than living under war conditions.

Fourthly, in the views of Chechen women in my study, God endows martyrs with superhuman characteristics. Believing martyrdom as an honorable death and a noble ideal, these women appear to exaggerate the characteristics of martyrs. Martyrs who sacrificed themselves for God are not really dead, but remain alive and walk around (even if they are not seen by the people). According to their interpretation of Islam, martyrs are considered eternal: They never die in reality. God bestows eternity on them. More specifically, they are endowed with an ability to walk around in the world. For example, Gulsum says that:

Based on the Quran and Hadith that I studied so far, martyrs have never died. Sometimes I felt that my child who was martyred was with me, like he was wandering around. Indeed, sometimes I thought that he was with me now, and then I tried to feel him. This idea of his presence and eternity made me feel better and calmer.

Ability to be eternal is considered as a reward that God grants to the martyrs for their sacrifice. According to these women, God gives this reward to the martyrs because they die for the sake of Allah and Islam. Also, consideration of martyrs as eternal people demonstrates the importance that these Chechen women assign to the martyrdom status. On the eyes of these women, martyrdom represents the ideals of nobility, passion, divinity, and heroism.

Finally, the women in my study consider martyrdom as a reward, not only for the martyrs themselves but also for the relatives of the martyrs. In other words, apart from the expected pleasures that await martyrs in the heaven, there are a lot of benefits of martyrdom for the relatives of the martyrs in the hereafter. According to the Chechen refugee women, God gives martyrs a right to position people into the heaven as they desire. Correspondingly, these women expect to be ascend into the heaven because their close relatives are martyrs. This right to place people into the heaven shows the greatness of martyrdom status on the eyes of these women. According to their beliefs, God assigns martyrs exceptional right to place people into the heaven which is normally decided only by God. These women grant martyrs god-like and superhuman features: for example, the ability to decide upon who will be located into the heaven. Beyza describes his dialogue with his son who was martyr. She says that:

> He (Beyza's son) said that they came to our territory. They killed our relatives, friends, all Chechens and they tortured us. If I am killed, I will turn to a martyr. So, he said that don't worry about me. He said that if I am killed, I will definitely turn into a martyr. All martyrs are given the right to allow 70 people from his father's relatives and 70 people from his mother's relatives to go to the heaven without any interrogation. But, I could not believe the possibility that he escaped to the war. But, he went for fighting...I try to be patient, it is difficult to stand for the loss of my son. As a mother, it is not easy. My sister who lives in Chechnya relieves me by saying that "there is no mother in Chechnya who did not loss her son. There can be 3 or 4 martyrs in the same house. Only one of your sons was murdered. You seems to be lucky when compared to these mothers who lost 3 or more of their sons". Although I lost one of my sons, it is very difficult to be steadfast and stand for the loss. But, he (the martyred son) will save us. Thanks to him, Allah will be placed us (you, me, my family, and my relatives) into the heaven inshallah.

These women expect to personally benefit from the state of martyrdom. God offers rewards not only for the martyrs but also for the relatives of martyrs. They expect to go to heaven thanks to their martyred relatives. Focusing on the benefits of martyrdom seems to help these women in dealing with the traumatic loss and distress of war. For example,

Emine says that: ''Thanks to my God, I am asking for his help and forgiveness. With his consent, I will be allowed to go to the heaven as a wife of martyr... It was not difficult since I always prayed to God. And also knowing that I am wife of martyr helped me a lot''.

Furthermore, these women consider the benefits of martyrdom as a compensation for their painful experiences. The idea of compensation seems to enable these women to handle their traumatic loss partly. It can be considered as a coping strategy for overcoming traumatic war experience, in particular loss. According to them, God is aware of how painful experiences these are. So, He also offers a reward for the relatives of the martyrs. For example, Hatice describes how her painful experiences will be compensated in the heaven: "It is very painful and traumatic. Although I lost only one of my children, I could not stand. But, I believe inshallah, Allah will place us in to the heaven, inshallah''.

To sum, all of the Chechen women in my study believe that martyrs are bestowed by Allah a glorified life on earth and eternal pleasures in the hereafter. These women consider martyrdom as honorable death, and the martyrs are represented as hero in the society. Not only martyrs but also their relatives are treated with respect by the community that they belonged to. Correspondingly, it can be regarded as a life of heroism on earth. In addition to high social status that attained martyrs in their community, they are bestowed by Allah eternal pleasures and benefits in the hereafter. The expected benefits of martyrdom can be described as the following. Firstly, different from normal death, martyrs don't suffer while dying. Secondly, martyrs are not exposed to any interrogation about their misconducts during the departure of their soul. God directly forgives all of their sins. Thirdly, martyrs are directly placed into the heaven where there is peace of mind. Fourthly, they are ascribed superhuman or god-like characteristics, such as being eternal. In addition to the expected pleasures of martyrdom for the martyrs themselves, there are some pleasures for the relatives of the martyrs in the hereafter. Thanks to their martyred relatives, these women expect to go to the heaven. It is clear that these women focused on the pleasures of martyrdom while thinking and talking about their traumatic loss. They present martyrdom as a positive achievement, an opportunity, or noble ideal, instead of painful experience. They consider the pleasures that await martyrs and themselves in the heaven as a compensation for what they experienced during the war, especially the trauma

of loss. It is important to underlie the perception of loss among these Chechen refugee women: these women consider loss in the religious context, especially for martyrdom. Focusing on the benefits of martyrdom, instead of the pain of loss of a loved one appears to help these women to accept and make meaning of their traumas. It seems that these women are strengthened and sustained by their religious principles that call for martyrdom as well as their religious beliefs that promise the blessings in the hereafter. Thus, the ideology of martyrdom can be used to explain partly the meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugee women in my study.

4.2.4. Deserving the Honor (or title) of Martyrdom

The Chechen women in my study consider martyrdom as a noble ideal. Thinking martyrdom as the highest title that an ordinary person can reach in the world, these women describe their thankfulness to God. They are thankful that God granted their relatives with the martyrdom degree and thankful as well to be a relative of the martyrs. However, being granted with such honor makes these women feel not only prosperous but also responsible for their elevated rank. Their accounts show that on the one hand, these women feel themselves lucky, superior, honorable, and privileged thanks to the fact that their relatives are martyred; on the other hand, they experience the sense of responsibility for their elevated status. They feel themselves responsible towards God, the martyred person, and the community that they belonged to. Correspondingly, they try to demonstrate that they deserve such a high status through their statements and behaviors.

They are the women who are the relatives of the martyrs, so in such a role, these women try to show that they deserve this special status to God, the martyr, their community, and themselves. According to them, their obligations are as follows; (1) they should show their appreciation and gratitude to God in their daily religious practices; (2) they should behave by taking into account the fact that they are the relatives of the martyrs; (3) they should tidy themselves up and put their lives and affairs in order in terms of Islamic rules, and lastly; (4) they should be aware of their obligations as a Chechen Muslim women. These Chechen women try to demonstrate that they deserve the title of martyrdom through their daily practices as well as religious services. It is evident in their accounts. Mehtap says:

Believing that my father is a martyr makes me feel proud. I am proud of him. It should be reciprocal, and thus he also should be proud of her daughter (me). In order not to embarrass him, I perform my religious responsibilities and practices as best I can. I tried to live in line with the Islamic rules so that he is not turned to be ashamed in the presence of God. Allah granted this high status (being the daughter of a martyr) to me, so I should live according to the verses of Quran, Hadith, and the teachings of the Prophet.

Nurgul says:

Allah equipped me with this elevated rank. I should live in accordance with His rules, and show my gratefulness to Him. Rather than pride, I feel hope in my heart. It is the hope for meeting with my beloved in the heaven. I should fulfill my obligations and live in line with the Islamic principles so that we will meet in the paradise.

To summarize, the high level of respect that is given to the title of martyrdom is reflected in their speeches and daily practices. Thinking martyrdom as noble ideal, they express their thankfulness to God. This idea of thankfulness seems to create a sense of responsibility on the part of these women. They feel themselves responsible towards God, the society, and the martyred person. Being the relatives of the martyr seems to create burden on the shoulders of these women. They experience the blessings and burden of being the relatives of the martyr at the same time.

4.2.5. Idealized Martyr

The Chechen women, in my interviews with them, emphasize that their martyred relatives are the representation of ideal Muslim in the world. These women admire their murdered relatives as religious, brave, dedicated, and wise. While they were alive, they were consecrating their life to Islam. According to these women, God granted the status of martyrdom to these people as a reward for their sincere commitment to Islam. They consider martyrdom itself as a present to these pious Muslims. They are chosen by God on the basis of their fidelity and obedience to God. According to these women, when

compared to the normal population, these martyrs are more religious and devotional. Because these people were in service of Allah, God has awarded them a prize; martyrdom.

In their accounts, these women emphasize that their martyred relatives were very smart, pure, brave, religious, dedicated, responsible and respectful. Thanks to their virtuousness, God granted them with the honor of martyrdom. For example, Gulsum, talking about her martyred sons says that:

> In the times of war, I could not read the Quran (because she does not read and write in Arabic) but I could read and understand the Russian translation of Quran. Whereas, my martyred sons were praying regularly and explaining the meanings of Quran by referring to verses. My martyred sons were very religious. They were very respectful to me. They always asked me to clean my feet, to offer me tea or water and to do everything for me. They were serving me like girls.

Beyza describes how his martyred son was religious, dedicated and brave of all siblings:

> There was a tomb in Chechnya, like Eyüp Sultan in Istanbul. While everybody including us was going to there by bus, he and some of his close friends were going to there by walking. Once time, we visited there. After my son and his friends performed the namaz inside, my son stayed there for a long time. Then, his friends asked him what he wanted from God in his prayers. He said that he wanted to become a martyr. He called down martyrdom. He fought for the independence of Chechnya. Besides, when he was a young child, he was always visiting commanders. When the sailor-man had asked commanders why this child was with you, the commanders had said that he wanted to be with us. So, he wanted to escape to the war when he was a young child. Furthermore, television programs have shown women who lost their children or husbands in the war. When we saw these women in TV, my martyred child was saying that these mothers were very lucky. While I was watching these TV channels, I was starting to cry because I could not stand it. Then, he asked me to look these

women and to imitate them. He was underscoring how lucky and wise these women are because their child was martyred.

Moreover, Mehtap who is the daughter of the martyr underscored how her father held together the family members and how he took care of them. They emphasized that their father was very smart, compassionate, brave, religious, and responsible. For example:

> My father was a very good father. Although he was 47-48 when we were children, he was taking care of us. He went to the war not because of the fact that he did not like us or he did not like his family, but because of the fact that he found it just war. He was very brave, strong, and good father. He went to the war, because he found it right. Unlike other who did not participate to the war, my father was not chicken hearted.

All of the women in this study talked only about the positive characteristics of their martyred relatives during the interviews. They never talked about personality traits and habits which are negative. It seems that these women splitted up the personality of their martyred relatives as good and bad. After splitting, they separated good from bad sides. While they were thinking about their relatives, they assigned only positive personality characteristics to them, such as smart, respectful, religious, and so on (which are all suitable for the degree of martyrdom). It can be concluded that these women want to remember their relatives in a favorable way. They prefer to think of only good memories of them. In their speeches, they are eager to demonstrate that their relatives are pious, smart, respectful, and dedicated Muslims. They also articulate that it is because of their "exceptional" characteristics that God chose them and awarded them with the title of martyr. Remembering positive characteristics of a martyred person can be regarded as a particular coping strategy of these Chechen women. Therefore, it is important to discover the implications of this coping strategy: How this way of thinking might influence the healing processes of these women.

According to Baddeley and Singer (2010: 200), "when a family member dies, each surviving family member turn to recalling and sharing stories about the loved one and the loss in order to repair and stabilize their fragile sense of identity and to reaffirm their

understanding of roles and relationships within the family structure" (Harvey, 2002; Neimeyer, 2001; Walter, 1996 cited in Baddeley, & Singer, 2010).   According to Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001 cited in Bluck, Dirk, Mackay & Hux, 2009), how individuals remember, reconstruct, and share their memories serves meaningful purpose in their lives: it is in purpose of building a coherent life story, and thus gaining emotional recovery (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Worden, 2002 cited in Baddeley & Singer, 2010). However, "building a coherent life story requires that people narrate only selectively and remain silent about many of the episodes in their lives" (Baddeley & Singer, 2010: 201). It necessitates that certain memories about the departed individual be left unspoken. This silence about the certain memories may be considered as purposeful (Baddeley & Singer, 2010). According to Baddeley and Singer (2010) , silence about one's certain memories may serve to facilitate the processing of the loss, and thus facilitating recovery. In other words, "keeping some memories about the loved one silent can contribute the griever's own identity growth or stability". (Baddeley & Singer, 2010: 203). Selective remembering is clear in the accounts of Chechen refugee women in my study. They prefer only to talk about the positive characteristics of their beloved ones. These Chechen women seem to differentiate between "what is acceptable material to speak and what is best keep silent" (Reese & Fivush, 2008 cited in Baddeley & Singer, 2010: 203). While they are talking about the positive characteristics of their departed relatives, they keep silent about negative memories of them or personality traits. This approach can partly explain why Chechen refugee women only talk about the positive characteristics of their beloved ones. They prefer to remember positive memories of their beloved ones, and this way of remembering might serve a coping function, facilitating their healing processes. It may because of the fact that these positive memories could not challenge the image of martyr as a noble ideal and hero on the eyes of these women.

4.3. Obligatory Narrative of Happiness

The traumatic events that the Chechen women in my study experienced during the war, especially the murder of loved one caused tremendous distress. The psychological consequences of being a war victim and refugee are difficult for these women. They are aware of the psychological after effects of war on their wellbeing. They believe that the atrocities that they experienced during the war are the causes of their physical and mental illnesses. The accounts of these women reveal that most of them suffer from muscles pains and spasms, stomach pains, insomnia, distress, emotional fluctuations and rhythm abnormality. In addition to their self reports, I was able to observe the behavioral indicators of their distress during the interviews. While talking about the atrocities of war, and memories of their beloved ones, most women cried. While some of them are seem to be aggressive, irritable and temper-short during the interviews, some women have a bleak outlook. They seem to have no interest in life, and feel fatigued and sluggish. However, despite the adverse effect of traumatic war experiences on the psychology of these Chechen women , they insistently articulate that they are happy, (some of them indicates that she is the happiest person in the world because her husband is a martyr) and they try to demonstrate their glory and proud through their sentences. Despite the calamities that these women experienced during the war, and their subsequent trauma, they try to be seem happy, and underlined the importance of Islamic philosophy of steadfastness in dealing with the distress of war. However, at the same time, in the midst of their speeches, they indicate how it is difficult to stay sane and steadfast while thinking about their war memories. There seems to be an inconsistency in the accounts of these women: On the one hand, they mention the difficulty of handling the traumatic memories of war, and being steadfast in response to loss of their beloved ones (their gestures and bodies also indicate their high level of distress), on the other hand, they argue that they feel lucky and happy because their beloved ones die as a martyr. It might be concluded that these women have tried to seem steadfast in response to what they experienced, and prove their steadfastness to the society that they belonged to. Therefore, this section aims to reflect these women's

perceptions of mourning, in particular the role that Islamic philosophy of steadfastness plays in dealing with the trauma of war, especially the killing of a loved one. More specifically, I will seek answers to the following questions; (1) what steadfastness means to the Chechen refugee women in my study; (2) what makes a person steadfast; (3) how they express their steadfastness; (4) what is the consequence of patience for these women; and (5) how it affects the trauma and subsequent healing process of these women.

All of the women in my study talk about the difficulty of being steadfast in dealing with the traumatic war memories. They mentioned that they find it hard to stand and be steadfast when they think about their martyred relatives. For these women, being steadfast means not to cry and mourn for their martyred relatives. It not only requires the suppression and foreclosure of feelings, but also creation of impression of happiness. According to these women, God has sanctioned these women to experience these painful experiences. Therefore, He expects these women to stand for the loss of their close relatives and tolerate it. According to them, it is their responsibility to be steadfast in response to loss of their loved ones. Thinking steadfastness as their responsibility, these women strive for fulfilling the requirements of what makes a person steadfast; it necessitates not only suppression and foreclosure of meanings, but also creation of impression of happiness.

Furthermore, the Chechen women in my study also consider steadfastness as an indicator of faithfulness. According to them, they can show their religiosity through the extent that they are steadfast. Thus, they have to demonstrate their religiousness to God by suppressing painful emotions, maintaining the image of steadfastness, and creating the impression of happiness. Their attempts of not mourning and maintaining the image of steadfastness are evident in their sentences. All of the women I interviewed emphasize that they are very proud and happy because their close relatives are martyrs. They refuse to accept their pain explicitly. For example, Selma whose husband is a martyr emphasizes that: ''Elhamdulillah, I am the happiest person in the world. My husband was a martyr. I am proud of him. I asked God to become a martyr too in my prayers''. Gulsum describes how she is willing to become a martyr. She says that:

Martyrdom is very different. I wish to be a martyr. Now, I am aged. The only thing I am doing is to pray, read Quran, and perform the namaz, and ask God to forgive all of my sins.

Mehtap says that: ''I am very proud of the fact that my father is a martyr. It is a great luck and opportunity for me. I feel myself lucky. God gave me such a great father who is not chicken hearted''.

Beyza's sentences show how she tried to maintain her steadfastness and not mourn. She says that:

On the one hand, I am saddened because he was very young when he died a martyr. On the other hand, I have known that the mothers of martyrs are different in a sense that they are lucky and privileged. There have been a lot of mothers of martyrs in Chechnya; I can see them in TV. The parents of these martyrs are very lucky. It is said that you should not mourn and cry for a martyr.

In their speeches, they refer to holy Qur'an and Hadith to show how it is inappropriate to mourn for the martyrs. Rukiye explains in the way that:

Elhamdulillah, I have believed that my father died a martyr. I have believed that. Whatever happened to me has come from Allah. Then, I was attending to the Muslim circles where we read Quran and Hadith. I remembered that there was such Hadith: If there was somebody among your relatives who die a martyr, you should not cry and mourn. I have believed the fact that Allah gave and took back.

These women regard crying in response to murder of a loved one as a riot or noncompliance to the will of God. They also feel guilty when they cry and mourn for their martyred relatives. According to these women, their lack of patience is caused by the lack of faith. When these women find themselves whimpering or crying, they feel guilty. Thus, they charge themselves with being an impious Muslim. In response, they ask God to give

them more patience. Nurgul feels guilty because of the fact that she finds it difficult to stand for the murder of her son:

> I am very emotional, and I find it difficult to suppress my emotions. The reason of why I could not suppress my emotions can be related to my lack of faith. May be, I am not enough religious person. In that, the religious or faithful people are the ones who are able to suppress their feelings.

The Islamic Philosophy of steadfastness is also widespread in the wider community to which these Chechen women belonged. The Chechen women in my study describe how the wider community, especially the women who also experienced and shared the same trauma, namely the loss of a loved one are important in their lives, and how they console them. These women have attempted to share their painful experiences with each other within their own community. However, the community has consoled these women by saying "be steadfast": The mothers/wives of martyrs should not mourn, since they were chosen by God. This religious explanation is partly accepted by the Chechen women in my study, but they kept stating that they missed their loved ones; therefore they cry sometimes and feel angry. These women welcome the religious support system that was offered by the wider community but the same support system is the support that causes them to feel choked. Thus, these women are suppressed by the society that gave them religious support. These women have been refugee women who lost their close relatives; the pain of a losing a relative is inconsolable. The wider society behaves towards these women in a way that their pain should have been replaced by the pride. These women are expected not only to show patience in response to death of their close relatives, but also be proud of their martyred relatives. They console these women by implying that it is needless to mourn for the martyrs because they are in a better place with their God. This approach underestimates the feelings of these Chechen women. However, the pain is the same. These women appear to find themselves unable to grieve in a culture which underrates their emotions, and believes that martyrs are to be prized and not mourned. Thus, they have found themselves trapped in a community that provides support for them while demanding that ''these women become the public figures of steadfastness and pride'' (Habiballah, 2004: 16). Thus, they are not allowed to grieve for their martyred relatives so they are not able to

recover from the loss totally. Tugba who lost her husband describes how wider community consoled her:

> They advised me to rely upon Allah's will and comply with it. And they also encouraged me to pray. And when you are surrounded by Muslims, your sufferings are being alleviated little by little, Alhamdulillah. When I lost my husband, people surrounding me were true Muslims, Alhamdulillah. They prayed for me.

Similarly, Emine says:

> I don't know how to read Quran, but people around me always talk about the elevated degree of martyrdom. I believe that such a high status are assigned to the martyrs. Although I could not read by myself, I listen to the Quran, and participate into the meeting where women explain the verses of Quran and teachings of the Prophet. I take a lesson from these meetings: I understand the importance of being the mother of a martyr, *Elhamdilullah*. I understand that martyrdom is an honorable death, and martyrs are bestowed by Allah elevated status and unending blessings in the hereafter. But, on the other hand, I would him to be alive, and to be with me. I would not want him to die. But, it was happened.

Both public and private expression of grief and mourning are discouraged in Chechen Muslim community. The common societal belief is that mourning and crying represent the denial of the will of God. This view is complemented by interpretation that the acceptance of God's will require acceptance of loss. It seems that it is not acceptable to show a grief reaction in the community of these women.

There is a growing body of research on successful coping with traumatic experiences, and these have shown that sharing the traumatic experience with others leads to better physical and mental health (e.g. Harber & Pennebaker 1992, Murray & Siegel 1994 and Pennebaker & Francis 1996 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006). This positive effect of emotional expression has been supported in many different domains, including varied traumatic experiences, such as job loss, imprisonment, displacement, and war

(Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006). Research by Pennebaker and colleagues demonstrates that disclosure about traumatic experiences is beneficial to one's psychological well-being (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997a and Pennebaker, 1997b). In support of this study, Pennebaker and O'Herron (1984 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006) also conclude that talking to friends about loss contributes to better mental and physical health.

To understand the disclosure effect, researches propose several reasons why disclosure of a traumatic experience can be beneficial (Bootzin, 1997 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006). One explanation of the benefits of disclosure (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006: 70) suggests that "*not* disclosing requires physiological effort in the form of inhibition. The energy required for inhibition is, thus, theorized to cause stress and the disclosure of the event is theorized to reduce this stress. The reduced stress is associated with the improved mental health outcome". An alternative explanation is that the disclosure of the traumatic experience reduces anxiety and negative emotions associated with memory of the traumatic event, and thus promoting the assimilation of the traumatic experience (Foa & Kozak, 1986 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006).   Another model suggests that disclosure process generates a sense of coherence and wholeness in the memory of the event. Also, according to this explanation, "disclosure can be a process through which thoughts and emotions are connected and the meaning of the event is rethought in a more psychologically adaptive manner" (Clark, 1993, Davison & Pennebaker, 1996; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006: 71).

The above mentioned studies have point out the beneficial effect of sharing traumatic memories with others, but Chechen women in my study appear to be discouraged to share their painful memories, and show their emotions without censorship. They are not only required to suppress and censor their feelings, but also express their happiness to the society. Since these women could not vent their emotions because of the social pressure and grieve the death of their relatives, it is possible that it can interfere with their healing processes. They are expected to react the death of their loved ones with great pride, and honor by accepting their sudden death as the will of God, and acknowledging martyrdom as an act of God, and for God. The constant pressure to not to cry and mourn can also be heard

in the wording of their narratives. Correspondingly, the role that Islamic philosophy of steadfastness plays in dealing with the trauma is complex. On the one hand, this philosophy gives these refugee women strength, and prevents them from feeling despair, hopelessness, or fatigue. On the other hand, it causes these women to feel more distressed by suppressing their emotions. Thus, these women seem to be choked by the Islamic philosophy of steadfastness. Bottling up their painful feelings could hinder their recovery process, thus harming their psychological wellbeing. There is some ambivalence that these women have a commendable theological vision of mourning that they are trying to live and achieve- but at the same time, their lost is not just divine, it is human, and they suffer the death of their loved ones like everyone else. They are trapped between the divine and the human; their belief system, and their community embracing this Islamic belief system does not seem to offer them much permission.

To sum, I described the recurrent themes which were found meaningful, important, and related to the research question of this present study. The themes were discussed under three sections: (1) Chechen Muslim theodicy; (2) martyrdom culture; and (3) obliged narrative of happiness. After describing the themes of the study, and providing a brief discussions on them, the next chapter will provide a summary and a discussion of all these data in detail.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion on Findings

This study aims to explore how Chechen refugee women living in Turkey who had lived through the distress of war, particularly that of traumatic loss, made sense of what happened to them. With this aim, this chapter is designed to discuss the data presented in the previous section by relating it to the literature, and try to answer the research question of this present study. The discussion in this chapter will be built upon three parts which would help to create a meaningful picture of how Chechen refugee women made sense of what happened to them. Each part makes a summary of the related data and then provides a discussion on them.

The first section on "Chechen Muslim Theodicy" focuses on the data about Chechen Muslim theodicy; and illuminates how these women turned to Chechen Muslim orienting system to make sense of their traumatic memories and develop religious coping strategies. This section describes in detail the religious coping strategies adopted by these women. Their implications for recovery processes are also discussed. By doing so, it shows how being Chechen Muslim women shapes meaning making and coping strategies of these women, and influences their healing processes.

The second section on "ideology of martyrdom" points out the importance of ideology of martyrdom in these women lives. It will show how the Chechen refugee women in my study consider traumatic loss in the religio-political context, and thus naming their murdered relatives as martyrs. In this respect, it demonstrates how this thought process is utilized as a particular coping strategy by these women, and influence their meaning making and healing processes.

The third section on "obligatory narrative of happiness" reflects the Chechen refugee women's understandings of mourning. It exposes the dilemma of Chechen refugee women: these women experience the pain of loss, but their belief system and their wider community does not offer them much permission to mourn. This section shows up how these women are trapped between the human, divine and societal expectations, and then discuss the implications for healing processes.

5.1.1. Findings and Discussion on the Chechen Muslim Theodicy

As a result of the traumatic war experiences, all of the Chechen refugee women in my study turn to Chechen Muslim orienting system, which shapes their meaning making and coping strategies, and thus healing processes. In the light of the Chechen Muslim identity, and related meaning making and coping strategies, the analysis of the interviews revealed five recurrent themes; (1) increased religious service; (2) submitting to the will of God; (3) Elhamdilullah; (4) theological explanations for the causes of war; (5) depersonalization of traumatic experience. All of these themes underscore the importance of religion in Chechen culture, and reflect how Chechen refugee women in my study utilize religious meaning making and coping strategies in dealing with the traumatic war experiences, in particular loss. However, each theme has different implications for the healing process of the participants. In the below section, I will summarize these themes, relate it to the literature, and discuss their implications for the healing processes.

Firstly, in response to the atrocities of war, all of the Chechen refugee women in my study not only conserved but also deepened their religious beliefs. According to Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005), exposure to trauma could play a role in developing and deepening one's faith. Deepening of religious faith, increased interest in Islam, and increased religious service subsequent to trauma are evident among the Chechen refugee women in my study. Being able to participate in Islamic rituals, praying, fasting, performing the namaz, and learning more about Islam gave them strength, happiness and peace of mind. Engagement into these rituals was regarded as purifiers of mind, and made them partly relaxed.

Secondly, all of the Chechen women in my study considered what happened to them during the war in the context of God's power, omniscience, and mercy. They believed that what happened during the war is pre-destined, with the permission of God; and thus submitted to the will of God without questioning. They have been sure that Allah who causes them to experience difficulties during the war controls everything, and He will definitely help them to handle all the difficulties that they had experienced. Despite the calamities that they experienced during the war, the image of God as an all-powerful, all-merciful, and all-knowing creator enabled these women to feel secure. They perceived God not only as a governing agent or adjudicator but also a fatherly figure taking care of their needs. Knowing and submitting to the will of God prevented these women from losing hope; made the things they experienced during the war more bearable; and helped them to stay sane. It can be concluded that thanks to religious values, they came to see what they experienced in a more positive way. Despite the painful experiences they lived through, they were thankful to God.

Thirdly, the Islamic philosophy of "Elhamdilullah" is reflected in how these Chechen refugee women thought about the calamities they experienced, and coped with them. All of the women in my study expressed their blessings to God because of the fact that (1) God has allowed them to survive; (2) God has prevented worse disasters from occurring during war and the process of pre-migration, displacement and resettlement. Instead of questioning the will of God or complaining about the calamities that they experienced, these women preferred to say "Elhamdilullah", and thus compared themselves with the women in more disadvantaged positions. This thought process appeared to help them in coping with their traumatic war memories, and thus bringing consolation. In brief, the Islamic philosophy of *Elhamdilullah* provided these Chechen refugee women "with a mindset full of acceptance which seems to be the key to happiness and peace of mind for them" (Hussain & Bhushan, 2012: 585).

Fourthly, all of the Chechen refugee women in my study developed religious, and supernatural causal beliefs about what they experienced during the war to make sense of their trauma. These causal beliefs can be summarized as the following; (1) feeling of being punished by God for one's sins or lack of spirituality; (2) feeling of being tested by God;

and (3) feeling of being rewarded by God. These religious beliefs provided these women with ways to positively reconstruct their personal narratives by ensuring a sense of order, purpose, and meaning in the midst of a shattered assumption. Furthermore, with the help of this thought process, these women were able to integrate their traumatic experiences into a sensible order, which in turn prevented them from losing hope and purpose in life, and facilitated healing processes (Peres et al., 2007 cited in Doucet & Rovers, 2010).

Finally, the Chechen women in my study depersonalized their traumatic experiences; and considered what they experienced from a group allegiances perspective. These Chechen women believed that they had been targeted because of their allegiance to their particular ethnic and religious group, namely being Chechen Muslim rather than because of something personal. In response to the traumatic war experiences, their ethnic and religious identities appeared to become more salient. This finding show that religious, historical and ethnic identity influenced how these women approached the war, how they made sense of the war, and how they saw the causes of war. Believing that it is society that is targeted rather than the individual facilitated the acceptance and normalization of trauma, but also served (1) to strengthen social bonds and cultural identity within the Chechen society and; (2) to create new Chechen identity rooted in suffering and violence. As Bakan (1968 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007) says "suffering for a reason is easier to endure than suffering without cause, benefit, or meaning". According to the Chechen women in my study, their suffering has not been without reason. According to them, they were targeted because of their ideological and religious values and ethnic affiliations. This though process helped these women to accept their trauma as part of their lives, meaningfully processed what they experienced, and endured the distress of war.

This depersonalization of traumatic experience challenged the individualistic approach to trauma. According to the Western theorists, experiencing the emotional pain of trauma nearly always causes trauma survivors to ask the question ''why did the tragedy happen to me?'' (Johnson, & Thombson, & Downs, 2009). Contrary to Western theorists' expectations, none of the women in my study asked "why me" question. Instead, they preferred to ask "why us or why Muslims in Chechnya. According to Stocks (2007: 73), "it would be inaccurate to suggest that survivors of trauma have nothing in common with each

other, but it seems that in order to comprehend fully the effects of trauma upon the individual, subject some appreciation of historical, social and cultural specificity is essential". Because of their ethnic, cultural, and religious bonds, these women prefer to ask "why did these painful things happen to Muslims in Chechnya?" instead of "why did these painful things happen to me?".

The high endorsement of religious coping strategies and related explanations of trauma were evident among the Chechen refugee women in my study. These women turned to Chechen Muslim orienting system in dealing with their traumatic war experiences. This thought process provided these women with the source of strength for working through what happened to them during the war, and thus brought consolation to them. All of them stressed the positive role of religion in their healing processes. The coping function of religious and spiritual beliefs in the face of traumatic life incidences has been well-documented (Bonanno, 2004). Increasing research has supported the idea that religious and spiritual beliefs can be helpful to people in dealing with and recovering from stressful and traumatic life events (e.g., O'Reilly, 1996; Pargament, 1996; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Rudnick, 1997; Rynearson, 1995; Schumaker, 1992; Koenig, 2005). The findings of the present study support the protective function of religious and spiritual beliefs in the aftermath of trauma. Being Chechen Muslim provide these women with necessary beliefs, values, and tenets, which in turn enable the formation of religious coping strategies. These religious beliefs helped the Chechen women in my study make sense of traumatic memories of war, and thus integrate their traumatic experiences into a sensible narrative. In short, as a result of the tragic war memories, these women turned to give more importance to religious and spiritual issues, and thus deepened their faith, yet such beliefs (and enhanced religious life) also function as resources for these women who struggle to cope with traumatic war experiences.

In the literature, previous studies concerning the coping strategies of Chechen refugee women have revealed (1) concentrating on children; (2) being preoccupied with various indoor activities; (3) and calling family members for support; (4) and having chat with other women in their community as important relief mechanisms (or coping strategies) for Chechen refugee women (Renner, Laireiter, & Maier, 2012; Renner, Ottomeyer, & Salem, 2007; Renner & Salem, 2009). In line with the above studies highlighting the positive

effect of distraction and social support, some Chechen women in my study stressed the importance of chatting with friends, and being preoccupied with children in dealing with the traumatic war memories. These can be considered as alternative or secondary coping strategies of the Chechen women in my study because these are uncommon and rarely used by these women. Instead of distraction and social support, Chechen refugee women in my study preferred to turn to religion for consolation. It is interesting that none of the studies in the existing literature concerning Chechen refugee's coping strategies has mentioned the religious coping. Different from the existing studies, the present study shows the high endorsement of religious coping strategies among Chechen refugee women living in Turkey, and suggests the important role of religious coping in the face of trauma among these women. All of the women in my study reported that they turn to religion for consolation and use religious coping strategies. Religion appeared to be the strongest force in these women's lives, providing several explanations for their traumatic experiences, prescribing the ways of coping with these traumas, and providing guidance in difficult periods.

The high usage of religious coping strategies rather than distraction or social support might be explained by the sample characteristics of my study: The Chechen women in my study can be considered religious. According to Pargament (1997), people are regarded as religious "when the sacred informs their deepest values and when the sacred is invoked to help, support or maintain those values" (Pargament, 1997 cited in Murphy, 2011: 220). Complementary to this, Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick (1997 cited in Murphy, 2011) find that most religious people adopt theological explanations to understand why people suffer. Because religion represents the ultimate source of consolation in the eyes of these women, they preferred to take refuge in it. This finding underscores the important role of religion, and related religious coping strategies in the lives of the Chechen refugee women in my study.

5.1.2. Findings and Discussion on Martyrdom Culture

All of the Chechen refugee women in my study referred to the term martyr to define their murdered relatives, and explain their loss. It shows that these women considered

traumatic loss in the context of religion; and the politico-religious ideology of martyrdom shaped their meaning making and coping strategies, and subsequent healing processes. In the light of Chechen women's interpretation of martyrdom, and related coping strategies, I uncovered four recurrent themes in their accounts: (1) what makes a martyr; (2) expected benefits of martyrdom; (3) deserving the honor of martyrdom; and (4) idealized martyr.

Firstly, Chechen refugee women stretched the definition of martyrdom in a way that their martyred relatives could be included into that definition. Although each woman in this study defined martyrdom differently, they agreed on how someone becomes a martyr: Each and every person who dies under war conditions is a martyr. Therefore, these women denoted their murdered relatives as martyrs. Naming their relatives as martyrs made these women feel calmer and proud because they believe in the expected benefits of martyrdom. As Cook (2007) said, ideology of martyrdom provided a particular way of coping for the Chechen refugee women in my study by presenting martyrdom as a positive achievement, a noble ideal, and opportunity instead of source of pain or suffering.

Cook (2007: 29) points out the "widespread effort by people to open the doors of martyrdom to anyone who wants it, including those who do not die in a battle". According to Cook (2007), it is the life of the person determines whether he will turn to a martyr, not his death. Furthermore, he defines martyrdom in a way that "the ideal Muslim martyr is a male who willingly enters combat with pure intentions and killed as a result of that choice" (Cook, 2007: 30). This tendency to open the doors of martyrdom to anyone who wants it is clear in the accounts of Chechen refuge women in my study. These women stretched the definition of martyrdom in a way that each and every person who dies under war conditions will be defined as martyr. The only precondition of martyrdom is to die during the war times. Expanding the definition of martyrdom and including their murdered relatives into that definition appeared to make these women partly consoled. In line with the previous studies (Speckhard & Akhmedova, 2006; Cook, 2007), this finding show that martyrdom culture is rooted among the Chechen refugee women in my study, and there is widespread support for martyrdom at the societal level. In that, martyrdom is presented as a noble ideal, or even a passion in the community of these women.

Secondly, these women focused on the expected benefits of martyrdom while making sense of their traumatic experience. The expected benefits of martyrdom can be described as the following. First, according to the Chechen women in my study, God enables martyrs to be free from any pain while dying. Second, martyrs are not exposed to any interrogation process while their soul is leaving their body. Third, God forgives all of the sins of the martyrs, and they ascend to the heaven directly. Fourthly, God bestows martyrs with superhuman characteristics. Finally, there are also a lot of benefits of martyrdom for the relatives of the martyrs in the hereafter. These women considered the above mentioned pleasures that await martyrs and themselves in the heaven as a compensation for their painful experiences. Focusing on the benefits of martyrdom, instead of the pain of loss of a close family member appeared to help them in dealing with their trauma. It seems that these women were strengthened and sustained by their religious principles that call for martyrdom, and their religious beliefs that promise the pleasures in the hereafter.

Thirdly, on the one hand, the Chechen women in my study felt themselves lucky, superior, honorable, and privileged thanks to the fact that their relatives were martyred; on the other hand, they experienced the sense of responsibility for their elevated status. They felt themselves responsible towards God, the society, and the martyred person. This caused them to experience the blessings and burden of being the relatives of the martyr at the same time.

Finally, all of the Chechen refugee women in my study idealized their martyred relatives. They only mentioned the positive characteristics of them, such as smart, religious and brave. While they were sharing positive memories of their departed relatives, they kept silent about negative characteristics of them. This can be considered as a particular way of coping among these women. Baddeley and Singer (2010) point out the important role of selective remembering in (1) dealing with the traumatic war memories; (2) building a sensitive narrative; (3) and gaining an emotional recovery. In that, building a coherent story requires to narrate only selectively and to remain silent about certain memories of their beloved ones, especially negative memories (Baddeley & Singer, 2010). Accordingly, Chechen refugee women's accounts might be considered as selective because they only thought of good memories of their murdered relatives. Therefore, narrating only positive

memories of their beloved ones, and keeping undesirable memories silent might facilitate the processing of the traumatic loss.

Analysis of the accounts of the Chechen women in my study showed that the politico-religious ideology of martyrdom shapes their meaning making and coping strategies, and subsequent healing processes. It can be considered as a particular way of coping among these women. The role of religious ideology in the face of trauma is well documented factor. Increasing research has shown the protective and coping function of religious-politico ideology Khamis, 2007; Laor et al., 2006; Oren & Possick, 2010). According to Khamis (2012), there are two ways through which ideology may influence the coping strategies and subsequent healing processes. Firstly, "ideology may provide a belief system or perspective that enables individuals to deal differently and perhaps better with crises in general and war atrocities in particular" (Punamäki, 1996; Punamäki et al., 2008; Shamai, 2002 cited in Khamis, 2012: 2007). Secondly, ideology may have an influence on meaning making, and coping processes through tenets and attitudes adopted by the trauma survivors such as *Jihad* and *Shehadah* (Khamis, 2012). The findings of the present study supported the protective role of religio-political ideology of martyrdom. The politico-religious ideology of martyrdom enabled these women to consider their traumatic loss in the religious-politico context, and to focus on the blessings and benefits of martyrdom rather than the pain itself. This thought process helped these women in coping with their traumas.

5.1.3. Findings and Discussion on Obligatory Narrative of Happiness

Obligatory narrative of happiness was apparent in the accounts of the Chechen refugee women in my study. It reflected the dilemma that these women experienced to make sense of their traumatic memories of war, particularly loss. On the one hand, these women mentioned the difficulty of coping with their traumatic experiences, and being steadfast in response to loss of their close family member (their gestures and bodies also indicate their high level of distress), on the other hand, they argued that they feel lucky and happy because their beloved ones die as a martyr. This thought process shows the inconsistency in the internal worlds of these women, and revealed their perceptions of mourning. While these women were distressed by the traumatic loss, they tried to seem

steadfast in response to what they experienced, and prove their steadfastness to the community that they belonged to. Both public and private expression of grief were discouraged in the Chechen Muslim community, in that, they regarded mourning and crying as the denial of the will of God. Correspondingly, these women found themselves unable to grieve in a culture which believes martyrs are to be prized and not mourned. On the one hand, these women welcomed the religious support system that was offered by the wider community but the same support system was the support that caused them to feel choked. Therefore, these women experienced the dilemma of being human (they are vulnerable, and distressed by the traumatic loss of their beloved ones even if they are martyrs) and being Muslim (their belief system, and the community embracing this belief system consider martyrs are to be prized not mourned).

Research on successful coping with traumatic experiences have revealed the beneficial effect of sharing traumatic memories with others(e.g. Harber & Pennebaker, 1992; Murray & Siegel, 1994; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006), but Chechen women in my study appeared to be discouraged to share their painful memories, and show their emotions without any censorship. They were not only required to suppress and censor their feelings, but also express their happiness to the society. It can be concluded that these women were trapped between the divine and the human, and their community did not seem to offer them much permission to mourn. Since these women could not vent their emotions because of the religious belief system and social pressure; and grieve the death of their relatives, it is possible that it might hinder their healing processes. As Caplan et al. (2011) says religious or spiritual beliefs do not always lead to the healthy meaning making and coping strategies. For the Chechen refugee women in my study, in this case, religious belief system and related social suppression appeared not to allow these women to mourn, and hindering their recovery.

This finding point outs the necessity of understanding complex dynamics Chechen refugees faced while listening and assessing their trauma: religion, society, patriarchy, social expectations, culture, politics and history are important parts of the lives of these women (George, 2010). How these women experience and express their suffering is shaped not only by their beliefs but also by the socio-political environment in which these

women lived. Understanding "how Chechen refugee women who had lived through the distress of war made sense of what happened to them" requires adopting an integrated and holistic approach to trauma. Considering individual women's trauma on its own (without any reference to social, political, cultural factors) can lead to a premature conclusion.

5.1.4. General Discussion

It is apparent that traumatic experiences, in particular loss made the Chechen refugee women in my study vulnerable and distressed. There has been a growing body of research on the psychological consequences of displacement, and these studies describe refugee experience as a chronic process of traumatization (George, 2010). Refugees not only suffer from the pre-flight stressors, such as torture, violence but also post migration stressors, such as economic problems, safety concerns in camps, and health problems. Increasing research has substantiated the psychological suffering of refugees around the world. High prevalence of mental distress, Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and insomnia have been found among several refugee groups from different cultures. Rasa, Brune, Huter, Fischer-Ortman, & Haasen, 2011; Lustig et al., 2004; Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Schmit, Kravic, & Ehlert, 2008; Fazel, et al., 2005; Mollica et al., 2005; Momartin, Silove, Manicavsgar and Steel, 2004; Vojvoda et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2005). Studies with Chechen refugees living in different parts of the world have also yielded similar results; high rate of anxiety, mental distress, PTSD, depression are found among Chechen refugees (Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007; Jishkariani, Kenchadze, & Beira, 2005; Maercker and Müller, 2004; Mollica et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 2006; Jonhson, Thompson, & Downs, 2009; Renner & Salem, 2009; , Renner, Laireiter, & Maier, 2012). The findings of the present research are consistent with the previous studies. In that, high level of distress is also found among the Chechen refugee women in this study. It is based on the self reports of these women. They believed that what they experienced during the war triggered mental disturbance. The accounts of these women reveal that most of them suffered from muscles pains and spasms, stomach pains, insomnia, distress, emotional fluctuations and rhythm abnormality. It is important to note that these women considered their physical illnesses as reflections of their psychological situation. In addition to their self reports, I was able to observe the behavioral indicators of their distress during the

interviews. While some of them seemed to be aggressive, irritable and temper-short during the interviews, some women had a bleak outlook. The psychological traces of war and displacement were evident among these Chechen women.

Chechen refugee women's understanding and experiences of traumas have been colored by social, political, religious and cultural factors. The accounts of the Chechen refugee women in my study evidenced that, in response to the traumatic experiences of war, all of them turned to Chechen Muslim orienting system to make sense of what happened to them. These women deepened their religious beliefs subsequent to traumatic experiences, yet these beliefs provide resources for dealing with their traumatic memories of war. Therefore, they develop several religious coping strategies, and each has different implications for the healing process of these women. In the below section, I will summarize the coping strategies of Chechen refugee women; and specific factors shaping these coping strategies, and their implications for healing processes will be discussed by relating them to the literature.

Firstly, the section on "Chechen Muslim theodicy" shows that religion constituted the strongest force in the lives of these women; it provided guidance in dealing with their traumatic experiences. All of the women took refuge in Quran and Hadith to make sense of why these things happened to them. Religious beliefs not only offered theological explanations for their suffering but also shaped their coping strategies and appraisals related to traumatic experience. Analysis of the data revealed five coping strategies frequently used by the Chechen women in my study; (1) increased religious service; (2) submitting to the will of God; (3) Elhamdilullah; (4) theological explanations for the causes of war; (5) depersonalization of traumatic experience. These religious coping strategies provided a meaning for the suffering of these Chechen women, and helped them integrate their traumatic experiences into a sensible order which in turn facilitates their recovery processes.

The second section on "martyrdom culture" revealed that the Chechen refugee women in my study considered traumatic loss in the politico-religious context. Therefore, the politico-religious ideology of martyrdom which constitutes the epitome of the Chechen refugee women's global belief system shaped the meaning making and coping strategies of

these women. As Cook (2007) says, it provided the particular way of coping for the Chechen refugee women in my study. Considering the Chechen refugee women's understanding of traumatic loss, I discovered five coping strategies in their accounts; (1) what makes a martyr; (2) expected benefits of martyrdom; (3) deserving the degree of martyrdom; and (4) idealized martyr. These coping strategies enabled the Chechen refugee women in my study to consider the traumatic loss of their beloved ones as an achievement or blessing rather than a source of pain; and this though process provided these women with meaning, sense of purpose, strength, and hope.

The above mentioned findings speak to the literature on (1) the role of religious beliefs and; (2) the role of ideologies in coping with the traumatic distress. These findings provide support for (1) the literature on protective role of religious beliefs in the face of trauma (e.g., O'Reilly, 1996; Pargament, 1996; Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Rudnick, 1997; Rynearson, 1995; Schumaker, 1992; Koenig, 2005); and (2) the protective function of ideology of martyrdom in dealing with the distress of traumatic loss (egg. Khamis, 2007; Laor et al., 2006; Oren & Possick, 2010). The study findings show the importance of religious, spiritual beliefs and ideologies held by trauma survivors in dealing with their traumatic experiences. Complementary to this finding, studies have shown that "cultures with greater traditional and religious heritage provide better means and resources for finding meaning and making sense of distressing events" (Ahearn, Loughry, & Ager, 1999; Hussain & Bhushan , 2011: 585). From the findings of this qualitative study, it is apparent that the rich historical, political and religious heritage of Chechen refugees promotes healthy coping strategies among these women, except obligatory narrative of happiness.

Thirdly, although religious beliefs and politico-religious ideology of martyrdom are found to be important source of strength, coping and resilience for Chechen refugee women, obligatory narrative of happiness which is prevalent in the accounts of the Chechen women in my study seem to choke them. These Chechen refugee women are trapped between divine and human; their community adopting Islamic belief system, in particular Islamic philosophy of steadfastness does not offer these women permission for mourning. Research on successful coping with traumatic experiences have demonstrated the beneficial effects of sharing traumatic memories with others and adverse effects of suppressing

emotions (e.g. Harber & Pennebaker, 1992; Murray & Siegel, 1994; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996 cited in Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006). Since these women could not vent their emotions because of the religious belief system and social pressure; and could not grieve the death of their relatives, it is possible that it might hinder their healing processes. As Caplan et al. (2011) says religious beliefs do not necessarily provide healthy meaning making and coping strategies. For the Chechen refugee women in my study, in this case, religious belief system and related social suppression interfere with the healing process of these women by not allowing them to express their grief and mourning.

Above mentioned findings describe and discuss the specific ingredients of Chechen culture, and their relation to meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen refugees in my study. From a more general perspective, it is apparent that the findings of this present study speak to the more general discussion on cultural responses to trauma in the literature. Considering religion as a part of culture, the findings show how Chechen culture influence the meaning making and coping strategies of the traumatized Chechen refugee women. Therefore, it shows that culture matters in the face of trauma.

Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews provides support for the well-established phenomenon in the literature: collectivistic nature of Chechen society (Renner & Salem, 2009). In this respect, this study contributes to the growing literature on cultural responses to trauma: How culture (collectivistic vs. individualistic) makes a difference in the meaning making process of traumatic experience. Considering the collectivistic nature of Chechen society, the findings of this present study challenge the individualistic approach to trauma. In that, the wider community the Chechen women in my study belonged to plays an important role in their lives. They influence the ways of how these Chechen women understand, express, and cope with their traumatic experienced. For example, because of the fear of being criticized and labeled as rebellious or infidel by their wider community, these women hesitated to express their grief. This finding shows the importance of considering cultural values, collectivistic values in the case of Chechen refugees in my study while listening their trauma stories. Furthermore, all of the Chechen refugee women in my study adopted a collectivistic perspective by making sense of their traumatic experiences. They depersonalize their traumatic experiences: Instead of asking "why these

painful events happened to me", these women prefer to ask "why these painful things happened to us, Muslims living in Chechnya". Therefore, their accounts challenge the individualistic approach to trauma. Chechen refugee experience is not an individualistic event that takes place in isolation. This findings show the importance of (1) taking into account collectivistic values; and (2) adopting a holistic approach while listening, understanding, and assessing the traumas of Chechen refugees in my study.

All the things considered, these findings show that society, culture, politics, and history play an intimate role in Chechen refugees' experiences and must be considered while listening their narratives. As George (2010) says, it is important to discover social, political, cultural, psychological and historical variables associated with each refugee. All of these processes shaped the ways of how Chechen refugee women made sense of what happened to them, and how they developed coping strategies. It is apparent that cultural, social, historical, political factors, including religion, patriarchy, social expectations, gender dynamics, long-lasting oppression of Chechen population by Russians, ideology have a great impact on their meaning making and coping strategies. Therefore, proper understanding of individual Chechen women trauma, and its psychological consequences required recognizing the broader context of refugee experience.

5.2. Implications of the Research

5.2.1. Theoretical Implications

Much of the literature on Russo-Chechen conflict has focused on either historical overview of the conflict or socio-cultural, economic, and material consequences of the conflict. Studies considering the psychological consequences of the conflict are very limited. In this respect, this study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on Russo-Chechen conflict by examining the psychological consequences of displacement, and traumatic loss on the mental health of Chechen refugees.

Additionally, because the sample unit of this research is consisting of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey, this study not only enriches the growing literature regarding Russo-Chechen conflict, but also contributes to the literature regarding refugees

living in Turkey by making research on an overlooked population which has not been studied before; Chechen refugee women in Turkey. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research aiming at Chechen refugees living in Turkey.

This study makes a contribution to the literature on refugee experience, with its specific emphasis on coping strategies in the face of trauma. Firstly, in the literature, studies examining the meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugees are prevalent, but mainly quantitative (e.g. Renner & Salem, 2009).To the best of my knowledge, none of them researches the issue qualitatively. Therefore, the present study enriches the growing literature on meaning making and coping strategies of Chechen refugees by approaching the issue qualitatively.

Secondly, the present research details the experiences of Chechen refugee women who lost someone close to them as a result of the war. Correspondingly, one of the most important theoretical implications of this present research is related to the unique experiences of research participants: traumatic loss of a family member. Existing studies consider the experiences of Chechen refugees as homogenous. However, as it was evident in their accounts, Chechen refugees varied in their traumatic experiences, such as threat to life, sexual violence, and loss of a loved one etc. Different from previous studies with Chechen refugees in the literature, the present study mainly focus on the psychological consequences of traumatic loss, and subsequent meaning making and coping strategies. Therefore, just as this study contributes to the growing literature on coping strategies in dealing with traumatic loss, so it makes a novelty to the existing literature on Chechen refugee experience by focusing on how Chechen refugee women understand and make sense of traumatic loss, and what kind of coping strategies they develop in the face of traumatic loss. Therefore, one unique contribution of this research comes from its participants; the participants of this study consist of Chechen refugee women who lost at least one close family member as result of the war related violence. This study primarily focused on the experiences of Chechen refugee women who lost one of their close family member as a result of war related violence.

The accounts of the Chechen refugee women in my study reveal that they used religious coping strategies to make sense of their traumatic experiences. Therefore, this

study primarily contributed to the literature on religious coping strategies in the face of trauma by demonstrating how religious and spiritual coping mechanisms are utilized by Chechen refugee women in Turkey. The protective function of religious and spiritual beliefs in the face of trauma is well-documented, but these findings are not necessarily generalizable to Chechen refugee population. This study supported the previous findings by showing the protective role of religious and spiritual beliefs in dealing with the trauma among Chechen refugees.

Additionally, this study also contributed to the literature on Chechen refugee experience with its emphasis on the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in dealing with the distress of war. Although previous studies have pointed out the diverse meaning making and coping strategies among Chechen refugee women, none of them has uncovered the religious and spiritual beliefs, and related coping strategies which are prevalent in the accounts of the Chechen refugee women in my study. This study makes a novelty to the literature showing how Chechen refugee women utilize religious, spiritual beliefs and related ideologies in dealing with the trauma of war.

From a more general perspective, it is apparent that the findings of this present study speak to the more general literature on culture, particularly cultural responses to trauma in the face of trauma. Considering religious and spiritual beliefs utilized by Chechen refugee women as a part of culture, the findings illustrate how Chechen culture influence the meaning making and coping strategies of the traumatized Chechen refugee women. On the other hand, it shows how cultural sources are utilized in dealing with the traumatic stress of war.

Considering that gender specific responses to trauma are important in collectivistic societies, such as Chechnya (Renner & Salem, 2009), another theoretical implication of this study comes from its focus on the experiences of women in the Chechen refugee community living in Istanbul. Therefore, this study enriches the literature on women refugee experience by describing the unique experiences of Chechen refugee women who had been lived through the distress of war.

Finally, the findings of the present study also speak to the global literature on martyrdom. Although there have been a growing body of research on martyrdom, much of the existing studies either analyze the social, political, and psychological motives for martyrdom, or socio-political reflections and consequences of martyrdom operations. However, studies concerning the trauma or psychological suffering of the relatives of the martyrs are very limited, and conducted with Palestinian samples (Habiballah, 2004; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2003). To the best of my knowledge, there is no study examining the psychological suffering of the relatives of the martyrs in Chechnya. In this respect, the present study makes a contribution to the literature on martyrdom with its emphasis on specific meaning making and coping strategies of the Chechen refugee women whose relatives were murdered during the Russo-Chechen conflict. Considering the high prevalence of martyrdom operations in Chechnya, this topic is of great value, and might open the doors for further research.

Before proceeding into the practical implications, it is important to underscore that even though this study has such theoretical contributions, the findings cannot be generalized on behalf of the whole Chechen refugees in Turkey or around the world.

5.2.2. Practical Implications

After considering the theoretical implications, the findings of this study should be of interest to NGOs, policy makers, politicians, and mental health service providers. In the below section, I will discuss the practical implications of the study at the socio-political level and clinical practice level.

Firstly, government authorities and NGOs should be aware that human rights violations and traumatic war experiences have a negative impact on the mental health of the Chechen refugee women in this study. According to their accounts, these Chechen refugee women face a range of potentially traumatizing experiences prior to their escape from Chechnya, such as crossfire, aerial bombardments, imprisonment, murder of a loved one, and mortar fire. Furthermore, they also expose to several traumatic incidences during their displacement and resettlement processes, such as torture, sexual violence, eviction, and dispossession. Therefore, these women are vulnerable, distressed and traumatized; high

144

level stress, anxiety, and fear are evident not only in their self reports, but also in body languages. Considering the significance of the situation, NGOs working in Turkey should be aware that mental health illnesses might be prevalent within this community and "make efforts to deliver care and ensure appropriate political representation for the displaced individuals" (George, 2010: 380).

Secondly, the results of this study contribute to clinical knowledge about the role of spiritual and religious beliefs in dealing with the trauma, and suggest appropriate interventions and specific communication strategies for service providers working with Chechen refugees. To provide culturally-competent services, mental health workers should consider integrating religious and spiritual values and practices into health interventions in order to promote overall well-being (Higgins & Learn, 1999 cited in Caplan et al., 2011). Because religious and spiritual beliefs provide guidance to these Chechen refugee women in dealing with traumatic distress, service providers need to be aware of and discuss the patient's belief systems. They should seek understanding, acceptance, and respect for the different beliefs, values, and experiences of each of their refugee clients. These factors should be integrated for understanding unique experiences of Chechen refugees, and promoting mental health among them.

Furthermore, mental health workers should take into account the culture-specific symptoms of trauma into account. Previous studies have highlighted the suspiciousness of Chechen refugees: Chechen refugees often suffer from feelings of suspiciousness, fearing conspiracy against them, especially by their own compatriots (Renner, Salem, & Ottomeyer, 2007; Renner, Laireiter, & Mainer, 2012). In line with this finding, Chechen refugee women in my study appear to be suspicious during the interviews. When communicating with Chechen refugees, mental health workers should consider the suspiciousness of these women, be sensitive towards their needs, and take appropriate steps to secure the confidentiality and to establish rapport. They should develop convenient communication strategies to enter into the lives of these women. Apart from suspiciousness of Chechen refugees, Renner, Laireiter, and Mainer (2012) suggest that Chechens less frequently share sadness or strain about their home country, relatives and friends left back home. They also seem more irritable and tense, rather than depressive. According to

Renner, Laireiter, and Mainer (2012), this situation might be caused by Chechen socialization process which emphasizes toughness, self-assertion, and vendetta behavior rather than depression. In relation with this finding, some of the women in my study appear to be tense, and irritable; and they underscore the importance of toughness, steadfastness, and strength in dealing with their traumatic experiences. Therefore, while listening and understanding their stories, mental health service providers should take into account the culture-specific symptoms of trauma.

Complexity of Chechen refugee trauma heightens service providers' sensitivity to medical, social, political, and historical background of refugees (George, 2010). They should consider pre-flight stressors that cause these refugees to leave their homeland, post-flight stressors intensifying their distress such as difficulties with host-government policies or poor living conditions in camps, physiological and psychological factors contributing to their mental distress, and socio-cultural variables influencing their well-being, such as gender dynamics, and societal expectations. Therefore, "society, culture, politics, and history play an intimate role in Chechen refugees' experiences and must be integrated into the assessment process for the development of effective interventions by service providers" (Georgia, 2010: 380).

Finally, it is important to consider the unique experiences of women refugees, such as discrimination, sexual violence, and social inequality that face women during pre-migration, migration and resettlement periods. Despite the traumatic experiences unique to women, "there is a lack of sensitivity in the social structures for interventions with female refugees" (Hyndman et al., 2006 cited in Georgia, 2010: 381). It is advised that mental health service providers must realize the struggles of female refugees to deal with societal expectations, patriarchic power and control with regard to gender (Georgia, 2010). Mental health workers who work with the community of Chechen women in my study should consider the influence of societal expectations as well as religious, political, and cultural factors.

5.3. Further research

In this study, I could not differentiate between the women losing their child, the women losing their husband, and the women losing their brother while listening their narratives. There might be a difference between the trauma of murder of a child, husband and brother. Further studies may investigate whether and how traumatic loss of child, husband, and brother are different from each other regarding the meaning making and coping strategies.

Although previous studies find a difference between the experiences, traumas, and coping strategies of old and young women refugees (Robertson et al., 2006), in this study, I could not observe any difference in terms of the age range of the participants. This might be explained by the sample size and sample characteristics of my study: I conducted 11 interviews with middle aged women. Future research may examine whether and how age makes a difference in term of the Chechen refugees' experiences, traumas, and coping strategies.

The present study adopted a qualitative approach to explore how Chechen refugee women who experience the distress of war made sense of what happened to them. It reveals the psychological suffering of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey. As I said before, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first study with Chechen refugee women living in Turkey. Further studies might substantiate the psychological suffering of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey by conducting quantitative research with large samples.

Finally, considering the importance of culturally competent psychological intervention for promoting mental health among refugees from diverse populations, further research should be conducted to better understand the cultural, social, and political factors facing refugees. Awareness and acceptance of these factors allows the development of appropriate interventions by mental health workers.

APPENDIX A: Consent Form

SABANCI UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Orta Mahalle, Universite Caddesi No:27 34956 Tuzla, Istanbul
Tel: 0212 292 4939 Fax: 0212 252 3293

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

To Participant in Research Study:

I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's Program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Sabanci University in Istanbul. The aim of my study is to learn from the experiences of Chechen refugee women living in Turkey. More specifically, I am interested in learning how the war impacted the lives and viewpoints of Chechen refugee women. And, how Chechen refugee women cope with what they experienced during the war. I hope that this study will enable the voices of Chechen refugee women to be heard of, creates the awareness in the society, and contribute to the further research in this realm.

During this research study, you will be asked to be participate in individual interviews. In these interviews, I will ask questions about your war experiences. Follow up interviews may also be requested.

I would like your permission to record the conversations with you. The transcripts of all conversations will be kept confidential. This means that your name will not appear anywhere in the written material that will come out of this research. You are free to decline to participate or withdraw from the project at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at haticeozen@sabanciuniv.edu

Thank you,

Hatice özen
Sabanci University

I, _____, consent to participate in this study to be conducted with Hatice Özen. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time. Furthermore, I understand that all responses I give during the interviews will be confidential and that my name will not be used in the final report.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Telephone   Email

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